

Santiago Jones pressed his ear to the door.

“Gran?”

He knew she was in there. He could hear her sobbing quietly, and it broke his heart. He eased the door open, and peered into the spare room. He hadn't been in there for years. By the look of it, neither had anyone else. The cramped, dark space was filled with cardboard boxes piled high, each overflowing with souvenirs and trinkets from his grandparents' travels across the globe.

And sitting amidst all the old relics and dusty treasures, dressed from head to toe in black clothes, barely visible in the darkness, was Jo Jones.

The Green Widow

by Samuel Marks

She looked around and, when she saw Santiago standing there in the doorway, forced a smile. “Come in,” she said, “and close the door.”

He did. Jo was sat cross-legged on the floor, carefully searching through all this old stuff. Santiago wasn't surprised that she still had all this. She and his granddad were terrible hoarders. They always held onto things for as long as they could, and found it hard to let go.

“Are you okay, Gran?” asked Santiago kindly.

She nodded, but he knew that she was far from okay.

“What are you looking for?”

“Nothing,” she replied quietly. “Well, nothing in particular. Just... Oh, I don't know. Felt like looking at some of these old things. So many memories in this room.” She choked back the tears, and finished quietly, “All I've got left now, I suppose.”

Santiago put his arm around her. “Granddad wouldn't want to see you like this,” he said. “He'd want you to be out there, Gran, carrying on like normal.”

She said nothing, and simply opened up another box. "What's this?" she wondered aloud, as she emptied the contents of the box onto the floor.

Santiago knelt beside her and looked. It was an old model train, disassembled and dusty and in a hell of a state. But it was vintage and intricate, and so beautiful. "Was this Granddad's?"

Jo shook her head. "Well, I don't know. It's not mine. But he hasn't – I mean, he never mentioned it. Never showed it to me."

Almost absent-mindedly, Jo had begun to clean the train, dusting it off, attaching the carriages and restoring it to how it used to be. At least, she was trying to.

They stared at it for a few moments, that strange little Hornby-esque train that had come out of nowhere. Something about it made Santiago feel strange, and somehow uneasy. But his gran was busy, and her mind was occupied with something, which was good, so he could leave her for now.

"Mum and Dad'll be round later," he said, as he made for the door. "I've just got a few hours at college, and then I'll be back to see you again. Okay? Gran?"

But Jo didn't seem to be listening – at least, not to Santiago. She was holding the model train up to her ear, concentrating hard. "Come here," she said to Santiago. "Listen! I think I can hear..."

Santiago sighed, and smiled sadly. This wasn't good. "Gran, look, maybe you need to rest for a while—"

"I can hear him, though!" she cried out, smiling. "I can hear his voice."

"Gran, you can't – I mean, you know – Granddad's gone. You know that, right?"

"What?" Jo peered closer at the train. "No – it's not Cliff's voice."

"Then... whose?"

Jo's smile grew impossibly wider and brighter. "The Doctor!"

Before Santiago could say another word, there was a flash of pure white light that almost blinded him. He had to shield his eyes.

When he looked again, Jo was gone.

"Gran?" he said nervously. "Gran!"

He scooped up the model train, inspected it closely on all sides, from all angles, (though he wasn't at all sure what he was looking for), and even held it to his ear as his gran had done. But there was nothing. No sign of her whatsoever.

Then the door creaked open.

Santiago must have dropped the train in surprise, because it was smashed to pieces on the floor nearby. He turned, startled, to face the door.

And there was Jo.

“Gran!” He threw his arms around her. “You’re okay!”

“Of course I’m okay,” she said brightly. “Better than ever, in fact.”

“But how – what was – how did you get out there?”

Jo laughed. “Oh, I’ve been a little further than that, Santiago.”

“What? So... Where did you go?”

Jo took a deep breath. “Well, it’s a long story, but here goes...”

The next thing I remembered, after the flash of light, was the Doctor.

I look so different now, but he hadn’t changed a bit. He was standing over me, with his hair no greyer than before, his shirt just as frilly, and his smile as warm and comforting as it always had been.

“Jo?” he asked. “Jo, is that you?”

I knew he’d recognise me. “It’s me, Doctor,” I said. “Where am I?”

The Doctor helped me up off the floor. I was in a train carriage, standing in the aisle. There was no one else there, just the Doctor and I. Everything was silent, no clacking of the rails, no distant conversations in the other carriages, not a single sound to be heard.

I looked out of the windows. There was only darkness. It wasn’t night, mind you. This was pure darkness, like nothing I’d ever seen before. It chilled me to even look out of the window, into the endless black pit, though this deserted train wasn’t much better.

“It’s just us,” the Doctor said quietly. “The whole train’s empty – I’ve checked. No driver. Not that he’s needed – we’re not actually going anywhere. Well, you see, Jo, there’s nowhere to go. We’re in some sort of void. Perhaps *the Void*, the space between dimensions. Limbo. Or, as some people know it, Hell.”

“If you’re trying to comfort me, Doctor, you’re not doing a very good job.” I had to laugh. “Let’s stick with Limbo, shall we? Sounds a little less terrifying.”

The Doctor mumbled an apology and nodded. He stared at me, his eyes narrowing, as he studied me closely. “If you don’t mind me saying so, you look... you look...” He was searching for the right word, but I knew what he meant.

“Older? Yes, well, I suppose I am.”

“Hmm.” The Doctor said nothing else for a while, only that noise. Finally, he said, “Tell me, Jo, how did you end up here?”

I thought hard. My head was aching, and everything was still a bit fuzzy – even more so than things usually are now. I remembered little, only grabbed images, like flicking through a photo album at high speed.

“I remember I was in a room, at my house,” I said, “sorting through some old boxes. I found something – something I hadn’t expected to find.”

“Was it a train set, by any chance?” said the Doctor.

“Yes!” I said. “Yes, it was. But how did you—”

“Because I think I found the same one, just forty years earlier.”

I sat down in one of the empty seats. “Okay. Explain.”

The Doctor sat across the aisle from me and took a deep breath.

“I was at UNIT HQ with my new – I mean, with a friend of mine – and I received a strange package through the post: a model train set. As soon as I picked it up, there was this strange light, and I found myself here.”

“The same thing happened to me,” I replied. “Well, nothing came through the post or anything. But I found a train and as soon as I touched it, poof! Now I’m here.”

“Some sort of spatiotemporal teleportation module,” the Doctor mused, “disguised, it would appear, as a toy train. But *why* a train?”

Why not? I thought. But I was still stuck on ‘spatiotemporal’...

“Well,” he went on, “we’ve been plucked from across time and space and brought here, to Limbo. Me from 1974 and you from – by my estimations – somewhere around 2013.”

I nodded. “So why are we here?”

“Good question. Here’s another one: how are we going to get out?”

I could see that the Doctor was a little panicked, and I was too. I wasn’t used to him not having the answers. Maybe it was my memory playing tricks. Maybe he wasn’t the infallible hero I had remembered him as for the last forty years. But I didn’t expect to see him this... well, I should know better than this, but he seemed... scared.

Before we could even look for a way out, the lights snapped off, quite suddenly. It was now as dark inside the train as it was outside, and I could see nothing at all. I tried to reach for the Doctor's hand, but I couldn't find him, and that made me feel even worse.

"Doctor," I whispered. "Doctor?" I must have sounded so pathetic. I wasn't a little girl anymore. I was a grown woman, smart and mature and capable... or so I had thought. Now, though, I wasn't so sure. I wanted to remain strong – for myself, and for him – but I couldn't. I just *couldn't*.

In a way, I was almost relieved we were shrouded in such impenetrable blackness, because I meant I could wipe the tear from my cheek without him noticing. I wished that the Doctor didn't hear my cries for him, or my whimpers in the dark.

And then the lights snapped on again, and I realised that he hadn't heard me at all. The Doctor had simply vanished. His seat was empty, not a trace of him left.

"Doctor!" I cried out.

At least, I think I called his name aloud. In my head, I was screaming for him. But everything that had happened recently, with Cliff and everything else... I don't think I had it in me to scream and shout and cry much more.

I was so panicked that the Doctor was no longer there that it took me a few moments to realise that, of course, I still *was* there. And I was alone.

What happened next was so sudden it was reduced to nothing more than a blur in my memory. Before I could comprehend it or make sense of it – though, really, I was used to so little making sense in the Doctor's world – the train tipped onto its side.

I fell across the aisle, through the air, slamming into the window at the other side of the carriage. Well, I must have done. All I really remember is the pain coursing through me as I hit the glass, and the effort it took for me to not only clamber to my feet but to make sense of how everything had rotated ninety degrees, and I was not standing on the side of the train as if it were the floor.

Just as I thought I was starting to make sense of it, the train lurched again. It was slower this time, and I remember more of it. It turned slowly, gradually, carefully, rotating precisely so that I was able to keep my balance, mostly, and I was on my hands and knees, on the ceiling of the train.

I heard the doors from the other carriage slide open, and I looked up to see a figure walking into the carriage. It was a creature that seemed to have been born in the darkness,

a walking, living shadow. Shaped like a human, yes, but with no features at all. An echo of a man: blank, pure darkness. In my heart, I remember thinking, pure evil.

The shadow seemed immune to whatever effects had overturned the train, and was walking along the aisle of the carriage, along the floor, as if it were still the right way up. I, of course, was still on the ceiling, and as I clambered to my feet, I looked up at the shadow that should have been looking up at me, and watched as it made its way down the aisle.

The shadow was getting closer, gliding along, like a ghost, and my head was growing fuzzier. My perceptions were so warped and twisted, along with the train, that I could barely make sense of any of this any longer.

I needed him then. I needed the man who had given me so much, for so long, who had been everything to me, my whole life, and had now been cruelly taken from me by the darkness.

“Cliff,” I said quietly. “I need you.”

Outside the windows, the darkness peeled away, replaced by pure, blinding whiteness. I had to shield my eyes from it. Though the shadow had no eyes, one of its arms formed in front of its face, and it recoiled from the light.

My vision returned to me, slowly, and I peered out of the window.

Looking back at me, suspended in nothingness, was a single human eye. It stared in through the window of the train, looking at me, then at the shadow, and it squinted, examining us closer.

It blinked, and as if on cue, the train slowly began to rotate again, turning itself the right way up. I stood face-to-face with the shadow creature, though I didn't look at it and instead focussed on the disembodied eye outside the window.

I could see my reflection in that huge eye. I could see the train reflected, in fact, the whole train, in the middle of complete nothingness. It all seemed rather preposterous, when I viewed it like that. Especially when I stopped to consider that I was viewing it reflected in a huge disembodied eye.

Then I realised, actually, it wasn't *this* train I was seeing. It wasn't a reflection. The eye was showing me another train, almost identical to this one, but a different one: I could see people in the carriage, just tiny little figures, but they were there, and it wasn't my train, but was actually another.

But this person – whoever it was, whomever the eye belonged to – how could they be looking into this place? Is that even what they were doing? Could they help me? I had to hope so. I had no other choice.

“Hello?” I called out nervously. “Can – can you help me? My name’s Josephine, but everyone calls me Jo. You can call me Jo, if you like – if you can. Can you speak? Umm. Listen, I think I need some help. I don’t know where I am—”

“Well, you should know, shouldn’t you?” came the reply, through the air.

I laughed nervously. Bit rude. I didn’t like her tone. And it *was* a woman’s voice I heard. She was rather well spoken, and I found myself speaking a little more posh accordingly.

“I suppose I *should* know, really, yes. But frankly I’m a bit out of practice with all this time travel business. I’m not really much of an adventurer any more.”

“Or indeed an impressionist!” came the reply, out of nothingness.

“Oh, I wasn’t – I mean, I wasn’t trying to imitate you,” I said hastily, a little embarrassed. “No, sorry. Didn’t mean to offend you.”

I glanced over at the shadow. It was just standing there, motionless, doing nothing at all. Somehow that made it all the more terrifying. I had to act to save myself, before it pounced – as it inevitably would soon enough.

“Excuse me,” I said hurriedly. “I know we don’t know each other, but you seem to be here – or at least your eye is, and that’s good enough for me at the moment – and I need your help. Do you know how I can escape? Oh, and any idea where the Doctor’s gone? He’s my friend.”

“I... wouldn’t know.”

“Oh.” I couldn’t hide the disappointment in my voice. “Well, never mind, eh?” I said, forcing a smile. “Just have to work out how to get out on my own. Thanks, though.”

I don’t know if I expected the eye to vanish, but it just stayed there, suspended in the Void, unmoving, blinking only occasionally. It was more unsettling than anything else. Really hindered my ability to think of a plan.

Yes, I’m blaming the disembodied eye for my lack of brainpower. Well, I’ll have you know it was very distracting. It’s bad enough being watched by regular size eyes – imagine a great big one, just hanging there in the sky!

I laughed nervously. “Couldn’t make this up, could you? Trapped on a train in the middle of nowhere, with a shadow monster, and the Doctor’s nowhere to be seen.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” came the reply, as the eye blinked rapidly, “but I would never write something like that, certainly it would never have green skin.”

“No, I wasn’t saying *you* made it up, I was – wait, what are you even talking about? Green? What’s *green*?” I replied, exasperated.

I shook it off. I had to think. “Think, Jo,” I said aloud. “Maybe I can, umm... Could I phone someone?” I rummaged in my pockets for my mobile phone: no signal. Of course not – we were outside all of time and space, after all.

But honestly, it would probably only have been embarrassing: I was never much good at working them, anyway. “So, no phone,” I finished miserably.

“Stupid idea,” said the voice.

“Who *are* you, anyway?” I huffed.

But I got no reply. At least, not from the eye.

I heard a groan from behind me – from the shadow. I took a step backwards, but it wasn’t trying to intimidate me, I don’t think. It was trying to talk.

“Muuurrr,” it moaned. It had no mouth, but it’s sound carried over to me like the wind. Though, of course, there was no wind in Limbo. It was all very confusing.

“Muuurrr...”

“What is it?” I asked kindly, fighting back the fear. “What are you trying to tell me?”

The shadow raised an arm, and pointed at the eye. “Muh, muh, me! Meeeuuugh. Me.”

“You? The eye – that’s you?”

The shadow shook its head.

“So what do you mean? Oh! The woman – she’s talking to you? Or she was, once? We’re looking at her through *your* eyes? Or something like you?”

A nod from the creature, and the eye faded away.

“What on Earth are you, then? You made the Doctor disappear. You brought us here, to this hellish place. Why? What exactly do you do?”

As if to answer my question, the shadow slowly, horrifically, began to morph into a shape that I recognised. It was changing into the Doctor! His features started to form out of

formlessness, hair sprouting from the darkness, brightly-coloured clothes appearing to be made from pure shadow.

The Doctor – no, the creature using his form – stayed still for a while, doing nothing at all, only looking at me through eyes that were not its own, and then inspecting its body.

Then the figure split into two – the Doctor seemed to be pushed outwards, like he was breaking apart from it, breaking out. He landed on his hands and knees, and I hurried over to him. He said he was okay, and I helped him to his feet.

“Well,” he said, dusting himself off, standing tall before the shadow, “that was rather unpleasant. What exactly are you? A nasty little parasite, I think, feeding off other people. Did I leave a bad taste in your mouth?”

“Doctor,” I said, “it sort of changed into you. It was you, for a moment, but it wasn’t really you, if you know what I mean.”

He nodded. “It’s a shapeshifter, Jo. This creature has no form of its own, so it assimilates others and steals their form. But why did you reject me?” The Doctor seemed a little offended that the shadow had spat him out like that, though the formless, expressionless mass of darkness was giving nothing away. “What’s wrong with me?”

A satisfied smile appeared across the Doctor’s face. “You’re broken.” He snapped his fingers, and grinned excitedly. “That’s it. Or at least, you’re not as good at shapeshifting as you once were. Don’t worry – I’m not the young man I once was.”

Or the young man you *will* be, one day, I had to stop myself from saying, as I remembered the other Doctor I had met with Sarah Jane Smith. It had felt so different then, standing at his side, to how it felt standing in that train carriage, with *my* Doctor.

But I couldn’t think about all that now. I had to help the Doctor to solve this, and to tell him what I knew – however insignificant it might seem. He would make sense of all this, I was sure of that. I had to be.

“I saw something, Doctor. In the eye. Did you see the eye? There was a big eye, outside the window, and I looked into it and I saw something. There was another train! The shadow told me – I think – I was looking through its eyes. Could this... shapeshifter have been on that other train too?”

All through this, the shadow was unmoving. It said or did nothing. Could it physically not say or do anything, I wondered?

“Quite possibly,” he said. “Is that what happened to you? You challenged someone else, and they defeated you?” The Doctor drummed his chin. “Hmm. It would certainly explain its lack of ability. Tell me, Jo, was the train you saw similar to this one?”

“It was, I think. Maybe even the same one. If not, almost identical.”

“Hmm,” he said again. He looked deep in thought for a moment. “Then it’s not just the *shadow* that’s a remnant of the past, an echo – it’s this whole place.” The Doctor addressed the shapeshifter. “Were you defeated on a train like this one? By whom?” He got no reply. “The Eternals? The Time Lords? One particularly brave and handsome Time Lord?”

There was only silence.

“So what does this... thing actually want, Doctor?”

“A new life. A fresh start. And it needs a new body.”

“Us?”

“Obviously not. I was rejected, and it clearly doesn’t want you. No offence, Jo, but it has had ample opportunity to assimilate you. But why not? Perhaps the TARDIS has made us immune to its cheap tricks...”

I let out a little laugh. “Or maybe we’re just too old for it.” I had a sudden thought. “Doctor – what were you saying earlier? About spatiotemporal connections?”

The Doctor seemed annoyed at this interruption to his thinking. “A link to bring us here, yes,” he said wearily, then sighed. “A connection between various points in space and time to get us here and then breaking off—”

“But did it? I mean, what if the link’s still open?”

“Then we could escape!” the Doctor said.

“Yes, but... So could the shadow.”

“But who’s out there, in range of the link, that could be at risk?”

I felt a shiver spread though my body. “Oh God, no...”

The eye outside of the train appeared again – but no, that was wrong: it was a different eye, and I knew immediately who it belonged to...

“Santiago!” I cried out.

“How’s he connected?” asked the Doctor.

“He was in the room with me, looking at the train.”

“Must be within range,” he mused. “His presence out there is affecting us in here.”

“Could him moving the model train around out there cause us to feel similar effects in here, turning everything upside down and completely doolally? You know, with that spatiotemporal thingy you mentioned earlier?”

The Doctor grinned. “That’s it, Jo! Santiago might just be the solution to all this. Do you think he’ll be able to hear us?”

But the shadow caught my attention. It was moving again, towards the nearest window. It looked longingly out at Santiago’s eye, which was hanging in the Void.

“It’s going to escape back into our world through the link – through the eye – and steal a new body in the process. Very clever plan, really.”

“Doctor, that’s my grandson!”

The Doctor nodded. “Of course, Jo. Now, can he hear us?” he pressed.

“I... I’m not sure,” I replied, a little flustered. “I heard you earlier on today. But when there was the other eye – someone else, maybe connected somehow, who I didn’t recognise... Thinking about it, I don’t think she could quite hear me.”

The Doctor thought hard. “What’s the key here?”

“Earlier on, before I was transported here, I heard *you* calling out,” I said. “Maybe there had to be a personal, emotional connection between people in order for them to communicate?”

“So you could call out to Santiago,” the Doctor realised. “Make him hear you and help us get out of here.”

I looked to the shadow. It seemed to be phasing through the wall of the carriage, out into Limbo – towards our world – towards Santiago!

“But – but what am I supposed to tell him? To call UNIT?”

“He has to destroy the train.”

“What? We’ll be lost in Limbo!”

“No, we won’t, I promise – now, concentrate, Jo! Do it!”

I closed my eyes and thought hard, unsure what I was supposed to be doing.

Santiago, I said inwardly, calling to him with my thoughts, feeling a little daft as I did it. *Santiago, my darling, can you hear me? It’s Gran. I need you to help me.*

I squeezed an eye open and saw that the shadow was out of the train now, and had now lost all human-like form, and was drifting towards the eye as a great black cloud, like a terrible storm.

Santiago! Hear me. You have to destroy the train set you're holding. It's the key. Throw it against the wall. Stamp on it. It doesn't matter. Just destroy it!

I heard a rattle, and a crash, and a cry of pain – from the shadow.

The train broke apart around me. I was cast out into the white void. There was no up, no down, no left or right, and I just sort of floated there, drifting through nothingness.

“Doctor!” I called out.

He was close by. “We did it, Jo. We're free.”

“Are we?” I gave a nervous laugh. “Looks like we're just trapped in somewhere that's slightly less confined – but still trapped nonetheless!”

“Have faith, my dear.” He pointed into the distance – if this place could even *have* distance...

But there was the TARDIS! It was spinning towards us, through the white space, the wheezing and groaning growing louder and more soothing as the seconds passed...

The Doctor and I found ourselves in the TARDIS console room, lying flat on the floor, with the model train sitting there between us. Instinctively I scurried away from it.

“It's okay, Jo,” the Doctor said soothingly. “This is the one I touched that brought me to Limbo. It'll never take me back there – and it's destined to zap you there in 2013. Something to look forward to, isn't it? The real train – as much as the construction of the one in Limbo was real – is gone.”

“And what happened to the shadow – to the shapeshifter? Is it still stuck there?”

“It was never even stuck there in the first place. Not really.”

“What?”

“As a formless creature, it could have escaped with relative ease. But it chose, rather foolishly, to stay there. To wait for a chance to trap us, and hurt us.”

“It was after revenge?”

The Doctor nodded. “I think so.” He flicked a few switches on the controls. “From what I can gather, one of its fellow shapeshifters was defeated and cast away – seemingly one it knew well and was close to, at a guess because of some sort of bond or shared consciousness, hence the visitation of the eye in Limbo – maybe by myself or a fellow Time Lord. Either way, the one we encountered wanted to avenge its ally. And it became obsessed with the idea of punishing me – by harming *my* friends in return.”

“Stuck in the past – not physically but... psychologically?”

The Doctor made his way over to me and put his hands on my shoulders. “Indeed, Jo. It couldn’t see anything else, so focussed was it on memories of the past. There was no way for it to look forward, then. That’s a terrible way to live, isn’t it? You have to move on, no matter how safe the past feels, and how much the present hurts.”

I nodded in silence, understanding enough.

“Now, we have to get rid of this train,” said the Doctor. “It’s an incredibly dangerous piece of technology, that’s for sure. But I don’t know where it should be taken. We can’t destroy it...”

“Actually, Doctor, we know *exactly* where it has to go. I need to touch it in 2013, remember? It has to be at my house.”

“So I give it to you – to the younger version of you?”

I shook my head. “No. I never knew it was there. It belonged to someone else. To my husband.”

The Doctor sighed heavily. “I’ll go alone and give this to him. I doubt you thought I would notice, but I can see that you’re upset – and it doesn’t take a Time Lord to know why. I’m so sorry for your loss. I won’t put you through the pain of seeing him again.”

“Actually... I mean, if it’s okay... *Could* I come with you?” The Doctor opened his mouth to refuse me, so I quickly added, “I won’t do or say anything to jeopardise the timelines or anything. I remember the Blinovitch thing.”

The Doctor smiled wryly. “I wouldn’t worry too much about that.” He stared at me for a while. “You sure you’re ready?”

“No,” I had to admit. “But I want to see him again.”

“Of course you do, but *he* really shouldn’t see *you*. Just in case...”

The Doctor hurried off into the depths of the TARDIS, and returned a few moments later with an impenetrable black veil. “You’ll have to wear this, I’m afraid,” he said, as I put it over my face. “We can’t risk him recognising you. Too many questions. Is that okay?”

It wasn’t ideal, but it would conceal my identity (though time had done that well enough, I thought – I wasn’t the girl I was then) and if that were what it would take to see my darling Cliff one last time, I wasn’t going to argue.

A few moments later and we were standing outside the house that Cliff and I first moved into after we got married, before we set off travelling again. I had to fight back the tears as I looked upon our old house, the front door with the wonky number nine that I had almost forgotten, and then I saw *him*. My Cliff.

He was weeding the garden when he looked up and spotted the Doctor and I standing across the road, watching him.

“Doctor!” he called out, in the voice that I thought I’d heard for the last time, flashing that smile that I had never quite accepted I wouldn’t see again. He came hurrying over to us. “How are you?”

“Not so bad, Clifford. How’s married life treating you so far?”

“Wonderfully,” he replied. “It’s perfect.”

He looked at me, but I knew – well, I hoped – that he couldn’t see who I really was, through the veil. Would he even have recognised me without it?

“Hello,” he said politely.

I could only nod. I didn’t know what to say.

“Now, my boy, listen to me,” said the Doctor. “I have a present for you. A wedding gift, I suppose, but it’s just for you.” The Doctor handed Cliff the model train set, which he was understandably surprised at.

“Oh, it’s... Yeah, it’s nice.”

“You must never play with this toy, do you understand me?” said the Doctor, waggling his finger in Cliff’s face. “And do not let anyone else touch it – not ever. Put it away in a box, in a spare room. Keep it out of sight, and preferably out of mind. Forget about it, if you can.”

“That’ll be easy,” teased Cliff. “So I’m just holding onto this for you?”

“For... a friend of mine. She’ll need it one day.”

Cliff nodded, obviously understanding little but just enough. Bless him.

“Hey, Doctor – Jo’s just inside. She’d love to see you again.”

The Doctor looked at me. “Better not, Cliff, if you don’t mind.” He pointed back at the TARDIS. “Lots to do. Best you don’t even tell her I stopped by, eh? I shouldn’t really be here at all.”

“Okay, Doctor.” He looked down at the train, looking understandably befuddled.

“And I’ll keep this safe for you.”

“Good man,” said the Doctor, shaking Cliff by the hand.

And then Cliff’s eyes rested on me and, though the veil covered my face, it was like he was looking right through it, into my eyes, and I still wonder if he could see it was me.

“Smile,” he said kindly.

“What?” I breathed.

“You look upset,” he said. “Whatever it is, I’m sure it’ll get better.”

“I doubt it,” I said.

He smiled at me, and I found myself smiling back, despite everything.

“That’s better,” he said. “Keep smiling.”

“Goodbye, Cliff,” I said, as he went back into the house.

The Doctor led me by the hand back to the TARDIS.

“Right,” said the Doctor, “now it’s time to get you home. Back to 2013.”

I watched him busying himself at the console. I used to be able to keep up with him. Now I wasn’t so sure. “So... all the time distortions are fixed now?” I asked. “When I get home, it’ll just be an ordinary train set?”

“Y-yes,” the Doctor hesitated. “Well, almost ordinary. Don’t forget that Santiago had to destroy it for us to escape, remember? But if there’s much left of it, there may be one or two leftover distortions. Aftershocks. Remnants. Echoes.”

“Echoes of what?”

The Doctor smiled sadly. “You’ll see. And speaking of that sort of thing – cracks in the timelines and such – I’m afraid this encounter has put an end to any plans of us being reunited again.”

“What?”

“The time lines around the two of us, Jo, have been completely corrupted. Even the TARDIS is struggling to contain the pair of us in this space, so strong is the force between us.” He patted the console. “Isn’t that right, old girl? This business with the shapeshifter, selfishly colliding the past and the present and the future, has rendered any further meetings between you and I more or less impossible, except in very grave circumstances. It certainly wouldn’t be safe, threatening all reality for a cup of tea and a catch-up.”

I thought for a moment, trying to understand. When I had met up with some of the Doctor’s other friends – lovely Sarah Jane Smith, for instance, and the Brig – they had

always talked about how the Doctor had returned to see them throughout the years. But not me, I had always thought, and wondered why.

But it was nothing personal, as it turned out, just a stupid bit of technical nonsense. There was a perfectly sensible explanation, as there always was with him.

“Okay, Doctor. I understand.”

“Good girl, Jo.” He threw a lever on the console, and the doors opened. “Here we are – 2013. Just outside your home. About, ooh, seven seconds after you disappeared. Thank goodness I didn’t bring you home seven seconds *before* you disappeared – I think the whole world might just have stopped turning, with recent events.”

Yes, he was right. So much had happened recently, and it had come so close to my world stopping altogether. But no, it would keep on spinning, because it had to, because I wanted it to. Because I knew, in my heart, Cliff would want that for me too.

“Thank you, Doctor,” I said. “This was wonderful. Unexpected and terrifying, yes... But still wonderful.”

“It was rather, wasn’t it?” The Doctor hugged me tight. “Goodbye, Jo.”

“Wow,” said Santiago. “Like... wow.”

“I know,” said Jo, smiling brightly.

“So you did all that,” Santiago went on, still taking it all in, “in the time that it took me to walk over there and pick up the model train. Time travel’s amazing.”

“Isn’t it, though? I miss it sometimes. I forget how wonderful it all was. Yes, there were monsters – of course there were. But really, when you think about all those old times – and the times that are still to come – it was all just magic.”

Santiago rubbed his head. “I don’t remember you talking to me, though. I mean, like, I didn’t hear your voice or anything.”

“Not consciously, perhaps,” said Jo. She pointed at the corner of the room. There was the train set, smashed up into a thousand pieces, having been hurled at the wall. “But you heard me, somehow. And you saved me. Thank you.”

“Go me,” Santiago replied, allowing himself a smile. “But, Gran – what did the Doctor mean about echoes?”

Jo shrugged. She bent over and picked up the train on the floor. One of the carriages was still more or less intact. She squeezed her eyes tightly shut, and Santiago saw that she

was concentrating hard on something. Whatever it was, it made her happy, as her smile grew and grew and grew.

Santiago knew, as Jo clutched the train tightly and held it close to her heart, that she was seeing Granddad again.

“Cliff,” she breathed.

Then Jo stepped out of the room, alongside Santiago, and closed the door.

And she never looked back, only forwards. Always forwards. To the future.

