**Mystery of Burgh Island**

The TARDIS materialised beside a small jetty stretching out into what Peri Brown would call a sound or a strait.

The Doctor didn’t call it anything. He noted that a ferry was just arriving from the mainland beyond the stretch of water, depositing visitors with expensive suitcases and bags.

The luggage was transferred to the boot of a minibus as the passengers climbed aboard. The Doctor added the two suitcases Peri had packed at his instruction and one smaller one of his own as they joined the bus.

“Ok, I’m impressed, so far,” Peri said. “We’re in the right place. I recognise the hotel, even from here. What year is it?”

“Twenty-twenty four,” The Doctor answered. “The current owners have spent a small fortune restoring the old place to celebrate the centenary of the hotel’s literary golden age.”

“When people like Agatha Christie stayed here to write,” Peri confirmed, recalling a magazine article about it. “Why didn’t we come in the ACTUAL golden age and meet the famous people for real?”

“We might do that, too,” The Doctor said. “But I was curious about this time. It is one of a bundle of pre-programmed locations that were put into the TARDIS navigation computer when I was a student. They were tests... To see how I would deal with problems.”

“Huh...problems....”

“Nothing dangerous,” he promised. “Not intentionally, anyway. I nearly got into trouble when Krakatoa erupted, but that was my fault for not getting out of there sooner. And another time I....”

“But there might NOT be something funny going on at a hotel directly connected with two fictional murder mysteries?” Peri’s tone of voice was edging towards suspicious. She knew enough about the Time Lords to know they didn’t know the difference between a student prank and a lethal situation. If they wanted The Doctor to come here, there was probably a tidal wave approaching the island or a small, localized civil war.

“A tidal wave in Devon?” The Doctor looked hurt. “Honestly, Peri. You have no faith in me.”

“Are you surprised?” Peri answered. “And 2024? Yet again, you’ve picked a time when my passport makes me an old age pensioner.”

But for all her complaints she was looking forward to a week at the famous Burgh Island Hotel. The two murder mysteries, the aforementioned Mrs Christie‘s ‘And Then There Were None' and ‘Evil Under the Sun', were among her favourite travel literature. It promised to be an interesting time as long as it remained short of bug-eyed monsters.

The bus trip wasn’t long. Peri had hiked much further with a backpack or even around the mega-malls of American shopping afternoons.

But this was a five-star hotel. Customers weren’t meant to arrive hot, grubby and perspiring. Instead, their bags were immediately taken to their rooms while the guests signed in and were brought to the Palm Court Lounge for a complementary afternoon tea.

Art Deco was the theme of the hotel, from its pure white exterior glinting in the sun to every aspect of the interior. Here in the lounge were period chairs and coffee tables, silver cake stands and cutlery (Frank Cobb and Co.) and classic flatware (George Jones). Even the waste paper bins and lampshades were straight out of a lush production of ‘The Great Gatsby' or a TV ‘Poirot’ episode. If there wasn’t a smoking ban in this era there would be art deco ashtrays.

And all under a spectacular flattened glass dome with iron spokes from the centre resembling the fronds of a very symmetrical palm tree. The glass was tinted enough not to be too hot when the sun was high.

“All very nice, so far,” Peri said, willing some unknown alien space ship not to land on the dome or murderous robots crash through the French windows that gave them such a beautiful sea view. “Are there many space monsters likely to come by sea?” she added purely out of caution.

“The Rutans are the only sea-borne aliens I’ve had much trouble with,” The Doctor answered. “There ARE the Sea Devil’s, but those are indigenous to Earth, so cannot be called space monsters.” Peri gave a disgusted look and he laughed. “Of course, you didn’t REALLY want to know, did you?”

“Not really, no,” Peri conceded.

“Relax,” The Doctor told her. “There is nothing coming to invade this perfectly pleasant little island. Besides, why blame every misfortune on ‘bug eyed monsters from space’? Earth produces plenty of gruesome serial killers – all perfectly human monsters.”

“Yeah, stuck on an island with a bunch of strangers, I’m not sure I want to know about those, either,” Peri admitted. “Ok, I’ll believe you. There’s nothing very terrible about this place and nothing is going to happen while we’re here.”

That’s better,” The Doctor said and poured her a second cup of tea.

Presently they were all shown their rooms. Peri was quite delighted with a suite comprising of bedroom, drawing room and bathroom, all in unashamed Art Deco style that made her think of the stage set of a production of ‘Anything Goes' that she had seen when she was last in New York.

That was very much the era invoked, but she noted that this was the Noel Coward suite. Right era, but more quintessentially British than Cole Porter.

Among the touches that proved this was a superior suite at a superior hotel was a box of Devon fudge and a bottle of chilled spring water from a local source. Peri threw off her coat and shoes and lay down on the very comfortable bed to sample both, enjoying the soft sound of the tide coming in on a nearby beach and noting the lack of the ever present background hum of the TARDIS.

She napped for a few hours and woke ready to shower and dress for dinner.

There were several dinner options: The Nettlefold restaurant, named after the silent era film producer who was the first proprietor of the hotel, the Pilchard Inn, offering superior pub fare, the night time cocktail club in what had been the Palm Court Lounge in the afternoon....

And the grand ballroom, the top choice. Evening dress was compulsory, though it didn’t have to be historically accurate.

Peri happily dressed in an iridescent blue dress she never expected to wear in The Doctor’s company. As she sat with a pre-dinner Singapore Sling in the Cocktail Club she really hoped that he actually understood the concept of dressing for dinner. If he turned up in something embarrassing, she was determined to go into the ballroom on her own and find another suitable dinner companion.

She was pleasantly surprised. He was wearing a proper, tailored black evening suit, a crisp white shirt and bow tie. He had eschewed his usual eclectic waistcoats for a silk cummerbund in TARDIS blue.

Nothing much could be done with that mop of hair, but she could accept that. She let him take her by the arm like a regular dinner date. The idea was so absurd she felt like laughing out loud.

But there was something in his expression that made her think he wanted it to be like that, just this once, and she controlled her sense of the absurd.

“This is really nice,” she said as they were seated at a window table overlooking the sea just as the sunset was painting the sky in post-impressionist colours.

The ballroom was art deco overload with murals of beautifully dressed Bright Young Things of the 1920s reminding everyone of the dress code. Peri knew her outfit lived up to expectations even before The Doctor paid her an unexpected and very rare compliment.

“You look quite beautiful,” he told her. “I am an unthinking boor not to have told you that more often, instead of dragging you through terrible places.”

The terrible places were a world away from this place of crisp linen, shining glassware and silver service. For one night, only, he was forgiven.

They ate sumptuously, including a soup made from locally sourced wild mushrooms, succulent lamb and a dessert including dark chocolate, Devon cream and champagne sorbet, followed by coffee and liqueurs.

“I should do more of this,” The Doctor said, lingering over an aromatic orange brandy.

“There is no reason why you can’t, is there?” Peri asked. “I wouldn’t complain. Unless... Please tell me you didn’t leave your credit cards on Alpha Magna and can’t pay the bill? If that happens, you are on your own. I’ll find a man who likes older women and jump ship.”

“Never fear, my dear Peri,” he replied. “There is no need to worry.”

“I’m trying not to, but your past record is against you. And the TARDIS’S record. And I’m not sure if I trust your Time Lords, either. They are a rather devious lot.”

“I’m in agreement with you there,” The Doctor said with a wry smile. Then he saw a way out of this line of conversation. The pianist who had been quietly playing 1920s songs during dinner was joined by a saxophonist and trumpeter playing dance music – the dance of old-fashioned ballrooms. As several couples moved to the floor, The Doctor stood and held out his hand. Surprised, Peri hesitated for a few seconds, then allowed herself to be led into a foxtrot which The Doctor performed elegantly.

Elegance had not been a noun she would normally associate with The Doctor, which was why she asked about this ability as a waltz tune took over and he was just as sure-footed and thoroughly decorous in how he held her.

“Devious they surely are, but the term ‘lords’ isn’t just pretention. We are trained at a young age to fit into refined society. Variations of the ballroom dancing you know are found all over the Galaxies, even amongst species with more than two arms. The Alpha Centaurian tango is an eye-opener to the traditionally humanoid dancer.”

The vision made Peri laugh which may have been one reason a well-dressed young man asked to cut in at the end of the waltz. The Doctor assented and went back to his brandy.

“Forgive my presumption,” the man said. “Your companion... He’s....”

“My uncle,” Peri said and noticed his relief at not treading on any romantic attachment. She introduced herself. The man said he was Anthony Marshall.

“You obviously don’t know who I am?” he said when his name didn’t surprise her in any way.

“No… should I?” Peri asked.

“I’m an actor,” he explained. “Stage and television... British television, none of it sold overseas as yet. But I am a little bit famous, here. Enough to enjoy dancing with a lady who isn’t a breathless ‘fan’.”

“We’re usually too busy travelling to bother with television,” Peri explained. “We’re on... Kind of like... the ‘Grand Tour’ people used to do in the nineteenth century. Seeing places, meeting people. You’re my first actor. Are you... Doing anything just now, or is that a bad question? Doesn’t it mean you’re unemployed if you’re not in a show?”

Anthony laughed pleasantly.

“I’m preparing for a role,” he answered. “ITV are paying for me to stay here and soak up the Agatha Christie atmosphere before I star in a series about the young Hercule Poirot. I’m in the Poirot room to get into the role Stanislavsky style.”

Peri didn’t know that Stanislavsky was a proponent of immersive method acting, and she wondered slightly if telling her his room was a subtle invitation.

“That... sounds interesting,” she said, hedging her bets.

“Well, I thought so... Until this afternoon. I was reading one of the little booklets they have around this place... About the famous former guests. It mentioned that Agatha Christie herself thought that she made Poirot too old in his first story. She ended up with him stuck aged mid to late fifties in books published decade after decade for over half a century. And before the first story he was meant to have been a Belgian policeman. I’m playing a young Poirot as a private detective in 1930s London. It makes no sense. Christie fans are going to be cruel. They are quite purist about it all.”

“Will you do it, then?” Peri asked.

“I am in two minds. Thirteen episodes with an option for two more seasons... Money in the bank, a year’s work. But if it gets pilloried I might regret it.”

He was cheerful about it. Peri said all the right encouraging things and enjoyed dancing with him before she declared herself ready to call it a night.

“Breakfast on the terrace, tomorrow?” Anthony asked before they parted. “They serve from eight o’clock. Weather report is for a warm start to the morning.”

Peri laughed softly.

“If the Poirot doesn’t work out, you could make good as a weather man,” she told him. “Actually, that DOES sound like a good idea. I’ll see you then.”

He gave her a gentlemanly kiss on the cheek which put a smile on her face as she headed back to the Noel Coward suite.

Well, why not? Travelling with The Doctor didn’t mean she couldn’t meet men of her own age. And she’d never had a breakfast date before. It was something to look forward to.

She ate another piece of Devon fudge as she settled down in her art deco queen-sized bed, promising herself to brush her teeth thoroughly before breakfast, and fell asleep easily.

She woke again about three o’clock, the sky still dark outside, feeling a little less content.

Something had woken her. Not a noise, maybe, but something.

She sat up and put on her side light. Was there a faint smell of burning.

Not something on fire. She fought down the natural alarm. More like a cigarette.

Smoking was prohibited in all parts of the hotel. But maybe somebody was on the terrace below having a sneaky one.

Then she heard singing – and it was coming from the sitting-room. It was a soft male voice, singing the sort of old-fashioned tune that the pianist had played during dinner.

That was definitely weird, though not quite The Doctor’s kind of weird. She was fairly calm as she put on the slippers and bathrobe that came with the suite and stepped out of the bedroom.

Life with The Doctor had prepared her for anything, so the ghost of a man dressed in a satin dressing gown smoking a cigarette through a slim holder didn’t startle her very much. She recognised him, anyway, and alive or dead he wasn’t somebody she would have been afraid of.

As she wondered what to say to the opaque but not quite solid shadow of Noel Coward lounging on her sofa, she became aware of the song he was crooning.

A Room with a view  
And you  
And no one to worry us  
No one to hurry us  
Through….

“Oh....that’s one of your songs,” Peri exclaimed as she, quite without thinking about it, sat facing him in an armchair. “I thought the people who wrote the room pamphlet failed English literature. They said “Maybe 'A Room With A View’ was written here.” But that was a book about Italy by E.M. Forster.”

“A delightful boy,” Coward said with a lascivious smile. “I don’t mind sharing a title with him. Unfortunately, that was all we shared.”

“Oh...” Peri blushed slightly as she got the mildly off-colour joke. “Of course. He was... like you... I don’t know what word they used for it in your time.”

“In the social class Edward Morgan and I walked amongst, it would be ‘a deviant of the Oscar Wilde persuasion’. Lower classes and policemen... just deviant... Or something much uglier.”

“Yes, I can imagine. But... You didn’t die here, did you?”

“As delightful as it is on this island, in good weather, at least, no. I died and was buried at my lovely warm retreat on the much warmer island of Jamaica. Contrary to what many people think – including myself when I wrote Blythe Spirit - ghosts are not confined to their place of death. It is, in fact, more like the explanation given by the spectre in A Christmas Carol – 'It is required of every man, that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death.’ Strangely, that is not at all true of myself. I got about the world and met plenty of my fellow men.”

“Perhaps you’re the exception that proves the rule,” Peri conceded.

“Oh, I do hope so,” Coward answered her with a joyful laugh. “What I do wonder is why I am a ghost looking like this... the satin dressing gown and cigarette holder. It really was just an affectation – for the cameras, for drama. It was never me in private... the real me. I had neither when I stayed here in those gloriously youthful days before the war.”

“There’s a picture on the wall over there by the window,” Peri told him. “That’s how I recognized you. I wonder what that says about ghosts. I always thought they’d be in the clothes they died in... Not what people think they should be wearing. I wonder if it’s this room. It’s a bit of a cliché, all.”

“Even that makes no sense,” Coward said. “This isn’t even the room I stayed in when I visited. It was on the other side, facing the mainland. All the rooms here have views, after all. But at least I get to meet a charming young lady who isn’t upset by my ghostly situation.”

“You’re not into women,” she reminded him. Though after The Doctor and Anthony, he was the third man in one night to pay her a compliment. A girl could get used to that.

“Deviant I may be, but blind I am not,” Coward answered her and she conceded the point. “I take it that I have been dead for some time? What year is this?”

“Twenty-twenty-four,” Peri told him. “I’m not sure how many people remember you, lately. The only one of your films that comes on TV very much is The Italian Job... Somebody tried to remake that a while ago. Your version is way better.”

It was a terribly trivial conversation. Peri wondered if there was something more vital to science or something she ought to be asking him.

But she had no idea what that ought to be. Besides, he was a playwright and comedy song composer. Would he know anything more about the paranormal than she did?

“There... Isn’t anything you need to tell me, is there?” she asked cautiously. “Like Hamlet’s father or Jacob Marley?”

“I don’t believe so,” Coward answered. “I couldn’t possibly say if you need to avenge your father and you are certainly travelling abroad. I think our meeting is just a pleasant coincidence.” He glanced at the window. The sky was more dark blue than black. Dawn would be about four-thirty. “Like Hamlet senior, I do have to obey one rule of the metaphysical. I must depart at cock crow. If you would be so kind as to keep me company until that time....”

Peri wasn’t sure a cock crowing was art deco enough for Burgh Island, but dawn was inevitable. She could give her visitor that much time.

They talked about music, plays and films. What else? Peri promised to see if there were any revivals of his work in the West End... Or even in provincial repertory. She meant it, too. She hadn’t really been a regular playgoer, but now it felt like a personal mission.

As the dark blue turned lighter he became more and more translucent. While he was still recognisable, he smiled wistfully.

“I fear this is goodnight,” he said. “Or good morning.”

Anything but goodbye, Peri thought. That was too final and a little too sad.

“It was nice meeting you,” she said. Then she watched as he vanished, leaving only the smell of his cigarette. In the morning, she thought she had better open the windows, in case the chambermaids thought she was a secret smoker.

But not yet. She wanted it to linger while she went back to bed. She fully planned to be at breakfast tomorrow on the terrace, but she could still sleep a few more hours.

When she arrived on the terrace in the early sunshine, wearing a soft shawl against sea breezes, she found The Doctor and Anthony at a table together. The former poured coffee while the latter held out a chair for her.

“Did you sleep well, my dear Peri?” The Doctor asked. She was about to say yes, when something about the way both men were looking at her made her hesitate.

Did they think there was a reason why she hadn’t?

“I slept fine apart from when I woke up and had a conversation with the ghost of Noel Coward,” she answered, and neither man was surprised by that.

“I was in the George Formby suite,” The Doctor said. “We had a good old sing song, and a discussion about the use of innuendo in comedy.”

“Ok.” Peri looked at Anthony. “Please tell me you didn’t stay up all night discussing crime with Hercule Poirot? Fictional characters can’t have ghosts. I’m quite sure about that.”

“No. Not Poirot. Or Miss Marple. But Agatha herself, looking young and pretty as she was in the twenties sat on the end of my bed and talked over my dilemma. She thinks the idea of a Young Poirot series is quite absurd, canonically, but nevertheless thinks I should do it. She thinks it would redress the problem she made for herself by making him too old in the first book.”

He blushed rather engagingly.

“She also said I would make a very handsome Poirot – which is a bit overwhelming when I’m in bed in my pj’s and she WAS very pretty in her heyday.”

“A little awkward,” The Doctor agreed. Peri didn’t trust herself to speak. She had Anthony’s eye last night. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to compete with a ghost.

“She also apologised for her constant references to him having an egg-shaped head – which she assured me I did not have. And for the fact that I would have to wear the silly moustache for people to believe in the character. She actually said it was ‘silly’. I never imagined she would feel that way.”

“I suppose she never expected her characters to be taken out of her books and onto the screen,” Peri suggested. “Where actors had to put up with his idiosyncratic look.”

“Very likely,” Anthony said. “The important question this morning in the delightfully warm light of day is this – none of us were dreaming? The celebrity ghosts WERE real?”

“Yes,” The Doctor replied emphatically. “Absolutely real. Why... I couldn’t possibly say. None of those three people died here....”

“Mr Coward didn’t think that mattered,” Peri told him. “He quoted Dickens as proof that ghosts could go anywhere.”

“Then I would be inclined to take his word for it,” The Doctor admitted. He glanced around the terrace where many other guests were breakfasting al fresco and let his alien telepathy gently touch their thoughts without being too intrusive.

Nearly all of them had an unbroken night of comfortable sleep. Only one man, sitting alone, had anything unusual to reminisce over. He was drinking some kind of green ‘smoothie’ that must have been recommended to him as a hangover relief. The man was remembering with perfect clarity a late night in the Cocktail Club where he had been drinking long, sticky and very alcoholic drinks and flirting with the ghosts of both Jessie Matthews and Josephine Baker, two celebrated dancers of the golden age.

“I know him,” Anthony said. “Sasha Dubois. He’s a professional dancer on Strictly. I did it two years back as a celeb contestant.”

Peri had no idea what ‘Strictly’ was. Nobody explained. But The Doctor said that Mr Dubois’ occupation was curiously relevant.

“With you and him, there’s a co-relation between your professions and the ghosts you met up with. Peri and I... not so much. Though I have often been called a clown, and Mr Formby was known as the ‘Clown Prince of Music’.”

“If he saw you in your usual outfit, he’d hand you the crown,” Peri teased him, but only out of habit. This was puzzling. It wasn’t terrifying like some of their adventures, but it was very, very strange.

“I’m going to have a quick word with that chap,” The Doctor said. “You two chat among yourselves.”

Oddly enough, although Peri felt a little like the time when her mother and stepfather actually approved of her high school boyfriend, she found chat with Anthony suddenly awkward. She poured more coffee from the pot while he idly flipped through another of the historical pamphlets that were placed in the art deco holder along with the breakfast menu.

When Peri passed his cup she saw a stunned expression on his face. Before she could ask what was wrong, he showed her a page in the pamphlet.

“Several of the rooms and suites are named for a group of well-known literary and musical personalities who all tragically died in a boating accident on June 28th, 1929. All were at the peak of their fame and who knows what greater work they may have achieved but for this tragedy.”

“Tragically and tragedy in the same paragraph is lazy writing,” Peri commented before going on to read the list of the victims.

“Along with Major Edward Dudley (‘Fruity’) Metcalfe, aide to Edward, Prince of Wales, who owned the boat, the victims were Noel Coward, the playwright and composer, George Formby, popular musician and actor, Agatha Christie, mystery writer, and Jazz dancers Jessie Matthews and Josephine Baker....”

She stared at Anthony. He stared back.

“But....” Peri began.

“None of those people died in the 1920s,” Anthony said slowly. “Agatha Christie died of old age in the 1970s.”

“So did Noel Coward. And in Jamaica. Not here.”

Anthony reached for his smart phone and googled Noel Coward. Wikipedia listed him as having died in 1929 in a boating accident off the Devon coast.

He guessed there was little point in checking the others.

“History has been changed,” he said, in a tone of somebody accepting the incredible. “I don’t know why we know it happened. If such a thing is possible... Surely we’d be remembering the new facts.”

Peri had assumed it was being a time traveller that made her immune to such things. But that didn’t explain Anthony being unaffected by the change.

“Maybe that’s why the ghosts came to us,” Peri suggested.

“You mean... They knew something wasn’t right... And they reached out... Even though they didn’t know what it was all about?”

“Absolutely correct,” The Doctor said, returning from his chat with the hungover Mr Dubois. “I think I know what’s going on. Come on....” He meant Peri, but he glanced at Anthony and made a decision. “You, too. You are involved and... Unlike your terpsichorean friend, sober.”

Anthony followed them as they dashed downhill on foot and rather faster than he was entirely comfortable with. When The Doctor unlocked the door of an old police box by the jetty, he was too out of breath to ask what it was about and didn’t think to ask how they might all fit inside.

“Shut the door,” The Doctor called out to him as he stared around the TARDIS interior. “Remind me of the date this tragedy is alleged to have taken place?”

“June 28th, 1929,” Anthony and Peri both said at once. Anthony waved the pamphlet that he had grabbed from.the table. “It says here... About three o’clock... On a sunny day with calm seas. Nobody knows how it happened.”

“I do,” The Doctor said. “We... The Time Lords... Have had trouble with this lot before. Their species is known as Grook. They call themselves Ratini-Collo - in Earth English the Historical Anarchists. They come from a planet in the Andromeda sector. They travel around the cosmos looking for soft points in the timelines, where they can disrupt history. Never anything useful like assassinating dictators. It’s usually just trivial... fiddling lottery numbers or changing the results of film awards. This time, one of them has found a soft point that would rob Earth of several important cultural figures all at once.”

“Why?” Peri asked.

“For fun, mischief, because they CAN,” The Doctor answered as he set the TARDIS controls. “My people have been accused of guarding the secret of time travel from those we consider unworthy. It is because of characters like these that we stick to that policy.”

Peri accepted that explanation. So did Anthony, apparently. Though of course he had questions.

“You have a space and time ship... Disguised as a police box.”

“Yes.”

“And you’re from another planet?”

“He is, I’m from Baltimore,” Peri told him.

“Of course. That makes perfect sense.” Anthony smiled resignedly. “Just my luck. I meet a nice woman and she’s a time Traveller. From the fiftieth century or something, I suppose.”

“No, I was born in 1965,” she admitted.

“So, you’re older than my mum,” he sighed.

“I’m afraid so,” Peri answered.

“You look better than my mum,” he said. “The years have been kind.”

“Oh shut up,” Peri said, though not unkindly. “Or when I get back to my own time I’ll... Come to your christening and get into all the photos.”

She laughed, then. So did he.

“Time travel must make relationships a bit tricky,” he surmised.

“It... It’s worth it.” She looked at The Doctor and thought of the ugly, terrifying times, the near death times, and despite it all, she was telling the truth. “Yes, it’s worth it. When I’m ready to stop... Wherever or whenever I am... Then I can think about... Relationships.”

“If it’s any consolation, it’s a bit like that with acting. Travelling, location filming, provincial theatre. Uncertain income. Ladies aren’t keen to jump aboard my bandwagon.”

“We’re here,” The Doctor said, cutting into their moments of reflection. Peri looked up at the view screen and noted that they were hovering over the water between the Devon coast and Burgh Island.

A sleek looking motor launch had a number of passengers enjoying the sunshine and calm sea.

“Look....” Anthony said, pointing to the top left corner of the screen where the water rippled in a way that reminded the two humans of a torpedo trail, except much slower.

I’m fact, as they watched, the ‘torpedo’ and the motor launch both stopped. The Doctor told his companions the TARDIS was projecting a localized time freeze. They had ten minutes maximum before it strained the engines as well as causality.

“Heading for the boat with a nasty little bomb,” The Doctor confirmed. While the TARDIS had been targeting the correct date in time, he had been busy connecting up a curious kind of harness and rope arrangement. Neither of his passengers had taken much notice until now. Then the penny dropped.

“You don’t have a ‘tractor beam’ or ‘teleport’ to scoop the alien up?” Anthony asked. The Doctor made a dismissive sound like an elderly person who had lived perfectly well up to now without smart phones and social media.

“What? Peri asked. “You’re going to jump out of the door and grab him?”

“Grooks are only two foot high – like rather wriggly troll dolls. Easy to catch.”

“I can do that,” Anthony volunteered, surprising both Peri and The Doctor. “I’ve done wire work in pantomime – and a celebrity bungee jump for charity. I can do it. You wind me back.”

There was no time for discussion. The Doctor passed the harness to Anthony who fastened it on expertly and looked more professional, in Peri’s opinion, than The Doctor would.

He opened the door. Anthony stepped to the threshold. He looked back at Peri and grinned.

“You don’t know me well enough to beg me not to do it like a melodrama heroine,” he said.

Then he jumped.

“You take the winch control,” The Doctor said, grabbing what looked like a large bird cage and approaching the door.

She did as he said and very shortly she was holding down the reverse winch. It was only a little longer before Anthony was hauled over the threshold clutching a very ugly creature, the grey-brown colour of old plasticine. As Peri helped Anthony out of the harness, The Doctor did two things. First he grabbed a small round object out of the Grook’s hands and tossed it back out of the TARDIS, then he shoved the creature into the cage and locked it.

Anthony and Peri watched as the bomb exploded harmlessly in mid-air just before the time freeze collapsed and the motor launch continued on its way.

“Right,” The Doctor said. “I’ll drop you two back at the hotel in time for a light brunch and then take this specimen to a penal colony I know where several of his lot are already being held.”

That was fine by them. The Doctor took less than half an hour delivering the Grook to the prison guards and they all enjoyed a quiet meal watching yachts on the water.

“The pamphlet is right again,” Peri reported, pointing to the now rather crumpled booklet. Everyone lived full lives as they were supposed to do. Even Fruity Metcalfe.”

“Nobody has admitted to seeing his ghost,” Anthony pointed out. “But it really doesn’t matter in the end.”

“I was right about one thing, though,” Peri said. “There WAS something going on here. Just not as icky as usual.”

“Yes, I’m sorry about that,” The Doctor apologised. “But now we’ve got that over and done with, we’re booked in for a week and we can enjoy ourselves.”

“Great,” Anthony said. “Peri and I have many stories to swap, mine of a perilous acting career and hers of adventures in odd and sometimes icky places.”

“Sounds good to me,” Peri said.

“And when I get home I’ll be checking my christening photos,” Anthony added, much to The Doctor’s bemusement.