

Let It Snow by Neil Murrell

The library was immense, an endless maze of books, and as Peri browsed the shelves it dawned on her, perhaps for the first time, just how much she would never, ever know. She liked the feeling, the knowledge that, no matter how far and wide she travelled, that sense of mystery, of *wonder*, would never be diminished.

“Peri, could you give me a hand with something please?”

Peri looked up with a start. The Doctor's voice, tinny and distorted, was echoing around the library over a tannoy system she never even knew existed. She looked up at the huge domed ceiling.

“Doctor?” she called “Doctor? Can you hear me? I'm in the library.”

“I'm afraid I can't hear you Peri” the Doctor said “But I'm guessing you're in the library. If you could come to the console room I'd be most grateful. I don't wish to alarm you, but I've something of a situation developing here. Could really use your help.”

Peri sighed, pushed herself out of her chair, and headed for the door. On the way, she spied a dusty, hidebound tome lying on a small table. *The Botanics of Essilon Nine*. Without breaking stride, she whisked it off the table, tucked it under her arm and headed out into the hall.

She found the Doctor in a corridor on the way to the console room. He was sitting cross-legged, immersed in thought, amid an intimidatingly large pile of circuitry.

“Ah, there you are. Hold that for me, would you?”

He handed her a circuit board, and returned back to the tangled chaos of wires before him.

“So...” Peri said after a moment “What's the situation?”

“Hmm?”

“You said there was a 'situation developing'. Sounded important.”

“Oh, it was.” the Doctor said, turning to her with a winsome grin “I was running out of hands.”

Peri smiled, but rolled her eyes at the same time. “So,” she said, with a playful lilt in her voice “You got me all the way out of the library, scared me half to death, I might add, all to hold a...” she waved the circuit board in the air “...a thing.”

“And you're doing marvellously.” the Doctor replied. “I'll have it back now.”

“Doctor, what's all this for?” Peri asked.

“That, Peri,” The Doctor replied, “would be telling.”

“Is it a surprise?”

“Oh, I certainly hope so.” he clipped the circuit board to another clump of wires, stood up and stretched.

“Ah” he continued, casting an inquisitive eye over the spine of her book “*The Botanics of Essilon Nine*’. I've not seen that in over a hundred years. Never did get around to actually opening it. Anyway, it's good to see you're keeping up with your horticultural studies. I'd be wary of growing any plants indigenous to Essilon Nine, though. They have a reputation for being rather intoxicating.” He grinned “Unless, of course, that's the entire point?”

Peri's smile widened. She prided herself on being a good judge of character, and, while she hadn't travelled with him long, she thought she had something of a measure of the Doctor. Brilliant, undeniably, but eccentric (celery?), and, even at best, quietly melancholic. Yet here he was making jokes and planning surprises. *'I suppose you never really know anybody'* she thought.

“Oh don't keep me in suspense Doctor. What's the surprise?”

“Just a few more seconds...*there!*” he said triumphantly, jamming the circuit board back into the wall. It fizzled a moment, and then exploded in a shower of golden sparks.

“Ah...” the Doctor said “Well, that's interesting. That really shouldn't have...”

A blaze of brilliant white light flared out into the corridor from behind the wall. The TARDIS lurched to the side, flinging them to the floor.

“Hold on to something!” The Doctor shouted. “Hold on and don't let go for anything!”

“What's going on?” Peri cried.

“I've no idea! The room. Something's gone wrong with the room.”

Struggling furiously against the momentum of the ship, the Doctor staggered to his feet and threw open a set of double doors. They opened onto a celestial nightmare. Stars blazed and died, constellations crashed into each other throwing plumes of incandescent gas like giant fireworks. And there was a howling. An ear-splitting wail, heavy with dread. It grew and grew until it seemed to fill the whole world. And then the Doctor was gone.

The doors slammed shut behind him, the TARDIS fell still, and silence descended, eerie and oppressive, like the eye of a storm.

Peri stood. She was bruised and shaking, and her heart beat like a drum in her throat but she barely noticed.

“Doctor?” she cried. Her voice echoed through the TARDIS corridors, white and sterile and still. She could feel her eyes beginning to sting.

“I don't know what to do.” she whispered.

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As his vision cleared and the pounding in his head receded, the Doctor stood up and tried to get his bearings. The room was still recognisably the TARDIS console room, the control panel with its oscillating central column was clearly the same, and the quiet electric hum of the instruments he knew as intimately as he knew the sound of his own breathing, but everything else...

“Peri?” He called out “Peri?”

“Sorry mate” a voice rang out from behind him “You're about four hundred years too late. Don't worry, though. Gotcha covered.”

The Doctor turned round and saw a gangly young man in a tweed jacket sauntering down a set of stairs with a tall red-headed girl in tow.

“Brilliant!” exclaimed the young man “Oh, this is Christmas! What did I tell you, eh? Bang on schedule.” He gestured at the Doctor's cricket whites. “Hey Amy, look how English I used to be!”

The girl inclined her head and peered at the Doctor with inquisitive eyes “Is that what you used to look like?”

“Oh, and a handsome devil I was too” the young man replied.

“And are you wearing...”

The young man scowled. “Yeah, it's celery. It was a thing, okay? Don't make a song and dance about it.”

“Well,” the young woman said airily “Beats a bow tie any day.”

“Excuse me” the Doctor interjected “I'm terribly sorry to be a nuisance but I'd be most grateful if somebody could please explain *just what in blazes is going on!*”

The young man smiled, and straightened the Doctor's lapels. “Oh come on, Doctor” he said playfully “Use your head. You were always the clever one, out of all of us. Think about it.”

The Doctor's eyes widened “Oh, no...”

“Oh, yes, I'm afraid.”

“You're a future version of...”

The young man sighed impatiently “Yes. I'm a future you. You know, this is the *third* time this has happened to you. I'd have thought you'd have gotten used to it by now. Now listen, I know you're a little disoriented - well, I remember it - but we've only got a

minute so pay attention. You were building a surprise for Peri, remember? Well, there was a bit of a glitch. Something went wrong and you opened up an unstable time-corridor and ended up here.”

“But what went wrong?” asked the Doctor.

“Doesn't matter.” the young man replied. “You're going to figure it out in a few days anyway. What matters right now is that you have a pen.”

With that the young man reached under the console, picked up a heavy hidebound book and threw it at the Doctor. He peered at the spine in disbelief. It was *The Botanics of Essilon Nine*.

“Turn to the first blank page. You're going to leave a message for Peri. You're going to tell her how to fix this.”

“But I don't even know what went wrong.”

“Doesn't matter.” The young man said with a winsome grin “I remember what we wrote. Now listen carefully...”

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Peri stood in the TARDIS console room and stared at the bewildering array of dials and levers, trying to decide which to pull first and hoping for a miracle. Deep down, she knew it was useless, but although the workings of the TARDIS were an utter mystery to her, she couldn't think of anything else to do. Without the Doctor, she was stranded, doomed to spend the rest of her life alone in the TARDIS, spinning aimlessly through the immeasurable emptiness of space. What did she have to lose?

Suddenly, she became aware of the heavy weight of the book in her hand. Snatched up in the grip of a sudden violent impulse, she hurled it across the room.

'Great help you are!' she shouted as it hit the wall. It landed on its spine, and spilt open at the first page. And from across the room, she could see a single word written in big black letters.

PERI

She hurried over and picked it up, her eyes widening as she read.

Dear Peri,

Please pay close attention and follow the instructions below to the letter. For reasons which aren't entirely clear, I am writing this from around four hundred years in the future. I'm quite all right, and I know you will be too. However, in order for me to get back, you need to do exactly as I say. There is no margin for error. Also, please take great care of this book. It must be kept safe in order that my future self can give it to me in order that I can write this message. Apparently, this is something called 'Timey Wimey' and it will all make perfect sense one day.

Don't worry. I've been assured that you'll do extremely well.

Yours,

Doctor.

Peri studied the rest of the message. It was a series of diagrams relating to TARDIS controls. She put her hand around the first lever. Well, she thought, *here goes*. She pulled the lever and the TARDIS growled in protest. Hesitantly, she flipped a series of switches and as she did so the lights dimmed and the console began to shake. The pitch of the engines grew from a hum to a whine to a howl, and finally to a scream. Peri grasped the console with both hands as her heart pounded and her every instinct screamed at her to get away, that anywhere was safer than here. Her eyes locked on the final lever. Big and brass and daring her to pull it.

And pull it she did.

In the same instant the air itself seemed to catch fire as the room erupted in a brilliant flash of white, then the shrieking metal cacophony died away, and the Doctor stood in the console room.

“Peri” he exclaimed “Well done! Very, very well done. I knew you could do it!”

Relief washed over her like an Arctic stream. “Oh, Doctor!” she said “I thought I'd never see you again. What happened?”

“Well” the Doctor said with a shrug “It's rather a long story. I'm not entirely sure I know everything myself yet, but if and when I figure it all out you'll be the first to know.”

“Try.” Peri demanded. She was in no mood for equivocations.

“Well” the Doctor began “I visited my own future. Obviously, I immediately knew everything would turn out all-right because I wouldn't have been able to visit my own future if it hadn't. So far so good?”

“Go on” Peri said.

The Doctor gestured toward the discarded botany handbook “My future self told me I needed to write out a message for you in that book.”

“But how did it get to be in the library for me to pick up?” Peri asked. “If your future self gave it to you, and you didn't give it to me...I'm confused.”

“My future self still has the future copy of the book. He's going to drop it off at the shop where I bought it the day before I picked it up.”

“With your message in it.”

“Correct”

“Which you won't read.”

“Well...I've got so many books. There's only so many hours in a day.”

“And so you'll put it in the library.”

“For later.”

“And then forget about it.”

“Correct. Actually, that reminds me” the Doctor picked up the book “I'd better erase that message. Otherwise I won't have anything to write in the future”

“The future.”

“Correct”

“Which is now part of your past.”

“Also correct.”

“And this is all called...”

“Timey-wimey.”

“I don't like it.”

“Neither do I, Peri. Neither do I.”

They locked arms and walked together back to the scene of the accident. The Doctor turned to her and smiled.

“Well.” he said “Everything should be back in order now. Are you ready to try again?”

Peri put her hand on his arm. “Are you really sure that's wise, Doctor?”

“Oh, don't worry” he said airily “The time corridor has collapsed in on itself now. Nothing can go wrong this time.”

Great. What a jinx. Peri thought.

“Are you ready for your surprise?” The Doctor asked.

He threw the doors open and together they stepped through.

Peri wouldn't have believed it if she hadn't been there to see it for herself. The doors opened out onto an endless, sprawling field, thick with snow. As her eyes accustomed to the brightness, she could pick out dashes of green on the horizon.

“Doctor...are those conifers?”

The Doctor nodded. He took a remote control out of his pocket and pointed it at the sky. A moment later, snowflakes began to drift lazily toward them. They feathered the treetops and melted in their hair. Peri stuck out her tongue and caught one.

“Doctor! Snow. Real snow!”

“That's not the best part. Come with me.”

He grabbed her hand and pulled her, shrieking with laughter, through the snow. They came to a tree festooned with ribbons and underneath a pile of gifts, perfectly wrapped in sparkling paper.

“The TARDIS is an unpredictable mistress, Peri. She takes me where I need to go more often than where I want to go. I can't guarantee I'll be able to get you home for Christmas, Peri. But if I can't, I can always bring Christmas to you.”

Peri looked at him, speechless with gratitude.

“So” he continued. “Which one are you going to open first?”