

The Forgotten Riddle—Part Two

by Christy Devonport

A Serena / Saedon Story
Featured on The Renegade Timelord Website
<http://drwho.rartec.com/>

Abstract: Serena tries to find her lost companion, Amy, as she continues to unravel a forgotten Gallifreyan riddle. She has picked up a new companion, a young boy named Brogan, and together they search. However, they are not alone in their quest - a mysterious Time Lord is also on the trail.

“So, you have made it through the first trial,” whispered an ancient voice.

Amy blinked, and the nearby shape came into focus. She heard a creaking sound and realised there was an old woman sitting in a wooden rocking chair, slowly tilting back and forth. The rest of the scene coalesced around her, and Amy found herself in a room that might have been in a castle. A meagre fire was dwarfed by a huge stone fireplace. There were neither windows nor doors; the room was completely enclosed by dark grey stone.

The old woman faced the glowing coals, her long unkempt hair drooping over her face so that Amy could not see it.

Amy looked around for someplace to sit, but the old woman sat in the only chair.

“What trial?” Amy asked.

“The trial of logic,” replied the woman.

“Logic?”

The old woman cackled. “For one who has passed through such a trial, you are not too swift.”

Amy thought about the stone circle and Serena's discovery. It was a Gallifreyan puzzle, or at least part of one, and so was this... hallucination? It seemed very real to Amy.

“So, if that was the trial of logic, what is this?”

The old woman nodded to herself. “The trial of fear,” she croaked.

That did not sound good. “How many trials are there?” Amy asked.

“Five.”

“And the others—”

“Enough of this chattering!” barked the crone. She slowly turned away from the fire to look at Amy.

Amy was horrified. The old woman’s eyes were sightless, completely covered over in hazy grey cataracts, almost as if a spider had woven nests there.

In spite of this, it was as if she was looking directly into Amy’s core. Amy shivered.

“So, what do you fear, pet? Hmm?” muttered the old woman. “And even more importantly, can you conquer your fear?”

Amy saw a flicker of motion in the corner of her eye and turned. A dark entrance had appeared in the stone wall, and a woman stepped forward from the shadows.

“Lisa?” Amy whispered.

The woman cocked her head slightly and the corner of her mouth turned up. Her curly brown hair hugged her scalp, her eyes were carefully painted with eyeliner and mascara, and she wore a shape hugging cream-coloured sweater and short tweed skirt. In fact, she looked just as Amy remembered her—from seven years ago.

Amy’s face started to burn.

“No, that won’t do,” muttered the old woman.

Amy jumped. She had forgotten about the old crone for an instant.

Lisa stepped back into the shadowed entrance and vanished.

“Hmm, this one is interesting, pet,” whispered the old crone.

A new figure stepped forward.

Amy sucked in her breath. It was Kendra Sear—Serena’s dark future self. The tall dark haired woman eyed her menacingly. She casually walked into the room and circled Amy.

“So, you’re still hanging around?” She coolly added, “You little bitch.”

Amy flinched. Kendra was different from her own Serena, but there was something recognisable in her eyes. She did not know what to say.

“My, you have such a high opinion of yourself,” Kendra continued. “As if you could control me!” She stepped closer. Her withering gaze could have frozen rivers. “You mean nothing to me now,” she spat.

Amy struggled for a response, and then Kendra vanished into thin air. Amy blinked.

The old woman spoke again. “That wasn’t the right one either. Save that for another day, hmm? But this one...”

Amy felt a wave of dizziness wash over her. When it cleared, she realized the room and the old woman were gone. Instead, she found herself standing in a lift.

“I wish that would stop happening,” she muttered.

It was a very familiar lift. She looked down at her clothes and realised she was back in her old captain’s uniform, torn and soiled from her last mission—when she had crashed the passenger vessel she had been captaining. She had a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach—and it was not from the lift’s movement.

The lift stopped its ascent and the doors slid open, revealing a spacious and expensively decorated lobby. Her father’s secretary glanced up from her desk, but Louisa’s usual smile did not grace her face.

“This isn’t real,” Amy whispered to herself.

The thought vanished from her mind, along with her memories of travelling with Serena. It was as if she had only just escaped from the disaster, as if she was only just returning to Earth after her unsuccessful voyage. She had come to face her father for the first time in the aftermath of her awful failure.

There was no hiding her failure from him. He probably already knew the facts, and judging by the look on Louisa’s face, he was not happy.

“What is this place?” whispered Brogan from the open door of Serena’s TARDIS. The massive cathedral was unlike any building he knew from home. He slowly wandered over to Serena, gawking at the high ceiling and the stained glass windows.

The young woman raised her head from the floor and looked at the boy. “Who is this, my Goddess?”

Serena looked down at the woman and then back at her young friend. “This is Brogan,” she said. “Please, stand up,” she instructed.

The young woman looked doubtful and slowly climbed to her feet.

“What is your name?”

“Marta,” she replied. “Goddess... Tagna, why have you come back to us now? Have we displeased you in some way?”

Serena surveyed the platform, the crescent symbol, and the open doorway to the secret chamber. She knew she should tell the woman that she was not her goddess, but for the moment, she was distracted and curious. “Has anything unusual happened here recently?” she asked.

Marta looked bewildered. “I... I took my vows last night and witnessed your message of faith.” She glanced at the open doorway with a hint of fear. “It is strange that the chamber is still open. Father Gwinn is always very careful to close it after ceremonies, to keep it secret.”

“That does sound strange,” replied Serena. She walked over to the chamber and poked her head inside, but she could see very little. She fished into a pocket and withdrew a small torch. Armed with the light, she climbed down the stairs.

Brogan followed her.

Marta was nervous. She looked up at the crescent and back at the black monolith with its angelic emblem. She reluctantly followed the others down the stairs.

Serena was shining the bright light at the carvings. “Brogan, this is definitely part of the riddle. Look at these,” she said excitedly.

“What does it say?” he asked.

Marta replied. “It’s Tagna’s seal.”

“Actually, it’s ancient Gallifreyan,” corrected Serena. “Simply translated, it means,

‘Sign the crescent,
Enter here.
Find deadly peril,
or cold tear.
To find the way
face your fear.’”

“Now, that sounds more like a riddle,” replied Brogan.

Serena smiled. “We just have to solve it.” She turned to look at Marta, who was standing near the stairs, as far from the wall as she could get. “You said you took your vows last night and witnessed my message of faith,” said Serena. “What did you witness, exactly?”

Marta’s eyes grew wide as she looked at Serena. In a quivering voice, she replied, “I stood where you stand now and waited. The wall split, revealing the brightest light I have ever seen—the portal to heaven and hell.”

“Yes? And what did you see there?” Serena was very solemn now, afraid she would lose Marta’s cooperation.

The young priestess looked at Serena with uncertainty. “Please, Goddess, is this some kind of test? Have I failed the training in some way?” She was shaking.

Serena gave her a gentle smile. She handed Brogan the torch and stepped forward, taking Marta's hands in her own. "No, you haven't failed. You've passed the test. But I want to hear your own words about what you saw."

This soothed Marta's nerves a little and gave her the courage to continue. "I had the sensation that I was in a new place, but everything was hazy. I sensed a presence, and realised it was something dark and awful. Terror filled my heart, but I could not run, and I knew I must be experiencing hell. Then the fear passed all at once, and I had the briefest sensation of warmth and happiness like the breath of heaven, and it was all over. And I was back here in this chamber."

Serena nodded. "Come, let's go back up. I need a little time to think about this." She glanced at Marta, who was relieved. The young woman quickly climbed the stairs. Serena and Brogan followed her.

Back on the platform, Serena puzzled over the riddle while keeping an eye on Marta. The young priestess seemed a little calmer now.

"Perhaps I should fetch Father Gwinn," Marta suggested.

Serena shook her head. "Maybe later." She looked at the crescent above the altar and moved a few steps away from Marta. Brogan came to stand next to her.

"What d' you think the riddle means?" asked Brogan.

"As Marta explained, the wall is an entrance." Serena kept her voice low.

"To heav'n and hell?" asked Brogan quietly.

"Well, probably not heaven and hell," Serena whispered. "But I think it is some sort of mind altering device—solving the riddle must have something to do with facing fear."

"How d' you make it work?"

Serena looked at the crescent again. "It said 'Sign the crescent, enter here.' I suppose it means to make some sort of hand sign that mimics the crescent." She nodded her head towards the object and pulled a small electronic device from her pocket. She scanned the crescent. "Excuse me for a moment," she added. She climbed back down the stairs into the chamber.

Marta worked up her courage to talk to Brogan. His presence made no sense to her, and Serena's actions were bewildering. "I don't understand what is going on."

"You an' me both," replied Brogan. He smiled his toothy grin. "I only jus' started travelling with her."

Marta smiled back, still a little nervous, but calmed by his friendliness. He seemed like such an ordinary boy, and his presence helped make the odd situation a little less overwhelming.

Serena returned and explained, "The crescent does seem to contain some sort of key mechanism, like the keystone in the stone circle. I'm still not sure exactly what the device in the chamber does, but it includes a transport mechanism."

"Like the one that tr'nsported Amy?" asked Brogan.

"Yes. But there is only one way to find out for sure. I have to activate it."

Fear crept back into Marta's face.

Serena turned towards the frightened young priestess. She knew Marta would not understand the truth, so she continued the pretext. "I realise this is all very hard for you, Marta. Someone close to me has disappeared into the portal, and I have to do this to find her." She spoke in her most earnest and reassuring voice.

"You've lost someone in hell?" asked Marta, confused.

"Yes, someone very dear to me, someone who doesn't belong there. I have to rescue her." She smiled gently. "But you needn't be afraid. The peril is mine alone."

"Can I help?"

“I’d like you to keep my visit a secret.” Serena looked into Marta’s eyes. “Please?”

Marta nodded slowly.

“After we have gone, close the door to the secret chamber.”

“Okay.”

“Brogan, come with me,” Serena instructed.

The boy followed her into the TARDIS.

After a moment, Serena re-emerged alone and walked over to the altar. “Sign the crescent,” she murmured. She raised her hand and traced the crescent’s shape in the air. The symbol began to glow, and the light appeared to scan her. A deep voice spoke. “Access granted. You may proceed with the riddle!”

“I’ve never heard that before!” cried Marta.

“I know,” said Serena. “When the monolith disappears,” she instructed, gesturing to the TARDIS, “I want you to come before the altar and reverse my sign over the crescent. You must do this to reseal the portal.”

Marta moved her hand in a small reverse crescent to demonstrate her understanding.

Serena hurried over to the chamber. She turned before going downstairs. “Thank you, Marta.”

Marta bowed her head slightly. “Rescue your friend, Goddess. Hell is no place for good souls.”

Serena disappeared into the chamber.

The chamber was glowing fiercely. Serena stumbled as she came into the space and instinctively blocked the light from her eyes. She stepped forward and wobbled unsteadily. Finally, she pulled her hand away from her face. She looked into the light and became transfixed.

Marta looked from the open passageway, to the monolith, to the crescent. A few minutes passed, and suddenly the black monolith made a wheezing sound and faded from sight. Marta’s eyes grew very wide again. She shook off her fear and walked up to the altar. “For the Goddess,” she murmured. She made the reverse sign as Serena had instructed and the symbol stopped glowing. She stayed there for a moment, contemplating the metal crescent, and then she crossed over to the secret passageway and closed the door.

Her tasks finished, Marta returned to the center of the platform and knelt before the altar, praying silently and contemplating the strange events she had witnessed.

She was still there when Father Gwinn came in fifteen minutes later at the sound of the cathedral bell calling the hour.

“How are you feeling this morning,” he asked as he slowly climbed the stairs to the platform.

The young priestess looked up at Father Gwinn. She wanted to tell him what had happened, but she restrained herself.

“Oh, my child, you look as if you have only just emerged from the chamber!” cried the old priest. “You shouldn’t be here. You should be resting, in your room, until you are fully recovered.”

“I’ll be okay, Father,” she replied. She suddenly thought how blessed she was to have spoken to the Goddess in person, and she smiled. “I’ll be just fine,” she added.

“He’s expecting you,” said Louisa.

Amy hesitated for a moment, looking at the large double doors into her father’s office. Finally, she took a deep breath and went in.

John Wilson sat behind his oversized antique desk, calmly reading from an electronic tablet. He did not look up immediately, but Amy knew that he was simply ignoring her until he was ready. She mustered her courage and walked over to one of the two chairs set before the desk. Her father was a tall man with dark brown hair—dyed to hide the grey for several years now—and he wore a perfectly tailored brown suit with a stylish black turtleneck. Everything was as she remembered it—the tidy desk with everything in place, the richly patterned Persian rug in the more comfortable seating area at the far side of the office, the breathtaking view from the extensive windows. She sat down.

Her father finally set the tablet down and looked up. He remained silent, looking her over as if she were nothing more than another electronic tablet. The only sign of his displeasure was in his eyes. He was never one to reveal too much of his emotions.

“It’s good to see that you survived your trip back,” he said, opening the conversation.

His stinging remark obliterated the words Amy had composed in her head for this conversation.

“The reports say that you are taking full responsibility,” John continued.

“Yes, Dad. If I hadn’t diverted the ship into the asteroid belt to shave some time off our voyage, we would never have run into the problems we had.” Her voice sounded weak in her ears. She looked at her father for his reaction, and she could almost see the cogs turning in his head.

“You were trying to recover lost time.”

“I should have never put us in that kind of risk. Five days extra travel was nothing compared to the danger. It was stupid.”

“I see.” He frowned. “Well, there’s no way I can protect you from the board of enquiry,” he said. “But I can see that they only demote you to some less critical position. Perhaps something in the home office.”

Amy was frustrated. Her father was disappointed with her, but he was still trying to protect her, trying to shoulder all of her responsibilities. She was even more annoyed at what he was suggesting—working as some clerk in the home office was not exactly the life she wanted for herself.

“I see that the crash itself wasn’t your fault,” he said, indicating the tablet. “That will weigh in your favor.”

She could see that this was just an excuse for him; it did not mitigate his disappointment in her. She shook her head slightly and felt her throat tighten.

“I suppose that will be all. You can stop by tomorrow morning. Louisa will set up an appointment for you on your way out.” He was obviously finished.

So that’s it? she thought. She frowned and stood up. He turned his attention back to the electronic tablet as she walked away from the desk. Her hand was on the door knob when she felt compelled to stop.

She turned back around. “No,” she whispered. She strode back to the desk. More forcefully, she said, “No. This isn’t right.”

He looked up at her.

“I’ve had it. I’ve had it up to here. I can never please you,” she said. “Even if I had made the voyage in record time, even if it had been uneventful, you wouldn’t have cared.” Her face burned and her eyes watered, but there was no stopping now. “Except maybe you wouldn’t be so embarrassed about me.” She felt disgust. Her voice was quite loud now and probably carried out to the lobby. “It was my responsibility and I blew it. I accept that. But you know what? I never wanted it in the first place.”

John was stunned. “Amy, I…” For once, he was the one who lacked words—probably for the first time ever, Amy realised.

“I will stop by tomorrow, but not to see you. I’ll be dropping off my official resignation.” With that, she turned away from her father and strode from the room, slamming the door on the way. She did not even acknowledge Louisa on her way out. She pressed the button for the lift and the doors slid open. Fuming, she stepped inside and punched the button for the ground floor with her thumb. The doors slid shut.

Serena shook her head, trying to clear her mind. She could see nothing at first, but soon her surroundings started to brighten a little—not that there was anything to see. She was surrounded by a heavy fog. About the only thing she could see was the ground which seemed to be made up of barren, packed dirt and rocks.

She looked up suddenly at the faint sound of laughter coming from somewhere behind her. “Who’s there?” she cried out. Her voice echoed a few times before fading.

The laughter came again, this time from a different direction.

“Show yourself!” she commanded. This place was unnerving.

“You won’t make it!” cried a disembodied female voice. “This trial is too hard for you!” The laughter came again, echoing.

“I will make it!” she replied.

“Ha! With your self-control? Impossible!” More laughter rang out.

Serena frowned. What kind of strange trial was this?

The laughter abruptly ceased.

“Help!” cried a new voice. Serena recognised it—it was Amy. She could not tell which direction it came from.

“Amy! Where are you!”

“I’m over here!” cried Amy, somewhere to Serena’s left.

“Keep shouting so I can find you!” Serena cried.

“Hurry! I can’t...” Amy was interrupted by the sound of gunfire.

The report was deafening, but Serena thought she heard her friend cry out.

“Amy?” No response. “Amy!” she shouted, panicked. Her friend did not respond. Serena kept shouting into the fog without getting a response, and she stumbled around for ten minutes without finding anything. Finally, she stopped and tried to calm herself.

“Ha! I knew you were weak!” cried the disembodied voice. “But that was fun, wasn’t it.”

“Fun?” Serena was getting mad.

“Still, it wasn’t what I had in mind. I know. Here’s something even better!” The laughter returned.

Serena suddenly felt dizzy. She could not seem to steady herself, and she slowly collapsed to the ground, her consciousness fading.

A voice called to her, as if across a great distance. It repeated, growing louder. “Serena!” She did not recognise the voice. “Serena! Wake up!” It was a man’s voice, and it was much clearer now. “Come on Serena! Wake up!” Her eyelids felt as if they were weighted down, but she forced them open. She looked up into the face of a man—a very concerned man. He looked human, but there was something odd about his eyes. She could not figure out what it was. His eyes were surrounded by crow’s-feet and his forehead was lined; she placed him in his fifties. He was not a very large man, but he seemed muscular. He helped her sit up.

“I thought I’d lost you there for a minute,” he said.

“I... What happened?” she asked. Her voice sounded peculiar in her ears. It seemed huskier and somehow different.

“The station overloaded and exploded while you were working on it,” he replied, indicating a computer console nearby. The buttons and levers looked fused and melted. The acrid smell of smoke hung in the air. “You were lucky.” He helped her to her feet.

“Where’s Amy?” she asked, suddenly remembering hearing her friend’s cry for help in the fog.

“Amy?” The man looked puzzled.

There was something familiar about the man, Serena decided. She could trust him, even if she could not remember who he was. “I’m looking for a friend, Amy Wilson. Have you seen her?”

Recognition entered the man’s eyes, and a sad look settled on his features. “Amy Wilson?” he said, still a little confused. “That blow must have hit you hard. Amy has been dead for nearly thirty years.”

“But I was...” Serena began. She suddenly found she could not finish the thought. She felt a little muddled. Her thoughts cleared again and she remembered losing her friend when they were trying to escape Daleks many years ago. He was right. Amy was dead. She sighed. She looked at him. “Your eyes!” she announced. “They’re yellow! You’re not human!”

“Of course I’m not,” he said soothingly. “Do you remember me?”

“Brogan?” Brief flashes of memory came to her as she recalled the time they had travelled together. Brogan had been with her almost his whole life. He still spoke with a bit of his original accent, but his manner of speech was no longer rough and uneducated.

He nodded. “You must have temporary amnesia from the blast.”

“Yes, I think so. Everything is coming to me in pieces.” She looked around the room. It seemed to be some sort of control centre. “What was I working on?”

“You were trying to override the commands for the automatic defense grid around this planet. They’re about to launch an attack on the Federation ambassador in orbit.”

“We’ve got to find some other way to warn them!” Another flash of memory came to her: The Federation ambassador had come in peace to negotiate a treaty, and a traitor in the government was trying to provoke a war. “Where’s the TARDIS?”

“Missing,” Brogan explained. “When we find the traitor, we’ll find the TARDIS.”

Serena remembered something else. “Maybe we can find Ekron. He might have a way to contact the ship.” They hurried out of the room, following the corridors out of the building. It was nighttime, which explained why the building was so quiet.

Serena broke through a few access points with her sonic screwdriver, and they soon slipped by the dozing security guard at the back entrance to the building. They had a hovercar waiting in a nearby carpark.

“Maybe we can catch Ekron at the hotel. He should be in at this hour,” suggested Brogan. Ekron was a Federation liaison. He was down on the planet making arrangements for the ambassador’s visit.

They soon reached the hotel, leaving the hovercar with a valet. Serena and Brogan strode purposefully to the lift which opened as soon as they pressed the button to go up.

They were about to step in when Serena let out a tortured gasp.

“What is it?” asked Brogan, alarmed.

She was speechless. She stared at the back wall of the lift which was mirrored. It reflected her image, but it was not the image she had been expecting. The reflection was of a tall woman with short, black hair. “Kendra,” she whispered hoarsely. “I’ve become Kendra!” She gasped again and felt unsteady. Brogan slipped his hand around her arm to keep her from falling.

“Kendra? You’re Serena. Don’t you remember? You regenerated about five years ago,” Brogan explained. “I was there when you changed.”

The shock was too much for her. Instead of climbing into the lift, she turned away from the hateful reflection and sat down in a nearby chair in the hotel lounge. “It can’t be true! It can’t be true!” she cried. “How can this have happened so soon?” She was becoming hysterical.

“Serena, try to calm down,” replied Brogan. His deep voice was soothing. “You’ve suffered a terrible blow. But you’ve got to calm down. We’ve got to stop this war and I can’t do it without you.”

“How did I... What made me regenerate?” Try as she might, she could not remember.

Brogan sighed wearily. “We were on Earth—temporarily stranded in the early 1900’s without the TARDIS. We got mixed up with a man named Wentworth, who ran several factories. He was severely abusing his workers, and we discovered some criminal evidence which could be used to put him away. Before we could act, he set one of the factories on fire to cover his tracks, trapping nearly one hundred women inside. All of the doors were locked or barricaded. We helped most of the women escape, but you were briefly trapped when one of the floors collapsed in the flaming building. Somehow you made it out, but you were badly burned, and you fell into a coma almost immediately. Your body struggled to heal itself over several days, but the damage was too severe, and in the end you regenerated. You’ve always had some trouble remembering the ordeal.”

Serena was devastated. She felt as if fate was forcing her down a path she was not ready for. She had always hoped that she would somehow be able to prevent her darker self from emerging, but now it seemed inevitable. She wondered what would drive her over the edge. How long would it be before some terrible event drove her to change her name to Kendra Sear? Her relationship with the Doctor troubled her most of all. She was not exactly happy with him right now, but that was a far cry from Kendra’s obsession with revenge.

Amy felt as if she had just woken up from a very vivid dream. One moment she was standing in the lift, fuming about her father, and the next she was standing in a circular room. At first she was bewildered. Her face was burning, and she could still picture the look on her father’s face when she told him she was resigning. She took a deep breath.

The room looked familiar. The walls were dark grey stone, like something in a castle, and there were no doors or windows. Her memories suddenly came back to her in a flood. She remembered the stone circle, her arrival in the cathedral, the horrible old woman. She realised that the whole encounter with her father had been nothing more than an exaggerated hallucination—though an extremely vivid one. She suddenly smiled. It had felt so good to finally face her father. It was a pity it was only an illusion.

She looked around the room and realised the old woman was missing this time around. “Hmm. Now what?” she said aloud.

Four wooden doors phased into existence in the walls around her. They were ornate, each with different carvings. They reminded her of the carvings from the secret chamber in the cathedral.

“Eenie, meenie, minie, mo?” she murmured. Nothing happened, so she decided to randomly try one of the doors. The carving on her selected door showed a circle with a wavy line passing through the middle. She pulled on the large handle, and the door opened more easily than she expected. She could not see anything; everything outside was shrouded in a thick fog. She shrugged and stepped through the doorway.

“It looks like a little of the color is coming back into your face,” commented Brogan. “Are you okay now?”

Serena did feel a little better, although she was still troubled. She nodded. “We’d better go up.”

They returned to the lift, and Serena tried not to look at her reflection in the mirrored walls of the lift. However, her eyes kept drifting back to the image. She could not help appraising her features. She remembered Kendra vividly. Kendra's eyes always blazed with her obsession and hatred of the Doctor. She looked at the eyes now, her eyes, and realised the same blind hatred was not evident. There was something different about her mouth, too. Kendra always pressed her lips together in a slight frown, and the only time she smiled was when she was being cruel. The mouth in the reflection was more relaxed. There was less tension in her face and her posture.

She looked at Brogan's reflection. He had turned into quite a man. He was confident, intelligent, and caring. She thought back over the years, what she could remember of them, and it occurred to her that she had treated him pretty well, partly because he was like a son to her and partly because she had felt guilty for her mistreatment of Amy during their travels together.

The beginnings of a smile played on her lips. Brogan noticed. "What? Have you got a plan?"

She shook her head and began to smile in earnest. "No. It's nothing. I'm just glad you're here with me." She looked away, a little embarrassed, but inside she was happy. *Maybe I do have a choice about my future, after all*, she thought. She looked back at her face and no longer felt as much dread.

As soon as she stepped into the fog, Amy felt the characteristic dizziness that accompanied the Gallifreyan puzzle, no doubt caused by its transport mechanism. A moment later she found herself standing in front of a beautiful view of a mountain range. It was very early in the morning, and the sunlight was only just touching the upper half of the mountains. The open plain below was still in shadow.

She was surrounded by five circular pillars, placed in a ring which created the perfect view of the mountains. The land gently sloped away from the outer pillars down to the plain. A mild wind blew through the pillars and gently pulled at her hair and skirt (she mentally noted that she was back in her original clothes and not the captain's uniform). The pillars looked about nine feet tall and were made of a granite which had a pinkish cast. A large block of the same material was underfoot, covered in places by a sandy dirt. Something caught her eye and she knelt down. There seemed to be a carving in the stone. She brushed some of the dirt away.

"It's just like the door," she murmured. The circle with its crossing wavy line was carved into the large block of granite.

She wiped her hands on her skirt and stood up. She listened for a moment. All she could hear was the wind and the nearby chirping of birds. Something occurred to her. Where was Saedon? She guessed he had used her to find this place—the next stage of the Gallifreyan puzzle had to be here somewhere. Where was he?

Well, no matter. She did not think he cared much about her well being—he had certainly lied to her several times. His companion, Tai, seemed like the murderous sort. It was probably better that she had gotten away from them. She was on her own, and if she continued to work on the Gallifreyan riddle, she reasoned, Serena would eventually find her. The old woman had told her that there were five stages, and she had successfully made it through the first two, the trials of logic and fear. That meant there were three more stages. She wondered what this one would be.

Amy had exhausted her search of the pillars and the carved stone within an hour of her arrival. She had not been able to discover any way to activate the Gallifreyan puzzle, and she was frustrated and increasingly fatigued from her lack of sleep. By late morning she had still learned nothing more from wandering through the town. The day had become

warm, and the heat was making her uncomfortable. Moreover, she was getting hungry. She had no money and nothing to trade, and she was self-conscious about her clothing. The women in town wore long, flowing silks in bright colors, and their hair was always covered. More than once she caught people staring at her, and she felt very uncomfortable. She was grateful that the people looked almost human, so at least she did not stand out as an alien. The men were equally colorful, but their costumes were simpler and they did not cover their heads. The town did not have much technology. They pulled water up from wells and used camel-like animals for riding as well as pulling wagons.

Amy sat down on the steps of a large building. The building was made of stone and looked very old.

A man sat at the far side of the wide steps, begging from passersby. His clothes were ragged and dingy and his straggly curly hair and beard needed a trim. He eyed Amy casually.

Amy wearily looked around the street, wondering if she would have to take up begging to get some money for food.

“What’s your story?” called the beggar.

Amy was too tired to be startled. “Just a stranded traveller,” she replied. “Got separated from a friend and my luggage.”

“You must come from far away,” said the man.

“Yes.”

The man nodded. “You stand out. You should cover your hair and legs.” He pointed. “It is unseemly for a woman.”

“I wondered why everyone has been staring all morning,” she muttered. This was not really news to her. Amy sighed, fingering her skirt. “I don’t have any money, or I would buy a more suitable outfit.”

The man sidled closer and lowered his voice. “I know someone who might help you,” he said. “Niseena has a kind heart. She lives nearby. When I’m really hard up, she sometimes gives me a meal.” He gave her directions to the woman’s house.

Amy smiled, grateful for the kindness of the beggar. “What is your name, in case we meet again?”

“Lergo.”

“Thank you, Lergo. My name is Amy. Perhaps I can return the favour someday.”

Lergo tilted his head and smiled.

Amy smiled back and then hurried away to find Niseena.

Amy followed the directions. As she walked along the streets and turned into a quiet side alley, she felt herself growing increasingly fatigued. She felt ill by the time she found the doorway to Niseena’s house. She leaned against the doorjamb for a moment, trying to steady herself. A wave of real dizziness flowed through her for a moment. Finally, she raised her hand to knock, trying to think of what to say to the woman recommended by the beggar.

A moment later, a middle aged woman answered. “Yes?” She was holding a broom.

“I know this is going to sound odd, but a kind man said you might be able to help me. I’ve been travelling and have become separated from a friend and my belongings. Perhaps I could do some housework for you or...” The words tumbled from Amy’s mouth.

“You poor dear,” said the woman. She rested the broom against the wall and said, “please come in. You look exhausted.”

She smiled weakly. Then she felt the wave of dizziness overwhelm her again, and she lost her balance. She blacked out.

A moment later, she came to her senses. She was almost sitting on the ground, half slumped against the doorjamb. Niseena kneeled nearby, very concerned. “You are ill.

Please, come in, sit down.” Niseena helped her to her feet and led her into the house. Amy barely registered that she was being led through a covered passage into a large open courtyard. Niseena seated her on some cushions in the open air.

Amy let out a deep breath. “You don’t know how good it feels to sit down for a moment.”

“What happened to your friend?” asked Niseena. She fetched a metal goblet and a pitcher from a nearby cabinet and poured Amy a drink.

Amy tried to figure out how much time had passed. “We got separated about two days ago. It’s kind of hard to explain. We were heading here, but I don’t know where she is now.” She accepted the goblet and took a long drink. It was just water, but it soothed her dry throat.

“Well, you’ll be okay now,” said Niseena. “You rest here for a minute while I get you something to eat.” The kind woman hurried through an open doorway at the side of the courtyard.

Amy became aware of the sound of a child crying. She forced her eyes to open and looked around, trying to remember where she was. Niseena was on the other side of the courtyard, comforting a little girl.

Amy remembered where she was. “Oh dear! I’m so sorry,” said Amy, sitting up straight. “I didn’t mean to—oh, I must have nodded off!”

Niseena smiled. “It’s okay, dear. I don’t mind. You needed the rest.”

“How long was I asleep?” asked Amy.

“Only a couple hours. I would have let you sleep all afternoon if Vellisha hadn’t woken you.” The child had stopped crying now, and Niseena put her down.

“Is she your daughter?”

Niseena laughed. “Heavens, I’m too old! She’s my granddaughter!”

Vellisha looked like she was about three. She ducked behind her grandmother’s legs and peeked at Amy shyly.

“Say hello, Vellisha,” said Niseena. The child did not speak. “She’s shy around strangers.”

Amy smiled. “She reminds me of one of my cousins. Hello, Vellisha,” she said, trying to make friends.

Niseena walked over to the cabinet and brought Amy a plate. “Here, you must be famished. It’s not much.”

“Oh, thank you so much,” said Amy enthusiastically. She accepted the plate. There were several pieces of a thick flatbread, a lump of creamy white cheese, and a few pieces of unrecognizable fruit. “I wish there was some way I could repay you for your kindness.”

Niseena said nothing.

Amy took a bite of the bread. It had good flavor and tasted like it had been seasoned with onions. She reached for the metal goblet on the floor, which still held some water, and washed the food down. “I’ve never run into a situation like this before, but if I ever do, I will remember your kindness.”

Niseena smiled and laughed. “Now, what are we going to do to help you find your friend? Did you come by boat?”

“No,” Amy improvised, “we were coming from the direction of the mountains. I entered the town near a place with five pillars.”

“That’s the Shrine of Wind. It faces the western mountains.”

“The Shrine of Wind? Interesting name. It was a beautiful place.” She ate a piece of orange fruit and discovered it tasted like watermelon.

“All of the shrines are beautiful,” replied Niseena. She filled a goblet with water for herself and sat down on some cushions across from Amy.

“There are others?”

“Yes. There is a shrine on each side of the town. The Shrine of Water faces the river on the east side of town, the Shrine of Soil is on the south side of town, and the Shrine of Fire faces the north.”

“How interesting. Are they all the same?” asked Amy. She watched Vellisha sit down on the far side of the courtyard. She played quietly with a rag doll and was very well behaved.

“No. Each shrine is dedicated to its own element. The Shrine of Fire, for example, has a monument to fire, and the Shrine of Soil is dedicated to all things growing on the land.”

“I’d like to see them. This town must have a fascinating history. How old are the shrines?”

Niseena sipped from her goblet. “They’ve been there for thousands of years. They were built long ago by an ancient king, to honor God.”

Niseena and Amy talked for quite a while. The town, Shrinna, had been built upon the ruins of another town, Linthka, which had been built upon the ruins of yet another town—in fact, one town or another had been on the site for several thousand years. According to Niseena, the shrines were dedicated to God and to the things God had created. However, they did not possess any magical or mystical powers, other than being holy places. The people of Shrinna were faithful, religious people and even had stories of ancient miracles, but in the present day there were no reports of unusual events. Amy was inwardly disappointed—this riddle did not seem as obvious as the last one. She decided she would at least visit each shrine. Perhaps she would discover something important by putting the pieces of the puzzle together.

Eventually their conversation turned to less historical subjects. “So, who is the friend you travel with?” asked Niseena.

“Well, my friend’s name is Serena. I don’t think you would miss her if you saw her—she has unusual taste in clothing. Stranger than my own,” she added. “She has recently been wearing a long black jacket, black trousers, and a frilly gold coloured blouse. Long blond hair, too. As I said, you can’t miss her.” She thought about Saedon and Tai. “After Serena and I got separated, I briefly travelled with some strangers from my own country, a man named Saedon and a woman named Tai. But they worried me—something about them made me not trust them, and I soon ended up alone again. At any rate, I’m pretty sure Serena will be coming through Shrinna sooner or later, so I hope to find her again.”

Niseena nodded. “Well, you are welcome to stay with us for a few days. We can improvise a place for you to sleep. My daughter, Nerla, should be home soon from doing the washing. Kalveck, her husband, is away for the week.” She explained that Kalveck was a river merchant. He sailed up and down the river, trading goods, and he frequently spent time away from home. It took Amy a few minutes to realise that Nerla was washing the family clothes the old fashioned way, at the river. She had almost forgotten how primitive the planet was.

“One more thing,” added Niseena. “We should probably find some more appropriate clothing for you. Perhaps one of Nerla’s old yinshas will fit you.”

Amy had no idea what a yinsha was, but she thought it would be good to blend in a little.

Amy was soon wearing one of Nerla’s old silk outfits, otherwise known as a yinsha. She thought it was beautiful, even though the silk was a little frayed at the edges. It consisted of loose trousers underneath an ankle length tunic which was tied at the waist. The final touch was a head scarf. It did not seem very practical to Amy, but on the other hand the fabric was quite comfortable in the midday heat. The silk was light red with gold accents.

Niseena showed her how to tie the head scarf so that it would hide her hair and stay in place.

Niseena smiled at Amy's transformation. "You look perfect—except for the shoes. Sandals would be better, but we don't have any spare."

Amy looked at her feet. "Well, perhaps no one will notice. The yinsha covers them a little. It's really more than I could ask for. Thank you!" She twisted a little to feel the silk swish around her. They came back out to the courtyard. Amy looked up and noticed that the day would be ending in a few hours.

Niseena noticed her glance. "You're thinking of your missing companion?"

"Yes. I think I should go and look for her a little before the daylight ends. It might be easier now that I blend in a little."

"Yes. You said she was distinctive—perhaps someone in the market will have seen her."

Serena stared at her reflection in the lift. Suddenly, she felt a brief wave of dizziness. She shut her eyes for a moment, thinking it was an aftereffect of being caught in the blast back at the control centre. When she opened her eyes, the lift was gone, and she was standing alone in the field of fog. Her memory returned to her, and she felt disoriented as she realised the entire episode with the older Brogan had been some sort of illusion. She reached up and pulled a lock of hair forward where she could see it: it was blond. She was back in her original form. She thought back to the riddle carved in the chamber wall—it had had something to do with facing fear. It dawned on her that she had done just that, facing her fear of regenerating into Kendra. None of it had really happened of course, but she felt somehow more reassured that she still had some level of control over her life. She smiled at the false memory of Brogan—perhaps it was not such a bad thing to have him travel with her.

She remembered the taunting voice from her last time in the fog and shouted, "You see, I did make it through the trial!"

No laughter returned this time; instead, four incongruous wooden doors phased into existence around her. They looked odd, standing freeform in the fog. A large carving was on each door, but Serena did not recognise them as Gallifreyan writing, although they had some similar shapes—no doubt they were invented by a Gallifreyan for the purpose of the next stage of the riddle. Serena could see no reason to prefer one shape to another, so she selected one with three wavy lines, like the movement of water. She opened the door and saw nothing but fog beyond its frame. She closed the door and tried the next one. It too revealed more fog. She experimentally waved her hand around the outside of the frame while looking through and found that her hand was visible. The other two doors were the same. None of the doors seemed to lead anywhere. She decided it was time to try walking through one of them, so she returned to the doorway with the wavy lines. She pulled the door open and stepped through the frame.

The Shrine of Soil was a peaceful place on the south side of the town. It was quite large and consisted of a sort of spiral garden. Many large rocks had been set into the soil like stepping stones in a spiral shape that worked out from a large round block of stone in the center. The gaps in the spiral had filled in with a thick ground cover which bloomed pink flowers only once a year, in the early spring. The outer edge of the fifty foot diameter space was almost completely enclosed in a variety of tall plants. The pink granite stone spiral accented the greenery perfectly. The far edge of the greenery partially obscured a view of farmland and the winding river which ran by the eastern side of town.

It was late summer now, and the shrine was less frequented by visitors. The stones absorbed the sun's heat and created the perfect growing conditions for the hearty ground

cover, but they also made it a hot place during the day. No one was at the shrine at this time of day. The sun was approaching the mountains, and the people in the town of Shrinna were thinking about going home for the evening.

No one heard the odd sound coming from one edge of the spiral. A wheezing sound filled the air, and then there was a solid thump as a large black monolith appeared between some bushes where nothing had been before. The monolith was featureless except for an angelic emblem which was etched in the front in gold.

Amy made her way through town, blending in better now that she was dressed like a native. At first she asked several people if they had seen Serena, but no one recognised her description, so she decided she would try to find one of the other shrines before the daylight faded and she had to return to Niseena's. Perhaps she would find another clue to the Gallifreyan riddle.

The sun was about to drop behind the mountains when she found the Shrine of Soil.

Brogan sat in one of the armchairs in the TARDIS, impatiently watching the scanner image. He had been waiting in the TARDIS for almost an hour, expecting Serena to appear at any moment. They had split up at the cathedral on Percantha, when Serena had programmed the TARDIS to follow a homing signal in a device she was carrying. She expected to use the Gallifreyan device in the cathedral to transport her to a new location, so theoretically the TARDIS would automatically find her. She had shown Brogan how to operate the scanner and the door lever, and her final instructions were for him to wait for her to return.

Moments after she had left him alone in the TARDIS, the TARDIS had indeed travelled to a new location. Brogan could now see a garden on the scanner, but there was no sign of Serena anywhere. He was beginning to wonder if he should go look for her.

Suddenly there was movement. A figure rushed toward the TARDIS. He was expecting Serena, so at first he did not recognise the face. The woman was dressed in long flowing red silks from head to foot.

He recognised the face. Amy! He rushed to the console to operate the door lever.

"Amy! You're here!" cried Brogan, rushing from the TARDIS.

"Brogan! Where's Serena?" cried Amy, rushing to greet the boy. They briefly hugged.

"I don't know! I thought she would be here!"

"I don't understand. Didn't she travel with you in the TARDIS?" asked Amy.

"No. We parted ways on Percantha," explained Brogan.

"You found the cathedral?" Amy was somewhat relieved to know that Serena was still on the trail.

"Aye. There was some kind o' transport device there. Serena was goin' t' use it," Brogan said. "She told me t' stay in the TARDIS. It was goin' t' follow her."

Amy thought about the Trial of Fear, and it suddenly struck her that Serena might be too unstable to endure such a test. "Oh no! What if she didn't pass the trial?" Horrified, she recalled her brief encounter with the false Kendra. She had no idea what happened if you were not able to face your fear in the illusion. What if the Serena's own fears pushed her over the edge?

"Trial?" asked Brogan, interrupting Amy's current line of thought.

"This riddle is broken into five pieces," explained Amy. "The stone circle was the first piece. It was a Trial of Logic. Apparently, if you figure out how to operate the device, you pass. It transported me directly to the cathedral on Percantha, which housed the second device, the Trial of Fear. This one was more serious. It has some sort of mind-altering

device which creates a perfect illusion based on one of your fears. To pass the trial, you have to face this fear. I think it's unique for each person. I had to face my fear of confronting my father. I have no idea what Serena might have encountered, but she has a lot of issues, and it could have been devastating for her. She could end up trapped in it or—oh, I don't know!"

Brogan looked worried. "So if she ain't here, she might still be trapped in that thing?"

"Well, yes." Amy thought about this for a moment. "Now, wait a minute. Maybe the fact that you are here is a good sign. The TARDIS must have locked on to Serena's signal for it to have come here. Serena must be here, somewhere. She must have made it through the trial!" Amy looked around at the shrine and at the spiral stonework. "Wait a minute," she said. She ran into the centre of the circle, jumping over the rings of ground cover. She knelt and looked at the large block of stone. Like the block at the Shrine of Wind, this one too had a carving. This one was carved in a spiral, mimicking the shape of the garden. "I recognise this! It was on one of the other doors."

Brogan joined her. "Doors?"

Amy stood up. "To leave the illusion, I was presented with four doors, each carved with a different symbol. I selected one with a circle and a wavy line and ended up at another shrine in this town which had the same symbol carved on a stone like this one. There are four shrines in this town, so perhaps there are four possible ways to enter it, depending upon which door you choose when you leave the illusion."

"So why ain't Serena here?"

"I don't know," she said, trying to think of a reason. "Maybe the TARDIS picked up on the homing signal at all four locations and just randomly landed at one of them. Serena might have arrived at one of the others. It all depends upon which door she selected." Another thought occurred to her. "Maybe that's why Saedon and Tai weren't there to greet me when I arrived. They must have landed at one of the other shrines by mistake." It was a good theory.

Brogan looked confused. "Who are those other people?"

"Saedon and Tai? I met them on Percantha. I think they are also trying to solve this riddle. Saedon has a TARDIS, so I think he's from Gallifrey, like Serena. I aided them briefly, but they were just using me to find the next stage of the riddle—they weren't very nice to me in the end. I wouldn't trust them if I met them again."

"So we just have t' visit them other shrines to find Serena," said Brogan.

"I guess so—although my guess is that Serena won't stick around long. But she has to eventually come back to the TARDIS. We can just leave her a note." Amy looked at the black monolith. "We should search this area first. Maybe we can find another clue to the riddle."

"What are we lookin' for?" asked the boy.

"I don't know. The Gallifreyan device was hidden in the crescent at the cathedral. I don't see anything like that here." Amy realised she was missing a piece. "How did Serena activate the transport mechanism at the standing stones? Last I saw, she was looking at the stone right in front of the altar. She said it was the key. Can you describe what she did? I didn't have a chance to see anything."

"She put her palms into two depressions in the stone," he said, holding his hands in front of him to mimic Serena. "The keystone started t' hum, and then the stone altar started t' glow and hum, and you dis'peared. Later we went back with more 'quipment from the TARDIS, and Serena opened up a secret panel in the stone. The insides weren't stone at all."

"Hmm. I didn't see anything like that at the Shrine of Wind. It consisted of five pillars and a carved stone underfoot. The pillars were smooth and perfectly shaped. There

was nothing else there. At least there was a clue at the cathedral. Did you find out what the writing on the chamber wall was?"

"Aye, we did. Something about signin' the crescent and facin' your fear."

Amy nodded. "Pretty clear instructions. The only difficult thing about that one was facing your fear."

"So what do you reckon this third riddle is?"

"I don't know. Definitely something more complicated. Let's look around."

The two friends scoured the area for any sign of hidden technology or Gallifreyan clues, but they found nothing.

"We'd better stop," said Amy. It was getting too dark to search. "Let's find you some appropriate clothing for this place. Then we can go back into the city. I've made a friend who might be able to help us."

"I have t' change again?" asked Brogan reluctantly. He was wearing dark trousers and a white shirt, giving him the look of a school boy.

"Normally I wouldn't care, but I think maybe it's wiser if we both blend in. That's why I'm wearing this stuff," she said, smoothing the silk yinsha. "It'll be easier to get information from the locals, and on the off chance Saedon and Tai are out there somewhere, it'll be harder for them to notice us."

"Aye," said Brogan. "I get your point." He followed Amy into the TARDIS.

Serena looked around at her new surroundings. She was no longer in the field of fog. Instead, she was standing in front of a stone wall which overlooked a river. It was late in the day, and the last of the sunlight glimmered on the water. The river was wide and several primitive boats were moored at docks along the bank; other boats were still travelling up and down the water, and fishermen and merchants were lighting lanterns to hang on the boat decks. Serena turned around. She was in a large square at the border of a town, and there was a functioning water well in the centre of the area. It was surrounded by a raised square of stone which served as a step.

She walked up to the well and looked down. It was deep and very dark. She pulled out her small torch and pointed the light into the depths, and water glimmered far below. A rickety wooden bucket was hanging from a rope suspended from a bar at the top of the well. Serena put the torch away and turned away from the well.

"Brogan?" she whispered, remembering her departure from Percantha. She looked around the square, but there was no sign of the TARDIS. Had she made a mistake in her assumptions about the Gallifreyan device? She pulled another small object from her pocket and turned it on. A light blinked on and off. The TARDIS had followed her, but it was not nearby.

The step at the base of the well attracted her attention. It was made of pink granite, and it was carved with three wavy lines, just like the carving on the door she had selected. The corners of her mouth turned up in a smile as she realised each door could have led to a different place. Since the TARDIS was here, she guessed that all of the locations were in the same general area—the TARDIS must have landed at one of the other ones. The smile vanished. If she could not get to the TARDIS quickly, Brogan would miss her. She just hoped he had the sense to stay put for the night.

The first stars were appearing in the twilight sky when Amy and Brogan emerged from the TARDIS. Brogan was now clothed in silks much like the native men of Shrinna, and Amy had even remembered to exchange her black shoes for some more appropriate sandals. She felt much more confident now.

"You think we'll run into Serena?" asked Brogan. He was holding a small leather pack full of things Amy thought might be useful for them in their search of the town.

“Perhaps. And if we miss her, she’ll see the note we left on the console. I’ve been wandering around this town all day, so I was able to sketch a rough map for her, too. We’re going back into the centre of town for the night. It will be a good starting place for tomorrow’s search of the other two shrines.”

Amy and Brogan made their way back to Niseena’s house, guided by a bright full moon. Amy had taken special care to memorise many of the landmarks along the way to the Shrine of Soil, so they only had to backtrack a couple times due to wrong turns.

As they walked, Amy told Brogan all about her experiences on Percantha with Saedon and Tai. At last, she finished with her memorable experience in the Trial of Fear. “So, what happened to you and Serena after I got zapped away?”

“Well, Serena was pretty upset when you disappeared. But almost as soon as you left, we met up with Beranna, and she helped us a little.”

“Who’s Beranna?” asked Amy.

Brogan flashed a moonlit grin at her. “Tindali’s daughter!”

“What?!”

“Tindali was real, but she’s been dead for fifty years. She was just a crazy old woman who lived in the hills. Most of her stories about her were nonsense. Beranna was her daughter, and she’d taken to living alone in the hills. She wasn’t a witch, either. She talked some sense into Serena and helped us heal the poisoned kadack. We spent the night back at her place so we could get back to the TARDIS quickly without going through the village.

“That’s good. I’m glad you didn’t end up in a confrontation. I was afraid whoever poisoned the kadack would come back.”

“But they did! We went back to the stones the next mornin’ with the TARDIS, and while Serena was lookin’ at the keystone, Conwin and Fagney and a couple o’ the other village men attacked us!”

“Oh no!” Amy remembered the time when Serena had nearly killed a man who had attacked them. She could still picture the crazed, icy look in Serena’s eyes.

“Fagney’s wife miscarried her baby, and the men blamed Serena. They wanted to bury her in stone for being a witch! Vanto attacked her from kadackback, but his kadack spooked and carried him away, and then Serena faced down Conwin and Rythan at the same time! I ain’t never seen a woman do what she did. She was as fast as lightning! She didn’t kill them or nothin’, just taught ‘em a lesson. Fagney just watched the whole time, lookin’ all angry and upset. When it was all over, she just told him to get back to his poor wife.”

Amy sighed in relief. At least Serena had not killed anyone.

“After that, we left. Serena figured out where you’d gone. We didn’t stay long on Percantha. I think Serena was embarrassed. We arrived early in the mornin’, and a woman there thought Serena was a goddess.”

“Tagna... Hmm. Just what we need. Serena with delusions of godhood.”

Brogan laughed.

“Look, we’re here. This is Niseena’s house,” said Amy. “I hope we haven’t returned too late.” She knocked on the door.

After a moment, Niseena opened the door. “You’ve made it back! I was worried—I thought you might have gotten lost in the darkness.”

“Good news! My friend is somewhere in town. I found our wagon on the south side of town, near the Shrine of Soil, and discovered another friend. Niseena, this is Brogan. We met him a while back during our travels, and he caught up with my friend Serena after I got lost. They’ve been travelling together since I disappeared.” Amy had worked out her excuse for Brogan’s presence while they were walking—she had not mentioned him to Niseena before and did not want his presence to seem too strange.

“Please, come in. Nerla and I were just having a late supper before bed. Vellisha is already asleep.”

Amy and Brogan followed the older woman into her house. She led them through the courtyard into a large kitchen area. A few candles flickered around the room, providing the only source of light. Shadows danced on the walls.

“This is the woman you told me about?” asked Nerla. She was kneeling on a cushion. The family resemblance between the two women was obvious, even in the candlelight.

“Yes, daughter. This is Amy. And her young friend Brogan.”

Greetings passed back and forth and everyone sat down on thick cushions around a low table.

“Help yourself to the keshi and bread,” said Niseena. There was a large communal bowl in the centre of the table. In the dim light, the mixture in the bowl looked like it contained cooked rice and chopped vegetables. Niseena passed around a basket of flatbread, and Amy and Brogan each took a piece.

Following Nerla’s cue, Amy used her flatbread to scoop out some of the keshi. She took an experimental bite. It was slightly tangy, like it contained lemon juice.

Brogan took a bite. After swallowing, he said, “I sure do love this travelling. You get t’ try so many diff’rent foods!”

They ate in companionable silence for a few minutes, and then Amy renewed the conversation. “It’s so lucky that I found Brogan. He was waiting with our wagon, but he doesn’t know where Serena is. She went looking for me and didn’t come back. We’re hoping to find her tomorrow. She has our money, so I’m hoping once we find her we can make arrangements at an inn somewhere.”

“Don’t worry about it. We have plenty of space here,” said Niseena.

Amy smiled. “Oh, I almost forgot. I brought something from our wagon for you. Hand me the bag.” Brogan obliged, and she pulled a floppy object from the small leather satchel. “You’ve been so kind to me, I wanted to repay you in some way. We don’t have much, but there’s this. I’d like Vellisha to have this.” She handed the item to Nerla. “It’s just a little souvenir, something I picked up earlier in our travels. It’s a doll.” She had actually discovered the doll in the vast TARDIS wardrobe, lying half covered by a pile of coats. It looked like something from Earth. It had bright red hair made of string and its face was coarsely stitched with black and red thread. There were no plastic pieces.

“Oh! It’s charming! Vellisha will love this!” cried Nerla.

“It’s very unusual. I’ve never seen this kind of material before.” Niseena took the doll from her daughter and fingered the doll’s dress. It was a blue print with small yellow flowers. “Her hair is very strange. Feel the texture of these threads,” she said to Nerla. “I hate to take such a rare item from you.”

“It was just a souvenir to me. I’m sure Vellisha will get a lot more enjoyment from it than I would.”

“And I sure don’t need a doll!” announced Brogan. Everyone laughed.

Serena was frustrated. She had been following the homing beacon back to the TARDIS, but the streets of the town were not set out in grid fashion, so she kept having to turn away from her desired direction. A bright moon illuminated the streets, but it was still difficult to navigate her way. Finally, several hours after she had arrived on the planet, Serena discovered the spiral garden. The TARDIS was tucked away at the side. She rushed to the door and went inside.

“Brogan?” There was no answer. She saw the note on the console. “Amy!” She knew the note had to be from her friend as the young boy did not know how to write. She rushed over to the console and began to read:

Serena-

Glad to see you've made it back to the TARDIS. I arrived in town earlier today and found Brogan this evening. We've got our work cut out for us to solve this riddle. Don't know how much you've learned, so I'll just summarise what I know. There are five stages to this riddle. The standing stones represented the Trial of Logic. The cathedral on Percantha provided the entrance to the second part, the Trial of Fear. There are three more, but I don't know what they are yet. There seem to be four points of entry to this one, and the people in this town (Shrinna) think they are shrines dedicated to God. I entered at the Shrine of Wind, which was marked with a circle and wavy line. The TARDIS is at the Shrine of Soil—the spiral garden. Don't know where you came in. The other shrines are for Water and Fire. Water is near the river, and Fire is on the north side of town. Brogan and I couldn't find any sign of technology or any clues at our shrines. We're going to visit the Shrine of Water first thing tomorrow and go to the Shrine of Fire by lunchtime. There has to be another clue here somewhere. We're staying in town tonight with a friend named Niseena. She lives near the centre so it'll be easier for us to start our search tomorrow. I've sketched a map for you (over).

One more thing. We have company. There's another Time Lord here, trying to figure out this riddle. I met him on Percantha. His name is Saedon, and he has a companion named Tai. Saedon is tall, has gorgeous blond hair and blue eyes, and is very charming. Don't let that fool you—don't trust him. You can't miss Tai—tall, exotic looking, revealing clothes, lethal knife. Definitely dangerous. They don't know about you—I pretended to be ignorant of the riddle. I'll fill you in on the rest when we catch up to you.

Amy

Serena stared at Amy's note. She felt a mixture of wonder and foolishness. All this time she had been worrying about her friend and the trouble she might be getting into. The truth was, Amy had managed just fine on her own, and she had learned more about the riddle than Serena had.

Who is this Saedon? Serena wondered. She walked around the console and called up the records from Gallifrey. She certainly did not remember him. "That's funny," she murmured. There was no record of a Time Lord by that name. Perhaps he had changed his name. But why? She checked the records to see who had signed out to use a TARDIS, but the search was a dead end. Everyone who had a TARDIS, according to the records, was authorized and accounted for.

She had an idea. The Time Lords were a telepathic race, so she thought it might be possible to sense his presence on the planet. She did, after all, have certain enhanced abilities. She closed her eyes and concentrated. She tried to feel his presence, but she could sense nothing unusual. She gave up on the attempt, as it was starting to give her a headache.

It was time for some old-fashioned detective work, Gallifreyan style. She collected a few pieces of equipment and headed out to examine the Shrine of Soil. Perhaps she would find something Amy and Brogan had missed.

"You're up bright and early," said Amy. It was a little past sunrise, and Brogan was sitting quietly on the cushions in the courtyard.

"Aye. I slept great last night. And summer's my fav'rite season."

Amy sat down across from the boy. "Mine, too."

“What’s that thing in the tree?” asked Brogan. The central feature of the open courtyard was a large, leafy tree.

“What thing?”

“That grey animal. The one that keeps makin’ the funny whistling sounds. I ain’t seen anything like it before.”

Amy laughed softly. “It’s just a bird. They’re very common on my planet, and many others.”

“I saw it fly.” Brogan uttered this with great sincerity and awe, as if he had experienced a miracle.

Amy was amazed. “There aren’t any birds on Krimshon?”

Brogan shook his head. “Nothin’ that flies.”

“I thought you said you’d eaten eggs before. Didn’t they come from a bird?”

“No. Lingmiks lay eggs when they come north in the summer. But they’re ground creatures.” The bird suddenly flew up out of the courtyard. The boy grinned and shook his head.

Niseena appeared at the doorway to her bedroom. “Good morning.”

Amy and Brogan greeted the woman.

Their host disappeared into the kitchen and returned with a pitcher of juice and some goblets. As she poured the liquid, she noticed Brogan’s eyes. “Oh my, your eyes are such a strange colour! I hadn’t noticed last night.”

Brogan became uncomfortable. “They’re normal.”

Amy covered for him. “They are a rare colour, aren’t they. They’re very common where he comes from. It’s very far from here.”

Niseena smiled. “They are a nice colour, if unusual. Very distinctive.” She passed each of them a goblet. “So, what are your plans for the day?”

“We’re going to try to catch up with Serena. I thought we might also visit the other shrines. The ones I’ve seen so far are very beautiful, and I’d like to complete the tour.” Amy inwardly hoped they would find another clue to the Gallifreyan riddle.

Serena sat cross-legged in the middle of the Shrine of Soil, her chin resting on her palms. The sun was rising in the east and the sky was a gentle blue. She was puzzled. She had spent half the night combing every surface of the spiral garden. If there was Gallifreyan equipment hidden somewhere here, it was very well shielded. Her most sophisticated sensory devices detected nothing, and there was no sign of Gallifreyan writing or something similar to give her a lead. She felt mystified.

She stood up and stretched. She had a few choices. She could try to meet Amy and Brogan at the Shrine of Water, or she could wait to catch up with them at the Shrine of Fire later. She vaguely wondered if she ought to look for Saedon, since he might know more about the riddle, but then she dismissed the thought. To begin with, she did not know where he was. She also remembered Amy’s warning that he was not to be trusted. It might be better that he did not know of her presence, at least for the time being.

She looked at the TARDIS. If Saedon found it, he would know another Time Lord was in the vicinity. On the other hand, she did not want to move the TARDIS in case Amy and Brogan came back for some reason. She decided to leave it alone, taking the chance that Saedon would not discover the spiral garden right away. However, she did take a moment to rig a remote control.

Brogan and Amy looked into the well at the Shrine of Water. They had already examined the area for clues. Amy sketched the layout and wrote a few details on a notepad from the leather pack. They had not discovered anything important.

"I don't know. This doesn't make any sense. We're still missing something," said Amy, looking at her sketches.

"Maybe we'll know what it means after we go t' the Shrine of Fire," suggested Brogan.

"Still no sign of Serena. Maybe she's making some progress." She noted the position of the sun. Noon was a couple hours away. "Let's head over to the last shrine. I'd guess it's about an hour's walk from here."

Serena ignored the stares she was getting. Her dark clothing contrasted sharply with the bright silks the local people wore. She was having an easier time of finding her way in the daylight. She paused in front of a large stone building to check her bearings and to make sure she was still heading for the Shrine of Fire on the other side of town.

"Give us a coin or two, strange lady."

Serena turned to see who was addressing her. A beggar was sitting on some steps, stroking his straggly beard and holding out a dirty palm. She pulled a generic gold coin from a pocket and handed it to the man. "Could you tell me the best route to take to reach the Shrine of Fire?"

He smiled. "You follow this street down to the market, then turn right, then left. Follow that road until you can't go any further, then go right. You follow the road until you reach the shrine."

"Thank you."

"Thank you," he said, examining the coin. "You are much nicer than the other lady I met this morning."

"Other lady?"

"Tall lady. Scandalous! Simply scandalous. She was almost naked. You could see her legs and stomach. I suggested she should change her ridiculous costume, and she threatened me. Came right up in my face and told me to shut up. But everyone was staring at her."

"Was there a man with this woman?" asked Serena.

"I didn't notice. The lady had a knife strapped to her leg. I thought she was going to use it on me."

"Not very friendly." Serena sat down on the steps. "I wonder what she is doing here in town."

"Another traveller?" said the beggar. "This seems to be the week for travellers."

"You've met others?"

"Oh, yes. I met a very nice lady yesterday. She was dressed in unseemly clothing, too, but they were not quite as scandalous. She did not take offense at me, humble beggar that I am."

"Sounds like Amy," murmured Serena.

"You know her? Yes, Amy. I am Lergo. You are the friend she mentioned?"

"I... yes, I am. My name is Serena."

"You have not managed to find her?"

"Well, not exactly. But she left me a message, and we are planning to meet at the Shrine of Fire at midday."

"That is good. She was not happy to have been separated from you."

"Tell me, Lergo, are there any other sacred places in this town, other than the four shrines?"

Lergo tugged on his beard. "Well, there are a couple of temples."

"Are they very old?" Serena asked.

He shook his head. "Only a few hundred years."

“Are there any other really old structures? Maybe an old meeting hall, or something like that?”

“Nothing that I can think of. Much of the town has been rebuilt several times over its history.” He looked down at the steps. “Now, wait. This one is old, maybe a thousand years. Built on the foundation of the hall of the great King who built the shrines. The original building was destroyed, but they reused the foundation.”

Serena’s eyes lit up. “This was built by the same King? What is it now?”

“The leaders of Shrinna use it for a town assembly, when there is a need. It is not used very often.”

Serena stood up. “Would anyone mind if I had a look inside?”

Lergo shrugged. “Probably not.”

She climbed the steps and pulled on the handle of one of the large wooden double doors. The door was heavy, but it moved freely. She went inside.

The assembly room had a vaulted ceiling and was massive. There were benches lined up in rows in three sections, and there was an open area at the front of the room. There did not seem to be anything unusual about the room. The floor was lined with large blocks of pink granite, and the walls were built of smaller stones.

Serena walked down one of the aisles between the benches. She looked around the room for some sign of an unusual symbol or Gallifreyan character, but the room was very plain. No one was in the room with her, so she pulled a small device from her pocket and scanned the area. As with the Shrine of Soil, she detected nothing.

She had reached the open area at the front. The only unusual feature about the entire room was the floor design. Most of the large blocks were rectangular, but two large semicircles were set in the floor to make a full circle.

Serena frowned. It seemed to be another dead end. She walked back out of the building.

“Not very interesting, is it,” said Lergo.

“Perhaps there was more to see when your ancient King built it,” replied Serena.

“This is it. The Shrine of Fire,” announced Amy.

The shrine was set out in a triangle, with one flat side overlooking the north. A smaller triangular depression, pointing in the opposite direction, filled the centre of the space. The sunken area was full of ashes and blackened with soot.

“No fire,” said Brogan.

“They must light a fire for special occasions,” replied Amy.

Brogan walked around the triangular fire pit. Though it was small compared to the entire shrine, it was still big enough for a large bonfire. “Maybe they don’t light it during the summer months. It would be too hot.”

Amy nodded. She looked around. “I wonder if Serena got our note.”

“I thought for sure she’d find us t’day.”

“Maybe we’ll find her back at the TARDIS.” Amy pulled out her sketches. “Well, you know the routine.”

The both began to look around the area for a clue to the riddle. Brogan found the first one. “Look at these lines.” A single line radiated out from each side of the inner triangle.

“There’s our fourth symbol from the Trial of Fear. The last door was carved with a triangle and three radiating lines.” Amy sketched the layout of the shrine on her notepad. “So we have all four now.”

“Let’s see.” Brogan took the pad from her.

“Maybe we’re missing something obvious,” said Amy.

“If it is something obvious, I don’t see it.”

Amy jumped. “Serena!” She turned. Serena was standing right behind them. “How long have you been standing there?”

“Only a minute. I didn’t recognise you at first. I see you’ve decided to blend in with the natives.” She smiled mischievously.

“It’s good t’ see you!” said Brogan. “We were beginnin’ t’ wonder if you’d make it.”

“Have you made any more progress?” asked Serena.

“We were just reviewing our notes. There’s not much, I’m afraid,” said Amy, gesturing toward the sketches.

“I couldn’t find anything, either. There’s no sign of technology here,” said Serena, doing a quick scan of the area. “So, we have a spiral, a few wavy lines, a triangle with a line on each side, and a circle with a wavy line,” said Serena, looking at the notepad in Brogan’s hands. “This riddle seems a little obscure. I don’t see any major pattern between the shapes.”

“Me neither. I feel like we’re missing a piece of the puzzle,” said Amy. “Did you find anything else?”

“I thought I had. There’s an old building in town which had ties to the same King who built the shrines,” said Serena. “But I looked inside, and there weren’t even any symbols like these.” She pointed to the notepad sketches.

Amy took the notepad from Brogan. “It would help if we knew what this part of the riddle was about.”

“Well, let’s see. These shrines have also come to represent other things. Wind, Soil, Water, and Fire. Maybe that’s our clue.”

“Maybe the directions are important. This one is lined up with magnetic north,” suggested Amy, pulling an old-fashioned compass from the leather pack.

Serena walked to the edge of the triangle. There was a clear view out over the farmland and the receding river.

Brogan took the pad back from Amy, and Amy walked over to stand next to Serena. “Maybe we just need a break from this to get some perspective.”

The two women stared out over the farmland in silence for a few minutes.

“The answer’s right here!” announced Brogan.

“What?!” replied Amy and Serena in unison.

“Right here on this piece o’ paper. I don’t know how t’ read,” said the boy, “but if there’s one thing I did learn workin’ for Meg at the inn, it’s how t’ count.”

The women rushed over to take a fresh look at the notepad.

“See, you can put a number with each shape,” explained Brogan, full of confidence. “This Shrine o’ Wind has five pillars. The Shrine o’ Fire is made up of threes—three lines and three-sided shapes. The well at Shrine of Water was placed in a square, a four-sided shape. And the spiral could represent a one, since it ends in a point in the centre. Four shapes, four numbers. One, three, four, five. So where’s two?” He looked up at Amy and Serena expectantly.

“That’s fantastic, Brogan!” cried Serena. She spontaneously reached out and hugged the boy. “Well done! And I know just where to look for number two!”

An hour later the threesome had made their way back to the old building in town.

“At last, I see you’ve managed to find each other,” said Lergo from his usual post on the steps.

Amy smiled. “Yes. It’s good to see you again Lergo. You brought me good luck. Thank you for sending me to Niseena.”

“I see she took good care of you. She has a good heart,” replied the beggar. “How’s your sightseeing going?”

“Very well,” said Serena. “I think there may be something interesting about this old building, after all.”

“Help yourself. I prefer it out here.”

Tai stepped out of an alley just down the street from the old assembly building. Her eyes narrowed slightly when she saw the strange woman talking to the beggar on the steps. There were two natives standing at her side. She slipped back into the alley to find Saedon.

Amy closed the door behind them, while Serena rushed up to the open area at the front. Amy and Brogan quickly followed.

“Look—two halves of a circle. There’s our missing number two,” said Serena, pointing at the blocks of stone on the floor. They all knelt down to examine the circles more closely. “Ah ha! I didn’t notice these before. Indentations, like those on the keystone in the stone circle.” Serena placed her hands in the depressions, one in each semicircle.

The floor at the very front of the room shimmered and disappeared, revealing a secret stairwell.

“Success!” cried Serena.

“Just like the secret chamber on Percantha!” cried Brogan.

“It might have a transport mechanism like the other places,” suggested Amy.

“What shall we do about the TARDIS?”

“I’d better program it to follow my signal again,” replied Serena, withdrawing the remote control from a pocket in her black velvet jacket.

“She looked out of place. Like she didn’t belong on this planet,” said Tai.

“Hmm. Not someone we’ve met before?” Saedon looked across the street at the old building.

“I don’t think so. She was dressed in a long black jacket with a gold blouse. Long blond hair.”

“Let’s have a peek and see what she’s up to,” suggested the Time Lord.

They walked across the street. Lergo was facing the other direction when they approached. He turned, about to launch into his usual begging routine, when he recognised Tai from their earlier encounter. She leaned forward and growled at him, fingering her knife and baring her teeth.

Lergo slid quickly to the side and lunged off of the steps, tripping a few times before he disappeared down the street.

“You do have a way with people, Tai,” said Saedon. He chuckled.

Inside, the assembly room was filled with the wheezing, groaning sound of a materialising TARDIS. The black monolith appeared at one side of the open area.

“I’ll be right back,” said Serena. She slipped into the TARDIS and soon returned.

“There. Shall we all go together this time?”

“Yes, please!” said Brogan. “I’ve missed out on half the fun.”

“Let’s go!”

Saedon and Tai quietly pulled open the door to the assembly building. They were just in time to glimpse Serena at the front of the room. It looked as if she had walked down some stairs. No one else was around, so they went in.

“What have we here?” said Saedon, approaching the black monolith. “This certainly doesn’t belong here. Look at this angel etched in the front. Very unusual.”

“Where did she go?” Tai was looked around the floor where Serena had disappeared, but it was whole again.

“Where indeed,” said Saedon.

Serena, Amy, and Brogan entered a chamber, and the door sealed behind them. They were in a circular room. The ceiling suddenly became illuminated, bathing the room in a dim light.

“Now what?” asked Amy.

“What’s this?” asked Brogan. He knelt down at the centre of the room and pointed to a metallic shape which was built into the floor. It was rectangular and was divided into three sections.

“Look, there’s one over here, too,” said Amy.

They soon discovered that there were five of them in the room—one in the middle of the floor and the rest built symmetrically into the walls.

Serena experimentally touched one. One of the three segments in the rectangle lit up. She touched it again and it turned off. She repeated this with the other segments and found the same behaviour. “Try yours, Amy,” she suggested.

Amy repeated the same experiment on the nearest rectangle. Its segments lit up in the same way.

“It’s like the light switch in my room in the TARDIS,” said Brogan. He turned on all of the segments in the central rectangle.

“I know,” said Amy. “This is how we show we’ve solved the puzzle.”

Serena poked at one of the segments, turning it on and off repeatedly. “Of course! Binary! We can use these lights to represent binary code. Amy, you first. Set your rectangle to be off-off-on. We’ll make that number one.”

Amy did as she was instructed, lighting only the third segment in her rectangle.

“Your turn Brogan. Set yours to off-on-off.”

“I don’t understand this bin’ry stuff, but okay.” He activated the middle segment at the centre of the room.

Amy was catching on by now. “Let’s see. Number one was on the south edge of town. Number three was on the north.” She crossed the room and activated the third rectangle. “Off-on-on.”

“This one would be the eastern side of town. Four,” said Serena. “On-off-off. Your turn again, Brogan. Set up the last one for five. On-off-on.”

Brogan moved to the remaining rectangle across from Serena and set it accordingly. Nothing happened for a moment, and then all of the rectangles started to flash randomly in the room. A deep voice issued from the very walls. “You have passed the Trial of Creativity. You may proceed to the next level.” The wall across from the sealed entrance shimmered and opened.

The threesome walked up to the exit, but they could not see beyond a few feet inside. It seemed to be a room shrouded in darkness.

“Part four, here we come!” cried Amy. They stepped through the opening together.

A wheezing sound filled the assembly room. Saedon and Tai looked up from examining the floor to see the black monolith vanish.

“Well, I guess that explains our mysterious friend,” Saedon remarked casually.

“It was a TARDIS!” exclaimed Tai.

“Yes,” he said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. “Another Time Lord. I wonder how much she knows.”

To be continued...