

November 5th 2011 – London Café

"Is this seat taken?"

"Hmm? No, go ahead."

"Thank you. My name's Charlotte Pollard, but my friends call me Charley."

"Katie."

"Nice to meet you. So... got any plans for..."

"You don't have to be nice to me. In fact I'd rather we just drank our coffee in peace if you don't mind."

"Oh charming. Are you sure you don't want to talk? Guy Fawkes Night?"

"Guy Fawkes Night? Haven't heard that in a long time. Most people nowadays just call it Fireworks Night, or Bonfire Night."

"Really? Oh, now you mention it, the Doctor did say something about that."

"Your Doctor?"

"No, the Doctor. Hey, if I tell you a secret, will you promise to keep it?"

"Erm, well, we don't really know each other, but... sure, I guess."

"I'm actually from 1930! The Doctor saved me with his time machine!"

"Okay... well, you don't have to worry about me telling anyone, that's for sure."

"Great! Hey, let me tell you what we were up to today..."

"Look, is this some sort of attempt to cheer me up? I'd rather you gave me 'Things can only get better!' speech or, maybe, 'Hang in there, Katie! They'll be other jobs! Other men!'. Time travelling adventures seems a bit... juvenile?"

"Oh, how do you know that if you haven't heard it yet! I won't start at the very beginning..."

"I have a feeling you won't leave if I say no..."

The Wow Factor

by David Hogan

"Great! Right, so the Doctor and I stepped out of the TARDIS, er, that's the time machine, and here we were in London, but eighty years into my future..."

"Here we are, Charley. London, 2011. Winter, or possibly late Autumn," the Doctor wondered

aloud. It was certainly cold enough. I looked around, and I couldn't believe it! Tall buildings poked out of the skyline, and shops were full of little electronic equipment, just like what the Doctor has in his TARDIS. I'd wanted to see Hampshire, where I grew up, in the future, but the Doctor said it was too risky. Something to do with running into any older relatives. This was certainly a compromise I was happy with.

"Wow, Doctor! Look at this!" I howled with excitement as I looked into the window of a local shop. Inside were flat screens with moving pictures. I'd seen some like it on the spaceship in Orion, but this was London! This was Earth. It was a strange feeling. I turned around to talk to the Doctor, but he was across the street, looking at another shop. He turned around with an excited look on his face and walked, no, almost skipped up to me.

"We've got really lucky, Charley!" he said. "It's November 5th!"

"Oh brilliant!" I responded. "So are you going to take me to a Guy Fawkes burning? Or maybe some fireworks! Oh, that'd be brilliant!"

The Doctor looked delighted with my response,

"Maybe not effigy burning Charley. By 2011 it was more common just to have a bonfire and some fireworks. But I'll gladly take you to one of those!"

I put my arm out as if I was asking him to lead me in a dance. "Sounds like a plan!" I responded, and we started walking down the street, arms linked. The Doctor started talking about what to do before it goes dark, like a huge Ferris wheel on the Thames, but I was already surprised at just how much my world had changed in less than 100 years. Cars were all over the road, planes were all over the sky, and each shop had things I'd associate with the Doctor and his alien technology. Suddenly, the Doctor stopped in his tracks.

"That's odd..." he said, with a hint of foreboding. "There, in that shop window." I followed him as he walked up to the window and started peering into it. I couldn't see anything any more odd than I'd seen in other windows, so I played along, "What's wrong, Doctor?" I asked, innocently.

"This technology is wrong..." the Doctor responded,

"Wrong in what way?" I wondered aloud.

"It's not of this time period. In fact I'm not even sure it's from Earth at all!" The Doctor sounded worried as he finished talking and turned to enter the shop. I followed him in, more pleased to look at some nick-knacks than stop an evil alien shopkeeper, or whatever was wrong. The shop walls were covered in technical gizmos, toys and on a little stand, fireworks. The Doctor

walked up to the lady at the tills.

“Excuse me,” he said, politely, “can I speak to the man in charge please?”

“What makes you think it’s a man?” the lady responded with an unpleasant tone.

“Oh, I’m sorry, it’s just a phrase. I didn’t mean it literally,” The Doctor looked nervous, as if he’d made a major mistake. “So, can I see the lady in charge?” the Doctor continued.

“Depends on what you want to see her about,” the lady once again responded in an unpleasant, emotionless tone.

“It’s about these objects in your store... I think they come from...” The Doctor hesitated to finish the sentence, probably realising that the lady at the tills might not know about the secrets of the technology.

“I think they come from my supply company,” the Doctor quickly quipped, “and I have no record of selling anything to, ah, er...”

“Brookesia Curiosity Shop, sir,” I quickly jumped in, pretending to be his assistant.

“Ah thank you, Charley,” the Doctor responded, “She’s my P.A., very good, if not a little easily impressed with our own equipment.” Those last words of his were slow and deliberate: I realised I was still looking at the objects in the store with wonder.

“Sorry, er, just making sure they really are our product,” I hastily said, “Yep, looks like it!” I stood next to the Doctor and smiled at the till lady, who then sighed and went to the backroom.

“Good work, Charley,” the Doctor whispered.

“Thank you. So do you think there are aliens running this shop?” I whispered back.

“Most likely yes, or at least they’re getting their supplies from some.”

A large lady walked out from the back with the lady from before. She did her best attempt at a smile, and then walked towards us.

“Hello, I’m Beth, I own this shop,” she said. “So, Jean tells me you think some of this merchandise was stolen from your design?” I felt uneasy as she approached, but the Doctor shook her hand.

“Well from our supply company, at least,” the Doctor responded.

“Have you tried Trioceros 24 Hour Shop across the street? We believe they’re ripping off our product,” Beth said with a look of anger on her face, albeit briefly, as she went back to that awkward smile.

“I don’t believe we have,” the Doctor said, with a contrastingly innocent smile.

“I see. Interesting,” Beth said, “Would you like to come to the back and discuss things

further, Mr...?"

"Smith," the Doctor said, finishing her sentence, "John Smith."

The Doctor then turned towards me and said, "Check out the shop across the street, if it has some of the same objects, come back and tell me."

I nodded and turned to leave as the Doctor and Beth disappeared behind the door at the back of the shop. I felt uneasy about leaving him alone, but I still followed his orders, so to speak. I went in the other shop and started looking around when the man behind the till suddenly shouted, "Hey, you!" So I turned and looked at him in bemusement.

"Yes?" I responded awkwardly.

"Did you just buy something in Brookesia?" he asked, as if he were a policeman interrogating me for a crime.

Before I could even get a sentence out he had come out from behind the tills and started to approach me. "Or is it that you're comparing prices? Or maybe you're a spy!"

I was frightened! "This is crazy, I'm just looking around!" I replied.

Before the man could say another word a man came from the back. "Jack, leave that poor woman alone," he said, with a booming voice.

Jack soon quietly went back behind the tills as the other man approached me.

"I'm sorry for his anger, my dear," he said disingenuously. "You look shaken up. Let me at least get you a coffee."

I wanted to just leave, but I felt like I'd be letting the Doctor down, so I nodded and he started to walk away, then he turned around, "Do come with me, won't you?" he said. Against my better judgment I followed him into the backroom, just as the Doctor had in the other shop. I sat down in an old wooden chair that felt as if it would collapse under my weight. The man, who I presume is the owner, left to a further room to get the coffee, though I imagined it was for something far worse. I started snooping around, looking into drawers and cabinets, but finding nothing odd or unusual. I then opened a crate and started stepping back in horror. Inside was the body of Jack, the man who was behind the tills! His eyes were wide open, but the body lifeless. What was going on? Is the Jack out there a fake, or is this a fake being kept for some trick? I didn't know what was going on, so I planned to run back to where the Doctor was and tell him, but instead I backed up into the large store owner.

"I see you're no spy, definitely not one of us," He said, with a hint of disappointment in his voice. "Sorry my dear, it looks like you are just an innocent who got caught up. Still, I can always

call another one of us here and make use of you. I do need a nice friendly girl at the tills..."

He grabbed me by the shoulders, a sinister look in his eye. I struggled so he called for help, "Ben, Nick, get in here!" he shouted as I struggled. Two more men came from the room he was just in and they all grabbed me. I was powerless as they started to drag me into the other room. Suddenly the backdoor swung open and the Doctor appeared!

"Stop right where you are!" he said, with a great deal of bravado. "This is space immigration! I'm taking you in!" An awkward silence followed that was only broken by the Doctor himself. "Didn't think that would work. Sorry."

The two other men left me in the grip of the shop owner as they approached the Doctor, but he didn't seem worried. He slowly walked up to the exposed crate and put his hand on the wrist of the body.

"One step closer and I break the link!" he said, with unwavering confidence, "That's right! I don't think your friend in the front of the store would want to be disintegrated, would he?"

I had no idea what he was talking about, but I couldn't help but feel relieved. That was until they all started laughing at the Doctor.

"Did you hear that Phil?" Nick said to the shop owner, finally revealing his name.

"I did! Ha! He's living in the stone age!" he replied.

The Doctor looked confused and soon checked the wrist. There was nothing there but bare skin. "I don't understand, I thought..." the Doctor began to say.

"You thought what?" Phil interrupted, "That we need the host bodies to live? Give me a break. That technology is hundreds of years out of date."

"Ah," the Doctor said, and suddenly my confidence plummeted.

Phil's two thugs grabbed the Doctor and we were both carried into a room with two silver beds next to each other, and some strange technological things hanging above them. We were tied to some chairs, back to back, as Phil told Ben to call for two new allies. They all walked out of the room for a while, leaving me and the Doctor alone.

"That was great work, Doctor!" I said sarcastically,

"Yes, sorry about that," he replied. "You see I've met this race before. They lost their faces and identities in some calamity on their world, and they used human bodies to copy their form and gain the identities they wanted."

"Oh that's awful," I replied, "for both the humans and them."

"Indeed, Charley," the Doctor replied. "What I learned in the other shop was that they're

two groups who decided to create this competition as a way to settle a bet or a feud.”

I was mortified, not just because these aliens would treat human lives like cards in a card game, but that the Doctor was so casual in telling this to me.

“So the people who they stole their identities from...” I said, slowly, knowing that I wouldn’t like the answer, “...are they dead?”

“I think so, Charley,” the Doctor replied.

“You think so?” I said shockingly, “What kind of answer is that?”

“Sorry, but when we last met they needed the bodies they copied to be alive in order to sustain their stolen form, but what that large man said has me worried. ‘That technology is hundreds of years out of date’. If that’s true, then maybe they’ve found a way to permanently copy a human and then... I hate to say it, but...”

“Discard the waste product?” I said, in order to speed up the inevitable horrible truth.

“Something like that,” the Doctor replied. “Sorry about this, Charley,” he continued, “but we’re not having a lot of luck with our adventures at the moment.”

“Don’t worry,” I said, trying to make sure he wasn’t feeling too guilty, “It’s just a run of bad luck. Must be a record, Doctor! What is it, three adventures full of danger in a row?” I started to chuckle at the thought of our misfortune, but I could almost feel the Doctor squirm behind me.

“Yes... a record. Ha... Unlucky Pollard, that’s what I’ll call you!” he said, followed by a nervous laugh. I wasn’t convinced.

“This happens all the time doesn’t it?” I said bluntly.

“Not all the time! No! Of course not... just, a lot of the time.”

“Oh great. Charming. Still, I suppose if it didn’t happen all the time, you wouldn’t be able to free yourself from the rope,” I said, having realised that the Doctor was now starting to stand up.

“Exactly, Charley!” he said, full of self pride, “Houdini taught me that one. Now...” Suddenly he heard Phil walking towards the door, so he threw the rope around himself and sat down again, holding the rope tight.

Phil entered the room. “I’ve got some good news, and some bad news,” He said, a twisted grin creeping across his face.

“Let me guess,” the Doctor interrupted, “The good news is you’re going to let us go, but the bad news is it’s after you kill us. Something like that, I’m sure.”

Phil seems surprised. “Very cute, Doctor. I do love someone who’s so flippant about his own death.”

“Oh, and here I was hoping you’d be horrified at the thought of what I was suggesting, and that the good news was you’re letting us go, and the bad news that there was no ice cream left in your fridge.” The Doctor’s calm and sarcastic act was getting to Phil, who obviously likes to intimidate people.

“Listen here, Doc,” He said, getting right in his face, “The good news is that we’re not going to steal your bodies, but the bad news is you’ve seen too much, and so we’re going to have to kill you anyway.”

Phil took a few steps back, expecting the Doctor to panic, but he doesn’t know the Doctor...

“Well, that was a bit of an anti-climax. No gruesome detail of how you’re going to do it? No rubbing your hands together and letting out an evil laugh? Come on Phil, embrace the role!” The Doctor was delighting in taunting him, so I decided to join in.

“Since you’re being so nice,” I said, “could you let us stay alive long enough to see the fireworks?” I could almost feel the Doctor smiling as I joined him.

“Good question, Charley,” he said. “Do we get a last request? If so are we allowed to request you don’t kill us?”

This was the final straw, Phil banged his fists hard on the desk and turned around with a furious look on his face.

“I’m quite tempted to let you see the local display, because I sold them half their firework, and trust me, they’ll have some dazzling effects...”

Suddenly this stopped being funny, and reality had sunk back in.

“What are you planning?” I asked, “I thought this was just some competition to see who can sell the most stuff or something.”

“Oh it is, dear,” Phil replied, “But you see those fools across the street keep selling technology that’s better than ours, and despite every effort to compete, we’re going out of business.”

“It happens. Small businesses are always the first to go,” the Doctor said, in another attempt to lighten the atmosphere. “I think it was opening a Chameleon named nick-knack shop across the street from another Chameleon named nick-knack shop that did it. Sometimes one can have too many Chameleon named...”

Before he could finish his sentence, Phil punched the Doctor across the face.

“Okay, let’s just skip this routine, shall we?” the Doctor said, in a rare serious tone. “You said you’re supplying half the fireworks. I can guess it’s your rival shop that’s selling the other half,

and your plan is to frame them and say it was their fireworks that caused it to go horribly wrong.”

“Very good, Doctor,” Phil replied, “but “go horribly wrong” is a bit of an understatement. My special fireworks will explode with a great big bang... releasing a nice acid rain...”

“Acid?” the Doctor wondered, “You’re sending acid in a firework?”

“Yes, Doctor,” Phil continued. “The “fireworks”, if you can still call them that, are made of Iridium, the most corrosion-resistant metal in the galaxy!”

The Doctor suddenly burst out laughing. I was mortified, but I couldn’t help cracking a smile at the belly laughs that I could hear behind me.

“That’s your plan, is it?” the Doctor said, after catching his breath, “It’s certainly a lot of effort. Why not just strap a large explosive? That’s what Brookesia across the street are doing...”

Phil looked shocked. “What?!” he wondered aloud.

“Oh right,” the Doctor said, “I wasn’t supposed to say about that. Oh well. Say, Charley, which do you think will have the bigger “Wow Factor”, a rain of clear, although harmful, liquid, or a large explosion?”

The Doctor continued before I could mount an answer: “I think that people will associate the acid burns with the explosion anyway, so I guess your side loses this little retail war game, Mr Phil... sorry, I don’t know your last name.”

Phil stormed out of the room and the Doctor rose to his feet and started untying me.

“Great work, Doctor!” I said, “I can’t believe they fell for that bluff!”

“It’s no bluff Charley,” the Doctor answered back. “Well, I mean apart from the fact that its easy to tell the difference between an acid burn and a fire burn. No, I’m afraid the rather frightening woman over the road let it slip that they really are planning an explosion to frame this shop.” By this point the Doctor had untied me and was looking out the door.

“Well, we have to stop them Doctor!” I said, as if I was some sort of hero.

“Very noble, Charley,” the Doctor said with a smile. “But it looks like these businessmen are off to wage a more direct war. Listen...”

I joined the Doctor at the door and listened in.

“Great, so... what? We’ve lost?” Jack, who had joined Phil and his two thugs in the backroom, said with panic.

“We’re men, you think we’re going to let those women win?” Phil responded. It seemed their race is still rather sexist. Reminded me of my own time, really. The Doctor looked surprised as we continued to listen in.

“But Phil,” Nick said, “the game deadline is midnight tonight. If the framing doesn’t work then they’ll go home and we’ll be stuck in jail or something.” Nick was starting to sound really scared. “Why couldn’t we have done this honestly? Just gone by the profits?”

Phil started to get into Nick’s face. “It’s all well and good saying that now! Come on, everyone. Grab something... something heavy. We’re going across the road...”

“Phil, you can’t!” Nick said, getting desperate, “Over all the years the annual Earth race has been going on, no one has resorted to violence! It’s not right!” Phil started walking up to Nick menacingly, “Wait, Phil... please! Stop!”

It was too late! Phil smacked Nick over the head with a bat he’d picked up. Phil gave a stern look to his other two team mates, and the three walked through the shop and out the door.

At this moment, the Doctor walked through the door and checked over Nick’s body. Sure enough he was dead: his skin slowly melted away, revealing a pale yellow-skinned alien, not a hair anywhere on its body.

“This is even more awful than I thought,” the Doctor said.

“What is it? Is he dead?” I asked, although I knew the answer.

“Yes,” the Doctor said with an angry look on his face. “But things make more sense now, Charley,” the Doctor continued. “These Chameleons, they’ve got new identities, new bodies, a male/female sex divide... Yet they’ve refined their old technology to steal an identity for however long they want and then discard it without any danger to themselves. They’ve turned their own sad history into an annual celebration. I’d rather not think of the irony of it being the 5th of November, though Guy Fawkes was a saint compared to this.”

I didn’t know what to say, as I didn’t really think it was any different. This was my first time encountering these things, I assumed that’s what they did. The Doctor on the other hand just stared at the body.

“I gave them chance after chance...” he said. “I felt sorry for them, Charley. I really did. Then what? This is the race they become? Using human lives like equipment for a game? I won’t stand for this.”

The Doctor starting walking towards the inside of the shop; I followed.

“Where are you going, Doctor?” I asked, worried he was just going to walk into their fight.

“I’m going to walk into their fight,” sure enough, that’s what he said, “and I’m going to give them one chance to leave. If they don’t, I’ll... stop them.”

I put my hand on the Doctor’s shoulder. “You don’t have to...” I started to say, but he

continued to walk forward, my arm flopped down beside me.

“Charley...” he said, “I want you to go down the street to somewhere safe.” I started to protest, but was cut off. “Sorry Charley, but I won’t be long. Have a cup of coffee, a sit down, and maybe a nice chat with someone who’s lonely, hmm?” I got the feeling there was more to this than I understood, so I agreed. “One way or another, trust me... I won’t be long.”

November 5th 2011 – London Café

“And that’s all he said as he walked away? You mean you don’t know what happened?”

“No, after that I came in here, and I found you and told you this story. Funny how he knew someone would be sitting on their own, isn’t it?”

“Well... actually...”

November 5th 2011 – London Café – A large explosion rocks the street...

“What was that?!”

“Oh, the Doctor stopping them I suppose.”

“But... I see...”

“And there he is, at the door. Do you mind if I leave the money for the coffee with you?

Thanks.”

“Hello Charley.”

“Doctor, there was no need for you to come in.”

“Oh but there was, Charley. Hello Katie.”

“Hi...”

“I’m sorry. I tried reasoning with your friends, but it didn’t work.”

“Wait a minute, Doctor... What do you mean?”

“This lady here helped me escape Brookesia, Charley. I told her to wait here until I sorted it out.”

“So you knew I’d tell her the story?”

“You told a complete stranger what happened today? Charley... I must talk to you about keeping our crazy stories to ourselves...”

“Yes, well, fine, but ...”

“It’s okay Charley. I know what they did was wrong, that’s why I left. After listening to the events from your perspective I know ever more how awful this is. When the ship comes to pick me

up tonight, I'll explain everything. I'll do everything in my power to stop this game from happening again."

"Glad to hear it. So, if the ship isn't coming until tonight, how about you join me and Charley in a nice walk around town?"

"Oh, I don't know..."

"Go on, maybe we can see the fireworks together before you go! Right, Doctor?"

"I'd have no problem with that. Well?"

"...but after all we've done..."

"Don't worry about it. The human race has a great knack for forgiving criminals who have repented and tried to make good. Or even those who didn't repent... do you know the story of Guy Fawkes? Well..."

"Come on Katie, let's go before he gives us a lecture..."

November 5th 2011 – London Café – The Doctor is left talking to himself...

**DOCTOR
WHO**

CLASSIC DOCTORS - BRAND NEW ADVENTURES

**THE WOW
FACTOR**



by David Hogan



THE COMPANION CIRCUITLES PROSE SERIES

by David Hogan

THE COMPANION CIRCUITLES PROSE SERIES