

Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas

by Elijah Mears

December 1998

dear SANTA

This year for Crismas i dont want any presents becuse ov my mummy is sick + daddy is really sad about her + i want my mummy to be better

I herd the grownups saying she has "cancer" + that makes me worrid because it sounds like cancel + i dont want my mummy to get canceled so i just want you to make her not be sick anymore. maybe you culd send her a doctor

xoxoxo

Annie

ps if you did get me any toys i like legos but you ~~proba~~ probly already new that

December 2013

Anne Fredericks was twenty-one years old, and she was studying engineering at North Carolina State University. After her mother had died fourteen years ago, she and her father had moved to the United States for reasons that were nominally work-related. Anne, however, had long suspected that, following the loss of his wife, he'd felt the need to run from England, from their

home. Now, Anne had not had an unsatisfactory childhood, but she had suffered from getting to see her extended family only on extremely special occasions, the sort which warranted her and her father flying across the Atlantic to visit. In fact, she could count the number of times she'd seen her cousins on one hand. The holiday season was always trying for her.

This year, however, would be especially difficult. It was her first year living off campus; she was renting an apartment in Raleigh and would have to stay there over winter break in order to pay rent, and also to look after her cat. She had a new job, working at the Applebee's down the road from the school, which was not very well-paying, but it kept a roof over her head. Or, rather, it would once she had her first paycheck. And with break coming up, she would be able to take on more hours, which was a great boon to her. Still, she would have liked to be able get back to Asheville, to see her father. Or, even better, to get back to England, see her cousins and aunts and uncles.

Even better would be to see her mother again, but Anne knew that that wouldn't be happening ever again.

On this day, the fifth of December, she was in her room, studying for exams. The mocha of her face was illuminated by the pale blue glow of her laptop and the multicolored Christmas lights she had strung around her walls, near the ceiling. She'd bought them for \$10 at Walgreen's. Gel clings decorated her window, giving the impression of snow, though, this being the North Carolina Piedmont, snow before January was highly unlikely. Instead, it was raining mistily. A dreary, cold December day at 5:15 in the evening.

And then her phone rang. She picked it up, and saw that it was her father. She pressed the button to ignore the call; she really didn't want to talk to him right now. It wasn't that she disliked him – completely the opposite – but rather that he was an exceptionally difficult man to deal with over the phone. He had... good intentions, yes, but he did tend to worry a bit overly much. Also, the last time he'd called, he'd been in a... well... Anne suspected he'd taken up drinking again. It wasn't good for him to be alone, but she just couldn't deal with him right now.

January 2000

“Right! Where to next?” said the Doctor, gentling caressing the TARDIS console. He hadn't been terribly impressed with the current desktop theme when it had first popped up during that nasty business with the looms; it had been a tad too homey for him. Oh, it had seemed nice enough at first, but it hadn't been terribly... TARDIS-y. Now, however, he had a second chance to get a really good first look at it, and he had to admit that it rather suited him. But then, the TARDIS was time sentient – he wouldn't be terribly surprised if the design had been chosen especially to match this face.

A slight smile beginning at the corner of his mouth, the Doctor pulled a lever and turned a dial, and then grabbed his cup of tea, heading over to the armchair. He'd never had an armchair in the console room before this one, and he wasn't entirely sure it was a good decision, given the TARDIS's propensity for in-flight bumping about, but it was so convenient to be able to read while the ship was in flight without leaving the room.

“Now, where was I?” he thought aloud, sitting down in the chair and picking up his copy of *The Time Machine*, turning it to where he’d left off. He’d picked up a copy of the book in his sixth life, after meeting HG Wells himself, but, well, no one knew how to lose track of time like the Doctor, and so he hadn’t gotten around to actually reading it until now.

He was comfortably sinking back into pages of Morlocks and Eloi when suddenly the record playing began to skip. It wasn’t an actual gramophone, but the technology closely mimicked one in appearance, and it did have the unfortunate drawback of sharing many of the gramophone’s faults. Such as skipping whenever the ship began to bump about.

The Doctor slammed the book shut and roughly put it down on the table. He sighed melodramatically and shook his head. He doubted he would ever again find a moment’s rest. If it wasn’t Daleks or Cybermen it was dashing off to some backwater planet to save some backwards civilization from some monster of the week. Oh, but he did so love the life.

Standing up, he frowned. “Oh no,” he said, “Not again.”

The scanner was blinking mauve, for extreme danger. Mauve was the highest priority a message could get according to the intergalactic standard. The TARDIS was receiving a distress call.

The Doctor rushed over to the console and began tapping away furiously at the keyboard, his eye fixed on the scanner. The message was... encrypted in a rather unusual manner, considering that it was a distress signal.

“You’d think,” the Doctor thought aloud, “that people wouldn’t make it so hard to help them out – but then, after a millennium of time and space, I really ought to know better.”

He tapped a few more keys and pulled a lever, and suddenly information was displayed on the screen in good old Gallifreyan letters. The Doctor’s eyes raced back and forth at speeds beyond human comprehension, taking them in.

“Let’s see... point of origin... London, England, Earth, 1998... oh, but isn’t it always? Might have known. But where... there seems to be a destination. Where is it going?”

He twisted several dials and tapped away furiously at the keyboard, attempting to gauge speed and trajectory to determine where the message was heading. It appeared to be something on the electromagnetic spectrum of not very large size. A radio signal, in fact. How primitive!

“Aha!” the Doctor shouted, clapping his hands. “Noel, in the Polaris system!”

He laughed, and then frowned. Why was a code mauve distress signal going there? Noel was a fairly uninvolved planet – the only life there was a race of fairly diminutive humanoids who were mostly collected in one settlement, near the planet’s warm magnetic north pole. They weren’t even a spacefaring race as far as the Doctor was aware.

Suddenly, the TARDIS shook, throwing the Doctor sideways. The record skipped again, and the screen flickered. The Doctor frowned – that wasn’t good at all. Regaining his balance, he banged on the console and the picture cleared up again, and – yes! – now the actual distress signal was displayed on the screen.

The Doctor laughed openly. Why, this was no distress signal – it was a letter! That was a child’s handwriting. He scanned the envelope. To Father Christmas, North Pole. From Annie Fredericks, age six. This was... a letter to Santa. What a quaint little Earth tradition. Still, the Doctor supposed, it was *extremely* strange that a letter to Santa Claus was being sent rocketing through outer space at superluminal speeds... and at a code mauve priority level, no less!

He punched a button, twisted a knob, and jiggled a thingy, and like magic the TARDIS had locked onto the letter’s trail. He rushed around to the other side of console and threw several sliders various distances to the left, widening the scanner’s purview. The Doctor’s eyes widened in wonder and amazement. He was in the middle of a whole fleet of letters, all traveling in a pack towards the Polaris system! He focused in on a few, gauging their recipients.

Timothy Bowling, Age 9. Rose Tyler, Age 12. Francis Cockerham, Age 13. Bit old to be believing in Santa Claus, that one, but probably no harm done there. Ella Yates, Age 8. Joseph McClaren, Age 3, definitely done in his mum’s handwriting. Clara Oswald, Age 9. Mostly English, largely from the London area, though one was from Lancashire.

How very strange. There were many things in the universe which the Doctor knew nothing about – this was good and fun; it would be so boring to know everything – but this felt a tad off to him. Occasionally new things did pop up where he least expected them due to ripples in the timelines, but this was very unusual. At no point in his life had he ever known of letters to Santa actually getting sent anywhere, and sending them into space was *certainly* an anomaly.

He twisted a knob and then rubbed his chin pensively. They were all Code Mauve. The absolute highest priority known to most of this universe – and likely to attract all sorts of attention to the destination planet.

Sighing, the Doctor rushed back over to the other side of the console, with the keyboard, and input his coordinates as the time and place towards which all the letters were headed: Santos Village, Noel, Polaris. 24th December, 1998.

December 2013

It was the morning of December 7th, and Anne was freezing. It had been unseasonably warm the day before, but overnight the temperature had dropped quite dramatically. Shivering, she dropped down from her bed and slipped her feet into bunny slippers. No way she was letting her bare skin touch the cold hardwood floor. Pulling her blanket off the bed and wrapping it around herself, she stalked over to the thermostat and turned it up a good few degrees, hoping to breathe some warmth into the frigid apartment.

About half an hour later, she was sitting at her desk chair, her cat – a fat tabby named Cushion – in her lap. She was smiling, a mug full of breakfast tea in her left hand, as she scratched between Cushion's ears.

Quite suddenly, her phone rang. Anne sighed, rolling her eyes. Probably her father, again. She shuffled over to her desk and picked up her mobile. And then she frowned. The number was... English. 07700 900 461. Not one she recognized. Usually, she would simply ignore it, but,

well... something today compelled her to answer. She picked up the phone, pressed the answer button, and held it to her ear.

She was instantly greeted by the crackle of static and a Received Pronunciation accent. It was faint and spotty, as if one of them was in a bad signal area. Slowly, however, the static faded and the voice grew more intelligible.

What she could make out was this:

“Hell... Doctor speak... (fizzle, crack)... hear me? Can you hear... listen, it’s ver... tant, am I speaking ... Annie Fredericks?”

Anne started. She hadn’t gone by Annie since she was ten years old at least. Frowning, she said, “It’s Anne, actually. Who is this? How’ve you got my mobile number?”

The voice responded, “Sorry, I looked i... up. White Pages. ...very urgent, just got your letter... ...about your mum... mauve...”

“I can’t understand you, you’re breaking up. What about my mum?”

“ng on... just a minute... going through a... of a tunnel.”

Just then, Anne could swear she heard a faint roaring noise from outside. Sort of like a key being scraped against wire. It was... strange. It felt vaguely comforting, but she knew she’d never heard it before. Or had she? There was a kind of... no, she hadn’t heard it before. And anyway, the man on the other end of the conversation was talking again, this time with much improved clarity.

“Hello, Anne, are you still there? Am I coming through alright?”

“Yeah, you’re just fine. Who are you? How did you get this number? Why are you calling me?”

The man sounded vaguely out of breath. “I just got your letter – so sorry about your mum, but perhaps I can help you out if you can help me. Oh, I’m the Doctor, by the way.”

Anne frowned, sitting down in the chair by her computer. Shaking her head, she said, “Come off it, mate, my mum’s been dead fourteen years. And, sorry, but doctor who?”

“Who indeed. Listen, Annie-”

“Anne!”

“Listen, Anne, I can explain much better if you just step outside.”

“Outside? You’re at my house? I ain’t stepping anywhere, mate, especially not for you. If you don’t leave right away, I’m going to call the cops.”

She stood, eyes wide, and opened her desk drawer, feeling around for her knife, her fingers wrapping around the handle. Cautiously, she walked over to her bedroom window and pushed the curtains aside.

“Oh, no need to do that. You’ll find that they’re already here, after a fashion.”

There was nothing unusual outside that Anne could see. She frowned, squinting at the bushes across the street.

“Mate, I don’t know who you are or what game you think you’re playing, but I ain’t playing along.”

Then she noticed it. She could only see the top of it – she was on the third story – because it was fairly close to the building, but it was definitely out of place. It was blue, with a light on top, and the sign on the front said, “Police Public Call Box”. She thought the light on top was on, but it was a tad difficult to tell in the daylight, cloudy day though it was. How very strange. She’d seen a few antique police boxes here and there throughout London as a little girl, but as far as she knew there’d never been any in America.

And she knew as a fact that there hadn’t been one right there the night before.

December 1998

Snow. It fell all around, light and crisp. Crisp. Now, that was a word. Out of all the words in the English language, the Doctor thought that it must be his favorite, because it sounded *exactly* like what it meant. His footsteps crunched through the blanket of white crystals, muted and soft. He was moving through tall conifers with flaky bark as red as blood. Above, the sky was dark green, and alien pinpricks of light wheeled above him. It was a cloudless night, though the clouds on Noel were truly spectacular when they showed themselves, tending to be all sorts of shades of silver and gold.

The Doctor shivered in the cold, rubbing his hands together for warmth. He sincerely regretted the decision not to put on mittens before leaving the TARDIS.

Ahead of him, he could see the forest begin to thin out. In the distance were impossibly high mountains, with lights twinkling in the foothills. They seemed deceptively far away, but they

were, at most, half an hour's walk. He wished he could have landed closer, but there seemed to be some sort of forcefield present around the planet's northern pole. Whether this was caused by the magnetic field or whether it was manufactured, the Doctor really couldn't say, but it certainly made life for him rather more difficult.

Off in the distance, an alien beast shrieked. It sounded vaguely lupine, but the Doctor couldn't be sure - at any rate, it was too far away to bear worrying about.

After some time, the Doctor found himself out in the open. Nights on Noel were quite dark, as the planet had no moon. The forest was behind him, and directly ahead lay Santos Village, the source of the lights he had seen earlier. The actual village was quite picturesque - an array of houses which looked like they'd been made from gingerbread, with gum drop chimneys and candy cane streetlamps. Of course, the material was actually an extremely strong alloy made from iron and verilinium (a compound found in the impossibly high mountains in the foothills of which the village was situated), but that hadn't stopped the Doctor from trying to take a bite on his last visit to the planet.

One thing, though, was noticeably different than on the occasion of his last visit - which had occurred during his Sixth incarnation - and that would be the large concrete structure in the middle of the village. It was like something out of Earth's industrial revolution, complete with a whole fleet of chimneys belching out black, acrid smoke. The Doctor frowned and bent down, sticking his fingers into the snow on the ground. Standing, he licked the snow and pulled a face. It

certainly tasted like industry, and on closer inspection, he could see that it was speckled with black and gray soot.

Continuing forward, the Doctor soon found that the endless expanse of snow gave way to a cobblestone path, lit warmly by gas lamps. That was new as well – the last time the Doctor had been here, they'd been halogen. Granted, that had been, oh, a good hundred years ago as far as the planet was concerned, but it was awfully strange to see technology move in this direction. Up ahead, he saw a diminutive figure silhouetted under a street light. It was no more than four feet tall, and it appeared to be carrying something in a rather furtive manner. Something that looked rather a lot like a box of letters.

Picking up the pace to a jog, the Doctor headed towards the figure, calling out, “Hello! I’m the Doctor, could you please-”

And then the figure was gone. The Doctor came to a halt and frowned. Curiouser and curiouser. He stalked forward cautiously until he came to the spot under the streetlight where the figure had been and then dropped to the ground, laying on his side. He put his ear to the patch of road where the figure had been, but heard nothing. This did, however, have the effect of making his ear rather cold. He tapped the ground and then licked it, but nothing seemed out of place. Then he stood and sniffed the air. Definite smell of ozone. Interesting.

Fishing about in his coat, he pulled out the sonic screwdriver, and waved it around, scanning the vicinity. It produced a somewhat pleasant buzzing noise, one which the Doctor rather enjoyed hearing, really.

“Now, let’s see,” he said aloud. “If I just reverse the polarity of the neutron flow...”

There was a pop and the Doctor disappeared.

December 2013

There was a knock at the door down below.

“Anne,” said the voice, “please, just step outside, and I’ll explain everything. Look, this is a parking lot, right next to a major road. What am I going to do to you?”

Anne was trembling. “Come off it, I’m warning you! I’m armed!”

“And I’m a Time Lord!”

“Time what? You’re off your rocker, mate!”

“I’ll explain later... if you would just step outside!”

“Alright! Alright! But let me tell you, mate, I’m calling the cops, and if I’m not still here when they’re here, you’re going to have some explaining to do.”

“Yes, yes, I’ll be waiting with baited breath.”

December 1998

It was dark and smelly. It reeked of paint fumes and lead and burning things. The air was filled with smoke, and the Doctor pulled a rag out of his breast pocket and held it over his face. He had a niggling suspicion – thanks to a bit of a tickle in the back of his throat – that certain gases in

the Praxis range of the spectrum might be present, and for the very first time in his life he found himself regretting the decision not to carry around a bit of celery on his lapel. Just so he could be sure.

Moving forward, he found the smoke cleared up a bit, and that he was in...

“Why, it’s some sort of factory floor!” he said, eyes wide. This was hardly Noel technology – it looked far, far too Dickens. The Noelites were much more... Rankin/Bass stop motion, really, with just a touch of Asimov. No, this was all out of place. Completely and totally wrong. The Doctor reached in his pocket for the sonic screwdriver, and frowned. He’d meant to put a light on the end of it, but he hadn’t gotten around to it yet – but then, in his defense, he’d been a bit distracted by the Master. It was awfully dark, though.

Up ahead was a great whirring noise, and so, naturally, the Doctor headed towards it. Soon, out of the hazy air, conveyor belts materialized. All manner of objects in different stages of completion moved along them, and Noelites were working tirelessly with blowtorches and paint brushes and bits and ends and screwdrivers and hammers. They were not, however, wearing their traditional festive garb – the Noelite eye only had cones for red and green, and so those tended to influence their choices of, well, everything. These, however, were dressed in gray, with welding masks and thick rubber gloves. Very out of the ordinary.

“An assembly line! Yes, of course, it all makes sense now...”

Suddenly, from behind, the Doctor was confronted by a deep voice.

“Oh, does it now, Theta Sigma?”

The Doctor wheeled around and caught his breath. He found that he was face to face with a humanoid not so different from himself, though looking quite a bit more wizened. His cheeks were rosy, or perhaps the rest of him was simply so pale as to give his cheeks that appearance. His nose was like a button, his skin was like leather, and there was a certain mischievous twinkle in his eye. A long, gray beard sprouted from his chin, and when he laughed, his stomach shook like a bowl full of jelly.

Appearances aside, the Doctor never forgot a telepathic signature, even if it had changed its face since the the last time he'd seen it.

“Well, well, well, Kladvix, I might have known. What're you doing with a factory on Noel underneath a TARDIS-proof forcefield, hm?”

“You haven't worked it out, Thete? Oh, but you must've. You were always so *clever* at the academy, you and the rest of the Deca. Come, come, my dear Theta Sigma, your frequent regenerations must've addled your brains.”

“Actually, I tend to go by the Doctor now, if it's all the same to you.”

“Of course, of course. You and your classmates were always that sort of pretentious twat, weren't you? The Doctor. The Master. The Monk. The War Chief. The Rani. So obsessed with the definite article, you lot. Good old Gallifreyan names weren't good enough for you, eh?”

“You're one to talk, Santa Claus. That's what you tend to go by now, isn't it? Don't think I haven't kept up to date on your exploits – what are you on the run from this time? What scheme are you trying to effect here? You'd fit in well with the Master and the Rani and the Monk and the

War Chief, I think. Not like other Time Lords, eh Kladvix? Not content to just sit on Gallifrey and watch history go by, no, you had to go out and make your own history, didn't you? What are you up to this time? Trying to steal Christmas? Have you really stooped so low that you're interfering in some backwater planet in the less fashionable west end of Mutter's Spiral?"

"You're one to talk, Doctor. I saw how much you adored Earth and thought I might have it for myself. The Rani's got all of Entel under her thumb, why can't I have a planet?"

"Does she now? Well, I'll have to go fix that after I'm done with you. Just because you're a Time Lord doesn't mean you can just go on a conquering spree whenever you feel like it!"

"Why not, Doctor? I'm so much better than any of those filthy apes down on your precious blue ball - surely I'm entitled to bring them a little civilization."

"I'm going to stop you."

"If you say so, Doctor. Guards, take him into custody. And find his TARDIS; it can't be too far away, I think."

December 2013

Anne was wearing a pair of blue jeans, trainers, and a white sweater. Her hair - frizzy curls - was an absolute mess, but, well, she wasn't exactly going to break out the big guns for this creep. She'd called the cops, and they would be by shortly, she imagined. Still, she had her knife with her, and she was no one to be trifled with. Sure, she had no formal training, but she liked to think of herself as being just as good as anyone else in a scrape.

Cautiously opening the door to her building, she stepped outside and immediately assumed what she thought was a defensive stance, even though it was actually a very poor one to stand in if one expected to be attacked. The form was all wrong, and it would have been more than easy to simply knock her over. Fortunately for her, she was not rushed by any attackers. Instead, she found herself face to face with a man. A man who looked, well... like Santa Claus.

She frowned, puzzled. "Are you the doctor who just called me on my mobile?"

The man grinned and said, "Not quite, Anne. Not quite."

Anne brandished her knife at the man, but it was too late – two... things grabbed her from each side. Four in all, each humanoid but no more than a child's height. They looked like... they looked like elves. She cried out, and one wrenched the knife from her hands.

"The cops are on their way, you bleeding scoundrels! Unhand me!"

The man scowled at her. "Shut up!" he growled. "All I need is your DNA – I don't *have* to take you alive. Consider that an act of mercy."

December 1998

It was not a conventional jail cell that the Doctor found himself in, but certainly not the only one of its kind that he had known over the past millennium. Rather than actual walls, he was surrounded by an electromagnetic forcefield – almost invisible, but just present enough to let the Doctor know where to not step if he wished to avoid regenerating twice in less than forty-eight hours. Additionally, just beyond that the room containing the cell was filled with gasses. And just

to make sure that the Doctor knew exactly how deadly the gasses were, a plate had been set out in the room with a stick of celery on it.

The celery was bright purple.

After a time, the Doctor heard a faint sucking noise, like a vacuum cleaner. This was accompanied by the sight of the gas beginning to drain from the room through the edges, where wall met floor and so on. The Doctor stood, intrigued, and clasped his hands behind his back. Waiting.

Quite suddenly, the door at the far end of the room slid open, and four diminutive humanoids – Noelites – entered, carrying a fifth person between them. This person was different – for one, she was of normal height, and of a much darker skin tone than what creatures accustomed to snowy climes tended to have. For another, she was shaking, eyes wide, lips pressed tightly together. There were burn marks all over her right hand, and nasty ones at that.

One of the Noelites fished a remote control out of his pocket and pressed a button, causing a hole to open in the forcefield. The girl was roughly thrown inside; she landed on the floor and instantly curled into a ball, still shaking. The hole sealed itself behind her, and the Noelites retreated out the door, which closed behind them in turn. As soon as it did, there was a hissing noise and the gas began to flood the room once more.

The Doctor instantly dropped to the floor and put a comforting, warm (while Gallifreyans had a core temperature of only about sixteen degrees centigrade, their external temperature was much closer to that of humans) hand on the girl's back.

“Shhhhhhh... shhhhh... it’ll be alright, it’ll be okay. Come on, I’ve got you. You’re safe,” he said softly, rubbing her back. “I’m a Doctor.”

She was clearly traumatized, but she wasn’t crying. That spoke volumes about the girl’s resilience – she was a strong one. This was good, because she would need to be strong if they were going to get out of here.

The Doctor pulled the sonic screwdriver out of his coat – the guards had been ordered to search him, but they had left his sonic behind, which said a great deal about the dynamic between Kladvix and the Noelites – and waved it over the girl. The burns were not too serious, and while she was suffering from a cracked rib and some internal bleeding, it was mostly near the surface, and was nothing to be overly concerned about – she would just bruise a bit. Looking upward, he sighed. This was time sensitive, and he couldn’t afford to let the girl take her normal human time to heal. He let out a small grunt of frustration and then closed his eyes, breathing in and focusing.

His hand began to glow with a golden light which flowed into the girl’s body. Regeneration energy, fixing her up. Like magic, the blistered skin on her hand became smooth. The rib became like new, and her body healed itself.

The Doctor let out his breath all at once, his hand slipping from the girl’s back. He sucked in air, breathing heavily; that had taken a toll on him. Shaking slightly, he stood, and looked the girl over. She’d stopped trembling, but her eyes were screwed shut.

Softly, the Doctor said, “You must be Anne.”

The girl opened her eyes and rolled over. “Yeah,” she said, uncurling slightly, “what’s it to you, mate?”

“I got your letter. Seems Kladvix did too, although I imagine the TARDIS set him a few years off course.”

Anne frowned, furrowing her brow.

“What are you talking about?” she asked.

“The man who brought you here – or who I assume brought you here. He isn’t a man. He’s a Time Lord, like myself, and his name is Kladvix. He’s a renegade – he forsook society and now he lives on the fringe. He’s a madman, but then, I’ve been told that I am, too.”

“Who are you? Where am I?” she asked.

The Doctor smiled. “I’m the Doctor...” he began, but her eyes widened and she shrunk away at that.

“Oh, dear, he used my name, didn’t he? Oh me oh my.”

He sighed.

“Listen, Anne, you’re going to have to trust me here, because otherwise we’re never going to get out of this cell in time. My name is the Doctor, and I am a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey. I’m not human, but I am British, and if you don’t believe that, just ask me how I take my tea.”

This elicited a very slight smile. Good. Progress.

The Doctor continued.

“Now, you are currently on the planet Noel in the Polaris system. The date, in Earth terms, is about 11:30 in the evening Greenwich Mean Time on the 24th of December, 1998, although that doesn’t mean much here.”

“Are you having a giggle, mate?”

“Oh, good, you’re talking again. No, I can assure you that I’m not. Listen, please, believe me on this, we haven’t got time to argue – if you need proof that something unearthly is afoot, look no further than how I’ve healed you just now. Look at your hand, Anne! It’s as good as new! Even the calluses are gone!”

Anne cautiously observed her hand, eyes widening further.

“What are you?” she spat out.

The Doctor groaned. “I’ve told you, I’m a Time Lord! Now, what did Kladvix do to your hand? Why was it burnt? This is very, very important, so please, trust me on this. I’m a Doctor.”

Anne sat up slowly, and said, “He... he put it in a scanner sort of thing. It looked sort of like an MRI machine, but smaller.”

The Doctor slapped himself on the forehead.

“Aha! Of course! A DNA scanner, but your human physiology couldn’t withstand the radiation so it burned you – I thought those didn’t look like fire! Of course, of course! Oh! Oh! It’s the same principle as blood control, but much, much more effective! Oh, but he’ll need... ah,

yes, that's it! The toys! He's going to play Santa, put a nice little satellite dish in every house on the planet. Yes, why didn't I see that! Christmas morning will come and suddenly every house in the western world is under his control - he could do anything he likes! He could start wars, learn every secret the governments of the world are keeping - oh! UNIT would be at his beck and call..."

The Doctor looked at Anne, who had scooted about half a meter back from where she had been.

He smiled and said, "They say talking to yourself is the first sign of madness - it's a nasty habit and I really ought to break it; perhaps you can travel with me, help out with that. But more on that later. Come on, come on, stand up. Up, up, up! We've got to get out of this cell! We have Christmas to save!"

The Doctor grabbed Anne's hand and helped her to stand, a smile plastered across his face. Anne looked thoroughly bewildered, but that was nothing the Doctor wasn't used to and able to deal with.

He spun her around - he didn't like to do this, but, well, if he knew Kladvix at all, they had about half an hour left to save the day (funny people, Time Lords - even the renegades loved to adhere to ancient customs and arcane traditions) - and gestured at the room.

"Do you see that?" he asked. "That's gas, but not just any gas. This gas is in the praxis range of the spectrum, which means it is extremely fatal to me. To humans, though, it is completely harmless. Well, not completely - in a room full of it you'll die from lack of oxygen, but it won't kill you nearly as quickly as it would kill me. Now, do you see that button, right over there?"

Anne nodded slowly.

“I think – emphasis on think, but then, when I think things, I’m usually right – that that button will drain the room of the gas. Now, if I can make a hole in this forcefield, can you run over there quick as you like and press that button?”

Anne nodded again.

“Yeah, think I can.”

“Good. Good.”

The Doctor brandished the sonic screwdriver at the forcefield, frowning, concentrating his psychic energies at it. Slowly, a small hole began to appear and widen. Gas also began to leak through slowly. The Doctor rolled his shoulders back, and grunted.

As soon as the hole was large enough, the Doctor shouted, “Now, Anne! Now!”

Anne rushed forward through the hole, coughing heavily. She slammed her hand against the button on the wall, and for a moment – just a moment – she and the Doctor both held their breath, waiting.

And then, with a hissing sound, the gas began to drain from the room.

“Brilliant! Incredible!” the Doctor shouted, waving the sonic screwdriver offhandedly and disabling the whole forcefield. He darted forward and scooped Anne into a hug, only to be met by hands pushing roughly against him.

He frowned and stared at the young girl who had pushed him away.

She said, "I didn't say you could hug me, mate. I'm still not sure if I trust you, you know."

The Doctor shook his head and said, "Come on!"

He waved the sonic over the door and it shot open, revealing eight well-muscled Noelites.

The Doctor frowned and said, "Ah, yes, well, this is awkward. Hello, I'm the Doctor, and this is Anne. We would really appreciate it if you would just step aside and let us go."

The Noelites frowned at him, and did not budge.

"Please?" the Doctor implored, eyes puppy-like.

The Noelite in front narrowed his eyes and said, "You're one of those Time Lords, just like Kladvix, aren't you?"

The Doctor licked his lips and said, "Yes, yes I am."

"So you're saying you could probably take him on with a pretty decent chance of success, yeah?"

The Doctor nodded cautiously and repeated, "Yes, yes I am."

The Noelites calmly moved aside.

The Doctor grinned and grabbed Anne's hand, running forward, pulling her along behind him.

"Come on, Anne!"

"Doctor! I don't understand!"

The Doctor laughed. "It's so simple! Did you see the factory floor? Those were some very unhappy workers - Kladvix has set up quite the dictatorship, don't you think? And what do peoples generally do when faced with dictators?"

"They revolt!"

"Exactly! You're very sharp - and might I say, you're recovering marvelously quickly!"

After some time's worth of running through corridors, the Doctor and Anne found themselves back on the main factory floor, where production had stopped. The Noelite workers were arrayed in rank and file, and a great podium had been constructed in the middle of the floor. Atop it sat the Doctor's TARDIS, which a line of workers were loading toys upon toys into. Kladvix stood atop a smaller podium on top of the large podium, surveying the work.

Clenching his fists, the Doctor called out, "Kladvix! Stop this!"

The other Time Lord wheeled around, a grin painted across his face.

"Ah, Doctor! I was wondering how long it would take you to escape, oh, but I should have known that you'd have waited around for the Earth girl - you *are* so partial to them."

"Your plan will never work!"

"Ah, won't it?"

"You can't use genetic control to do anything more than suggest, Kladvix, you know that!"

"Can't I?"

"You would need a psychic link as powerful as..."

“As powerful as a little girl, crying out at her one possible savior in an attempt to save her mother’s life? That’s why I needed Anne, you know – she had the strongest psychosentimental attachment to her letter out of all the ones I received. One strong enough to let me do anything I want to the people under my control, Doctor.”

The Doctor was, for once, speechless. He put an arm around Anne, and squeezed her shoulder gently.

Kladvix continued, “Look around, Doctor – you’re beaten. There’s nothing at all that you can do. The Noelites are completely loyal to me, and there’s far too many for you to kill – not that that was ever your style. No, you prefer the quick, all-at-once kind of slaughter, don’t you? Keeps your hands from getting dirty.”

Anne looked up at the Doctor – really, they were about the same height, but the Doctor was one of those people who *felt* tall – and frowned, pushing his arm off of her.

“What does he mean by that, mate?”

The Doctor sighed and frowned.

“I’ve been traveling through time and space for the better part of a millennium – even the best of people would have to make a few bad decisions in that time. I am not the best of people.”

Kladvix rolled his eyes.

“Classic Doctor – a whole world’s about to be conquered and he has to stop for a self-deprecating monologue. It’s a surprise, Thete, that you ever won any of your fights – granted, Rassilon knows the Daleks could talk about shooting someone all day before they’d actually do it.”

The Doctor opened his mouth to respond, and then shut it neatly. He smiled, a slight twinkle in his eye.

Anne could practically see the wheels turning beneath his flowing locks of hair. In spite of her initial misgivings – especially regarding the bit where Kladvix had tricked her into thinking that he was the Doctor – she found herself implicitly trusting the man. He had a certain charisma, a winsome charm, and, well, he wasn't exactly hard on the eyes either. Of course, he was in no way Anne's type, but still...

“You said the Noelites are completely loyal to you, isn't that right, Kladvix?”

“What are you getting at, Doctor?”

“Are you sure about that? You know, the Noelites are a peaceful race, lovers of science. I can't imagine they like what you've done with the place – isn't that right, guards?”

A puzzled expression crossed Kladvix's face for a brief instant before the eight Noelite guards came running out of the corridor behind the Doctor. The head guard shouted, “Noelites, rally! Rally!”

Instantly, the rank and file workers broke like a school of fish in the sea perturbed by a toothy predator. The last few loading toys dropped their packages and immediately the crowd surged forward as one, engulfing Kladvix.

“Wait! Stop!” called out the other Time Lord. “I am your leader! I am your mas-”

He cried out, groaned, the Noelites on top of him. One of the guards – the one who had taken Anne's knife – rushed to the top of the pile, and the knife flashed in the air once before the

guard jammed it into Kladvix's throat. A golden glow engulfed the mob, but the guard, fearless, raised the knife into the air once more. It came down again, and the glow instantly disappeared.

Running forward, the Doctor shouted, "Stop! Stop! Get off him! Clear the way, I'm the Doctor, give him air!"

The sea of Noelites parted, revealing Kladvix's body on the concrete. It looked so small, so broken, limbs in unnatural positions and orange blood pouring out of his throat. It was bruised and gray, but its chest still heaved, gasping, gulping in air.

The Doctor bent down over Kladvix and touched the other Time Lord's face.

"Kladvix," he said, "just answer me one thing, one thing and I will let you on your way, help to put you out of this misery."

The dying Time Lord scrunched up his nose, frowned, furrowed his brow.

"For you, Doctor? I won't give you the pleasure of wrapping up whatever mystery brought you here in the first place. That's all you really are - you never have any intentions of saving anyone, you just want to know answers. And if you save a few lives on the way, what difference does it make? You think you're a force for good, but the only true tragedies in your life are when a mystery has to go unsolved."

The Doctor licked his lips and said, "Please, Kladvix! Why were the letters code mauve? Why here? How did you get them?"

Kladvix smiled and said, "Wouldn't you like to know?"

The Doctor looked at Anne, a frown across his face. Kladvix had stopped breathing.

The girl ran up the steps of the podium, to the Doctor, and knelt down next to him. She studied his face – there truly was great age there, in those eyes.

Anne took a breath in, and turned her head to the side. “He’s dead, though, mate – isn’t that a good thing?”

The Doctor sighed, shoulders slumping. “No.”

There was a moment’s pause before the Doctor hopped up, clapping his hands.

“Come on, Anne, we’ve toys to deliver.”

Anne stood, puzzled. “But, Doctor, the genetic control...”

The Doctor smiled. “Oh, I think the toys are perfectly harmless now that Kladvix is dead. And, well, if all the letters to Santa went here instead of to everybody’s mums and dads, we sort of have to play Santa, don’t we? Come on, let’s save Christmas! Help me get these last few packages into the TARDIS – the Noelites have done enough work, don’t you think?”

“But, Doctor! We don’t have enough time to-”

“Time? Time? It’s a time *machine*, dear! We have all the the time in the world; come along!”

So the Doctor and Anne flew across the world, delivering Christmas to every girl and boy who had sent off a letter. At last, they delivered the final present – a red bicycle to a young girl of twelve living with her mother in a council estate in London – but one letter remained.

Closing the TARDIS doors, the Doctor held it in his hand, and then looked up at the young woman relaxing, nearly asleep, in his armchair, tired after a very long night of spreading Christmas cheer. Smiling paternally, he walked up to her and removed his coat, putting it over her like a blanket.

He said softly, "One last letter, one more - don't you worry, I'll get this one."

He bounced over to the console and tapped the keyboard. The TARDIS was never good at short hops, but that was alright - he needed to make a quick trip rather far into the future first. There was never a bad time to replenish the ship's medicine cabinet.

December 2013

It was the eighth of December, a Sunday morning. Anne had had a terribly interesting time the day before - the cops had shown up, but she wasn't sure why. Certainly, she didn't remember calling them. And then, there was a very vague memory of a dream she might have had, but... she remembered it happening after she'd woken up. Something about... about, well, Christmas, and space and time and a doctor of something or other. She shook her head, dismissing the thought, and smiled, groaning as she stretched.

She reached over to the nightstand and picked up her phone to see she had a voicemail from her father. Hopping down from the bed, she rested the phone between her ear and shoulder, setting the message to play.

“Hey, Annie girl, sorry to call so early, but I just couldn’t wait to share the news. Aunt Carole called and she says she and the cousins are gonna be able to fly over for Christmas after all – you’re taking the train home on the 17th still, yeah? Your mum can’t wait to see you again – she says this semester has been extra hard on her now you’ve got that apartment, seeing how you didn’t come home for fall break. Anyway, just wanted to let you know about the fam – the cousins are super excited to see America for the first time. Call me back when you can, love you.”

As she listened, she wandered over to her desk and noticed a card there. Absently, she picked it up and read it.

It said: Anne – have yourself a merry little Christmas. Love, the Doctor.