

The one thing I can always put trust in as far as the Doctor is concerned is that he'll do everything in his power to keep you safe. It was, after all, he who rescued me from Traken's untimely demise, even if I wasn't aware of it at the time. Undoubtedly he tried to save Adric, to get him off that freighter, but Adric's own... not stubbornness, that's not right... his own defiance in the face of danger... there was nothing the Doctor could do against that.

And here I am. Alone, and waiting.

This room has an ominous feeling to it, like some imminent tragedy is about to descend upon me. Yet I'm calm because I know that the Doctor will come. He'll break me out of this confinement, wherever here *is*, and we'll travel on and see more wonders of the universe. More than I could ever have dreamed of back in my life on Traken, an inconceivable number of dangers and pleasures in equal measure,

My thoughts always return to all that I've lost: my mother, so long ago and my father, to the monster that still wears his face and who destroyed my whole world. When I remember those times past, I always wonder what would have happened had the Doctor not come to Traken. Would my father and my friends still be alive? Would I be happy?

And that's how I came to be here...

## The Price of Wishes

by Andrew Weston

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"I think – I *know* – that we need a little rest and relaxation."

The Doctor looked at me, smiling that smile when he doesn't want to show off his perfectly white teeth. I knew him well enough to be sure that following this face would be the more serious one that I'd seen all too often. He'd perfected this

over time, through all the occasions we'd been in mortal danger (and there'd been quite a number).

"I know it's not been easy. First Adric..."

He paused, contemplating what it meant to say the boy's name aloud. Composing himself, he continued. "... Then Tegan leaving. We need time to reflect and just... do nothing. What do you think?"

What I really appreciate about the Doctor is that he's interested in my opinions and always takes them into consideration. It was telling this time that he'd mentioned Adric. That hadn't happened a great deal, so it was clear that he'd been in the Doctor's thoughts of late.

"Yes, that sounds like a rather wonderful idea." I smiled at him, genuinely glad to be in his company. "Did you have anywhere in mind?"

The Doctor looked at me, contemplative at first, but suddenly full of enthusiasm. "Well there is one place I've been meaning to pay a visit to for some time. A little place called Parador, just on the outskirts of the Valanhti system."

It wasn't a planet I'd heard of, though that wasn't unusual. The universe was a big place, time even larger. "Well, I'm sure it'll be just the thing we need," I said, not entirely sure *what* to say.

"That's settled then!" announced the Doctor, and busied himself around the console, setting the coordinates.

We left the TARDIS, walking straight into a colourful parade celebrating... well we never did find out what. The journey had taken almost no time at all, and Parador did indeed seem to be the ideal place for a rest.

"Does this planet have libraries?" I asked. I was always keen to immerse myself in knowledge, and libraries were by far the best place to do so. The Doctor disagreed, insisting that meeting the locals would be far more beneficial. I could understand his logic, but I feared that we'd end up embroiled in some nefarious scheme if we took that path, so I declined his offer. "I'd like to be alone for a while, with my thoughts," I offered by way of explanation. I looked at him, not wishing to offend. This had been *his* idea after all. "If that's all right."

He nodded, seemingly not offended in the slightest. “Absolutely fine with me, Nyssa. I’ll find you later – perhaps we can meet for dinner?”

“I’d like that.” And I would have, had we met up again that day. But events never transpired as smoothly as I would have liked, even when I was trying to *avoid* trouble...

The Doctor wasn’t sure where the libraries would be, and while he did offer to look with me, I thought it better that I search by myself. I knew the time alone would help, and I was quite looking forward to finding something on my own. Very often I found we were all too reliant on the Doctor and his advice. ‘*Were*’ being the operative word: I was the only one left now. Poor, poor Adric. And then Tegan, who I wasn’t sure would ever forgive the Doctor for what had happened.

I told myself not to dwell on it any longer. The thoughts had been rattling around in my head for so long now that it finally felt right to set them free and just think of myself for a change.

As I walked, I realised that not only did I have no idea where I was going but that I positively relished the prospect. Although I did want to find a library, I found that the longer it took the more I didn’t mind taking the scenic route.

The sense of festivity was everywhere: music and dancing, and market sellers hawking their wares. I wandered in and out, through people cart-wheeling and jumping, playing instruments I’d never seen the like of before. Everyone seemed so happy, so content. It made me think back to when I’d last been *truly* happy, at home with my father.

It was as if my very thoughts drew me to them, to the Vendors. I happened upon them completely by accident, taking a shortcut through an alley to avoid the crowds. There they were, odd figures stood around in crows. I couldn’t see any of their faces, nor have any idea who these people were.

“Nyssa of Traken, daughter of a world lost long ago.” One of them approached me and at first I felt a little unnerved before realising that this figure could very easily have some telepathic ability. “We can grant that which you seek.”

I was confused at first, but realisation came as my thoughts drifted back to

the memories I'd had: my father and Traken. I looked at this figure, more than a little concerned at what he was implying; yet curiosity overwhelmed me and I couldn't resist. "How can you do that? I've always wondered if it could be possible but..."

I didn't even have a chance to finish before the figure interrupted. "The Doctor does not always tell the truth. It is an unwritten law that he lies. Not always, but when it suits his purposes. He is not the saint he would have you believe Nyssa."

I never for one moment believed that the Doctor was perfect, and it would have been foolish to do so. I'm not naïve enough to think he doesn't have flaws. Yet, was what this figure saying true? I couldn't be sure, merely wanting to know how it could bring back my father.

Again, I didn't have to speak, the creature reading my thoughts almost instantaneously. "We have ways of extrapolating places and beings, recreating that which you most desire." He turned, and gestured towards a door set into a wall further down the alley. With no warning it swung open, revealing a blinding white light beyond. I shielded my eyes from the glare and gingerly stepped closer to the luminescence.

"Do not be afraid Nyssa of Traken. Beyond the door lies all you desire." The figure indicated for me to go through the door...

...yet I was reluctant. I stopped in my tracks, looking at the cowed shadow. "Why are you offering this to me? What do you want in return? This all seems a little... too good to be true."

"What do we want?" The creature began advancing on me, and I had little choice but to back away. My back was to the open door, but I was certain that I wouldn't step through without realising. "Why, your happiness of course. That is what we want for all. Simply happiness." It continued to move towards me, and all the while I backed away. Two of the other figures turned and began moving towards me too, forcing me still further back, towards the light.

I could see the light encroaching upon me, beginning to envelop me as I stepped back again. I had no choice now, I was destined to enter the brightness, to do what these creatures wanted from me.

As I stepped back through the door, I could see them through back their

hoods, hideous gnarled faces twisted in a grotesque parody of a smile and then...

“Nyssa, my dear, whatever’s the matter?”

I felt a hand on my arm, the sunlight on my face. That hand, this place felt all too familiar. I looked around, disorientated, taking in the scenery. Trees and flowers and the air on my face, and the smiling face that looked back at me was...

“Keep back!” I stumbled, uncertain as to what had happened. The figure stared at me in bafflement.

“Nyssa, it’s me. Surely you’ve not forgotten your own father?”

At first all I could see was *him*, my father’s murderer: but as I looked I saw that there was none of *his* youthfulness; my father’s age and weariness was readily apparent. But the greying hair was coupled with a look of softness and compassion in his eyes: whereas *he* had only a cold murderous glare.

“Am I really... here? With you?” I wasn’t really sure what to say, I never thought I’d be here again. I couldn’t be, it was destroyed, all lost to me. Yet, here I was, on Traken, with the one man in dearest to me in the whole universe.

My father smiled. “Of course! Where else would you be Nyssa? You fell asleep, here in the Grove. The Fosters thought it best that I come to take you home.”

Could it be true? That everything that had happened, all of my time with the Doctor, was nothing but a fiction? “Where’s the Doctor? He was here, wasn’t he?”

My father nodded. “He left hours ago, though there was a rather curious clock left here. I felt drawn to it, but Keeper Luvic sensed evil lingering and the Fosters had it burned. There’s nothing to fear any longer.”

I smiled back at him, though I still wasn’t certain what had happened. Some sort of time portal perhaps? Or... I really wasn’t sure. Those creatures’ cowed faces still lingered in my mind. I half wondered if this man really were my father, and not the imposter, playing out another trap to ensnare the Doctor once again.

“Come, it’s time for dinner. Let us celebrate the banishing of evil once again!” My father extended his arm and I took it, still not completely comfortable, but little knowing what else to do.

I ate and talked and all seemed like old times. That night I slept soundly in my bed, the finest sleep I've had since I could remember. I was at peace, with everything. All was well, and I decided to stop my mind from doubting this was real. It *had* to be. Those creatures, whatever they were, really had done this deed with no value to themselves.

Or so I thought.

It was the next day as I sat eating breakfast that the first of the instances occurred. As I sat and watched my father, there were faint flickers around him, almost as if the other with his likeness were fading in and out of existence in my father's place. I said nothing, but it was then I knew that all was not right.

Later that day, as I walked in the grove, I watched the sky turned from day to night and back again, as if from some projection, a false reality overlaid on the real world. I sought to concentrate, to block out the interference preventing me from seeing the real truth, but nothing came of it, save for a bad headache.

Yet, after that, days and weeks came and went with no further signs. I wondered if I had been projecting my own anxieties onto my surroundings, almost willing a facade to slip and another world, the *real* world, to take its place.

One night I slept, and in that sleep I had a curious dream. The faces of the creatures I had seen were looking down upon me, almost as if I were a patient in a hospital. I appeared to be unconscious, and yet I saw myself lying there, being studied intently by these... whatever they were. I wanted to scream, to cry out, but no sound came and the version of me watching over me didn't seem to move, simply looking down at my comatose form as if in mourning.

I awoke, thinking I could hear the Doctor's voice ringing in my ears, apologetic and full of worry. I shrugged it off, thinking it must be a part of the dream, nothing more.

More days seemed to pass, but my memory of what had happened each day was hazy, as if it had passed in a blur, no memorable action having taken place. Each night I slept, and the dream recurred; and each morning, as I woke, I swear I could hear the Doctor's voice.

So, I formulated a plan.

I stayed awake for as long as I could, using whatever means I had to hand. I lasted quite well, and I didn't even realise when sleep took me, as eventually it did. Yet when the dream came this time, it was different. No one stood over me, the room was empty. I opened my eyes, looking around. This time I even managed to stand, though felt weak for the experience. As I moved from the bed, I walked around the room, slowly. It was small, more like a cell than a hospital room, which is what I'd assumed it had been.

I looked back at the small bed and saw wires hanging down. I realised then that the dream was Traken. This was the harsh reality. I looked in the polished surface of the door and saw my own now emaciated reflection twisted back at me.

I sat down on the floor. The Doctor would find me, he had to. And I waited, for what seemed like an eternity, getting weaker and weaker, until suddenly, the Doctor's face appeared at the door's small window.

"Oh Nyssa." He looked down at me. "I'm so sorry."

I stood up, a burst of energy overtaking my weakness. "Doctor! Please you must get me out of here."

His face fell. "I can't. It's not possible."

I shook my head. "No, no it must be. There must be some way out, there always is."

He gave the weakest of smiles, a nervous tic for him it seemed. "No, Nyssa, it really is impossible. You see, you're... "

"I'm trapped!" I shouted. "I was wired up to a machine, forced to dream of my father, of Traken. What my heart desired – or so I thought!"

The Doctor shook his head. When he spoke, I could hear the wavering in his voice. "No, it was real, a reality of sorts, recreated from your memories. Made to feed those creatures that created it." He paused, and I could tell this wasn't easy for him. "They are sick, you see. Very, very sick. And looking for a cure. Not that I could in any way endorse their actions and not that it did them any good."

I looked around. I hadn't noticed before, but there on the floor were several small piles of cloaks and dust. And then I had the biggest shock of all, for peering

through the window next to the Doctor was... me.

“I wasn’t sure I could face seeing myself in this state, but I think it’s only fair that I explain. The Doctor’s been through enough already, and it’s all my fault.” The other me had the same solemn look that the Doctor had done, and I had a horrible feeling what she was going to say. “You’re not real. You’re a virtual construct that the Voltrani built up to create a timeline around. They made you, from me.”

I staggered back to the bed, though in truth wasn’t really surprised by the revelation. “Go on,” I hoarsely muttered, determined to find out the whole story.

My other self took a breath and continued. “They need the energy that an artificial reality can give them. They created a whole possibility for me... *you*... to live in. Exactly what we wanted.” I could see she was fighting back tears. “They gave it to us, only the Doctor found me before it was too late, but he had to seal you in. It’s a Zygma-energy containment unit, not that that matters now. The whole reality was being woven there. If the Doctor hadn’t found me, we could both be...” She tailed off, turning away, unable to look at me any longer.

The Doctor looked through once more. “There is one thing I can do, to ease your suffering. If you’d like to live out the rest of your time, then I won’t try to stop you but...”

“End this.” I knew it would only be a matter of time, perhaps not long. I possessed a rational, scientific mind, *her* mind, so I knew that there was no point trying to fight it. This unit was sealed and it had to remain that way. I knew the excess energy still generated by my presence could prove lethal to the planet and its inhabitants, and I’d no wish for that to happen for a few minutes more of air and sunshine. I knew I should never have existed, and so it was that I needed be unmade. I knew that my real self would always remember me and these events. We shared that bond, a mental connection that couldn’t be broken even by death. “Please Doctor, do what must be done.”

I smiled weakly as I knew he would in return. I looked to myself, and our minds were one for one last time. I nodded, as did she. It had to be done.

“A matter of moments, no longer, and then all this will end. I only wish there could have been another way.” He looked at me one final time and I could see the



sadness in his eyes. Then, he was gone.

As I sit waiting, my father reaches out to me, and I take his hand one final time.

And darkness descends.

# DOCTOR WHO

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## THE PRICE OF WISHES



by Andrew Weston



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