

Prologue

Marlowe Hapworth spent the majority of his last afternoon at the Frost Fair. There was a bite in the January air and he could feel the tingle of frost forming at the edges of his moustache. The snow crunched pleasantly beneath his feet. He laughed as a snowball whistled past his ear, waving encouragement to the urchin who had hurled it at a friend.

He stood for a moment on the Embankment, watching the skaters on the frozen river describing curved shapes on the ice before the Palace of Westminster. He blew out a stream of misty breath, letting it hang in the air as he listened to the laughter and reflected on the joys of being young. How pleasant to be carefree, at least for a while. An afternoon away from his studies, and then back to work in the morning, Hapworth decided.

Further along the river, he found the Frost Fair. It sprawled along the bank of the Thames and out onto the ice. Tents and stalls, sideshows and attractions.

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Hapworth hurled wooden balls at coconuts that he suspected were fixed to their poles. Not that he minded in the least. He watched a man on stilts, sure-footed in the snow, juggling first with skittles and then with burning torches. He ate chestnuts so hot they scalded the roof of his mouth.

And at the end of a line of stalls selling everything from carved wooden animals to muffins, from brittle toffee to lace kerchiefs, he found a sign pointing him to the Carnival of Curiosities. Set slightly apart from the rest of the Frost Fair, the 'Carnival' seemed to be a combination of circus, fair, and exhibition. Hapworth paid a penny for admission to the lad at the gate, and then wandered fascinated through the carnival.

A strongman, stripped to the waist, his upper body covered in tattoos juggled with medicine balls laughing all the while. A gypsy woman sat at a table, peering into a crystal ball. Various tents advertised their contents as 'The Amazing Bearded Woman', 'A Genuine Wolf Boy', 'Never-Creatures – animals not of Nature' and other intriguing and enticing attractions. He paid more pennies to laugh and cringe and marvel at them all.

Most fascinating was the Shadowplay. From his time in India and the Far East, Hapworth had an appreciation of the art of shadow puppets. He experienced a moment's apprehension as he stepped inside the large tent – would this be a pale imitation

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of the artistry he remembered, an inept aping of the skills he had so admired in his younger days? He took his seat between a snotty-nosed girl and man who reeked of ale and was already snoring. But after a few moments, he noticed neither of them...

The ringing was so sustained and insistent that Carlisle assumed it must be either a creditor or a constable. It was therefore with some surprise that he found his master standing on the doorstep. Carlisle had rarely seen Mr Hapworth so distracted. He stood silhouetted against the pale glow of the snow-reflected moonlight, breathless and agitated.

'Thank you,' he muttered as he pushed past Carlisle and into the hallway.

'Are you quite well, sir?' the manservant felt compelled to ask.

'Well? Oh yes. But I have seen...' Hapworth shook his head. 'Things you could not countenance. What to do?' he wondered. 'Whatever to do?'

Hapworth lapsed into silence, standing at the foot of the stairs, as if uncertain whether to proceed up or not.

'There are some messages, sir,' Carlisle ventured, hoping to break Hapworth out of his unsettling reverie.

'Messages,' his master echoed. 'Yes, of course. A message. I must send a message at once and tell her

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what I have witnessed.'

'Sir?'

'Pen and ink.' Hapworth nodded vehemently. 'In my study. I shall set down exactly what has happened this afternoon, and then you must bear the epistle. At once.'

'Of course, sir. May I ask to whom this message must be delivered?'

Hapworth was already hurrying through to his study. Carlisle followed him into the large room. Each wall was lined with bookcases from floor to ceiling, interrupted only by a large window on one wall and the gas lamps that jutted out from between the shelves and cast a gentle luminance across the room. In the middle of the room was a large globe. To one side, Hapworth's desk. On the other, a small table bearing a decanter and glasses. Hapworth made straight for the desk, pulling a sheet of writing paper from a tray and setting it squarely on the blotter before reaching into a drawer for pen and ink.

'Sir,' Carlisle prompted. 'The letter you wish me to deliver? Who is it for?'

Hapworth glanced up. His eyes were shadowed, his cheeks hollow, his fingers trembling as he held the pen. 'Why, to the Great Detective, of course. To Madame Vastra.'

Carlisle shivered despite himself. He had been to Paternoster Row before. Hapworth was acquainted

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with Madame Vastra, and she had called upon his learning and knowledge on several occasions. Carlisle found the veiled woman cold and not a little unsettling.

‘Now I must set this down at once,’ Hapworth insisted. ‘Leave me. I shall ring for you when I am done.’

As he spoke, Hapworth put down his pen and got to his feet, following Carlisle to the door. As soon as the manservant was out in the hall, Hapworth pulled the door shut. A moment later, Carlisle heard the scrape of the key turning in the lock. Only then did it occur to Carlisle that his master was utterly terrified.

Inside the study, Hapworth closed and barred the shutters on the window, then drew the curtains across. He took a moment to adjust the gas, turning up the lamps as he fought to get his nerves under control.

At his desk, he paused before sitting. He shrugged out of his coat and draped it across the globe. The last flecks of snow had melted, but a tiny patch of white was visible. Something poking out of the coat pocket. Hapworth lifted the coat to reach inside, and drew out the ticket he had been given when he entered the Carnival of Curiosities. It was damp and stained. As he pulled it from the coat pocket, several other, smaller pieces of paper came with it and scattered

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across the polished wooden floorboards. He bent to pick them up.

Three pieces of paper, snow white, each folded into the shape of a stylised bird. It was expertly done, all the more impressive as the birds were so small – only a couple of inches across. Hapworth dropped the paper birds, together with the Carnival ticket, beside the ornate letter-opener on his desk and sat down, gathering his thoughts before committing them to the paper in front of him.

A faint breeze ruffled the folded paper, giving the illusion for a moment that the wings of the birds were stirring into life. Hapworth glanced across at the window – only to see that, of course, it was closed, the shutters and curtains drawn. He frowned.

Outside the door, Carlisle waited, unsure quite what to do. He had no idea how long Mr Hapworth would be, but equally he did not want to venture too far away. His master might need him at any moment.

The scream echoed round the hallway, barely muffled by the heavy study door. It seemed to go on for ever, before it was choked off into a rasp of pain.

‘Sir?’ Carlisle called. ‘Mr Hapworth?’

The door was still locked. Carlisle put his shoulder to it, and with a strength borne of fear and urgency he managed to break it open on his third attempt. He stumbled into the room, accompanied by the sound

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of splintering wood as the doorframe gave way.

Hapworth was still at his desk, but sprawled forward across it, his body twisted onto its side. One hand was stretched out desperately across the surface, fingers curled into a gnarled claw. His eyes were open, staring wide, fearful, and lifeless at Carlisle standing in the shattered doorway.

On the paper before him, Hapworth had written just two words: 'Madame Vastra'. The paper was flecked with red.

Carlisle looked round, appalled. But apart from him and Hapworth's body, the room was empty. The window was locked and shuttered. He had broken through the only door to get inside.

Blood continued to seep out from the sharp metal letter-opener that jutted from between Hapworth's shoulder blades. It dripped to the desk, soaked up by the crimson-stained blotter.

Chapter

I

The pub was crowded. People stood so close together that they were almost on each other's toes, except for at one end of the bar, where two stocky figures stood alone. There seemed to be an unspoken understanding that no one else should get too close to them.

Everything about Rick Bellamy was angry. His face was a permanent scowl, his hands – except when lifting his pint glass – knotted into fists, his stance pugilistic and intimidating. His tone was no exception.

'A penny!' He spat the word across the bar in front of him. 'Well, I thought, there must be something good in here, then. But no, it was just the usual rubbish for the punters. More stalls and sideshows and the like. Freaks and exhibits. Oh, interesting enough I s'pose. But a penny. Carnival of Curiosities? More like a rip-off.'

'Your anger does you credit,' Bellamy's companion said. 'I imagine you laid waste the entire area and demanded restitution.'

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Bellamy drained his glass and slammed it down on the bar. 'Well no, actually,' he admitted. 'Though I did give them a piece of my mind. Told them what I thought. Made it clear how angry it made me. Then I put it down to experience and came here for a drink. You ready for another one, Mr Strax?'

'Allow me.' Mr Strax finished his own pint. Rather than set down the empty glass, he crushed it casually between his large fingers until it exploded into a satisfying spray of shards and fragments. 'Boy!' he called across the bar. 'Two more pints.'

The serving girl sighed, left the customer she was serving, and pulled the beers.

'You not working tonight, Mr Strax?' Bellamy asked as they waited for their drinks.

'My mistress was called away. I declined to join her. A swift strategic assessment suggested you would be here.'

'I appreciate the company,' Bellamy said, though his face was still clinging to its irate frown.

'And I find your perpetual ire refreshing. Most humans keep their wrath hidden away. We could have a fight later,' Strax added hopefully.

'Not tonight. I've had a few too many, I fancy. And I've a bare-knuckle match tomorrow afternoon. Come and watch if you like. Blackfriars.'

'Ah, sport!' Strax nodded. Since he had no neck to speak of, this involved moving most of his upper

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body. 'I may indeed. How many of these black friars will you kill?'

The pub was considerably less crowded by the time Strax and Bellamy finished their conversation. Strax, as he had said, found Bellamy a refreshing change from most humans in that his anger spilled out in every word and expression, every movement and action. Strax had never told Bellamy that he was not actually human himself, but was in fact a cloned warrior of the far superior Sontaran race temporarily working as manservant to a prehistoric lizard woman. But if he had, Bellamy would probably have nodded, swigged his drink, and complained about the state of the East End. Or the incompetence of the government. Or his poverty and current inability to find gainful employment. Or the price of the beer. The notion of friendship was alien to both of them, but if they had to enumerate their friends, then each would have been on the rather short list produced by the other.

In Bellamy's case, Strax might well have been the only name to feature.

'Maybe see you at Blackfriars tomorrow,' Bellamy said as they parted company outside the tavern.

'It is certainly a possibility,' Strax agreed. He slapped Bellamy on the back, making the big man stumble. Bellamy was a good head taller than Strax, and almost as broad – one of the few humans who could sustain

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a fight with Strax for more than a few seconds. 'I have fought against Headless Monks,' Strax told him, 'so a few black friars will pose little problem. We should meet beforehand to discuss a suitable strategy.'

'Whatever,' Bellamy agreed. 'G'night then.' He made a half-hearted attempt to return the slap on the back, which Strax barely noticed though it would have felled most people.

Strax watched Bellamy disappear into the distance, becoming little more than a shadow beneath the glow of the gas lamps. Then he turned and headed back towards Paternoster Row. There was snow in the air again, a few flakes lazily drifting down to land on his dark jacket. But Strax didn't mind the cold. His mind was already on the tasks he needed to perform when he got back. The surveillance systems would need to be primed. His personal blaster rifle could do with de-ionising and recharging. He would check the locks on the windows and doors for any sign of attempted entry. And there was the washing-up to do.

The cold of the night cleared Bellamy's head as he walked. The snow was getting heavier, starting to settle on the pavement and across his broad shoulders. The streets were quiet, but this being London they were rarely deserted. A late cab hurried past, the horse's hooves and the iron-clad wheels clattering on the cobbles. A woman with her face painted thick flashed

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a gap-toothed grin at Bellamy from the entrance to a narrow alleyway. He ignored her.

Further along, passing along the side of a large industrial building, the light from a gas lamp cast the shadow of a figure against the side wall of another narrow alley. The figure raised its hand and beckoned. Bellamy ignored this figure too.

Except...

He stopped, and turned back. He could see the shadow on the wall. He could see the lamp casting the light. But – whose shadow was it? There was no one there.

The shadow beckoned again, insistent. Then, as if assuming Bellamy would follow, it turned and walked down the alleyway. Still he could see no one, could hear no footsteps. He looked round to see if anyone else had remarked the shadow, but the street was empty. His face contorted into an even angrier expression, Bellamy gave in to his curiosity.

The alley was dark. But he could see the shadow, cast against the wall further along the narrow passageway. It hesitated, turned back, beckoned him onwards again. Whoever this joker was, he'd not find it so funny when Bellamy caught up with him. He'd tell the fellow what he thought about conjuring tricks like this, and in no uncertain terms.

Bellamy picked up his pace, striding swiftly after the shadow. The alley turned abruptly, running

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past the doors of a large building – an abandoned warehouse or factory. This part of the passageway was suffused with a pale yellow glow. There was a lamp at the end, where it emerged again onto a main street. Snowflakes twisted and danced through the light before settling on the cold ground. There was no sign of the shadow, or whoever had cast it.

Bellamy gave a grunt of anger, and turned to retrace his steps. As he turned, a man stepped out of the doorway of the large building, making Bellamy gasp in sudden surprise. It wasn't the figure that had cast the shadow, of that Bellamy was sure. This man was thinner, almost gaunt. Deep-set eyes and hollow cheeks. A narrow beak of a nose. And the long frock coat he wore was a distinctive shape, to say nothing of the black top hat. A swathe of dark material hung from the back of the hat. He might not have cast the shadow, but the man looked as if he had coalesced out of the darkness. Even his gloves were so black that they seemed to absorb light as he raised his hand in greeting.

'You want to be careful, creeping about like that,' Bellamy said. 'Here, did you see another bloke come this way?' he wondered.

'Only you.' The man's voice was deep and sonorous. His grim expression did not change.

'You look like you're on your way to a funeral,' Bellamy said.

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Still the man's expression did not alter. 'And who says the illiterate have no sense of irony?'

Bellamy felt the anger rising in him. 'The what? Are you insulting me?' He took a step forward, fist raised.

A few moments later, the tall man dressed all in black walked slowly away down the alley. He paused for a moment, body braced as if he was about to sneeze. His expressionless face twisted into a sudden and extreme snarl of pure rage. Just for a second, then the anger faded again and the man's face settled back into its previous, neutral appearance.

On the ground behind him, Bellamy lay twisted and still. The clothes seemed far too big for the wizened, emaciated husk of a body. A skeletal hand stretched out across the ground, fleshless fingers frozen in the act of clawing desperately at the cobbles as if trying to cling to the last moments of fading life.

Chapter

2

'King Arthur.'

'No.'

Clara glared. 'What do you mean, "No"?''

The Doctor didn't look up from the TARDIS console, just put up his hand like a policeman stopping traffic. 'No. Not King Arthur.'

'You said I could choose.'

'Within reason.' He still didn't look up.

'Not what you said. I can choose, you said. Any place any time any person, you said. So I choose King Arthur.'

'No.'

'We just did that.'

'Still no.' He did look up now. His eyes were lost in shadow so it was hard for Clara to see if he was joking or deadly serious. The rest of his face always looked serious, it was the eyes that were the clue. If you could see them.

'So why not?'

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‘Not a good time, that’s all.’

‘You got something better to do?’

‘The time of King Arthur is not a good time. Smelly, dirty, dangerous. You’d hate it. Besides...’ He turned back to the console, cradling his chin in his hand as he stared at the screen.

‘Besides?’ Clara went over to join him, staring over his shoulder at the jumble of lines and squiggles and blobs on the screen. ‘Besides what?’

The Doctor sighed, straightened up, and waved his hand at the screen. ‘Well, look at it. Just look at it. There. See?’

‘Um, no. Is it broken?’

That earned her a raised eyebrow.

‘What then?’

‘Power spike.’

‘Something wrong with the TARDIS?’

‘Not the TARDIS, no. A power spike in the late nineteenth century, right in the middle of London. Someone’s using a post-nuclear power supply, and that’s not good. Oh, they’ve got it shielded,’ he went on, striding round the console, hands behind his back and head down as he considered. ‘Which just confirms the fact that it can’t be a natural phenomenon or an instrumental anomaly.’

‘Well, quite. Late Victorian London?’

‘That’s what I said.’

‘Could it be Madame Vastra? Maybe Strax is messing

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about with some new post-nuclear weapon.'

'Very likely he is. But no.' The Doctor shook his head. 'No, no, no. They'd never be that careless. This is someone who doesn't want to be found, but who has no idea of the anachronistic implications.'

'So we forget King Arthur and go and sort out this post-nuclear spike, is that what you're suggesting?'

He was already working the controls. 'It wasn't a suggestion.' He glanced across at Clara. 'We'd better get changed into something that blends in a little more, don't you think?'

'You already look Victorian,' she told him.

'"We" was a tactful term. It wasn't actually me I was talking about.'

'That's a first.' Clara looked down at her bright blue blouse and short skirt. Maybe he had a point. 'I'll find something that will fit in with late Victorian then.'

He was working the controls again, pulling a lever and checking a dial. 'Choose something practical. It'll be smelly, dirty and dangerous,' he warned her. 'You'll love it.'

Frost clung to the trees like brittle blossom. The snow was filmed with a thick crust where it had frozen over. Icicles looked as if they had sprouted from the undersides of windowsills and ledges. Most impressive of all, the wide expanse of the river Thames was a sheet of opaque ice.

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‘There’s a definite nip in the air,’ the Doctor observed.

Clara’s breath misted in front of her. ‘You can say that again. Well, not actually say it again,’ she added quickly. He could be so literal sometimes.

The TARDIS had landed in a narrow, deserted street close to the river. Judging by the lack of footprints in the snow, it was not a street that saw a lot of traffic.

‘So, have you got some instrument that can lead us to this power source?’ Clara asked as they set off along the pavement beside the river.

‘Power *spike*. It’s not a source, it was a spike, a spike that came from a source.’

‘Which is different, right?’

‘Right. And because it was a spike, it just happened the once. So now it’s gone, and there’s nothing to detect.’

‘Unless it does it again?’

‘Unless it does it again. In which case...’ He pulled the sonic screwdriver from his pocket and checked its settings. ‘In which case we’ll know. But we can’t just wait for it to happen, because it might not.’

‘So how do we find this power source, then?’

‘We investigate. The TARDIS landed us as close as she could, but we could still be a couple of miles away.’

‘Oh, is that all?’

‘That’s not bad over several centuries and few million light years. Anyway, it shouldn’t be too hard

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to track down an alien presence in London. Chances are that they'll be obvious, arrogant, think themselves superior.'

Clara gave the Doctor a good stare. 'Yeah, right.'

His eyebrows knitted together. 'What are you implying?'

'Nothing,' she said quickly. 'So, what's the plan? Pop along to Paternoster Row and ask our local friends for help?'

'Vastra and Strax and Jenny? Oh no, we don't need to bother them. Trust me.' He shook his head. 'This'll be easy.'

It was late morning and a steady stream of people made their way to the Frost Fair. Caught up in the tide, Clara and the Doctor were happy to go with the flow.

'So, it's not desperately urgent, this power spike?' Clara said through a mouthful of roasted chestnuts.

The Doctor was examining a baked potato, trying to work out how best to attack it. 'We're investigating,' he said, before taking a huge bite. He hopped from foot to foot, mouth open, and gasping.

'Hot?' Clara guessed.

The Doctor nodded furiously, while also somehow managing to scowl at a nearby boy who was laughing at the spectacle.

'I think you just wanted an excuse not to go and see King Arthur.'

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‘Not at all.’ He blew furiously on what was left of the steaming potato. ‘Though last time I visited there was a bit of a problem with a sword.’

‘Really?’

‘He was very young at the time, came running up shouting that he needed a sword, so I handed it to him.’

‘And that was a problem.’

The Doctor risked some more potato. ‘Apparently,’ he said as he chewed, ‘Arthur was supposed to take the sword out of the stone *himself*. Lot of fuss about nothing, if you ask me. But I did get to be King of England for a day before I abdicated in his favour. No real harm done. Are you going to stand here chattering all day?’

‘Sorry.’

‘What’s that over there?’ He didn’t wait for an answer, but popped the rest of the potato in his mouth and strode off into the crowds.

The centrepiece of the fair was a large merry-go-round. Clara watched the horses rising and falling as they spun. Coupled with the music there was an almost hypnotic quality to the scene. The Doctor watched with her for a few minutes, then dived off on his own, and they met again by a stall selling rag dolls and cloth purses.

‘You having fun, love?’ the woman at the stall asked.

‘Oh yes,’ Clara assured her, hoping she had said

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it loud enough to cover the Doctor's less positive response. 'Is there a fortune teller?' she asked on a whim.

'That'll be in the Carnival.'

'The Carnival?'

The woman pointed. 'Up that end is the Carnival of Curiosities. They've got all sorts in there. It'll cost you a penny each to get in, mind.'

'Want to give it a go?' Clara asked the Doctor.

'Oh yes. It sounds...'

'Curious?'

He smiled. 'Intriguing.'

The Doctor produced two shiny pennies to pay at the gate into the Carnival of Curiosities, receiving two cardboard tickets in return.

'Just show this if you want to come back later today, squire,' the lad on the gate told him. 'Only valid for today though, mind. Tickets'll be a different colour tomorrow.'

Inside the enclosure, there was an open area where several stalls were set up in the snow, and tents round the outside. The fortune teller was something of a disappointment. The elderly woman, wrapped in a shawl, sat at a table hunched over a crystal ball. She waggled her fingers over it, having first deprived Clara of another halfpenny, then gave a bored and obviously pretty standard spiel about her meeting a tall handsome stranger and going on a long journey.

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‘Well that much is right, I suppose,’ she said to the Doctor. ‘You want a go?’

He shook his head. ‘Either she’s a charlatan, in which case there’s no point. Or she genuinely can see into the future in which case meeting me will probably provoke a coronary.’

He was more interested in an exhibition of ‘Never-Creatures’. Once inside the tent, they found themselves confronted with glass bell jars filled with unidentifiable organic matter and grotesque sculptures. Labels suggested the contents were anything from a still-born starchild to a breed of moon-pig only found in the mountains of Spain.

The prize exhibit, stretched out under a glass case at the end of the tent was a dead mermaid. The Doctor spared it little more than a glance. ‘An obvious fake,’ he announced, just too loudly for comfort. ‘The skin’s the wrong colour and those fins are entirely the wrong shape.’

He embarrassed Clara again by yawning loudly in the middle of the Strong Man’s demonstration outside the tent. The man was huge, his upper body covered with tattoos that included a dagger on each bicep and chains across his chest. With his bald head and broad physique he reminded Clara a little of Strax, except the man was much taller – well over six feet. He impressed the rest of his audience by smashing a pile of bricks with his hand, breaking a slab of stone with

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his forehead, and finally attempting to lift a metal pole with baskets of rocks attached at each end.

The muscles in his neck and arms stood out impressively as he strained and grunted and eventually managed to raise the rocks off the ground. He braced his legs, hefted the pole to his chest, and staggered as he struggled to lift it high above his head.

The Doctor sighed, looking round to see if there was anything more interesting happening somewhere else.

‘You got a problem, mister?’ the Strong Man demanded, slowly lowering the pole. He kept it braced across his chest as he stared at the Doctor.

‘Me?’

‘That’s right – you.’

‘Sorry.’ The Doctor walked up to the Strong Man. ‘I just wasn’t *that* impressed, I’m afraid.’

‘Really?’

‘Doctor,’ Clara warned.

There was a tangible air of anticipation among the crowd as the Strong Man glared back at the Doctor. ‘I can soon teach you to be impressed.’

‘You think so?’ The Doctor gave Clara a ‘What can you do?’ glance. Then he took the metal pole from the man, holding it easily in one hand, steady as the rocks in the baskets attached to each end. ‘Let me hold that while you try.’

The Strong Man stared back, astonished.

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‘What’s your name?’ the Doctor asked.

‘Michael.’

‘Michael what?’

‘Michael, sir.’

‘No, no, no. Let me put this down.’ The Doctor set down the pole carefully. ‘What’s your surname? Michael what?’

‘Oh. Michael Smith.’

‘Ah!’ The Doctor’s face cracked into a sudden smile. ‘I’m a Smith myself. Doctor John Smith, well sort of. Us Smiths have to stick together, you know. Good act, by the way. Maybe work on your presentation a bit. Develop some patter to keep people interested.’

‘Yes,’ Michael the Strong Man said. ‘Thank you, sir.’

The Doctor turned away. ‘No problem. Oh,’ he said, looking back for a moment, ‘and try to make it look difficult.’

‘I have never been more embarrassed in my entire life,’ Clara told him as they walked away, ignoring the stares of the crowd.

‘Yes you have.’

‘Yes I have,’ she admitted. ‘But I was probably with you at the time.’

The last tent they visited, right at the back of the enclosure, advertised ‘The Most Magickal Shadowplay.’

‘If it was that impressive,’ the Doctor said, ‘they’d

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be able to spell “magical”.’

‘Don’t be so grumpy and come and enjoy the show,’ Clara told him.

The show was already in progress, so they made their way to the nearest seats at the back of the darkened tent. Across the tops of the heads of the rest of the audience, Clara stared transfixed at the screen. The principle was simple. A light was shone from behind the thin screen, and cut-out puppets between light and screen cast shadows as the show unfolded. There didn’t seem to be a story as such, not in this part of the show anyway. It was more of a display, a dance of animals, of flights of birds, of figures so lifelike and so well animated that it was easy to believe the shadows were real, were *alive*.

‘It’s good, isn’t it,’ the Doctor whispered. It was a refreshing change to find he was actually impressed. ‘Is it just me,’ he added, ‘or is it actually impossible?’

‘What do you mean?’ Clara hissed back. ‘Can’t you just enjoy it?’

‘Oh I can, I am. But...’

‘But? But *what?*’

‘But, they’re puppets.’

‘Obviously.’ She turned back to watch the show. A butterfly fluttered delicately through the air, chased by a child with a net. Her mind had no problem filling the dark shadows with imaginary texture, detail and colour.

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‘So,’ the Doctor whispered right in her ear, ‘where are the strings, or the rods? If they’re puppets – what keeps them up and makes them move?’

Clara frowned. Actually he was right. ‘Well, they’re hidden, that’s all,’ she decided. ‘Or the wires are extremely thin. It’s very clever.’

‘I wouldn’t argue with that.’

The show ended to a riot of applause. The screen rose into the air, to reveal a figure standing behind. A young woman wearing a red cloak. The hood was folded back, so that her long hair spilled down the back – black as shadows. Her features were delicate, almost childlike, as she took a bow.

She was still standing there as the tent emptied. Clara turned to go, and found that the Doctor was already hurrying the other way, down to where the woman stood.

‘How do you do it?’ he was demanding as she arrived.

‘Sorry,’ Clara said before the woman could reply. ‘What he meant to say was: “That was really impressive and we enjoyed it very much.”’

The woman shook Clara’s hand, and smiled. ‘I’m glad my show entertained you.’

‘It did,’ the Doctor agreed. ‘So, like I said, how do you do it?’

‘This is the Doctor, by the way,’ Clara said. ‘And I’m Clara.’

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‘I have always had a talent for shadow puppetry,’ the woman said. ‘For bringing shadows and shapes to life. You’ll forgive me if I don’t share all my secrets with you. My skill is all that I have.’

‘I’m sure that’s not true,’ the Doctor said. ‘But like Clara said – impressive. Thank you. Oh,’ he added as they turned to go, ‘you didn’t tell us your name.’

The woman pulled the hood of her cloak up over her head, so that her face fell into shadow. A striking red figure standing stark against the glow of the lamp at the back of the tent.

‘I am Silhouette,’ she said.