

The Forgotten Riddle—Part One

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A Serena / Saedon Story
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Abstract: Serena and Amy accidentally land on an unsophisticated world in the middle of winter and set off to do a little exploring, only to find a clue to an ancient Gallifreyan riddle. When they try to unravel the secret, Amy is transported to an unknown destination where she encounters two unusual characters. In the meantime, Serena must try to locate her friend despite local resistance.

“This isn’t Earth.” Amy stood in the open doorway of Serena’s TARDIS, looking out at the dark landscape.

“What?” Serena stood at the console, checking over the readouts. She looked confused.

“The moon and the stars are all wrong,” added Amy, looking up at the night sky. The landscape seemed earth-like, but it was cloaked in moonlight and shadows, so there were no discernible features. However, Amy could not recognise the strange constellations, and the moon’s face was different from the one she remembered. She shivered. The outside air was freezing and she could see patches of ice and frost on the ground. She moved away from the door and the environmental force field. The TARDIS air was much more comfortable.

Serena pressed one of the brass buttons and glanced at a screen recessed in the black granite console. Data scrolled up the screen, and a faint look of chagrin settled on her face. “Sorry, Amy. Our navigational circuits are acting up again. We’ve landed in the wrong place.”

“Again?” Amy sighed. They had been having problems with the TARDIS for the last few weeks, ever since a time storm had caused them to make an emergency landing. The storm had blown out a few of the circuits, and in spite of Serena’s repairs, the navigational circuits continued to have erratic behaviour.

“It looks like the TARDIS selected a planet that matched our criteria, minus the specified location,” explained Serena. “This is the planet Krimshon.”

“You mean we’ve found another Stonehenge?” Amy had visited Stonehenge once in her own time, but the ravages of time, tourism, and vandalism had taken their toll upon the stones, and the circle was in a poor state. She had always wanted to know more about it, and lately she had been studying Earth’s ancient cultures with renewed interest—being able to travel in time and space had its advantages. Her Gallifreyan friend had planned to take her to an earlier time so that she could learn more about the origin of the circle.

“It would seem so. I’m detecting a large stone circle on a plateau about fifteen miles from here. I hate to risk another jump to move us closer though—we might accidentally leave this planet, and then we wouldn’t get to explore anything at all. I’m going to have to spend a little more time working on the navigational circuits. Do you mind doing some exploring the old-fashioned way?”

“Sounds like fun!”

They only had a few hours before daybreak, so they spent the time preparing for some cold weather hiking. According to the TARDIS databanks, the planet was indeed a primitive one. There were few resources, and the planet’s inhabitants struggled to survive with meagre agriculture and minimal trade. Few aliens had visited the planet, as there was little of economic, cultural, or strategic value. The inhabitants had quite similar external features to humans, with the exception that they possessed slightly smaller physiques and yellow irises in their eyes.

The TARDIS had materialised in a northern region in the midst of winter and short days. Fortunately, readings indicated a small village about eight miles away. The two women would have a long hike, but they hoped to find shelter in the village for the night before continuing their journey up to the plateau. Still, that meant that they would have to spend at least one night outside, so Serena dug out some lightweight winter camping gear, while Amy located some food and water for their journey.

As they assembled their cold weather wardrobes, Serena insisted that they try not to stand out too much. Amy had favoured a high-tech Gore-Tex winter coat and sophisticated winter hiking shoes, but she settled for a long, warm coat made from unidentifiable animal fur and a pair of lined boots. In spite of her own advice, Serena kept her now familiar black velvet jacket and gold coloured blouse, over which she donned a lovely black cloak lined with a dark grey fur. She also tucked away a few pieces of

technology and some fabricated local currency to assist them in their journey. For the final touch, they both put in special contacts which made their eyes look yellow.

As they prepared to leave, Amy took a last look around. Her eyes settled on her friend. “You look positively strange,” she commented. Serena looked otherworldly in her yellow contact lenses and dark cloak. “You know what you look like? A cat,” she added.

Serena raised an eyebrow and surveyed her friend’s furry coat. “I’m not sure how to classify you. Some sort of wild animal, I think.” She smiled.

Amy gave a mock wolf howl and grinned as she hoisted her leather pack onto her back. “Ready when you are.”

The landscape outside the TARDIS was frozen and covered with a few inches of snow. The TARDIS, in the guise of a black monolith, looked forlorn standing in the middle of the field. Their footsteps made crunching sounds as they trudged across a fairly level area—Serena guessed that they had landed in a farmer’s field. Amy watched her breath puff out in front of her. It was just below freezing, but she felt snug inside her gear, particularly with their brisk walking. They passed a grove of evergreen trees. The trees looked a little like pine but with the longest needles and the biggest pine cones Amy had ever seen. After a few hundred metres they came upon wheel ruts in the snow, presumably marking a dirt road.

Serena pulled out a small disk from one of her pockets. “I think we can follow these tracks to the village,” she said, reading the electronic map.

Her human companion paused to look at the animal tracks that followed along with the wheel ruts. “I wonder what their version of horses looks like,” she murmured. The prints had a peculiar four pronged shape but did not appear to be hoofed.

“No doubt we’ll find out. Perhaps we can borrow some to take us up to the plateau.”

They walked in silence for a few miles, following the tracks. The wind whistled through the branches of trees and occasionally they heard scuffling from the undergrowth along the way, but otherwise it was very quiet out. There were no birds.

Amy broke the silence. “Look, Serena. There’s another one of those stones,” she said, pointing. At the side of the wheel tracks there was an irregular block of granite. It was the third one they had passed. “What do you suppose it is for? A distance marker? A tombstone?”

Serena came over to take a closer look. “No,” she replied. “They haven’t been spaced at regular intervals, and it’s too peculiar a place for a grave.” She brushed a gloved finger across a patch of snow on the stone, pondering its existence. There were no markings on the stone, but it looked intentionally placed. “Judging from what we know of the planet, I would guess that this is some sort of offering place for the local deities,” she conjectured.

Amy jumped to conclusions. “You mean like a sacrificial altar?”

“Well, nothing so dramatic. Travellers probably leave small offerings of food for the local gods, or spirits, or whatever supernatural forces they happen to believe in here. It’s a common practice in many pre-technological cultures.”

Amy stifled a giggle. “What a strange practice.” She felt a little embarrassed, her thoughts dwelling on her silly assumption about the rock being a sacrificial place.

“Not so strange to the people who live here, I am sure. Such beliefs probably help them cope with the harsh environment.”

They continued walking, and Serena made some more observations. “They are probably quite dependent upon the seasons, since their survival is based so heavily upon agriculture.”

“That must be why they built their own Stonehenge,” Amy suggested, trying to be more sensible in her thoughts about the local culture. “Isn’t it supposed to be a sort of calendar for predicting the summer and winter solstice? Maybe that’s how they keep track of time and know when to start planting in the fields.”

“It will be interesting to see how sophisticated this circle is. Such structures are good indicators of the potential of the inhabitants. Some of the most seemingly primitive cultures have developed quite complicated maths and astronomy.”

As they continued their hike, Serena told Amy more about some of Earth’s ancient cultures. She had plenty of interesting tales gleaned from her studies on Gallifrey, although she still had little personal experience with Earth. While she spoke of Earth, her mind was on other things. She inwardly realised how little she had really managed to explore since she had left Gallifrey. Was it really less than three years since she had departed her isolated life there? It felt like a century—so much had happened since then. They had spent the last several weeks travelling to random places, avoiding anything that promised to bring conflict. Serena needed time to come to terms with her behaviour during their last encounter with the Doctor. She knew she would have to deal with her issues eventually, but for the time being it was easier to lead a simpler life. Serena could also tell that her companion was also somewhat relieved to be temporarily out of the emotional fray.

She pushed these thoughts aside for the moment and focused on recounting her tales. Her stories of ancient pharaohs and kings would have delighted any Earth bound archaeologist, and her descriptions brought to life people long forgotten in the standard histories.

The morning passed quickly, and the sun reached its highest point in the sky, only sixty degrees above the horizon.

“Let’s stop for lunch,” Serena suggested. They were passing an outcropping of boulders which seemed like a good place to sit and rest.

Amy brushed snow from one of the large rocks and sat down to open her pack. She could feel some of the cold seeping through her clothes from the stone, but it felt good to get off her feet for a few minutes. She pulled out a couple energy bars and handed one to her friend.

Serena tore open the package, careful not to drop any of the wrapping, and took a bite of the bar. It was slightly sweet and very crunchy. Though not an exciting flavour, she knew it contained plenty of nutrients and sugars. Of course, she could probably have done without the food, but Amy could not, and it felt more companionable to eat together.

“How much further do we have to go?” Amy asked.

Serena consulted her electronic map. “We’ve made good progress. We have about three and a half more miles to go. We’re lucky to have found this road, or it would be taking us a lot longer. We should reach the village by dusk.” She looked into the distance towards the large hill they were planning to climb. The landscape was generally hilly, although the low dips and valleys were dwarfed by the larger plateau which was the highest point of a longer ridgeline. She guessed that the village was nestled at its base. The areas they were passing through were rocky and mostly forested.

“That’s good. I’m not looking forward to camping out in the cold tomorrow night.” She looked at the ordinary leather bag strapped to the base of her backpack. It contained an ultra lightweight, high-tech mummy bag, capable of withstanding extremely cold temperatures. Each of them carried one. They would not have to worry about freezing, but nonetheless it did not sound very comfortable. “I’ve never been much of a cold weather person. I much prefer warm weather. I could never stand the winters at home. Always depressed me.” Amy munched on her energy bar. “Some day I think I’ll settle someplace warm and sunny.”

Serena smiled.

“What’s the weather like on Gallifrey?” asked Amy. She had actually been to Gallifrey once herself, but all she had seen was the inside of Serena’s home, and there had been other pressing matters more important than sightseeing.

The smile faded from Serena’s face. “We don’t really go outside much at home,” she replied. “We have a great deal of control over our planet, over the weather and the environment. But Gallifrey’s surface is not very attractive, so we spend most of our lives indoors with perfect climate control.”

“Ugh! Sounds dreadful! Must be horribly boring.”

“It is,” Serena agreed. “But most people don’t care. They’re more interested in their studies, in cataloguing and doing research. Weather would just be a distraction.”

“No wonder you left. I don’t think I could stand spending every waking hour studying.” Amy finished her bar and reached into the pack for a bottle of water.

“Oh, we don’t spend all of the time studying,” Serena said. “Life on Gallifrey is quite varied. There are a variety of social events, and we have a great passion for dramatic theatre and musical performances.”

“But no rock concerts, I’ll bet.”

“Well, no.”

Amy looked at her Gallifreyan friend. “I suppose some aspects of such an intellectual lifestyle are very fulfilling,” she said. “But sometimes the best things in life come from experiencing the variety the world has to offer.”

“Very true.” Serena nodded slowly. She looked at her friend, who had turned to look at the ridgeline. Amy could be silly and foolish sometimes, and at other times, so wise and practical. Humans were certainly strange creatures. When her mind was clear at times like these, Serena could easily sense the feelings of her friend. The thoughts and emotions just drifted into her head the way a scent drifts on the wind. This ability still made her feel a little awkward, but she was getting used to it. Amy was feeling a little

embarrassed at giving advice to her friend. She was actively reminding herself how much older Serena was than herself and that she was probably a poor judge of Gallifreyan lifestyle.

“Amy,” Serena said softly, “You’re right—experiencing everything that life has to offer is much better than studying life from afar. Even if some of the experiences are awful.”

Amy turned to look back at her friend and smiled suddenly.

Serena felt surprise at hearing her own words. She had been actively keeping herself from thinking about certain things lately, and her own unexpected observation was a shock.

The afternoon passed much more slowly than the morning for Amy. Serena’s mood changed, as it so often did, and she was quiet and remote. Amy trudged through the snow, staring at the frozen landscape and the long needled trees. She could not see very far ahead along the windy path, but she could occasionally make out the ridgeline above the trees. She noticed a bank of clouds rolling over the hills, coming in their direction. She hoped they would reach the village before the weather turned. The wind picked up and the sun soon vanished behind the swift moving clouds.

They were within a mile of the village when snow began to fall.

At last they rounded the final bend and came in sight of the buildings. Dusk had arrived, and the snow was growing heavier now as it whipped down from the sky.

“I think I see a sign for an inn,” said Serena. It was the first time she had spoken since lunch. She gestured towards one of the buildings. A small hand-painted sign with strange and somewhat coarse writing hung over the door.

Amy said nothing but hurried forward and stopped before the door, waiting for her friend.

Serena glided along behind her in her graceful manner and nodded. “This will do nicely,” she added, pulling open the door.

Warm air greeted them, and they entered.

All eyes turned to greet the strangers standing in the doorway. Serena ignored their stares, shut the door, and approached the bar.

Amy gazed around the modestly sized room. There were only ten people present: a woman behind the bar, a boy of eleven or twelve years tending to the tables, and eight men of varying ages scattered around at tables near the roaring fire. Most of them looked to be in their thirties and forties, but she was a little uncertain. She surmised that people aged quickly and died young in this harsh environment. However, there was one significantly older man sitting close to the fire. His hair was grizzled, his skin heavily wrinkled. He sat a little away from the others but he seemed to be involved in all of the conversations. It was a very communal atmosphere which made Amy feel even more like an outsider.

In the meantime, Serena had arranged for their room. It was a small inn, so they were to share a small room upstairs with two twin beds. Amy turned away from the warm fire and followed the barmaid and Serena up the stairs.

The room was simple. There were two beds, covered with several layers of blankets made of a roughly woven fabric. In between the two beds was a small table upon which sat an unlit candle and a small box. There was no electricity.

Amy set her bag down on the nearest bed.

The barmaid lit the candle with a match from the box. "Will you be wanting food?" she enquired.

The woman's accent sounded rough and uneducated to Amy, who understood the alien language through Serena's Gallifreyan technology.

"Yes," replied Serena. "We'll be down in a few minutes."

"What do you have?" asked Amy. She realised that she was very hungry.

"There's gerdesh stew," replied the barmaid. She turned and left the room, shutting the door behind her.

"Hmm. I see they're big on choice here," Amy said quietly. She pulled off her coat, thinking suddenly of her grandmother's beef stew. It had been a very long time since she had been home, and she wondered how her grandmother was doing.

When Serena and Amy returned to the main room, the conversations died down once again. The women took seats at an empty table and the barmaid brought them two steaming bowls of stew. Amy looked dubiously at her meal and picked up the heavy metal spoon that came with it.

Serena nodded at a couple of the men who were staring, and they looked away, suddenly self-conscious. The conversations soon resumed, though in somewhat muted fashion.

The boy came by with two glasses. He watched the strangers shyly through long lashes. "Would you like some ale?" he squeaked.

"Please," replied Amy, smiling at him.

He smiled back with a toothy grin. His teeth were very crooked. He poured some brown liquid into the glasses and then scurried away, stopping at one of the men's tables to refill their pints.

The old man watched the women keenly, appraising them. Few true strangers passed through the village; most travellers were just neighbours from nearby villages.

Amy ate a bite of the stew. It was bland. The meat was similar to beef but more gamy, and there was some sort of white root vegetable which had no flavour at all.

"Needs garlic," she muttered. "And pepper."

Serena raised an eyebrow and took a bite of the stew. She said nothing, but she inwardly admitted that her human friend could have done a lot better. She would have skipped the meal completely but decided it would look better if she ate.

Amy drank a little of the ale. It was not bad, though rather strong. She savoured the taste for a moment, and then took another sip. A few of these, and she would probably not care what the stew tasted like.

The men were talking more openly now. “I tell you, if I don’t have better luck w’ next year’s crop, I’m not sure what we’re goin’ to do,” said one of the younger ones. “And with Jeana expectin’, we got to worry ‘bout another mouth to feed.”

“Maybe you should try planting kelp,” suggested one of the others.

“That ain’t a good idea,” said another. “Morgan tried planting kelp last year but the drought didn’t do it no good. If we have another dry year, well...”

“Drought, pah!” cried a third. “I heard tell that Morgan neglected to make adequate off’rin’s to Tindali. That’s why his crops failed.”

The first man spoke again. “That won’t be my problem. Jeana and me, we made plenty of off’rin’s last year. As much as we could afford. But if the harvest is like last year, we’re going to have a rough time.”

“You just keep up your off’rin’s to Tindali,” announced the old man, still with an eye on Serena, “And you’ll do just fine. She’ll bless your farm if you pay her ‘omage.” He cocked his head towards Serena and addressed her for the first time. “Supposing the lady here has another idea?”

Serena looked faintly uncertain. “I’m not entirely sure I can make any valuable comments on your farming predicament. We’ve come from quite far away, where our situation differs significantly.”

Several groans and chuckles came from the men. Serena’s perfect language and diction sounded out of place in this community.

“I see we’ve got a fine ed’cated lass here,” said the old man. “Surely you must know something of crops. What would you do if you were in Fagney’s place?” He gestured towards the young man who was having the problems.

A thoughtful look settled on Serena’s face. “I suppose I would make a study of the land to select ideal crops—I might even plan to grow two or three different things to improve my chances of success. Then I would study the past weather cycles to try to predict the coming weather pattern.”

Not wanting to be left out, Amy added, “Better irrigation might help as well.”

“Would you neglect makin’ off’rin’s?” asked another man towards the back. He looked smug.

Serena looked at the bearded man who had asked the question. “I’m afraid I don’t know about your particular circumstances here. We don’t follow the same ceremonial practices at home,” she replied. “Perhaps you could tell me more about this Tindali?”

The young boy, who was currently refilling pints at another table, could not resist chiming in. “Tindali is the witch who watches o’er these parts,” he said, making a sign with his hand. “She blesses them who give her ‘omage, and curses them that don’t.”

“What sort of offerings do you give her?” asked Amy. She remembered the stones they had passed along the way into the village.

“Every year we hold a harvest festival up at the stones,” replied Fagney. “We ded’cate a portion of our crop to Tindali.”

The man sitting next to Fagney spoke. “She watches us perform the cer’monies. We leave the off’rin’s on the altar stone.”

Serena looked fascinated. “Which I suppose she collects during the night?”

“Aye!” said the boy. “An’ if you don’t leave her a good off’rin’, she curses your house and crops.”

“The boy’s right,” said the old man. “Morgan decided he didn’t want no more to do with Tindali after his youngest died of the red fever. An’ the next year his crop withered. An’ it weren’t no fault of the weather.”

Fagney said, “No. Everyone else who grew kelp last year had a decent harvest. But not Morgan.” He looked worried.

“Has anyone ever met Tindali?” asked Serena. She wondered why one man’s crop failed when others grew the same thing successfully.

“Not in a long time,” replied the boy. “But sometimes people says they seen a ghostly woman when they were travelling through the forest up to the stones.” He knocked one of the glasses he had just filled, and ale sloshed out on the table.

“Watch what you’re doing, lad!” cried the man with the spilled drink.

The boy apologised and wiped up the spill before dodging out of the way. He moved to the back of the room so he could keep listening to the conversation.

Everyone was silent for a few minutes. Finally, the bearded man stood up. “Well, I’d best be off home.”

“See you later, Conwin. Our regards to Lissa,” replied a couple of the other men.

“I’m off too,” added another. Several of the men bundled up in coats and headed out into the cold night. Only a few remained to finish their drinks.

The old man kept his seat. “So, why are you lasses out here in the middle of nowhere?”

“Just passing through,” replied Serena casually. “Could you tell me a little more about the stones where you hold the harvest festival? It’s rather different from our harvest ceremonies at home.” She gave one of her most charming and disarming smiles.

They awoke a little before dawn and prepared to head out, armed with a little more knowledge, directions to the stones, and two kadacks—a shaggy creature which looked like a horse crossed with a moose. Now that they were riding, Serena hoped to reach the stones by midday.

Amy munched on another energy bar as she rode along next to her friend who was as uncommunicative as she had been yesterday afternoon. Serena denied that anything was wrong, but Amy was unable to lure her out of her silence. She resigned herself to another quiet ride. It was colder than yesterday, and everything was covered in several fresh inches of snow. But the skies were clear, and the old man, Kaylef, had predicted that they would have good weather for a few days.

About an hour into the ride Serena reined in her kadack. The animal made a snorting sound and puffed steamy clouds of breath onto the cold air.

“What is it?” Amy whispered when she heard nothing.

Serena listened for a moment longer and then replied, “I thought I heard something.” She shook her head and gently urged her kadack to start moving again.

They rounded another bend, and Serena pulled to a stop again. She turned around.

“Show yourself,” she commanded loudly.

Amy could not see anything behind them on the path, but after a moment, she could hear the sound of a third kadack. They were being followed. The animal rounded the bend, and she realised it was the boy from the inn. He grinned sheepishly.

“What are you doing here?” asked Amy.

“Nothin’,” replied the boy.

Serena watched the child approach. “What is your name?”

“Brogan.”

“Now, Brogan, won’t your mother miss you?” asked Serena.

“Nah. I ain’t got no mum.”

“No? Who looks after you?”

“Meg.” Meg was the barmaid. “My parents died of the red fever when I was six. Now I help ‘round the inn an’ Meg gives me food an’ a place to sleep.”

Serena raised an eyebrow. “You should go back, Brogan.”

“She said I could have the day off. An’ I can spend it anyhow I choose. ‘Sides, you shouldn’t be going to the stones alone,” he replied cockily, his prepubescent voice squeaking. “I can help show you the way,” he added, grinning.

“Do you have camping gear?” asked Amy. “We might be spending the night up there.”

“Really?” His eyes grew wide. “Tindali might not like it.” The cocky look settled on his face again. “But I’m game!” He patted his saddlebags. “I got everything I need here.” He was warmly dressed, too. He wore a long fur coat and oversized woollen hat, and he looked quite comfortable despite the freezing temperatures.

Serena relented. “I suppose you can come along.”

Brogan was excellent company, Amy decided. He was naturally inquisitive and enthusiastic, and his good spirits even managed to draw Serena partly out of her self-imposed shell.

“Where do you come from?” he asked.

“I’m from Earth,” replied Amy, “and Serena is from Gallifrey.” She neglected to mention that these were planets, not towns.

“Where’s them places? Are they further away than Lintroll? Kaylef’s been to Lintroll, which is sixty miles ‘way.”

“Oh, they’re much more distant than that.”

“Someday I’d like to go to other places. I ain’t never been no further than Junpeter, which is only fifteen miles ‘way. I get tired o’ sittin’ in the same ol’ village. I bet you seen lots of int’restin’ places.”

“These stones should be interesting to see,” said Amy. “We’ve got something similar not far from my home.”

“Oh, what’s so special about a bunch of old rocks?” Brogan did not share in her enthusiasm.

“Do you know the history of the stones?” asked Serena. “How long have they been there?”

“Kaylef says they been there at least a thousand years.”

Amy shot her friend a glance. She had expected them to be a lot more recent.

The boy continued. “No one really knows where they come from. There’s other stones around, Kaylef says, but there ain’t none so ‘laborate as these.”

“How often do people go up there?”

“Just a couple times a year mostly,” replied Brogan. “Harvest festival and spring fair. Meg makes me work during ‘em both. It ain’t no fun when you have to cook food and serve drink the whole time. They have a big ol’ boring ceremony for Tindali.”

“What do you know of her? How old is she?” Serena’s curiosity was growing.

“Dunno. Older ‘n Kaylef.” He spotted one of the offering stones ahead at the side of the path. “We’d best stop here. Don’t want to be upsetting no one.” He rode forward and dismounted gracefully. He pulled something from his saddlebag and knelt briefly before the stone, signing with his hand as he had the night before and murmuring something they could not hear. Amy and Serena drew even with the boy and watched him brushing snow from the top of the stone. He placed a large chunk of bread on top and climbed back up on his kadack.

He smiled at the woman, made a clicking sound, and spoke to his kadack. “Off we go, Migmo.”

Neither Serena nor Amy copied the boy’s ritual.

A few hours later they climbed the last rise of the path and came up onto the plateau. There were small shrubs dotting the landscape, but there weren’t many trees this high up, and most of the vegetation had been cleared away from the standing stones. They were massive—huge blocks of granite standing in three circular rings on the plateau. There was a large altar stone in the centre and smaller rocks marked asymmetrical radial lines around the third ring.

Amy rode forward to get a closer look. The arrangement was more spectacular than Stonehenge, not to mention that the stones were in much better condition. They were unmarred and looked as if they had stood since the beginning of time.

She looked back at her companions and smiled. “It’s wonderful,” she shouted. She circled around the perimeter and vanished out of sight.

Brogan’s expression was doubtful; he had seen the stones many times and they did not hold any mystery for him. However, Serena was transfixed. She trotted slowly into the centre of the circle to observe the placement of the massive rocks. The boy followed her, wondering what was so interesting.

“Brogan, when is the winter solstice?” Serena spoke in the tone of a teacher questioning a pupil, as if she already knew the answer.

“Oh, that’s easy. It’s next week—five days hence.”

Serena glanced at the sky, noting the location of the sun. A thoughtful expression settled on her face, slowly followed by an expression of wonder.

Amy rode in between the tall stones to join them.

“This is really fantastic,” said Amy. Then she saw the look in her friend’s eyes. “What is it?”

Serena drew her arm out in a wide circle. “These stones are placed in a very peculiar manner. They don’t seem to be marking out any sort of cyclical calendar for this place.”

Brogan squinted up at her. “What’s that s’pposed to mean?”

“What purpose do they serve then?” asked Amy, her own curiosity growing.

“I don’t know. But there is something very strange about this circle.”

Amy and Brogan had finally given up following Serena around. She was busily hurrying from stone to stone, taking measurements and checking readings on her scientific equipment. The sun was low in the sky and would be sinking beneath the horizon within another half-hour.

“Wonder what’s so special ‘bout them stones,” said Brogan. He was helping Amy set up the all-winter tent they had brought along for the night.

“I don’t know. But it must be something pretty important.” She pulled the last tent pole into its guide hole. The shiny silver dome tent would be cramped with the three of them, but it had good insulating properties which would help keep them warm during the cold night.

“Say, this is a great tent. What’s it made of?”

Amy replied vaguely. “It’s a special fabric we make... in Earth.” She almost laughed at her words; it was strange to speak of Earth as if it was a town, but it was unavoidable. The boy had no concept of space travel, and she did not want to be the one to introduce the idea to him.

He ran his finger along the tent frame and discovered the zippered door. The zipper was another unknown device. “Wow. I wish we had this stuff.” He pulled the zipper up and down a few times, marvelling at the way the teeth joined and unjoined so easily.

Amy opened up the leather bags which held their sleeping bags. She interrupted Brogan’s amusement with the zipper. “May I?”

He grinned sheepishly and backed up.

She climbed into the tent and began unrolling the bags.

“You’re going to sleep in them things?” asked Brogan. The mummy bags looked insubstantial against the cold.

“As a matter of fact, yes.” She grinned.

A blood-curdling cry pierced the night. Amy bolted upright where she slept, still bundled up in her warm mummy bag. She looked around, trying to make out the shadows in the tent. Fortunately the moon was out, so the tent was slightly illuminated. She realised Serena was missing. Brogan, on the other hand, was sleeping soundly to her right. He murmured something and rolled over, but he remained asleep. He was wrapped up in a blanket from his pack plus Serena’s warm cloak.

Amy listened for a minute, adrenaline pumping through her veins, waiting for another sound. None came. She slowly unzipped her bag and squirmed out, trying not to disturb the boy. She fumbled for the torch in her backpack and found her way out of the

tent. Fortunately she was still wrapped up in her warm coat, but the cold air chilled her face and hands. She had forgotten her gloves in the tent.

She scanned the surroundings outside the tent, relying on the moonlight, rather than turning on the torch. Had they been attacked? Was Serena hurt somewhere out there? She slowly walked forward, trying to figure out what had happened.

The nighttime silence was disturbed by another loud screech. Amy jumped. But she was more awake now, and she had a better sense of direction. The sound had come from somewhere to the right, just beyond the third ring of stones.

As she rounded the perimeter, she could see two shadows on the ground. She came closer and realised that one was a figure huddled over a kadack—and the kadack was lying unnaturally on the ground.

The figure was Serena.

She was running her hand along the throat of the beast. The animal's breathing was laboured; the poor beast was in a great deal of pain. Amy realised that it was the source of the awful screams.

"What happened?" whispered Amy.

Serena glanced up, her eyes glittering in the moonlight. Amy could just make out the yellow tinge from the contacts, which made her friend look eerie.

"She's been poisoned, I think. I thought I heard something and came out to check, and I found her having a seizure." She spoke quietly, using her most soothing voice, caressing the animal's shaggy main. "Can you get me the medkit from my pack?"

Amy nodded and hurried quietly back to the tent. Brogan was still sound asleep.

She returned and handed the kit to Serena who was still trying to calm the animal. "Hand me that torch, will you?"

Amy obliged. She crouched down and rested her hand on the kadack's neck. The other kadacks were about thirty metres away, pacing restlessly and looking spooked. But at least they had not bolted. The injured one was Serena's mount. Poison?

"Who would do such a thing?"

"I don't know." Serena's voice was soft and grim at the same time. She prepared a hypospray and gently administered something to the kadack. She murmured quietly and ran her hand over the animal's forehead as it grew calmer and lapsed into a sedated sleep.

"We'll have to tend to it in the morning, but at least that will keep her alive through the night and dull the pain. I hope. I'm not exactly an expert on veterinary medicine."

She closed up the medkit and they trudged back to the tent.

Amy had a hard time falling to sleep after she crawled back into her sleeping bag. She kept remembering the kadack's awful scream.

Amy sat on a small rock by a crackling campfire. She drank orange juice from a box and contemplated what she would eat for breakfast—she had a choice between energy bars and instant meal packets which reminded her of the survival rations from the ship she used to command, neither of which seemed very appealing this morning. "Oh, what I wouldn't give for a hot cup of tea," she muttered. She watched Serena who was again

busily surveying the stones and trying to deduce their function. Her Gallifreyan friend had been up since first light. Amy had dragged herself out of bed soon after, hoping she could help, but now she wished she had slept in. However, she had managed to get a fire started and was enjoying the heat. It was helping to take some of the chill out of her bones. She stretched. Her muscles were a little stiff from sleeping on the hard ground.

There was a rustling in the tent, and Brogan emerged. Amy turned to greet him, but he dashed off to the edge of the plateau and disappeared out of view, no doubt looking for a tree.

He returned a few minutes later, as fresh and cheerful as he was the day before. He spied Amy and hurried over to the fire. "Where's Serena?" he asked.

Amy nodded towards the center of the circle. Serena was now standing on top of the altar stone, looking towards the sun. The sun was at least twenty degrees off of the axis for what should have been the winter solstice position, according to the stones.

"Ain't she cold? Where's her cloak?"

Serena was indeed without her cloak. Amy had not even realised it.

"I think you used it as a blanket," she replied.

"I'd better fetch it for her. She must be half froze!" The boy dashed back to the tent and pulled out the black cloak. Then he ran into the circle.

"Mornin' Serena," he said, looking up at the Gallifreyan woman. She was an unusual sight, standing upon the altar. Her long blond hair shone in the morning sun, contrasting with her black velvet coat. "I brought your cloak," he added. "Thanks for letting me use it last night. It sure was bitter cold."

Serena looked down at him and smiled. She jumped down, as lithe as a cat. "Thank you, Brogan. Did you sleep well?" She took the cloak from him and put it on.

"Aye. I'm just goin' t' have some breakfast. You want to join me?"

"Sure." She followed Brogan out of the circle and sat down on another rock across from Amy.

Brogan whistled. His kadack wandered into view. He walked over and began to greet Migmo, when he saw the other animal lying on the ground near one of the stones. "What happened?" he cried. He ran over to the injured animal. The kadack was still in a drug induced sleep. He knelt down and ran his hand over the animal's shaggy head and neck. He looked up at the women. "This don't look natural."

"Come here Brogan," said Serena.

The boy walked slowly back and took a seat next to her.

"We think someone came in the night and poisoned her," explained Serena, watching the boy's expressions.

"What? That don't make no sense. Who'd want t' do something like that?"

"We don't know. We've been trying to figure it out. I've given her something to dull the pain and make her sleep, but I don't know how to counteract the poison. Do you think Tindali could have done it?"

He shook his head vigorously. "That don't seem likely. Tindali loves animals and would ne'er harm one. She mostly curses people's crops when they don't please her. She's got magic, see, so she got no need of poison."

Amy spoke. "Can you think of anyone else who might want to do this?"

He scrunched up his face in thought. "Nope. Ain't that your kadack, Serena? Somebody sure must have taken a dislike t' you." He stood back up and went back to his own kadack, opening up his saddlepack and pulling out a piece of bread and something wrapped in brown paper. He came back and sat in front of the fire again.

Serena and Amy exchanged glances. "Has anything like this ever happened before to anyone in the village, Brogan?" Amy watched the boy unwrap the paper and pull out a yellow lump of cheese.

He shook his head. "The only thing I can figure is that someone wanted to teach you a lesson," he suggested.

"One of the men from the inn, perhaps," murmured Amy.

"Could be. Maybe someone wanted t' make you think Tindali was 'gainst you."

"Someone who doesn't like a skeptic," said Serena, staring at the fire.

No one said anything for a few minutes. Brogan produced a small knife from a pocket and sliced into the cheese. He took a bite and then looked up.

"Would you like some?" he offered, holding up his crusty bread and the cheese.

Amy smiled. "Sure. Would you like to share? We've also brought some food."

"Whatcha got?"

She fished two packets out of her leather pack. "Instant omelette," she read, "and oatmeal with raisins."

Brogan looked puzzled. "Don't know what them things are."

Serena smiled. "Omelette is made from eggs, and oatmeal is a grain, cooked in water, in this case."

"Oh, I see. I sure do like eggs. We only get them in summer when the lingmiks migrate north. I'll take the omelette."

Amy handed him the packet. "You pull this tab, see, to heat it up. Give it a minute and then pull the cover off. There's a fork attached to the side."

He followed her instructions and grinned when he removed the cover to find the steaming omelette inside. "This sure do beat my bread and cheese," he said, digging into the yellow contents. He handed Amy his former breakfast.

She ate a little of the cheese, but it tasted sour to her, so after a few bites she decided to eat the oatmeal.

Serena declined the food but selected a juice box.

They sat in companionable silence for a time, eating and drinking and watching the fire. Amy added some more branches, the easiest kindling she could find.

Brogan polished off the last of his meal. He examined the packet. "They make this in Earth, too?" he asked. "Must be full o' all sorts of marvels. Zippers, fancy fabrics, meals that heat themselves. I'd like to go there someday." He gazed into the fire, dreaming of travelling.

Amy glanced at the stones. "Any more ideas?"

Serena sighed. "No. It's very puzzling. They are set out in a very complicated pattern that seems to have absolutely nothing to do with the seasonal changes here."

“Maybe it had some other purpose. Some sort of giant calculator, perhaps?” Amy guessed. “A map? Art?”

“It’s quite a riddle,” replied Serena. She was perplexed.

“Pity you didn’t have a magic glass so you could look back in time,” said Brogan. “Tindali is s’posed to have a glass like that.”

Amy looked thoughtful. “Pity it’s so much trouble to use the TARDIS.”

Serena shook her head. “I don’t know. I like a good riddle from time to time. It keeps the mind sharp.” She stood up and wandered around the stones, looking down at the asymmetric radial lines that came out from the third ring.

The others stood up, deciding to follow her this time.

“There’s something familiar about them, but I can’t place it.”

Her companion looked at the nearest stone. She chuckled. “Maybe aliens put it there,” she joked. “After all, some people at home still believe aliens helped build the pyramids and were responsible for other things—like those huge figures you can only see from the air.”

“Oh, nonsense.” She corrected herself. “Well, except in a few cases.” She frowned.

Brogan looked puzzled.

A new look entered Serena’s eyes. She looked around herself as if seeing the stones for the first time. Her jaw dropped. “I don’t believe it!” She took off at a brisk pace, practically running around the outer perimeter.

Amy and Brogan rushed to keep up.

Serena hurried in between two of the largest monoliths and ran up to the stone directly in front of the altar. “By Rassilon! This makes no sense!” she cried. Her face was flushed with excitement.

“What is it?” asked the others in unison.

“You’re going to think this is crazy, Amy, but I think you’re right! This wasn’t built by the local inhabitants at all!”

“What?!”

“Who built it?” asked Brogan. He did not understand what aliens were, but Serena’s discovery sounded exciting nonetheless.

“I think people from my own planet put this here!”

It was Amy’s turn for looking astonished. She was stunned. “The Time Lords did this? Why?”

“I don’t know, but I think this stone is the key,” she said, touching the stone in front of her. “Some of these stones are placed in a sort of graphical configuration showing our solar system before the Great Experiment. Others seem to be placed to represent energy transferences, in a very rough illustration of the general theory which the Three eventually turned into reality.”

“But that still doesn’t make any sense,” said Amy.

“It makes a little more sense to me. One of the earliest things we learn on Gallifrey is our own history. I remember a bit of trivia about the time of the Great Experiment—the time of Rassilon was an exciting one of advanced studies and challenging thinking. One of the offshoots of this intense period was the fashion of creating and studying riddles. They

took all forms—word games, puzzles, all sorts of things. One of my teachers mentioned that someone invented a riddle to end all riddles, something of immense difficulty. It created a lot of excitement at the time, but then the Three performed the Great Experiment, and everyone forgot about it because there were suddenly far more important issues to deal with. And somehow, most of the records were lost, so it just became a footnote in our history.”

“You said that this stone was the key.” Brogan pointed to the monolith in front of her. “How is it the key t’ this great riddle?”

“Well, if you look at the placement, it would represent Gallifrey, whilst the altar stone would represent our sun. The purpose of the Great Experiment was to harness the power of the sun.”

Amy walked over to look at the altar stone. Her friend’s explanation was incredible. She ran her hand over the edge of the stone and shook her head in disbelief.

Serena noticed two minor indentations in the surface of the monolith, something she had overlooked before. She pulled off her gloves and reached up to rest both palms on the surface of the cold stone. Suddenly, the rock made a deep humming sound, and faint slivers of light began to glow beneath her hands.

“Amy, take a look at this!” she shouted over her shoulder. “It has DNA recognition built in.”

Brogan’s eyes grew wide as he watched the monolith’s decidedly unstonelike behaviour. Suddenly, a new hum came from behind him, from the altar. He turned around, just in time to see Amy vanish. His jaw dropped.

“Um, Serena?” He was looked at the altar, which was glowing slightly.

“What is it?” she asked, still excited. She turned her head to look back and realised her friend was missing. “Amy?”

“She just vanished. Like a ghost,” explained Brogan.

Serena pulled her hands away from the keystone, horror filling her eyes. “What have I done?” she cried. She rushed to the altar, but the glow faded. The granite looked ordinary once again.

A new voice boomed out. “Who are you, and what are you doing in this sanctuary?” The voice was old and rough.

Serena looked up from the altar, panic written across her face. Brogan dodged behind the stone and peeked around the edge from a safer vantage point.

An old woman dressed in long furs stood at the side of the circle, staring at them accusingly. Her grey hair poked out from her hood and she leaned heavily upon a long staff.

“Who are you?” asked Serena absently. Her mind raced. At first she had been delighted to discover that there was more to this Gallifreyan model than she had originally thought—until she had accidentally transported Amy to some unknown place and time. At least she hoped that was the explanation. She desperately needed the equipment in her TARDIS.

The boy worked up his nerve and stood up. He signed with his hand and came forward, kneeling next to Serena. "Please forgive us for intruding, Tindali," he said. He bowed his head.

"Tindali?" replied the woman. "Stand up boy," she commanded. "I'm not Tindali. She's been dead for fifty years."

"Huh?" Brogan stood up.

"I'm Beranna. Tindali's daughter."

Serena walked back over to the keystone and examined it more closely. "I need to get this open," she muttered.

Beranna stepped closer. "What's going on here? Why are you disturbing this ancient sanctuary?" she asked, looking at Serena.

"You may think it's a sanctuary, but to me it is something else," replied the Gallifreyan.

Beranna looked annoyed. She did not appreciate flippancy. "It is still a sanctuary, regardless of what you think. Explain yourself," she commanded.

Brogan came to Serena's rescue. He made the introductions and tried his best to explain everything that had happened since they had reached the plateau.

"And you say this woman, Amy, just vanished?"

"Aye, like a ghost. Some kind of magic, ain't it?" he asked.

"It's nothing of the sort," interjected Serena. "It's a machine." She reached into a pocket and pulled out a small device. She held it in front of one of the depressions on the keystone, observing the readout. "Actually, technically it's a mechanical puzzle." She frowned. "A toy."

"It don't look like a toy," said Brogan.

"The trouble is, I don't know enough of the inner workings of this puzzle to figure out what happened to Amy."

"She ain't dead?"

"I hope not. I think she's just been transported somewhere."

"You weren't making no sense earlier when you explained things," said Brogan. "You said people from your own plant built this thing." He looked bewildered.

Serena corrected him. "Planet, not plant."

Beranna wore a quizzical expression. "Planet?"

"What's a planet?" asked Brogan, frustrated.

"A planet is a celestial body which orbits the sun," explained Beranna, who had more education. "We live on a planet, but there are others in our solar system."

"Pah!" said Brogan. He grinned nervously.

"It is possible to see the other planets through a special looking glass called a telescope," said Beranna. She took another look at Serena. "Although I had no idea that life existed anywhere else but here. Which one are you from?"

Serena responded haughtily. "I am not from one of other the planets in your system. I am from Gallifrey, and I am of the race known as the Time Lords," she explained proudly, as if everyone ought to know about the Time Lords.

The old woman frowned. “Lords and Ladies, hmm? I’ve never been fond of aristocracy.” She walked around to take a look at the monolith Serena was examining. “Well, I’m sorry you’ve lost your friend,” she said unsympathetically. “But first things first. We need to tend to this poisoned kadack.”

Something in the old woman’s voice carried an edge of wisdom that broke through Serena’s defensive attitude. She nodded and said, “Yes, I suppose you’re right. There’s nothing I can do for Amy at the moment.”

“Aaammmmyyy... taaake aaa looooo...” Serena’s voice faded away like an echo. Amy felt lightheaded. Her vision became fuzzy and then went completely, and she thought she was blacking out. She shook herself, trying to clear her head.

The odd sensations vanished as quickly as they had started. “Serena...” She stopped, realising that her surroundings had changed.

The stone monoliths, the frozen landscape, and her friends were gone. She was now in a large building which looked like a cathedral. The far wall held a huge stained glass window, and the high ceiling was carved with intricate designs. There were pews below, and she was up on a large raised platform with a podium. The stone walls around the platform were lined with wood panels. The large hall was dimly lit—light came in from the colourful window at the back, from small windows set high up on the sides, and from scattered candles.

Amy felt a little dazed. Had she somehow been transported back to Earth? She suddenly felt unsteady on her feet. She felt something behind her and put her hand down to steady herself. Then she turned to look. It was a long stone table, covered in a profusion of flowers and candles. It was an altar. She glanced up, expecting to find a cross, but instead beheld a large metallic crescent hanging from the wall.

“I guess I’m not in Kansas anymore,” she murmured, seeking comfort in her own voice.

“What on Earth...?”

Amy jerked her head around. She had not realised there was anyone else present.

The voice came from a tall woman who was standing at the far side of the raised platform, blocking a small passageway that exited the area. Even in the candlelight, she made a striking impression. She was six feet tall, and her outfit accented her muscular body and long legs. She wore a polished brown leather miniskirt and a tight yellow bodice which was laced up the front, revealing her ample cleavage. Heeled brown leather boots hugged her calves, and a sheathed knife was strapped to her right thigh. Her face was even more dramatic. Her eyes were brown and looked Chinese, but the rest of her facial structure looked almost Russian, with a hint of some other Eurasian nationality. Her dark brown hair was cropped close and looked spiky, except for three thin braids which dangled from her left temple down to her breasts. They were each tied with thin pieces of leather. Everything about her seemed to consist of contrasting elements.

She turned around and poked her head into the passageway. “Saedon, you’d better come up here. We’ve got an unexpected guest.” She turned back and watched Amy.

A man appeared in the passageway. “Oh?” He emerged from the passageway, which appeared to lead down a flight of stairs, and stood up to his full height. He was a few inches taller than the woman, and he was dressed in a casual grey suit that looked like it came from the 1920’s on Earth. His eye caught Amy’s and he casually walked over, surveying her appearance. He was quite handsome—he had wavy blond hair and intense blue-green eyes, the color of the sea. He was well built and did not seem lanky for his height.

Quite unexpectedly, he thrust out an arm and held Amy’s chin as if inspecting a farm animal. She was stunned by his action, but something in his eyes kept her from resisting—only afterwards would it strike her as odd. He turned her face slightly from side to side.

“Hmm. Not a native of Percantha,” he said, dropping his hand. His eyes roved up and down her costume. “Primitive dress.”

“She has funny eyes,” said the woman.

Saedon looked at them again. “So she has. Ah, she seems to be wearing contacts.”

Amy came to her senses. “Do you mind? I don’t appreciate being talked about as if I weren’t present.”

The man’s eyebrow shot up. “English? You’re a strange penny.”

She was not sure, but she had the strangest sensation that he had suddenly changed to speaking English, rather than being translated through Serena’s Gallifreyan technology. It was an odd feeling, something she occasionally noticed when she was with Serena. “Who are you? And where am I?”

“Forgive me for being so rude,” replied the man. “My name is Saedon, and this is Tai.” He gave a charming smile and nodded his head slightly.

The woman stepped forward. She did not smile.

“And you are?” he asked.

“Amy Wilson.”

“Well, Amy Wilson, you aren’t on Earth anymore—if indeed that is where you came from. This is Percantha.”

“You mean she’s human?” said Tai. She wrinkled her nose.

Amy was starting to feel decidedly warm in her fur coat. “Yes, I’m human,” she snapped. Tai was not making a good first impression.

Saedon scolded his companion lightly. “Manners, Tai. So, where did you come from then?”

“I’m not really sure what happened,” Amy said. She felt uncomfortable about telling these strangers too much, so she modified the truth a little. “I was visiting an archaeological site on the planet Krimshon.”

The man looked thoughtful. “Hmm... I’m afraid I don’t know that one.”

Tai tossed a glance towards the back of the cathedral. “I hate to break up this fun little scene, but we’d better be going soon. Father Gwinn will be waking up soon from his morning nap.”

“Ah, how right you are.” He turned away from Amy. “Won’t be a moment.” As he passed Tai he quietly added, “Keep an eye on our new friend.” He disappeared into the passageway.

Tai crossed her arms and stared at Amy. Amy felt really uncomfortable. She unbuttoned her coat. “Are you from Earth, too?”

The tall woman shrugged. “I suppose so,” she said.

Saedon returned up the stairs and pressed a groove in the wood panelling next to the passageway. A matching wood panel slid into view and locked into place, seamlessly obscuring the exit.

Tai started down the steps at the front of the platform and turned to the left, disappearing from view.

Saedon looked at Amy expectantly. “After you,” he said, gesturing towards the steps.

She followed Tai out of the cathedral, escorted by the tall stranger.

The old woman sat by the poisoned kadack, gently probing the animal’s neck and examining her mouth and eyes. “My guess is that someone spiked a kavel with egleberry juice. It would have taken an hour or two for the poison to have any affect on her.” The kadack was just starting to come out of the drug-induced sleep and was beginning to make pained sounds.

“Which explains why I couldn’t find anyone in spite of the footprints our intruder left in the snow,” said Serena. “It must be someone from the village though,”

“You mean someone else followed us up the path?” asked Brogan.

Serena nodded. “The footprints went down the path a little ways, where our visitor had a kadack waiting to carry him away.”

“I have a mixture of herbs I can put together to make a draught that will reverse the effects of the poison,” said Beranna, “but I don’t know how to administer it to her while she is in this state.”

“If you can show me what you have, I might be able to think of something,” said Serena.

“I don’t know what you have in mind, but we can try.”

“You got one of them fancy gadgets you can use?” asked Brogan.

“Quite possibly.”

Beranna showed Serena the dried herbs she carried in a small satchel at her waste, which the Gallifreyan scanned with a sensor from the medkit. Before long she had fabricated medicine for a hypospray injection.

The kadack did not recover right away, but she seemed to calm down a little within just a few minutes. While they waited for the animal to recover further, Brogan added fuel to the dying campfire.

“So, how are we goin’ t’ rescue Amy?” Brogan asked, poking at the fire with a stick.

Serena was calmer now, but she still looked worried. “I need to figure out where she’s gone. Which means I need some more equipment from the TARDIS.”

Beranna asked the inevitable. “TARDIS?”

“My ship. The vessel which brought me to your world.” She tried to keep her explanation simple so as not to add to their confusion.

“Where is your ship docked?” asked the old woman.

She inwardly cringed. “The TARDIS isn’t exactly docked. It’s not like a sailing vessel. It’s sitting in a field, about eight miles east of the village.”

“It’s too late to travel so far today,” said Beranna, noting the position of the sun. It was already late morning. “I live about two miles from here in a secluded spot. You can sleep there tonight and then get an early start tomorrow.”

“Do you know of a way to bypass the village? I don’t particularly want to go through there if I can help it.”

“There is a narrow path which leads through the forest and rejoins the main road a few miles past it. I can sketch a map for you.”

Outside the cathedral, Amy’s mind raced to assess her situation and new surroundings. Should she stay with the strangers, or should she try to get away from them? The cathedral was in the middle of a large park, bordered on one side by a wide river and on the other by a street with expensive looking residences. There was no use trying to make a break for it in such a wide-open space. Serena would no doubt be looking for her, but she had no idea how long it would take her friend to locate her, so she was on her own for the time being. As they followed a path to the road, she could see primitive cars parked in a few places, and one drove by. From this she guessed that the Percanthans were not very advanced technologically and would not have space travel. The strangers, on the other hand, did appear to have knowledge of other worlds, which suggested they also had a means of transport. On the off chance Serena never came for her, she might need to stay with Saedon and Tai to get off of the planet; she did not relish the idea of getting stuck on such a primitive world.

She was also intensely curious about the strangers. Tai was human, but she was not so sure about Saedon—there was something alien about him. What had they been doing in the cathedral? Was it a coincidence that she had arrived there? She wondered what Saedon had been doing in the secret passageway.

Amy was not the only one who was curious. “So, Miss Wilson, perhaps you could tell me a bit more about this archaeological site you were examining on Krimshon?”

His expression was attentive and full of good will, but some deep instinct kept Amy from trusting him completely. However, she thought it might be wise to gain his trust, and to do that she would have to tell him at least part of the truth. “We were examining a large stone circle there,” she explained. “Something like Stonehenge back on Earth. It was in beautiful condition, and much more elaborate than we’d expected it to be.”

“What purpose did it serve?” asked Saedon.

“That was the puzzle. We had expected it to be a measure of the position of the sun, but it did not appear to have any sort of relationship to the planetary seasons.”

“How old was it?”

“I think it was at least a thousand years, but I don’t really know.”

Saedon looked closely at her. “You’re not much of an archaeologist. Had you not taken measurements?”

“I never said I was in charge of the study. I’d fallen in with the archaeologists a while back and volunteered to help out with the tedious boring stuff if they’d let me come along as an observer. It was more interesting than my last job. I used to be a rather awful ship’s captain.” A momentary wave of embarrassment came over her as she recalled her dismal failure.

“I see. What else had you learned about the stones?”

“The most interesting thing was that the circle hadn’t been built by the natives.”

Saedon looked more interested. “Oh? Who built it then?”

Amy tried to look her most puzzled. “I don’t know. We were just trying to figure that out when, well, whatever happened, happened.” It was not difficult to act confused, even though she was lying about knowing who had built the circle. She was still trying to sort things out in her head. “I was looking at the altar stone in the centre when everything went all fuzzy and I thought I was blacking out. I think one of the others was looking at a nearby stone, but I haven’t a clue what she was doing.” No dishonesty there—she truly felt baffled and frustrated. She also felt too warm in her winter clothes. It was still morning, but it was already warm out—she guessed it was spring or summer. “I don’t suppose there’s any chance you’d have some more suitable clothing? I’m going to bake in these winter things.”

Saedon smiled. “I think we might be able to accommodate you.”

By this time, they were passing out of the residential area and into more commercial streets. The architectural style was not modern looking to Amy. There were lots of flared cornices and elaborate buttresses on the shops, offices, and hotels they passed. The roads were relatively quiet. Tai turned into the entrance of one of the nicer hotels, and Saedon guided Amy by her arm.

There was a man behind the front desk, reading a newspaper. He glanced up at them but they ignored him and headed straight for the lift. Amy felt a little uncertain about stepping inside. It was as primitive as the automobiles outside and looked very rickety. She could see the cables and the metal grate which served as a door, and it was controlled by a boy who was probably only a year or two older than Brogan.

They stepped inside.

“Third floor,” requested Saedon. He flashed a smile at Amy which did nothing to reduce her general uneasiness.

The boy, who was dressed in a smart blue uniform, pulled the grate shut and locked a safety bar into place. “Third floor,” he said, pulling a lever. The lift began to move, and Amy listened to the clanking of the cables and chains as they climbed. She was suddenly very doubtful about her chosen course of action. She tried to calm her nerves, observing the boy out of the corner of her eye. He might have been human, except that his face looked a little too angular. She probably would not have noticed, except that she was looking for the differences.

They reached the third floor and the boy opened up the safety bar and grate. Saedon passed him a tip and then they proceeded down the hall. Tai gave Amy a cool stare while Saedon pulled a large key from his pocket and opened the door to their room.

“After you,” he said, feigning chivalry.

Tai made a sound somewhere between a snort and a sigh. She walked into the room, and Amy followed. The suite looked expensive—there appeared to be two main rooms: a sitting area and a bedroom.

Amy took her coat off and set it down on the back of the sofa.

“See if you can find something for Miss Wilson to change into,” said Saedon as he closed the door.

Tai shrugged. She looked at Amy for a moment, judging her size, and then disappeared through the doorway into the bedroom, shutting the door behind her. Saedon wandered over to a table in the corner and pulled a small data pad out of his pocket. The bedroom door opened, and Tai emerged.

“I’ve put a few things out for you,” she said. She was not very enthusiastic. She walked over to the table and sat down across from Saedon.

“Thanks.” Amy smiled, trying to be friendly. She walked into the bedroom and shut the door.

The room had one large bed, two nightstands, and two wardrobes. Though it was a large room, it seemed a little crowded. “That’s odd,” she muttered.

She looked at the clothes on the bed. She had half-expected Tai to put out something awful, but the selection was not too bad. There were a couple tops, a skirt, a pair of trousers, and a few different pairs of shoes. Nothing was really her style, but it would be better than her thick sweater, lined trousers, and snow boots. Amy held up the trousers to her waist, but they were too long, so she decided she would have to wear the skirt. She undressed quickly and put on the lightweight blue skirt and a white blouse. The blouse was just a little too large, but the skirt was perfect, if a little long for her tastes. As for the shoes, Tai had placed out four pairs, each a different size. Only one pair fit, a pair of plain black shoes. She put them on.

Amy looked around the room. A question popped into her mind. Where had the clothes come from? Tai was certainly not her size. She walked over to the first wardrobe and quietly opened it. It was nearly empty; it did not contain any clothes but housed a few extra pillows and blankets for the bed. She looked at the other wardrobe suspiciously. Walking over, she touched it. It felt solid, ordinary. It had a dull varnished finish. She reached for the handle and gently tried to open it. It would not budge. She could not see a gap between the doors, and her suspicions grew.

She turned away and went into the bathroom. Her reflection nearly startled her—she was still wearing the yellow contact lenses, and it made her face look alien. She chuckled. “Enough of those!” she murmured. She took them out and tossed them into the waste bin. The bath looked very inviting, but she did not want to take too much time, so instead she just washed her face and tried to smooth out her hair which was a mess. She noted that the strangers had not left any personal items in the bathroom.

Staring at her reflection in the mirror, Amy started to put two and two together. The strangers had been investigating something in a secret location beneath the cathedral, right below the place in which she had arrived. She had been transported there by a Gallifreyan device which was part of some sort of complicated puzzle. Therefore, a second piece of that puzzle might lie beneath the cathedral—more Gallifreyan technology, perhaps. It was too suspicious—the location where they met, the lack of personal items in the room, the clothing they had provided at a moment’s notice, and the strange locked wardrobe that was the perfect disguise for a TARDIS. Saedon was a Time Lord.

She admitted to herself that she was making a lot of assumptions, but they fit together too well. She smiled at herself, and the reflection smiled back. If she was right, she would have a small advantage.

Just before she came out of the room, Amy overheard a little of the strangers’ conversation.

“Why are we wasting our time with this woman?” said Tai as she examined the data pad.

Saedon replied, “You dismiss her too readily. She may be of some service to us, and I’d still like to find out more about how she came to be here.” He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

Amy decided to go out. “Thank you for the clothes. I don’t know how you managed it, but they’re much better.” She did not want them to become suspicious of her. She sat down on the sofa.

“You’re welcome. My, you are a changed woman, Miss Wilson.” Saedon smiled. “Those yellow contacts did not suit you at all.”

She smiled in return. “Please, call me Amy. Miss Wilson sounds so formal. Have you any idea how I might get back to my friends on Krimshon?”

“At the moment, no. Perhaps you would like to stay with us in the meantime?”

“If it’s okay with you,” said Amy. “I hope I won’t be any trouble.”

Tai glanced up from the data pad. She said nothing, but her eyes revealed her displeasure.

Saedon looked pleased. “Good. I thought that you might be able to help us with our own studies here.”

“Oh? What are you studying?” Amy noticed that the luxurious room did not contain many technological advancements—though there were simple electric lights, there did not seem to be any entertainment devices such as an old fashioned television or even a radio. Even the clock hanging on the wall was mechanical. “Percantha doesn’t seem to be very advanced.”

“I’m a freelance writer, developing pieces for large publications like Galactic Geographic. I do most of the writing, and Tai helps me with the general research. We came here to study the Percanthan religious rituals for a new article.”

Though he sounded sincere and his explanation was believable, Amy doubted his veracity. However, it was better to pretend to believe him. Besides, she had been wondering about the crescent shaped fixture in the cathedral. “What sort of religion do

they have here? Is it anything like Earth's Christianity? The cathedral seemed so much like one from home."

Tai abruptly stood up from the table. "I'm going to run down to the bakery to get us some breakfast. Saedon?"

"Good idea. I could do with some tea. Amy?"

"Tea would be lovely. I'm surprised you can get tea here."

"Well, it isn't really tea, but it's similar. Thank you Tai."

Tai tossed him a glance before leaving the room. It was an odd look, one that made no sense to Amy.

Saedon carried on with his description of the local religious beliefs. "The Percanthans believe in a single goddess who takes two forms—the ancient power which created all things and can take any shape, and the child who was born in Percanthan form to communicate the will of the goddess. The child, a female, is based upon a real person who lived nearly four thousand years ago. She came to bring justice to the living and the dead. You see, before that point, they believed that everyone went to the same garden paradise at death. They never had a concept of sin; they simply believed that people returned to a state of purity in death. Tagna, the child goddess, came to change that. She said that people were behaving wickedly in life because they never had to pay penance in death, so she introduced the concept of two separate places for the dead spirits. Only those who had lead a proper life would be allowed into the original garden paradise; those who had failed to meet the expectations of the goddess would be banished to a sort of hell for a thousand years to make up for their evil ways. Only at the end of their punishment would they be allowed to enter paradise."

Amy was enthralled by his account. "Fascinating. And I suppose that gave the people in charge free licence to tell everyone how to lead a proper life?"

Saedon nodded, slightly amused. "Yes. They wrote Tagna's words into a holy text and new prophets came later to add to her teachings.

"Hmm. There must be lots of planets with similar belief systems. What made you choose this particular one for your article? There must be something special about this place." Amy almost withheld her next question, but she decided it would be more conspicuous if she omitted it. "Does it have something to do with the cathedral?"

"You are perceptive. Yes, the cathedral is special. As it occasionally happens, myth sometimes has a basis in reality. We've discovered that there is some factual truth underlying the Percanthan belief system."

"How's that?"

"The higher orders of priests and priestesses practice an unusual ritual that caught my attention. This city we're in, Omgali, contains the birthplace of Tagna—and the cathedral is built upon the very spot where she gave her last oratory before returning to paradise. The events surrounding Tagna's departure later evolved into a ritualistic ceremony which has spread around this world over the intervening years. The ritual involves a sort of trial, by which a novice takes his or her final vows before becoming a full priest or priestess. Most of Percantha practices this by forcing the novice to undergo heavy fasting and long hours of solitude just prior to a strenuous question and answer

session by the highest members of the order. By itself, a very rigorous test of faith. But we discovered that the priests and priestesses at the oldest place of worship here in Omgali were performing a slightly different ritual. We managed to get a little information out of one of the priests who alluded to a device which allows the novice to temporarily experience the tortures of hell. They use it to ensure that each new priest and priestess takes his or her vows seriously and remains completely devoted to Tagna.”

“Wow. Sounds kind of harsh. If you believe in that sort of thing.” Amy wondered how this tied back into the Gallilfreyan puzzle.

“When we discovered the secret chamber under the cathedral, we began to take the priest seriously. There is something down there, but we haven’t been able to figure out how it works. We were trying to gather a little more information about it when you popped in on us.”

He had a pretty good explanation, Amy had to admit. Perhaps she was being overly suspicious of him. “This device sounds like something sophisticated,” said Amy. “If they’re using it to force someone to experience an alternate reality, it must have some sort of mental interface. And that’s way beyond the current Percanthan technology.”

“I can see why those archaeologists didn’t mind taking you along. You’re absolutely right. The technology is alien to this world.” He indicated the data pad on the table. “I’ve collected some data and hope to analyse it today before we go back for another look.”

“I take it you aren’t exactly welcome to poke around down there?”

Saedon gave her a sly half smile. “No. Father Gwinn would be most displeased.”

“Not surprising. But you’ve got me intrigued. How can I help?”

“So how did you end up here?” asked Serena. They were in Beranna’s small cottage, deep in the woods, sitting in front of her fireplace. “Please don’t take this the wrong way, but you seem very well educated for these parts.”

Beranna sighed. “I left home when I was very young, perhaps a little older than Brogan here.” She smiled at the boy who was sipping hot kavel cider from a mug. His eyes were drooping sleepily. “I left home the day my mother, Tindali, told me about my father, who lived far away in Gosalla. She had met him only once when he was passing through the area on a trade mission.” The old woman had a distant look in her eyes. “By the time she realised she was pregnant with me, he was long gone. After I was born, she came to live up here in these woods out of a sense of shame.”

Serena nodded. “You went in pursuit of him?”

“Yes. I did not enjoy life here in the woods. I was lonely, for one thing. My mother forbade me contact with people in the village. So I left. I made my way down to Gosalla over the course of two years and picked up a lot of knowledge along the way.”

“Did you find your father?” asked Brogan.

The old woman shook her head. “No. I never found him. But I made a life for myself in Gosalla, working at various jobs. I discovered that I could get better jobs if I didn’t sound so backwards, so I studied and worked to improve myself. I was happy for a time and thought little of home. I married. But we had no children, and in the second

year of our marriage, my husband died of the red fever. Life in Gosalla suddenly lost its luster, so it was time to come home.

“I discovered that my mother had grown even more eccentric in her ways. She had begun to practice witchcraft and spent a great deal of time up at the stones. This didn’t help relations with the villagers, who were already a superstitious lot. They began to tell stories of the witch of the woods, and legends began to form. Then I discovered that my mother was ill. She began to forget things—small things at first, then more important things. I had to tend to her closely, and I watched her slowly deteriorate until she didn’t even know me. She lived for several more years, and we settled into a routine. When she finally died, I decided that I was happy up here in the woods, so I stayed. I used to travel out from time to time to other villages, but it has become too difficult as I’ve grown older.” She fingered a book on the small table next to her chair. “I have to admit, it’s nice to have someone to talk to again.”

Brogan smiled. “I think you’re good company, Beranna. I wish I’d known you lived up here all these years—I’d have come t’ visit.”

“The village could certainly use a bit of your wisdom,” said Serena. “I fear that someone has been twisting the legends of your mother to his own ends. Are you very familiar with the harvest and spring festivals they hold up at the stones?”

“I’ve watched a few of them—yes. But I’m not often up there after dark, so I’m afraid I’ve never seen anything unusual.”

“Maybe somebody figured out how t’ make the off’rin’s vanish like you made Amy disappear,” suggested Brogan.

“No, I don’t think so. I think they use conventional means to remove the offerings. The key stone can only be activated by a Gallifreyan.”

“Oh.” Brogan looked dejected.

“They’re probably just hauling the offerings away with a cart. Here’s a thought—Brogan, is there anyone in your village who seems to do exceptionally well, year after year?”

Brogan looked thoughtful. “Maybe a couple of families. Larso’s family... and Conwin’s.”

“Conwin. He was one of the men at the inn, wasn’t he?” asked Serena.

“Aye. Every year he always leaves a huge off’rin’ up at the stones, almost half a cartload,” replied Brogan.

“Does he? Hmm.” A dark look settled briefly in Serena’s eyes, and then she thought of her missing companion. “Well, nothing we can do about it right now. First things first, as you say.”

Serena and Brogan set out first thing in the morning with Beranna’s directions and instructions to leave the kadacks with a friend who lived near the field where the TARDIS had landed. They made fast progress riding the kadacks, bypassing the village and encountering no one. Serena was almost disappointed. They reached the farmhouse as the sun was setting.

The farmhouse of the friend was only a half a mile from the TARDIS. Beranna's old friend, a widow, was glad to hear news of the aging recluse. She agreed to watch the kadacks for them and tried to convince them to spend the night. Serena politely declined and they set out to find the TARDIS in the receding light.

As they began to cross the field, Brogan looked for Serena's TARDIS. All he could see was a large shadow which contrasted barely with the snow in the twilight.

"Is that your ship?" he asked, squinting.

"Yes." Serena rummaged around in her pack for a torch and clicked it on. She directed its beam towards the TARDIS.

"It don't look like a ship." They drew closer and he could see it a little better. "It looks kinda like one of them stones, only black."

Serena smiled briefly. "I suppose it does." As she unlocked and opened the door, she turned off the torch. A faint glimmer of light flickered within.

Brogan gave her a skeptical glance and stepped inside.

The gaslights flared to life as soon as they entered the TARDIS, gently illuminating the large cathedral-like console room. Clouds of red and gold plasma moved within the transparent cylinder at the centre of the console, catching Brogan's eye.

"You sure you ain't a witch? This thing's bigger on the inside than it is on the outside."

Serena laughed and unhooked her cloak. "It's all very scientific, I assure you."

"If you say so." He wandered over to one of the high-backed armchairs and set Amy's pack down, which he had been carrying. "And you say we can figure out the secret of them stones with all of this?" He gestured at the room.

"Yes. But I must get the navigational circuits working first." Serena opened her own pack and pulled out the equipment she had taken along on the journey.

"You got some food? I'm famished."

Serena looked embarrassed. "I'm terribly sorry. I didn't even think of that. Here—let me take you to the kitchen." She led the way to a wooden door in one of the large stone walls.

"You mean there's more?" Brogan looked at her in disbelief.

She nodded mischievously.

He followed.

"There's not much in here... just some lasagna Amy made a few days ago." Serena peered into the nearly empty high-tech refrigerator. "Or we could just use the food replicator."

"I'll eat whatever Amy made. If it's anything like her omelette, I can hardly wait!" Brogan appeared at Serena's side.

Serena did not have the heart to tell him that the omelette was not Amy's creation. Not that it would matter—Amy's lasagna was delicious. She had been practicing her cooking skills ever since their adventure on Kemth when she had spontaneously plunged them into waitressing jobs at a small restaurant.

Soon, Brogan was set up with a hot piece of lasagna and a tall glass of milk. “Aren’t you goin’ t’ eat something?” He took a huge bite of lasagna.

“I’ll get something later. I’m not really hungry at the moment.” Serena had brought one of her electronic devices to the kitchen, and she was re-examining the readings. “I’ve got a busy night ahead—I need to fix the TARDIS and figure out how I’m going to analyze the puzzle.”

“Wh’ wr’ng w’ th’ TARDIS?” Brogan mumbled through a mouthful of food.

Serena was concentrating on the device and did not notice his poor manners. “The navigational circuits keep malfunctioning. I’ve got to repair them before we can attempt travel.”

Brogan did not understand her technical explanation. He picked up the glass of milk and drank half of it all at once. “Oh. Boy, this lasnia is delicious! I ain’t never eaten anything so good.”

“Lasagna,” Serena corrected him. “Amy would be delighted with your compliment. She is very proud of her new culinary skills.”

Brogan ate the rest of his meal and sat quietly for a few moments, feeling contented and looking around the kitchen. “Why is the console room so much different from the rest of this ship?” He contemplated the bright white roundels on the walls, the illuminated ceiling, the clean kitchen appliances, and the austere white table at which they sat. “It’s so dark in there.”

Serena thought about his question and tried to formulate an answer that he would understand, but she had trouble. “I just needed a change of... decor,” she said lamely.

Brogan nodded without understanding.

Since he was done with his meal, Serena decided it was time to show him to his temporary quarters so that she could get some work done. They made their way back through the corridors and paused at the open door to Amy’s room.

“I like it,” said Brogan, looking inside. Amy’s tastes were simple and practical. She had a blue and purple duvet covering her large bed, a small nightstand with a lamp, a digital clock and a couple books, and tall wardrobe which was closed. It was uncluttered and tidy, a sign of habits picked up from her ship captain days.

“You can sleep here tonight,” said Serena, opening up the door across from Amy’s room. She touched the light switch near the door, avoiding the complications of introducing Brogan to the voice controls.

The lights illuminated a room about the same size as Amy’s. It held a similar bed with a green duvet, but the stained wood furniture was more elaborate.

Brogan walked in and sat down on the bed, bouncing a few times. “This is mighty plush. It ain’t nothing like the room I have at Meg’s Inn.”

“Feel free to do anything you like to make the room comfortable,” said Serena. “The toilet is down the corridor, next door on the right. If you keep going, you’ll come back to the console room.”

Brogan smiled. “Thanks Serena. This is sure turning out to be some adventure!”
Serena smiled back. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

As she walked back to the console room to begin her repairs, it occurred to her that she might be acquiring a second companion. She liked Brogan's enthusiasm and energy, but she wondered if it might be a mistake to travel with someone so young. For all of his hardships, the loss of his parents when he was so young and the fact that he had worked from such a young age, he was still very innocent.

After breakfast, Saedon decided to team Tai and Amy up for the day to do a little more "research" while he spent the time at the hotel analysing data and doing a little writing. Amy was a little daunted about spending several hours alone with Tai, but she decided to make the best of it. Their assignment was to visit Father Gwinn again. Amy was more personable than Tai, so the hope was that she would have more success in getting information out of the old priest. Saedon suspected that they were missing an important piece to the puzzle.

"So how did you approach Father Gwinn yesterday?" asked Amy as she and Tai walked back to the cathedral. "Did you tell him the truth, that the two of you were doing research for an article? Or did you have some other sort of cover?"

Tai cocked an eyebrow as she looked down at Amy. "We gave him a modified form of the truth," she replied. "We said that we were from Caldonne, a province in the southern hemisphere, writing a piece for a religious publication."

"How well were you received?" asked Amy. She wondered if the Percanathan people were prudish. Tai had left her knife back at the hotel, but she was still dressed in her revealing outfit. Amy actually felt a little dowdy walking alongside the tall woman, but she realised her simple attire could play to her advantage.

"He was a little suspicious of us," admitted Tai. "He seemed to like Saedon better than me."

Amy nodded. "Perhaps he felt a little intimidated by you," said Amy, trying to be diplomatic.

The corner of Tai's mouth turned up slightly in a subtle smile. "Perhaps you're right." It was the most positive response she had given Amy during the entire morning. While she still remained cool, her open hostility seemed to be fading slightly.

As they entered the park, Tai described yesterday's conversation with the priest in greater detail. They were supposed to be writing for a small publication called the Caldonne Tagnian Weekly. They decided that Amy would pretend to be a new journalist, sent to join her more experienced team members. Their goal was to find out more about the performance of the ritual, particularly if there was anything special that the priest did to activate the device.

They reached the main entrance of the cathedral and pulled open one of the large wooden double doors underneath the huge stained glass window.

The cathedral was as peaceful as it had been earlier in the morning, except that there were now a few people scattered around in the pews, quietly praying. A robed man stood up on the platform, quietly reading from a large book on the podium. Glasses were perched upon his angular nose, and he looked like he was in his seventies.

"That's Father Gwinn," whispered Tai.

Amy smiled and walked purposefully down the aisle.

The man looked up from the podium when he saw the approaching women. As Amy reached the front of the platform, he asked, "Can I help you?" Then he saw Tai, and he frowned slightly.

"I hope so. I was wondering if I could take a few minutes of your time to ask you some follow-up questions. I believe you met my colleague yesterday?" Amy smiled graciously and indicated Tai.

Father Gwinn walked around the podium and slowly climbed down the front stairs with the aid of a cane. He was a few inches shorter than Amy and quite frail. He waited attentively for Amy to continue.

Amy took his attitude as an assent. She kept her voice low so as not to disturb the other people in the pews. "Thank you. My name is Amy Wilson, and I'm a new writer for the Caldonne Tagnian Weekly. I'm sorry I couldn't be here yesterday with my colleagues, but I had some travel difficulties." She suddenly wondered how Serena was managing. "I've only just joined the Weekly, you see, and they sent me here at short notice to join our team on this project. It's going to be a very exciting piece for our readers. Many of them have never had the opportunity to travel to Omgali, so we are trying to bring a little of Omgali to them." She looked around the magnificent cathedral, letting her eyes rest upon the crescent symbol hanging at the front. She smiled blissfully. "It is truly a wonderful thing to be here," she added. "This place evokes such a sense of purity and love."

Father Gwinn seemed pleased with her words. "Shall we sit down?" he said, gesturing towards the nearest pew.

"By all means."

They walked over to the pew and slid in to take a seat. Tai sat near the end of the bench, away from the priest and Amy. She observed them carefully but let Amy do the talking.

"What are your questions, my child?"

"Well, so far we've managed to get a pretty fair idea of the atmosphere here and the general day to day worship which takes place here at the Cathedral of Tagna Rising." Amy became more intense. "But we're missing a vital element, something which will give our readers a sense of the devotion in the place, something which will help them remember the importance of keeping Tagna's words and meanings close."

Father Gwinn briefly glanced up towards the platform. "How right you are. Too many people today are forgetting Tagna's message of faith." His glance drifted to Tai, who looked away.

"How do you manage to guide your parishioners along the righteous path?" asked Amy. She looked briefly towards the quiet worshippers in the back. "Your parishioners seem to have a rare clarity which guides them."

At that moment, the side door opened, and a novice came through, tending to the candles around the room. She was dressed in a robe similar to Father Gwinn's, but the tie at her waist was coloured white.

“We focus upon Tagna’s message,” said Father Gwinn, “and we try to remind our priests and priestesses how the unrighteous will suffer.” His glance drifted briefly to the novice and then back to the platform. “Our training here at the Cathedral is very rigorous, probably more rigorous than anywhere else. Our novices must prove themselves before Tagna. Take Marta here,” he said, indicating the novice who had crossed to the platform to check the candles on the altar. “After this morning’s service she will begin preparing herself for the ultimate trial.”

“Ultimate trial?”

“Yes. Here at the Cathedral of Tagna Rising, we are very close to the doorway to paradise... and hell. Tagna has provided us with a means for opening that doorway just a crack so that our novices can look beyond this life. It leaves them with an everlasting impression, which aids them in guiding the other members of the community.”

“That is amazing. And you say Marta will undergo this trial soon? How can one prepare for such a powerful experience?”

Father Gwinn looked solemn. “She practices an oath of silence for seven days prior to her trial, fasting during the daylight hours and spending many hours in prayer when she is not performing her duties. At midnight of the final day, we hold a special ceremony for Marta, and we pray to Tagna to open the doorway to the beyond, to bring her guidance.”

The large double doors at the back of the cathedral opened, and sunlight streamed into the room. Several people entered, wearing dresses and suits. The sound of their hushed voices bounced around the large room, disturbing some of the stillness.

“I’m terribly sorry, but I must finish preparing for today’s sermon,” said Father Gwinn, excusing himself. The three of them slid out of the pew and Amy walked with the old man back to the stairs.

“Thank you so much for your time,” Amy said.

“May Tagna bless you, my child.” He made a circular gesture in front of her, mimicking the shape of the crescent, and climbed the stairs.

Amy and Tai moved away from the platform. “We should stay for the sermon,” whispered Amy.

Tai nodded, and they slid into a pew a few rows back. Amy noticed there were holy books in a wooden bracket on the back of the pew in front of them, so she pulled one out. “You should take one out, too,” she suggested.

“But I can’t read it,” replied Tai.

“Neither can I. Just pretend. Better to make a good impression, just in case.”

More people were coming in all the time, and the pews were starting to fill up. After about twenty minutes, the cathedral was nearly full, and Father Gwinn began his sermon. Amy thought it was very boring, and she had to stifle more than one yawn. Tai, on the other hand, seemed to be ignoring his speech, but she was looking intently at the platform and around the room.

An hour later, the two women finally escaped the confines of the cathedral.

“What do you think? Did we learn anything new?” Amy asked, feeling a little disappointed. Father Gwinn’s description of the ritual Marta would undergo did not seem very informative to her.

Tai said, “Perhaps. It might be a stroke of luck that they are holding the ceremony tonight. Saedon might have a gadget or two we can use to observe it from a safe distance.”

Amy nodded. “That’s a good idea.”

“It also occurred to me that the crescent may be important. He kept looking at it, almost as if it held more than just symbolic meaning.”

Morning was arriving on Krimshon when Serena decided it was time to test her repairs of the navigational circuits. She set the coordinates for the plateau and activated the TARDIS dematerialisation circuit.

A moment later, the TARDIS rematerialised, and she activated the scanner. An image of two stone monuments appeared. She let out a small sigh of relief.

The door to the corridor opened, and Brogan appeared. “Mornin’!” he announced cheerfully.

“Good morning.” Serena smiled at the boy.

“I sure did sleep well.” His stomach made an audible rumbling, and he wandered over to Amy’s pack which was still sitting on the chair. “I couldn’t find anything to eat in the kitchen,” he said. He looked inside the pack and found one of the instant meals. He looked at the writing on the cover, unsuccessfully trying to deduce the contents, and finally decided it did not matter. He pulled the heating tab and opened the package a moment later. It contained oatmeal.

“I’ll have to show you how to work the replicator.” Serena came over and checked the contents of her own bag, which was now sitting on the table in between the two high-backed chairs. She had prepared her equipment during the night, so she was all ready to get to work.

Brogan hurried through his food and noticed the scanner image. “You got a painting of where we’re going?” he asked. “It sure does look realistic.”

“That’s because it is.” Serena operated the door controls, and the two large wooden doors at the entrance swung open, revealing the snowy landscape of the plateau and one of the stone monoliths.

The boy’s eyes grew wide. He set the instant oatmeal down and rushed over to the entrance, stepping outside. He was not wearing his coat. He jumped back inside and patted his arms, shivering. “How did we get here so fast?” he asked. “I never felt the ship move!”

“We made a short jump through space.”

Brogan came back over to the chairs and continued eating his breakfast. “The TARDIS sure is a neat ship. It makes travelling so easy!”

“I’m going to get started outside. Join me when you’re ready,” said Serena, pulling the cloak around her shoulders. She picked up the bag and walked outside.

With the right equipment, it did not take Serena long to find a release mechanism to open up the key stone. Light glowed around a large rectangle beneath the hand impressions and a hidden panel popped open.

Brogan came out of the TARDIS, now dressed in his warm coat, and said, “If I didn’t see it with my own eyes, I’d never have believed this!”

The inner workings contained Gallifreyan circuitry which contrasted with the stone exterior. However, it was primitive and simplistic compared to more modern Gallifreyan technology, and Serena made fast progress in her analysis.

He watched Serena as she worked, fascinated by the unfamiliar technology. Serena occasionally described how the different parts worked, but most of it was beyond Brogan’s comprehension.

“There, I think we have everything we need now,” said Serena.

“So we can go find Amy now?”

“Yes, with a bit of luck.” She smiled.

They suddenly heard the sound of kadacks. Serena glanced around to see two men approaching, riding in between the stones.

“Evil witch! How dare you desecrate Tindali’s Sanctuary!” Conwin, the bearded man from the inn, spoke angrily and stared at them with accusing eyes.

Fagney rode at his side. Fagney’s eyes sparkled with some unspoken rage.

Serena calmly closed the panel which latched shut and sealed. The stone looked whole once again. Then she turned and faced the men.

“All set?” asked Saedon. He was sitting at the table in the hotel room, casually setting up a sophisticated portable computer to monitor the evening’s activities in the cathedral.

“Yes. We placed the cameras in the cathedral as you instructed,” said Tai. The cameras were small and capable of hovering—the type of thing favoured by the media of Amy’s time to film live news broadcasts.

Amy looked out the window. The sun was setting.

“Good. It should be a very informative evening.” He tapped his fingers a few times on the table, looking satisfied.

“What are we going to do after we figure out how the ritual works?” asked Amy. She wandered over to the table and looked at the screen over Saedon’s shoulder. There were three windows open, showing different angles inside the cathedral. One of the cameras showed a broad view of the platform; the second provided a close-up of the altar and the crescent; the third hovered inconspicuously near the secret passageway. They had not had the opportunity to go inside as there were always people about. Even now one of the cameras showed a woman seated in one of the pews near the front. The room was full of shadows, lit by a multitude of flickering candles.

“I haven’t decided yet,” said Saedon. “Perhaps try a little experiment of our own.” He gave a half smile. “We should take this opportunity to get some food and rest—it could be a very long night.”

Amy decided it was a good time to take a long hot bath.

It was nearly eleven when they detected renewed activity in the cathedral. Amy dozed on the sofa, while Saedon and Tai sat at the table, casually watching the computer screen. The remains of sandwiches and three empty glasses littered the table.

“Show time.” Saedon sat up and gave the screen his full attention.

His words jolted Amy out of her sleep and she yawned. She came over to the table and pulled up a chair to watch.

Several priests and priestesses filed into the cathedral, walking slowly and moving into preordained positions. The cameras detected the sounds of movement, but no voices, yet. Marta, the novice, followed, a hood pulled up over her head. Father Gwinn appeared from the side door and hobbled up the stairs of the platform, leaning his cane against the altar. His face held a very somber expression as he waited for the novice.

Marta climbed the platform and kneeled before the altar.

Saedon adjusted the position of the second camera to move closer to the action on the platform.

Father Gwinn spoke. “Are you prepared to face the trial of Tagna?”

“I am prepared,” replied the hooded novice. Her voice sounded faint and unused as she spoke her first words in seven days.

The old priest gestured to the side of the platform, and another priest stepped forward. He pressed the groove in the wood panelling and revealed the entrance to the secret passageway. The assistant then picked up a candle from the altar and guided Marta down the stairs. The third camera followed them down.

This was the first time Amy had a chance to see the secret chamber beneath the cathedral. It was very dark, lit only by the single candle. The room seemed to be carved out of stone.

The priest knelt and lit two candles which were placed before the wall directly beneath the altar. The camera adjusted to the increased illumination and revealed a handful of carvings in the stone. Amy could not make sense of them—it was in some sort of alien writing that she did not recognise. She counted about twenty symbols in total.

Marta knelt between the two candles and began to pray. The assistant climbed back up the stairs.

Back on the platform, Father Gwinn gazed up at the crescent through his glasses. He raised his arms and said, “We pray to you, Tagna, to guide us along the path of righteousness.”

The other priests and priestesses repeated his words.

“Guide Marta along the path to purity, so that she may know your wishes,” continued Father Gwinn. Again, the others intoned the second prayer.

“Open the gates to paradise and hell!” Father Gwinn made the circular flourish before the crescent symbol. The symbol began to glow, and a light shot out from the wall and shone upon the old priest. Below, in the secret chamber, the carvings began to glow. The wall split down the middle, casting a tremendous glow upon Marta and the chamber. She reached up to touch the glowing fissure.

Saedon adjusted the camera so they could see her face and watch her movements. A sudden look of fear filled her eyes, but she was transfixed by the glow and could not move away.

Father Gwinn patiently stayed in his position upon the platform. The symbol suddenly stopped glowing and the light that came from the wall went away. The old priest bowed his head in silent prayer.

At the same time, the fissure sealed up in the chamber and the carvings returned to normal. Marta was once again only illuminated by the two flickering candles. She continued to hold her frozen position for a moment longer and then shook her head as if to clear it. She seemed a little bewildered, and her eyes were filled with a look of shock. Whatever she had experienced had greatly affected her.

“So that’s how it works,” murmured Saedon. “It’s activated outside the chamber.”

For her part, Amy felt chilled. She could hardly draw her eyes away from the image of Marta as the dazed woman climbed the stairs to the platform.

“What happened to her?” Tai whispered. She was equally touched.

Only Saedon seemed unmoved by the events they had witnessed. He leaned back, hands behind his head, and stretched. “Oh, just a little misuse of technology, I think.”

“What?” Amy looked at him.

Saedon gave her one of his sly smiles. “They’ve figured out how to activate the device, but it deactivates almost immediately.”

“Deactivates? But look at the effect that it had on Marta!”

“Just a side-effect. She was caught in the energy wash, that’s all.”

By this time, Marta had reached the platform. The assistant priest helped guide the stunned woman away, and the other priests and priestesses slowly dispersed. Father Gwinn was the last to leave, sealing up the chamber on his way out.

Saedon selected the image which had captured Father Gwinn’s movements. “Watch.” He rewound the segment and showed Father Gwinn tracing the crescent shape in the air. “There, he’s activating the device. There’s a motion sensor hidden in the wall.” He paused the image and set it to play in slow motion. Amy watched a small speck of light appear in the wall in front of the old priest. Light shone out upon him. “The device is scanning him.” The image played out, and the light vanished again. “It finishes the scan, having detected that the priest does not meet the parameters set to operate the device. It deactivates.”

Tai spoke. “So this device wasn’t really showing the novice heaven and hell?” She seemed a little shaken.

“Of course not! Probably just gave her a hallucination!” He shook his head, as if expecting Tai to know better.

“So what now?” asked Amy, realising that she was tired.

“Now it’s our turn!” replied Saedon, full of energy. “Time to check out. Tai, will you run down to the front desk and return our key? We won’t be needing it anymore.”

Amy felt a sense of foreboding. She had not expected things to happen so quickly. If they left now, would Serena ever be able to find her?

Serena looked up at Conwin and Fagney, giving them an icy glare. “What do you want?” she growled. She heard the sound of more kadacks from somewhere behind her, but the sound bounced off of the stones, obscuring the direction.

“Where’s your friend?” asked Conwin.

Serena ignored his question. “You’ve got no business here. Leave us alone.”

“You’ve got it wrong, witch! You don’t belong here!” snapped Conwin.

“You’ve brought ruin upon us!” cried Fagney. His voice was loaded with anger and something else—sorrow.

Conwin urged his kadack to move forward, sneering down at Serena and Brogan. “Get away from here, boy. We only want her.”

Brogan looked confused. “What did she do to you?”

“Her presence here has brought a curse upon us,” said Conwin. “She is evil, and she’s trying to take the place of our blessed Tindali!”

“No she ain’t!” cried Brogan. He was about to explain about Tindali, when a third man interrupted.

“We come to deal with her evil ways in the only way we can.” The third man appeared to Serena’s right, riding upon a kadack.

A fourth man rode forward at the other side of the keystone. “To make her pay for killing Fagney’s baby.”

“You stole our child!” cried Fagney. “My wife miscarried in the night. It’s all your fault!” He pointed an accusing finger at Serena.

“You are mistaken,” Serena replied evenly. Her eyes flashed dangerously.

“We will bury you in stone, witch!” cried Conwin. “That will put an end to your evil ways!”

The man to her right came closer, holding a coiled rope in his free hand.

“Leave her alone, Vanto,” squeaked Brogan.

The fourth man, who was fairly close to Brogan, kicked at the boy square in the shoulders. Brogan fell down, crying out. He looked up at the man, anger and hurt filling his eyes, and bravely pushed himself back up by his hands.

“Out of the way!” the man ordered.

“F*** you, Rythan!” spat the boy.

Serena snapped. Perhaps it was Rythan’s cruel action, perhaps it was Brogan’s foul response—whatever it was pushed her over the edge. She took a deep breath and focused on Rythan’s kadack, her eyes glittering.

The animal began to tap the ground nervously with its feet and suddenly reared up on its hindquarters, throwing Rythan out of the saddle. The man hit the ground and was momentarily stunned. The kadack bolted out of the circle.

In the meantime, Vanto was approaching Serena. He had formed a loop with the rope and intended to catch her in it. Serena sensed the movement and turned quickly, grasping the rope just as he was trying to toss the loop around her. She yanked hard, and her unexpected strength took Vanto by surprise, jerking him half out of the saddle. He

managed to stay on the kadack, but he lost control of the rope. He backed a few paces away.

“It’s not that easy!” She sneered menacingly at him. She crossed to the altar stone and jumped up to stand on top of it, her cloak fluttering around her. Now she stood at eye level with the three men.

Brogan pulled himself out of the way and leaned against the key stone, watching Serena with a sense of awe. Though she was dwarfed by the circling kadacks and their riders, her presence was intimidating. She played with the looped rope, tossing it casually from side to side.

She turned to gaze at each man. “Which of you wants to try next, hmm?” she challenged.

Vanto urged his kadack forward and Conwin followed, coming in from the other side. Serena swung the rope at Vanto’s head, trying to knock him from the kadack. He reached up and blocked her move. Conwin came in from behind and lunged off of his animal, jumping to the altar. He closed his muscular arms around Serena from the back and they struggled together. Vanto managed to scoop up the rope, and for a moment it looked to Brogan as if the men were succeeding in restraining the overwhelmed Gallifreyan.

Serena worked a foot in between Conwin’s legs and suddenly managed to pull him off balance. They both topped from the altar. Conwin grunted when he hit the ground. Serena landed on top of him. She thrust two quick elbow jabs into his rib cage and broke free of his grip. Catching her breath, she scrambled backwards right into Vanto’s kadack. She looked up at the towering animal. Vanto pulled the kadack back and smacked Serena hard with the rope. He sneered down at her.

She reached up and felt a trickle of blood at her mouth. She tried to calm her rapid breathing and focused upon his kadack. Like the other one, his kadack reared and made a shrill noise. Vanto held on tight, but the rope slipped and toppled to a pile on the ground. The kadack reared again and bolted out of the circle, carrying Vanto away. He could not control the crazed animal.

Conwin got back on his feet and Rythan joined him, now recovered. They slowly walked side by side toward Serena.

Turning swiftly, Serena obscured her next move with her long cloak. She flung a lightning high kick at the men when they came within range, taking the men by surprise. Each man fell backwards. Conwin was the first to recover. He lunged. He swung at her, but she ducked. He reached forward, but he was off balance. Serena crouched sideways and kicked at his legs, hitting one of his shins. He jumped backwards and grabbed his bruised leg, cursing. Rythan came forward, flinging a backhand at Serena’s head. She stepped back and grabbed his arm as it came around and pulled him forward. He skidded headfirst into the ground. She turned quickly and caught Conwin coming at her. He was closing in on her and she kneed him in the groin. He yelped and stumbled backwards, holding himself. Rythan, still on the ground, grabbed her leg and tried to pull her down. She stomped on his arm with her free foot and he jerked away. He sat up and cradled his arm.

Serena moved away from Rythan. Fagney was still on his kadack, watching the fight, anger boiling in his eyes. However, he was unaccustomed to fighting, particularly when the adversary was a woman, and he wavered. His kadack paced back and forth between two of the monoliths.

“What about you?” asked Serena, reaching up to her bleeding lip again. “I didn’t hurt your baby, can’t you see that? You should be at home, with your wife, comforting her. Injuring me isn’t going to make you, or her, feel better.”

Fagney suddenly looked guilty and disgusted. He turned away and rode out of the stone circle without raising a hand against Serena.

The injured men did not try to attack her again. Vanto was no where to be seen. Serena looked at Conwin and Rythan. Both clutched at their injuries, each breathing heavily and glaring.

Serena walked over to Brogan and held out a hand to pull him up. He accepted it. “I’m leaving. Do you want to come with me?” she asked.

The boy brushed snow from his clothes and nodded. Serena picked up her bag of equipment and they went into the TARDIS.

“Why are we going into the bedroom?” Amy asked. “I thought you said we were leaving.” Of course, she already guessed that they were going to go into Saedon’s TARDIS, but she did not want them to know that.

Saedon smiled. “You’ll see.”

Tai checked around the room to make sure they hadn’t left anything behind. She picked up Amy’s fur coat from the back of the sofa and followed them into the bedroom.

Saedon walked over to the suspect wardrobe and pulled a key from his pocket.

Amy held the portable computer and waited, watching Saedon with as much confusion as she could muster.

He unlocked the wardrobe and light spilled out into the room. He stepped inside.

“Go in,” instructed Tai.

Amy shrugged and stepped through the wardrobe door.

She was right. It was a TARDIS.

“Okay, I’m confused now—what is this place?” Amy asked. She looked around at the large hexagonal room. The walls had the characteristic roundels, but the console room was much more colourful than Serena’s TARDIS had ever been. The floor was tiled black and white like a checkerboard, and the gleaming white console had contrasting black levers and buttons. The transparent cylinder at the centre of the console was filled with shining rods. At the far side of the room were several oversized chairs in shades of rich blue, purple, and burgundy. They were placed around a multicoloured fur rug which appeared to have a large animal head attached at one end. Three small black tables stood near the plush chairs. An exquisite crystal chess set was set up on one of them, a game already in play. A large oil painting of a crowded street hung upon one wall, but Amy did not recognise the artist. Long silken fabrics in lilac and green hung from the high ceiling at the

two walls closest to the seating area, giving the room an added softness. A single door led out of the console room at the far side, just past the chairs.

Saedon walked up to the console and pushed the lever to close the main doors. Tai crossed to the chairs and dumped Amy's coat upon one of them.

"Welcome to my TARDIS," said Saedon.

"Your what?" asked Amy.

"Time And Relative Dimensions In Space—my ship." He smiled and pressed a few buttons. The rods in the central column began to glow, and the TARDIS dematerialized.

"Your ship? Hidden in a wardrobe?"

Saedon looked impatient. "Yes. You must learn to think in multiple dimensions."

A moment later, the ship rematerialised. Saedon pressed another button, and a sliding plate rolled up on the wall across from the painting, revealing the shadowy interior of the cathedral.

The cathedral was silent and very dark. Many of the candles on the altar were starting to burn out. The TARDIS had materialized as a large door in the wall at the side of the platform. No one was about. Saedon stepped outside and purposefully crossed over, opening the secret door. Amy and Tai followed.

Saedon collected the three small cameras and stuffed them into a pocket. Then he looked around the room and said, "I think we're ready. Amy, would you mind going down into the chamber?"

This took her by surprise. She recalled the fearful look on Marta's face. "Why? I thought you could activate the device up here."

"Yes, I can. But I need someone to be downstairs. Besides, I think this will send you back to Krimshon."

"It will?" Amy was doubtful.

Saedon nodded. "I think so. I should be able to activate this device."

"But you said it didn't work."

"It didn't work for Father Gwinn because he didn't have the right DNA. Now, run along." He glanced over at Tai. Tai looked at Amy, fingering the knife which was once again strapped to her thigh.

Amy realised she didn't have any choice in the matter. She slowly turned and walked towards the passageway. When she reached the entrance, she turned to look back at Saedon.

Saedon had turned back to study the wall and the crescent symbol. He pulled a few small devices from another pocket and examined the wall. He smiled. "Perfect," he murmured.

Tai smiled at Amy, but it was not a reassuring look.

Amy turned and climbed down the stairs.

The chamber was still lit by one of the candles from the ceremony. It was a small stub and flickered in the pool of melted wax. Amy walked over and squinted at the carvings in the wall. She could barely see them. She ran her fingers over them and felt the

ridges in the cold stone. She shivered. The underground chamber was cooler than the outside air. She tried to reassure herself. This was the second part of the Gallifreyan puzzle, designed to amuse people and challenge them, not to injure them. At least, that is what Amy hoped.

Above, Saedon quickly mimicked the priest's sign, drawing a crescent in the air. The symbol began to glow and light appeared from the wall, scanning Saedon. He waited impatiently, keeping his eye on a device he had placed upon the altar.

The carvings began to glow in the chamber. Amy stared at them and watched the glowing fissure appear. The light was hypnotic, and she could not pull away.

A deep voice boomed out in the cathedral, coming from the wall. "Access granted. You may proceed with the riddle!"

Tai jumped. Saedon smiled. "Did you hear that? A voice from the past!" he cried, excited.

The fissure grew into a doorway in the chamber. The whole room filled with a blinding light. Amy felt dizzy. She fell forward into the light.

Her head began to clear. She rubbed at her eyes, trying to clear away the spots she was seeing. She could see a shape nearby but she could not make it out.

Amy shivered, but this time not from cold. Her vision began to clear, and she realised she was not alone.

"Got it! I've locked on to her location," cried Saedon. He scooped up his devices and grinned at Tai. He made a brief reverse motion in front of the crescent and the symbol ceased its glowing. The device deactivated.

"Where did you send her?" asked Tai, glancing at the entrance to the chamber.

"To the next stage of this little puzzle, I think." He was beaming. "I want to get this data analysed right away."

They entered his TARDIS. A few moments later, the door vanished as the ship dematerialised.

Serena stared at one of the console readouts. It had taken her a few hours to analyse the data she had collected, but she had determined that Amy had been transported to the planet Percantha. It was a relatively primitive world, so she hoped that her friend had managed to stay out of trouble.

Brogan was sitting in one of the chairs, looking quite relaxed. They had both had a chance to clean up after the fight with the men. It did not weigh too heavily upon his mind. Serena had shown him the wardrobe room and he had changed into a costume more suitable for their destination. He still found it hard to believe they were going to travel to another planet, but it excited him. Serena was not very talkative after the fight, so he amused himself by looking up at the dizzying image of space on the domed ceiling.

Suddenly the image shifted. He thought it suddenly looked like carved wood.

The TARDIS materialised. Serena activated the scanner, which revealed a wood panelled wall. She did not see anyone and did not detect a hostile environment.

A door appeared in the newly arrived black monolith. Serena stepped out, looking around. The cathedral was dimly lit. The rising sun shone through the stained glass windows at the back, casting coloured light throughout the room.

“Oh, my Goddess! Tagna, you’ve returned to us!” cried a young woman, dressed in a robe with a black tie around her waist. She had been kneeling before the altar and had turned to face the strange new arrival. She bowed her head to the ground in supplication.

“Oh dear,” replied Serena.

To be continued...