

“It’s beautiful!” I said, while watching the scanner as stars flew by. Or rather, we flew by them.

“Isn’t it just?” the Doctor replied, with that charming smile of his.

The boys weren’t that impressed though. “We see stars everywhere,” said Ben, Jamie nodding in agreement. “What’s so special about these?”

The Doctor sighed deeply, clearly exasperated and disappointed at the boy’s lack of positive reactions. I couldn’t help but share the Doctor’s feelings. No matter how many times I’d seen stars before, they always looked beautiful to me. Besides, it wasn’t often that we saw them move past us like this.

Now, if you know anything about the TARDIS, you may wonder why we were flying through space in it. Usually it would just disappear in one place and re-appear in another. Well, the truth is, the TARDIS itself isn’t actually flying. We’re simply ‘hitching a lift’, to use the Doctor’s words for it. He had materialised on the roof of what he called an ‘Intergalactic Circus Train’.

I must admit that, as pretty as the sight on the scanner was, part of the name that the Doctor had given the vessel below us unsettled me. ‘Circus’.

Circus Train Under Siege

by Elinor Ekman

You see, I never really liked the circus. I went there once, as a child, and what I remember of it is that they had creepy clowns and badly treated animals... and I really mean, very badly treated. Still, I tried to be positive, thinking that since this is the future, perhaps the circus had changed for the better.

I was suddenly snapped out of my thoughts of circuses and animals as the TARDIS shook abruptly and fell onto its side. “What just happened” I asked, as I crawled up from the

wall, that had now become the floor.

“The train appears to have stopped,” the Doctor said, more to himself than to me.

“But why?” asked Jamie. “You said it would go on for many hours”

The Doctor nodded. “Something must have got in its way,” he said thoughtfully.

“Like What?” asked Ben.

The Doctor shrugged. “I don’t know. I can’t see the front of the train from here,” he answered, while crawling up to the TARDIS console. He reached out and flicked a switch and, suddenly, the console room returned to its intended angle. “There, that’s better!” he exclaimed cheerfully, while rubbing his hands together. “Now, let’s see if we can find out what’s going on” With those words, the Doctor flicked some more switches, pushed some buttons and pulled some levers and the TARDIS dematerialised.

The TARDIS had landed in one of the cabins on the train. As I looked at the scanner again my eyes were met by another, enormous, pair which appeared to stare right at me. The owner of those huge eyes wore extravagant clown make-up all over her wide, round face – or his, I wasn’t really sure, but I thought it was a woman.

“Seems we’ve been noticed” the Doctor said. “Let’s go out and say hello, shall we?” he continued with a cheerful smile, and opened the doors.

But I didn’t feel like smiling. “I hate clowns,” I said out loud. I wasn’t speaking to anyone in particular though and nobody seemed to have heard me. The Doctor and Jamie had already left the TARDIS.

Ben was just about to follow them when he instead stopped and turned to me. “Are you coming duchess?” he asked. I sighed. I had told him numerous times not to call me that, but he never listened, so I gave up.

“Well?” Ben pressed, impatiently.

“Yes yes!” I answered, a slight tone of frustration in my voice. Ben raised his eyebrows, but said no more. Instead, he exited the TARDIS and I followed, if a bit reluctantly.

“HEELLOO!!” the clown’s voice boomed as we came out into the train cabin, my suspicion about her gender now confirmed. Her face might have been androgynous, but her voice was not.

“Hello there, miss” the Doctor greeted her with a disarming smile. “I take it that

you're part of the circus that owns this train?"

"Betzy the clown, at your service!" She introduced herself with a clumsy salute. "And who might you be, sir?" Betzy grinned expectantly while waiting for the Doctor's answer.

"I'm known as the Doctor and this is Jamie, Ben and Polly"

"WELCOME," Betzy boomed, "to the intergalactic circus train!"

I smiled faintly, reminding myself that there was a real person behind that make-up. It would be rude of me to give her the cold shoulder, simply because of her occupation.

The Doctor thanked her for the warm welcome and was just about to ask her something, when the door to one of the adjoining cabins opened. A tall man with blond hair poked his head through the opening, a long, purple cape appearing beside his shoulder as he did so. I must admit to thinking he was quite handsome.

"What are you booming about, Betzy?" the man asked, his voice somehow sounding both soft and strong at the same time.

"We have visitors, Cedric!" Betzy answered, waving a thick arm towards us.

Cedric, as this man was apparently called, stared at us in surprise. "How did they get in?" he asked Betzy, who just answered with a confused frown. He sighed and turned the question to us instead.

The Doctor explained, as well as he could, about the TARDIS and how it worked. Cedric seemed genuinely impressed. He was a magician, he told us, and while he knew many fantastic tricks, he couldn't, he admitted, actually make things disappear and reappear like that. Not for real anyway.

"Tell me mister Cedric," the Doctor said, before the man could go into details, "could you perhaps tell us why the train has stopped? It won't reach its next destination for several hours yet."

But Cedric didn't know, nor did Betzy. Their ring-master, a man named Zack, had gone to the front cabin to check, but he had yet to return. The Doctor asked Cedric to take us to him and he obliged. So we left Betzy's cabin and moved forward through the train

First we came into Cedric's own cabin. The floor in it was almost covered by loads of cards, hats and plastic flowers. The magician muttered an embarrassed apology, for the mess, and ushered us through into the next cabin.

It was pretty dark in there, the only light coming from a couple of candles. Between

said candles sat an old woman, meditating on the floor with her eyes closed.

“I see it!” She spoke suddenly, without moving anything other than her mouth. “It is coming! Disaster is upon us!”

“What disaster?” Jamie asked, while Ben just stared at her and I covered my mouth, trying very hard not to laugh.

“Don’t mind her” Cedric said quietly. “If Morgana was right every time she foresaw a disaster, the entire universe would have been destroyed by now!” We followed him into the next cabin, treading carefully around the old woman, named Morgana, so not to disturb her.

As we entered the next part of the train we were met by a high-pitched scream, followed by an embarrassed stutter.

“W-What are you doing Cedric!? D-Don’t you knock before entering a woman’s cabin!?”

Cedric’s face turned bright red, and so did Ben’s and Jamie’s, as before us stood a pretty, ginger-haired woman, wearing nothing but a towel. The Doctor had already turned his back to her, hands raised in a silent apology. The other three soon followed his example, stuttering excuses. The woman then turned to me, asking me who I, and ‘the other newcomers’ were. I tried my best to explain our situation to her and she seemed satisfied enough with what I had to say. She told us to wait until she had dressed herself and, once she’d done so, she then accompanied us through the ring-master’s cabin, the dining cabin and then, into the front cabin.

I had hopes that the ring-master would be as easy to get along with as the rest of this circus, so I was rather disappointed, not to mention annoyed, when this turned out to not be the case. Instead, he started a tiring interrogation about who we were and what we were doing on his train. The explanations we had given the other didn’t seem to be enough for Zack and he was soon arguing with Ben and Jamie, the Doctor trying desperately to calm all three of them.

I stayed out of it, instead turning my attention to another man, with long black curls, who were standing behind Zack, a rather smug expression on his face.

“Who’s that?” I asked the pretty woman, who I now knew to be an acrobat by the name of Aysha.

“What? Oh! That’s Rio. The animal tamer!” My face fell. That was it. Any positive

feelings I might have had about this circus were now completely gone. Clowns I could tolerate, even if I did find them rather creepy, but animal tamers...

Suddenly, the train shook hard and I was snapped out of my thoughts as I fell to the floor. "What IS going on!?" called out worriedly.

"You tell me!" yelled Zack, his angry glare going from me to the Doctor.

"We don't know either!" the Doctor answered, exasperated. "That's why we came here! To find out!"

"You must have found something out by now, Zack!" said Aysha, Cedric nodding in agreement. Zack sighed. "There's... some kind of creatures out there. Two of them. They're attacking the train from both sides. I saw them through the telescope on top of this cabin. They look like... like constellations! Living constellations!"

"Could I have a look?" the Doctor asked. Zack looked like he was about to protest, but after receiving an angry glare from Aysha, he reluctantly agreed.

The Doctor looked through the telescope and soon concluded that it 'was as he thought'. Zack demanded to know what he meant by that and the Doctor explained that he knew these creatures. He had encountered them before. They were Stellans, magnificent space-animals that travelled the universe in families of three. But their current behaviour was very odd, according to the Doctor. The Stellans weren't usually hostile. They wouldn't just attack someone without reason.

"But they are attacking us now," said Zack. "I was going to ask Rio if he could possibly tame them, what with him being an animal tamer and all. Where is he by the way?"

I looked around, only to find that Zack was right. Rio the animal tamer was nowhere to be seen. "He's probably run back to his cabin in fear or something" said Cedric. "He may act confident, but I think he's really a coward beneath that smug-looking mask he has for a face"

"Cedric!!" Aysha exclaimed, clearly upset about how the magician talked of Rio. Cedric shrugged and looked away to avoid the woman's glare.

"Well," the Doctor began, "we might not need him. If I could manage to communicate with the Stellans I could ask them why they are doing this. Depending on their reasons we might be able to find a more... peaceful solution to this problem."

Zack agreed to give him one chance and the Doctor sat down on cabin floor, in a position not unlike that of Morgana the seer. He was going to attempt a telepathic contact,

he said, so we all had to be quiet so that he could concentrate. I felt very grateful towards the Doctor at that moment. I really didn't like the idea of Rio taming the Stellans, or any other animal for that matter. Hopefully the Doctor would find another way.

But my hope was short-lived as the train suddenly shook again. The Doctor let out a frustrated moan. "It's no use!" he said. "They don't seem to want to listen to me! They're intent on breaking into this train!"

"What do we do now then?" asked Jamie. "I don't fancy becoming food to some space animals!"

The Doctor told Jamie that the Stellans don't eat humans, but the boy didn't seem convinced. Zack reminded the Doctor that he only gave him one chance, so it was now time to get Rio. I was sure that the Doctor would protest, that he would tell that ring-master that there were better ways to deal with this situation, but to my surprise, not to mention my dismay, he just nodded.

"Where does this animal tamer have his cabin?" he asked, to no one in particular.

"At the far end of the train, well almost, on the other side of Betzy's" answered Cedric.

The Doctor nodded again and turned to me. "Polly, would you be so kind and fetch mister Rio for us?" he asked.

I began to protest, but Ben interrupted me. "Come on duchess! Do as the Doctor says, before we all become crushed to stardust." I glared at him for a moment before saying 'Fine!' and running out of the cabin before anyone could say anything else.

I caught a glimpse of Betzy the clown as I quickly walked through the dining cabin. She was sitting by a table, eating a banana, and waved at me when I passed by, but I didn't wave back. I wanted to get to Rio's cabin as quickly as possible. If I had to do this, I thought, the sooner I got it over with, the better. So I ran through the other cabins, including that of Morgana the seer, which was empty this time. Finally I reached Betzy's cabin and stopped in front of the door to the next one.

There I was, outside Rio's cabin. I hesitated for a second, before I knocked on the door.

"Come i-in!" came his sing-song voice from inside and I did as he said. I closed the door behind my back and it automatically locked itself.

"Rio..." I said, my voice sounding a bit stiff, even in my own ears, "the Doctor wonders

if... if there's any chance that you would be able to... tame the Stellans!" I finished the sentence with a bad taste in my mouth.

"And what do you wonder, Miss Polly?"

I blinked in surprise. That was not the response I had expected. Maybe, I thought, Rio had noticed my disgust for the question I had just asked. I didn't want him to tame the Stellans. Those magnificent creature, those living constellations, surely they deserved to be free. It was true that they were currently attacking us, but surely they wouldn't do that without a reason. They must have a reason.

"I wonder..." I spoke, less stiffly this time. "Do you know why the Stellans are attacking us? The Doctor said they don't eat humans, so why would they want to attack us?"

"If I were to tell you that, Miss Polly, you will be eaten by the beast" He answered smugly.

"The Doctor said..." I began protesting, but Rio interrupted me and tutted.

"Not the Stellans of course, dear Miss Polly. I meant the other beast." He said, like it was the most obvious thing in the universe.

"What other beast?" I asked, now totally confused, not to mention annoyed that I didn't understand something that Rio made out to be obvious. Even though his long hair almost covered his entire face, I had the feeling that he was smirking at me behind those black locks.

"Look behind you!" he said in a teasing voice.

I turned around slowly, afraid of what I might find, but there was nothing there. I turned back towards Rio to tell him this, and caught my heart in my throat as I was faced by a huge lion! At least, it looked like a lion, only it had three heads and twice as many tails! For a few second, I was frozen to the spot, but as soon as I could move my legs again I ran for the door.

The lion roared, with all three of its heads, and walked menacingly towards me as I fumbled with the lock. I could feel its breath against my neck as I finally managed to get the door open. I ran out, shut the door behind me and locked it tight.

I half walked, half ran back towards the front cabin when I suddenly felt someone grab my arm. I gasped and spun around, to find that it was Morgana the seer. She quickly let go of me and raised her hands up towards the ceiling.

"It is calling for me!" she said, her voice sounding even raspier than usual.

"What is?" I asked, while massaging my arm. His grip had been surprisingly strong for someone who looked so fragile.

"A past!" She said, "A person's past is calling for me! I see.... a train!"

I was going to joke that the reason for that might be because we are on a train, but before I could open my mouth, Morgana spoke again. "Not this train, but a different one!" So much for my joke. "And on it, is a girl!" she continued. "And seven men!"

"I'm sorry Morgana," I said, apologetically. "but I really have to get back to the Doctor now!"

I turned and began to walk away from her, thinking that I simply didn't have time to listen to her ramblings, but then she said something that caught my attention.

"One of the men is old and white-haired and has the same soul as your dark-haired friend!"

I stopped and turned to stare at the old seer. It couldn't be, could it? Was she really talking about the Doctor? I mean, the Doctor from before, as he was when Ben and I first met him. The old man with the white hair that had beaten that horrible computer WOTAN, and sent Dodo north for a rest. And then changed before our eyes, amidst the snow, into the man we now knew and loved. I decided then that Morgana's ramblings might be worth my time after all.

"And there's a creature!" the old woman continued. "He's bringing another hand-cuffed man aboard the train." I felt worried for a second, before remembering that, even if these events that Morgana described were real, they were all in the past. The Doctor's past.

"The girl spits on the creature!" I raised my eyebrows. Whoever this girl was she had guts to do something like that. "And now, the white-haired man is standing up! He's saying something. Yes, I can hear him! 'Just take them!' he says. 'Take them and spare the other three, at least'!"

I pretty much stopped listening at that point, Morgana's recounting of the Doctor's exclamations becoming little more than a background noise in my ears. I could barely make out more 'Take them's and 'Take me's, as my mind was focused on something else. A number. Three.

I knew now. I knew why the Stellans were attacking this train.

I just about caught Morgana saying something about a Time Lord, before she fell

silent. "I have to go." I told her, before I turned and ran towards the front cabin. I had to tell the Doctor about this, before it was too late.

I ran to the other end of Betzy's Cabin, stumbled over the cards and flowers in Cedric's cabin and had just reached Morgana's dark place when the train shook violently again. I fell onto my back and just about managed to catch one of the candle-sticks before it reached the floor and started a fire.

Once the train stopped shaking I stood up slowly and put the candles aside, on a table by one of the windows. As I looked out I saw, to my great horror, that the train had been torn in two. From where I was standing, I could see right into Aysha's cabin, as the back of it was open to space. I could go no further.

As I'd come to this conclusion, I instead decided to go back, but I had only just entered Cedric's cabin, as my path was blocked by Rio the animal tamer. "What's the hurry Miss Polly?" He asked, in a tone which told me that he already knew the answer.

"Where is it?" I asked back, as demandingly as I could manage.

"Where is what?" Rio tilted his head in feigned confusion.

"The third Stellan." I said. "The Doctor said that the Stellans travel in families of three, but there's only two of them outside the train. So, where is the third one?"

"I wouldn't know" Rio answered, smiling smugly as he did so. Oh, how I hated that smile, but I wasn't going to let him get away with this.

"If that's the case, then you wouldn't mind it if I searched through this part of the train, would you?" I took a step forward, towards the door to Betzy's cabin, but was quickly stopped by Rio's outstretched arms.

"Not so fast, Miss Polly!" he said. I opened my mouth to make some witty comment, but fell silent as I saw his cold, threatening glare. I swallowed, my confidence quickly fading away. If this man could tame creatures as huge and strong as the Stellans, who knew what he could do to me if I pushed him too far. Not knowing what else to do, I just stood still, thinking. We must have been staring at each other for a few minutes, when suddenly...

"DISASTER!!!" came a loud, shriek from behind Rio, who jumped to the side, startled. I saw my chance and ran through the now open door, which then closed behind me. I stopped, just by Betzy's wardrobe, and turned to thank my saviour. It was, of course, none other than Morgana the seer. She bolted the door, so that Rio wouldn't be able to follow us,

and then turned to me.

“I know what you seek,” she told me, “and I think I know where it is!”

“Where!?” I asked, eager to find the third Stellan as soon as possible.

“Follow me!”

Morgana walked passed me, towards Rio’s cabin. She stopped by the door and turned towards me again, a slightly impatient look on her face. I took a deep breath and then followed her inside ‘the lion’s den’, to coin a phrase.

To my surprise, Morgana didn’t stop as we entered Rio’s cabin. Instead, continued walking until she reached the other end of it. I went after her and found her standing by another door. I stared at it in confusion for a moment, before I spoke.

“I thought that this cabin was the last one?”

Cedric had said that, hadn’t he? That Rio’s cabin was at the far end of the train? But Morgana shook her head.

“There is but one more,” she said, in a whispery voice “for *special storage*”

“Oh!” Not knowing what more to say, I instead reached out a hand and tried the door, but it wouldn’t open. “It’s locked!” I moaned, which made Morgana chuckle for some reason.

“Not if you have the key,” she said and dangled a large chain of them in front of me. She then shoved me aside, gently but firmly, and opened the door.

“It’s huge!” I exclaimed, as we entered the storage cabin. Morgana explained that it had to be, as there were huge circus tools stored inside it. Although I couldn’t argue with that logic, I wished it wasn’t the case. It would take us ages to search through this place. At least, that’s what I thought. However, we had only been looking for a couple of minutes, when I heard a melodic cry, coming from the other end of the cabin. I looked at Morgana and she nodded, before leading me towards the sound. It must come from the third Stellan, I thought.

True enough, when we reached the end of the cabin, and the train, we found a huge cage, hidden behind a pair of enormous storage cans, and in it was a Stellan. It was smaller than the other two, which I had seen when looking out the window earlier, but it was still big enough to be uncomfortable in its current, cramped position.

“We have to get it out!” I said.

“Hmm, that might not be possible for us,” came Morgana’s response.

“What!?” I exclaimed. “We’ve finally found it and *now* you tell me we can’t set it free!?”

“Not by ourselves,” the seer nodded.

“Then what should we...” I stopped myself, as the solution suddenly became clear to me.

“Earlier,” I began slowly, “the Doctor tried to contact the Stellans through some sort of telepathy. You wouldn’t possibly be able to do the same?”

The old woman’s face lit up and she told me that, of course she could! She sat down on the floor, in her meditative position. I could only watch and hope, as she muttered the words ‘Morgana calling the Stellans’ over and over.

“Ah!” she exclaimed suddenly.

“What is it?” I asked, half worried, half excited.

“We have contact,” she whispered.

“Then tell them we’ve found their family member,” I said, now just excited.

“Yes, yes” she muttered, impatiently. The Stellans were overjoyed, she told me once her conversation with them was over. The one in the cage was their son, and they were eager to get him back. Morgana had asked them to just give us a little time to get to another cabin, so we wouldn’t get crushed once they free their child. They agreed, and so we made our way back between all the cans and boxes.

Morgana were muttering something about Zack getting angry at her, because of what the Stellans would do to the storage cabin, but I didn’t care. We had won. The Stellans would get their son back and no one had to be tamed. We once again experienced a violent shaking, as the Stellans tore the storage cabin apart and retrieved the third member of their family. I smiled widely, despite of my physical discomfort, but...

My smile faded as the door to Cedric’s cabin flew up and Rio jumped through it, fury written all over his face. He pulled out a whip from and snapped its tongue towards me. I screamed, as I expected the whip to hit my body, but instead, it rolled itself around me, binding me, my arms pressed against my sides. Rio pulled me to him and whispered in my ear.

“You should have known better than to oppose me, Miss Polly,” he snarled. I glanced around, looking for Morgana. She had saved me from this man before, so maybe...

My thoughts were interrupted as Rio whispered to me again. “You’re seer friend

won't help you this time. She's knocked out cold!" I caught my heart in my throat and my chest filled with fear. I couldn't rely on a convenient rescue this time.

Suddenly, I was thrown against one of the windows. I gasped in pain, before looking up to see Rio hovering over me, holding a large clown-ball, in the hand that wasn't grasping the whip's handle.

"Wh-What are you going to do!?" I stuttered in a high-pitched voice, unable to hide my fear.

"You've become too much of a problem, Miss Polly," Rio said in response. "I think it might be best to get rid of you, the same way we get rid of trash on this train."

"H-How?" I asked, though I was afraid to learn the answer.

"By ejecting you into space!"

My eyes widened. "That window behind you might be fairly thick," Rio began, his smug smile returning to his face, "but I think that if you throw this ball at it hard enough, the window would..." He left the rest of the sentence unspoken, but I knew exactly how it would have ended.

"You wouldn't!?" I yelled, while struggling to get free from the whip. "You would get thrown into space with me!" I hoped that would make my captor hesitate, but his smile didn't even falter in the slightest. Instead, he just raised the clown-ball backwards, ready for the throw. He was going to do it! I closed my eyes and waited.

...And waited...

After I had waited for what felt like forever, I opened my eyes again and was surprised to see that Rio was... frozen. Yes, that was the best word for it. He was completely still, didn't move a muscle, the clown-ball still in his hand. Suddenly, the train began shaking again. The frozen Rio and I both fell to the side and I groaned as I hit the floor. Slowly, I managed to get myself up on my knees, the ropes of Rio's whip still tying my arms to my sides. I took some deep breaths, before I looked up, just in time to see a familiar face peak through the open door to Cedric's cabin.

"Doctor!" I exclaimed, breathlessly, and was given a warm, and not unwelcome, smile in response.

"Hello Polly! I see you're a bit tied up!" he said.

If I wasn't completely exhausted, I would probably have scolded the Doctor for the bad pun, but I decided that there was better things to use what little energy I had left for. Like asking him to untie me for example.

Once I was free of the whip, the Doctor and I proceeded to wake up Morgana.

"Uuh, what happened?" she slurred as she opened her eyes. I told her about Rio, his attempt to eject me into space and how he had suddenly become frozen, though I didn't know how. The Doctor explained that it was all the Stellans' doing. When all three of them were together, they had the ability to 'freeze' people at will. Once they'd dealt with Rio, they had then proceeded to put the two halves of the train together again. After that they had told the Doctor about what had happened and told him where to find me, before they left.

"They asked me to thank both of you very much, for finding their child," the Doctor concluded his explanation.

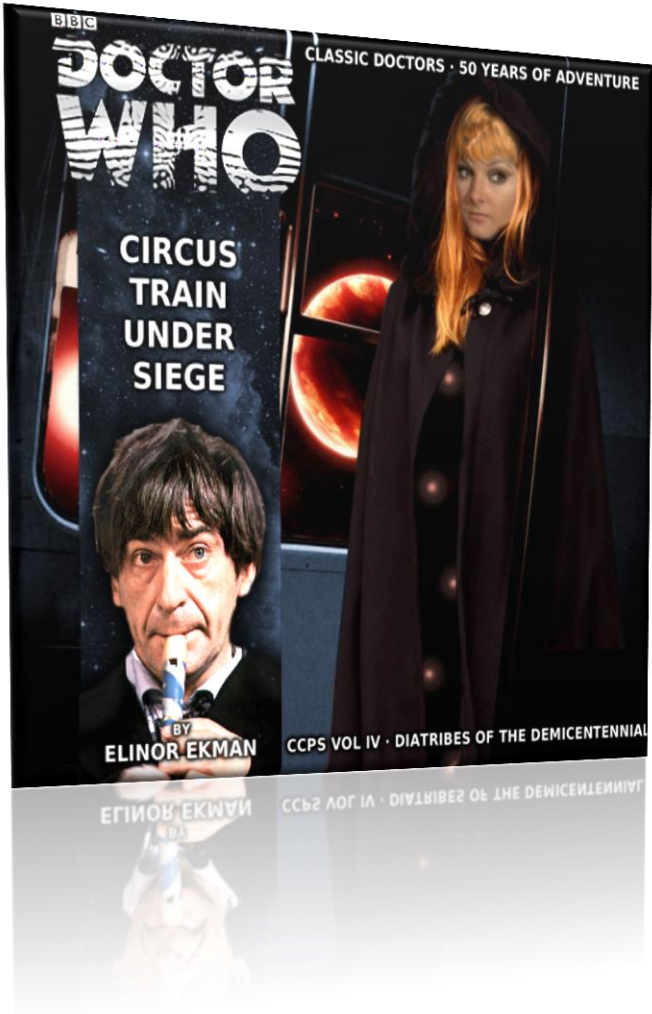
"But, if Rio was frozen as you say," began Morgana, "then where is he?"

I turned around, to where I had left the animal-tamer, only to find that he was indeed gone. The Doctor suggested that, perhaps, the Stellans had taken the man away, as a last favour.

"Good riddance" I muttered. This might sound harsh, but I really felt no pity for a man like Rio the animal-tamer.

A few minutes later we had been joined by Ben and Jamie and were saying our goodbyes to the circus team. It seems Rio really had disappeared from the train altogether and, unlike myself, Aysha was really upset about it. After quickly shaking hands with me, she ran back to her cabin, tears streaming down her face. The Doctor suggested, with a knowing smile on his face, that Cedric should go after her. The Magician blushed and stuttered an 'excuse me', before doing as the Doctor said.

So, once we'd exchanged handshakes with Zack and Morgana and received bear-hugs from Betzy the clown, we went back into the TARDIS and left the Intergalactic Circus Train to continue its journey through the stars.



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CIRCUS TRAIN UNDER SIEGE



BY ELINOR EKMAN

CCPS VOL IV · DIATRIBES OF THE DEMICENTENNIAL

ЕЛИНОР ЕКМАН

СССР В ОЛ IV · ДИАТРИБЕС ОФ ТЕ ДЕМИСЕНТЕННИАЛ