

Here I am, writing the next few pages of this journal while riding a coach back to Percy and the rest of my companions. In the last page I said how I had made up my mind about leaving the Doctor, his hypnotic charm blinding me to the death that always stalks him. Telling him was not easy; he took a lot of convincing, as I imagined he would.

“I can change your mind, we can go to such-and-such where it’s always peaceful” or “This place is known for its high level of serenity!”

My beloved Doctor, I knew you would take this hard.

The Last Ride

by David Hogan

It is perhaps not surprising then, that he did convince me to take one last trip. Not to a planet, not to the past or future of Earth, but to a train. “The most amazing train ever built!” he said, “It stretches across a whole solar system and connects several planets, oh and get this: it was designed to resemble old Earth trains from your time period!” I was unconvinced, but then he caught me out.

“Look, when we first began travelling you criticized my TARDIS for cutting out the travel, that it is sometimes more about the travel than the destination. Come on, Mary... just this one train ride. Let’s end our travels on a positive note. Please?”

Before I knew it the TARDIS console did its usual rumbling and churning, the central pillar rising and falling. My heart was beating fast, as it always did when I knew we were moving, yet I did not feel movement. Eventually the Doctor looked up and smiled.

“We’re here!” he shouted, checking his glass screen for information, an idea that still baffles me as much as travelling through time. “Yes, a perfect journey, one that has no

record of any nefarious activity. The train is already in motion. Shall we?" Well, what was I to say?

We stepped out of the TARDIS and into what did indeed look like an average baggage cart, luggage and boxes everywhere. The TARDIS looked no more out of place than the train itself; a fact confirmed when the Doctor lured me towards a window. My God. I have seen the stars from Earth, I have seen new stars glistening in an alien sky, but this... I was amongst the stars... planets and stars and galaxies, things I knew so little about but things that were undeniably beautiful. I was truly awestruck.

Eventually the Doctor grabbed my hand in his and asked if I wanted to see more of the train. I agreed, but he then warned me that this train, although of Earth construction, was used by many different races for tourist purposes. I readied myself for what was going to be behind the door, but little did I imagine so many different... things. People with bright blue skin, giant lizards standing upright with pointed heads, more things I don't think I could actually describe. Just in front of us was a man who looked human in all but the fact he had three heads! Three! He, I believe it was a he, walked up to the Doctor.

"Good morning/Stop right there!/Can I talk to you sir?" the three heads said, one after another, first the left, then the right, then the centre head. My word, if anyone finds this journal they will truly believe me mad.

"Er... yes." the Doctor replied. I could see he was fascinated – was this a race that even my well-travelled Doctor did not know?

"Sorry to bother you/I going to ask you a question and you better give me a good answer!/Can I ask you a question sir?"

The Doctor was baffled, and slightly amused I felt.

"Certainly... sirs?"

"No need to worry at all sir, please enjoy your trip/We're looking for an escaped convict, where were you four hours ago??/I am an officer of the Twin Systems rail authority and I need to see your identification."

An escaped convict - oh joy unconfined! The Doctor had done it again. Wherever he goes the cold scythe of the reaper is rarely far behind. I knew this last journey would be a mistake, I told myself. The Doctor was going through his coat pockets in a state of slight panic – whether because of the police officer with three heads or because he could sense my anxiety, I couldn't tell you. Finally the Doctor handed the officer a piece of blank white

paper that was laminated. Bizarrely the officer nodded and handed it back before apologising.

“Sorry to bother you/I’ve got my eye on you!/That’s fine sir.”

The Doctor turned to me and winked. “Psychic paper,” he said. “I really must remember to bring some with me more often in the future.” I gave a look towards the officer, and I can only assume the Doctor read my mind, as then he walked towards him.

The officer turned around as the Doctor approached. “I’m sorry, is there something else I can help you with?/Look I’m a busy man, step away!/Yes sir?”

The Doctor smiled: he obviously found this whole situation quite amusing. “Just wondering about this convict you seemed to have no problem telling me about, should I be worried?”

“Don’t worry and enjoy your trip sir./It’s a shifter, it broke from the slammer a few hours ago, and it could be anybody./I can’t reveal that information, you and your companion can take your seats.”

The Doctor was smiling again. I got the feeling that if it were up to him, he would talk to this man all day.

“Well... that was both informative and uninformative. Say, what’s going on with the three heads, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Thank you for asking, we’re a Tribunal Android, programmed to see both extremes and then make the best decision/None of your business!!/Perhaps later sir, I have my duties to perform.”

The officer walked away and the Doctor put his arm around me. “I can only assume it’s malfunctioning, giving both the good and bad answers verbally before making the right one. Still, a handy defect for our current dilemma, don’t you think?”

There he went again, describing the fearful and the harmful as the start of an exciting adventure, and once again I felt a battle in my own head, not of extremes of good and bad, but of my human nature to want to escape danger and the feeling that I don’t want to let him down, and that maybe this will be fun. Silly really, looking back, but that man... the Doctor. He is charismatic and charming to the point of danger.

“A Shifter Mary, that means it could be anyone. Don’t let your guard down... and, sorry. I promise once we solve this we’ll spend the rest of the journey looking at the stars.”

A smile broke out on my face... a smile that has now once again broken out as I write this. Such a big promise for him to make, one that I didn't hold out much hope for, and yet my face betrayed my perhaps misguided optimism.

At this point I was feeling a little shaky and decided to go into the bathroom cubical. It was quite a bit larger than cubicles on trains that I'm used to, I even saw a mirror to my right... or what I believed to be a mirror... instead I looked again and saw my likeness standing there, smiling back at me. A most unsettling experience, seeing one's own self staring back at them.

"What do you think?" it asked, sounding like a common street urchin from central London.

"Well, you should know, shouldn't you?" I quickly responded, stepping back to the wall.

"I'm a shape-shifter, love. Not a mind reader."

"Or indeed an impressionist!" I quickly retorted. She... I... It just smiled back.

"I'm a big fan, Mary," it said, slowly walking towards me. "I couldn't believe my luck when that Time Lord brought you on this train. I mean, I'm no expert, but plucking important literary figures from Earth's history and walking around with them on your arm has got to be against some law or other, right?"

"I... wouldn't know," I said, having never really thought about it, and certainly in no state to do so then.

"Oh, I know! Hey, guess who I am!" it said, with childish glee. Before my eyes my own body rippled like water with a stone is skimmed across its surface, and then a large man with green skin, screws in its neck, stitches on his forehead and a flat top of black hair stood in front of me. I couldn't help but shriek.

"What? You don't recognise me? But, it's classic Mary Shelley! You know, Fra-" I cut it off, the Doctor has always been careful not to tell me my future; and this being my final trip, I didn't want that rule to be broken.

"I don't know what you mean, but I would never create something like that. Certainly it would never have green skin: an insane idea!" I said loudly but calmly, trying to make it believe I wasn't as scared as I was.

Suddenly there was a bang on the door and the Doctor's voice echoed out of it.

"Mary? Sorry to bother you, but I thought I heard you shout."

I looked at this... thing, this shape-shifter. It slowly shook its head side to side, I knew it wouldn't want to be caught.

"N-No, I'm fine. Thank you."

"Ah, okay then," he replied. "One thing, if you should come across someone you think is the shape-shifter we talked about, try showing the person its own reflection, that normally freaks them out a bit. Something to do with not recognising what they see because they rarely stay in the same form."

My brilliant Doctor, he knew something was wrong. The shape-shifter lunged toward me! I just had enough time to pull out the small mirror in my purse, and sure enough the creature closed its eyes in shock, long enough for me to slip past and leave the cubical, to where the Doctor was waiting.

"Well, that's a sight for the record books," he said with a smile. "Mary Shelley running from Boris Karloff..."

I had no idea what he meant or why he found humour in this situation, but I was relieved. He hugged me, a comforting feeling rushed through my body, but at that moment of embrace the shape-shifter changed into a regular human and ran past us both. The Doctor chased after it but it had found a crowded part of the large carriage and changed its form again. The Doctor snapped his fingers and turned around "Ah, that's the problem with shifters, Mary. Great at hide and seek. Not so great at chess, at least from my experience."

Half the time I don't know when he's being serious or just trying to lighten the mood. Either way I was still shaken, so imagine my added shock when I turned around to see the officer with three heads standing behind me.

"I understand you've been through a lot, but can I ask you some questions?/You! What did you see? Where did he go!?!/Could I take a statement please madam."

I was not in the mood for this so I pushed past him – them! – and headed back towards the baggage cart where the TARDIS was, saying that the Doctor would explain. I heard him call out to me as the doors shut behind me, but I just wanted a break from the madness that was unfolding on this train.

Reading that back, it's apt that I should use the word 'madness' as that is exactly what happened next. As I took a step into the carriage the walls began to shimmer. Soon the whole room began to twist and contort, I stepped backwards trying to feel for the walls or the door, something to steady myself with. When I did the train was not as I remembered it.

It was entirely different, almost ethereal. A man with bright blonde curls of hair and a dress sense that defies all possible reason stood talking to a lady with equally curly autumn hair that flowed to her shoulders. I went to shout out, but they began talking.

“Come on River, embrace it!” The oddly dressed man shouted to the lady. Then he said something that sounded like complete nonsense, but for reasons I can’t possibly fathom, I can remember every word. “How often do you get to experience such an erudite scholar at work in the field of block transfer computation? This is a work of art!”

Most of these words meant nothing, or at least not in the context I was hearing. They continued to talk, or I should say the man continued to talk. The lady, River if what the man said was true, merely praised him once and then stared into the distance, was there something there I couldn’t see?

Suddenly I heard the distant sound of the Doctor. “Mary!” he shouted, “Mary snap out of it!”

I closed my eyes, and then when I opened them again I was in the train carriage as I knew it, the Doctor staring back at me.

“Are you okay?” he asked with a smile.

I could only shake my head. “No...” I said. “I saw... a vision, but it was so real!”

The Doctor then said it was some sort of space phenomenon that he, in his many travels, had only experienced once. “Cosmic rays, a rare kind,” he said. “They bombarded the train all of a sudden and are known to cause visions, hallucinations and the like.” Then he made some sort of joke to do with a fantastic group of super men from a future publication. I just nodded. He asked what I saw, I just said a different train, a woman and an oddly dressed man. He laughed.

“Doesn’t sound too far removed from reality to me!” I couldn’t help but smile, even though I felt a bit drained, and that man’s words still rang in my head without fading.

“Doctor,” I asked, slowly, “what is block transfer computation?”

He was stunned. I knew one such as myself should not know these words.

“Mary, how do you know about that?” he asked with a rare serious look on his face. “Was it in this vision?”

“Yes,” I replied. “The oddly dressed man said about it, and the woman seemed impressed that he used it, or something along those lines...”

Before the Doctor could answer my question, he looked behind me – then grabbed me by the shoulder and moved me forcibly to the side. I protested, naturally, as he said, “Get behind me, Mary!”

“Why?” I replied, shuffling behind him in a state of confusion.

“Because Christopher Lee as Dracula appears to be standing behind you.”

I don’t know who that was, but sure enough a man had made his way behind me.

“Not just a fan of Mary then, Mr Shifter?” the Doctor said. “Hammer Horror in general, yes?”

At this point I was completely lost, but I had heard enough to know the shape-shifting thing had returned.

The Doctor began to buy time, and I still remember his words.

“I love a bit of Hammer myself. Starred in a couple, you know, ‘Hobo #3’, ‘Dapper Gentleman #4’, ‘Mad Man in the Background.’ Not a lot of call for ‘Man in Cricket Outfit’ and I kind of lost my sense of fun for a while after that...How about you?”

The shape-shifter flipped its cape over his arms, and walked towards us. We stepped back, slowly. Suddenly it whipped its cape open again and hit the Doctor over the head with some sort of wooden object. I was helpless, I tried to run but he grabbed my arm.

“You’re not going anywhere. I just want to ask you some questions!” it shouted. I continued to struggle in vein. I gave up, but as I did I saw the Doctor wasn’t unconscious, instead he was on the floor, muttering to himself, occasionally closing his eyes like he was doing hard mathematics.

“Well, Mary,” it said, with a smile, “my first question...”

And then it stopped, mid sentence, its eyes wide with shock.

“I don’t believe it!”

I didn’t understand, until I saw what he had caught sight of. A grand set of stairs had appeared on the other side of the carriage, red carpet going down every step.

“It’s the staircase from Dracula... it... I... wow!” he said, I felt his grip loosen and I managed to break free. The Doctor stood up triumphantly, dusting down his velvet jacket. The Shape-Shifter was slowly touching the staircase – and I had no idea what was happening.

“Now, that was easy,” the Doctor said. “Well... distracting a Hammer Horror fan was easy; using block transfer computation while lying on the ground with a sore head, not so much. Still, at least he didn’t use the stake as originally intended.”

“You ... caused that staircase to appear?” I asked.

“I did! Not something I would have thought about if you hadn’t mentioned it.”

“By ‘it’, you mean this block transfer computation?” I asked, and the Doctor nodded.

The three-headed officer walked in and the Doctor pointed towards the oddly dressed man slowly walking up some stairs that led to nowhere. It was this kind of madness that I will not miss. The officer placed some handcuffs that were seemingly made of light around the Shape-Shifter, who protested by going through several different bodies.

“It’s not fair! It’s not fair!!” it screamed, finally settling on a human-like form, not unlike a regular human, as I know them anyway.

“Thank you very much for your cooperation. You put your life in danger, leave it to the professionals! I will take it from here.” The officer said, walking the Shape-Shifter away.

They left. I was still shaking, and the Doctor put his jacket around me.

“Thank you, but I’m not shivering because I’m cold,” I said, resisting the idea of calming down.

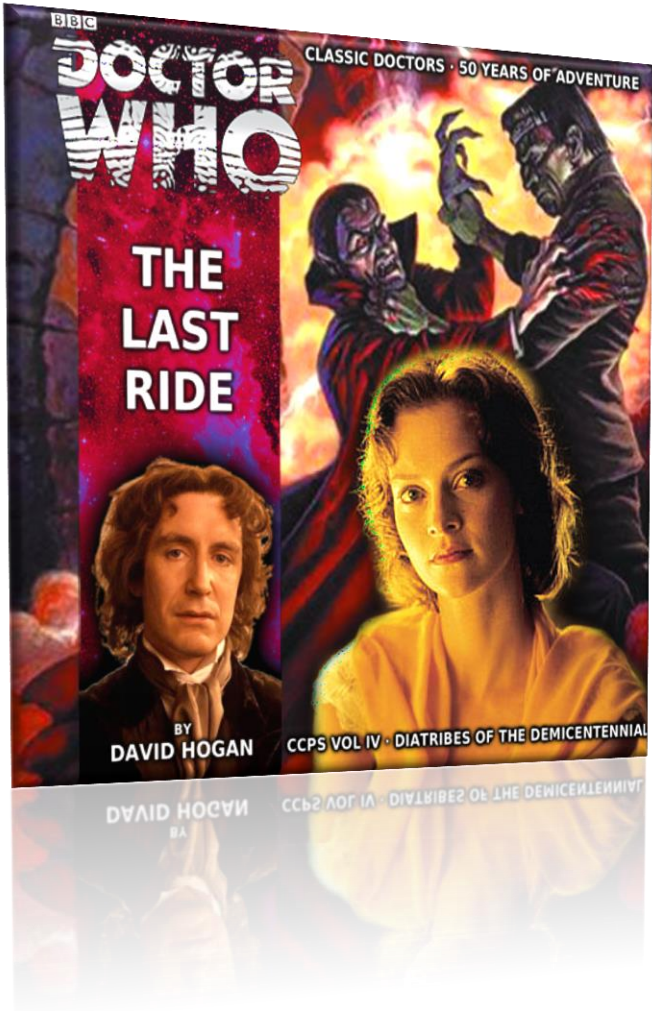
“It’s okay, Mary. It’s all over now. Let me keep my promise!” The Doctor winked as he went over to the staircase and pressed a button under a banister. To my surprise, a settee slowly revealed itself and settled in front of the window. I couldn’t help myself, despite everything that had happened: I began to laugh!

“How can I possibly refuse?”

And that, my faithful journal, was how my travels with the Doctor came to an end. We sat in front of the stars, and indeed the stairs, and I listened to his stories of amazing adventures as he pointed out planets and other celestial bodies in the passing patches of space. We laughed, we talked, we embraced. I was truly happy. I now sit in this coach, knowing my life from now on will be dull in comparison. Well, maybe I can write some stories of the fantastic, the bizarre. I certainly have plenty of experience...

Goodbye my dearest Doctor.

Mary Shelley.



BBC
DOCTOR WHO

CLASSIC DOCTORS · 50 YEARS OF ADVENTURE

**THE
LAST
RIDE**



BY
DAVID HOGAN

CCPS VOL IV · DIATRIBES OF THE DEMICENTENNIAL

DAVID HOGAN
BY

CCPS VOL IV · DIATRIBES OF THE DEMICENTENNIAL