

Chapter 25

It was true that The Doctor spoke with such confidence that they didn't feel bad about entering. And on top of all the other strange things that had happened to them that day, being asked to enter a blue box by a fake Doctor was the least of their worries. It was amazing enough that there even was a blue box at the end of a hospital corridor, and amazing that no-one in the hospital had seen it or done anything about it. But the most amazing thing of all about the blue box was its size.

It was tiny!

They could barely all fit inside! Along one side of the box, for that is what it was, was a small shelf.

'Come on then, where's the patient?' said Dr Who pleasantly, seemingly not noticing the extreme crush that was developing inside. 'You go up there, old chap, lie down, make yourself comfortable'.

Predictably, Hardy groaned, complained about some new part of his anatomy that was hurting, and climbed reluctantly onto the shelf. By folding his legs right up under his chin, he could lie there in a way that approximated to lying on a bed. He groaned again.

'Don't touch that!', cried Rose, as Freddy grabbed hold of a lever on the central console, to steady himself. Freddy pulled his hand away quickly, but as a result, stood straight on Wil's foot, which was positioned inches from his own. It was Wil's turn to yell this time.

'Now, now, don't worry about a thing', said the Doctor in his easy, reassuring tone, 'we are almost ready to move, is everyone comfortable?'

'Not really', said Clara, who had been squashed up against the door when Rose had pulled it shut.

'Oh we'll only be a couple of minutes, my dear', the Doctor replied.

'But-but-but...where are we going?', said Hardy, pathetically.

'Oh, about 1850,' replied the Doctor nonchalantly, fiddling with some dials on the central console.

'1850!', they all screamed in unison. In doing this, Hardy sat up on his shelf and smashed his head against the top of the box. Freddy in his surprise and anxiety, grabbed hold of the lever Rose had told him not to touch just seconds earlier.

The box gave a lurch.

The box gave a shudder.

The box started emitting strange sounds, like the grinding of rocks or metal deep in the earth somewhere. The shuddering was like being in a lift in a tall building. A slight jerk, and a sensation of speed, but no apparent movement.

'Well thank you Freddy my man, we are off. Perhaps a little earlier than expected, but here we go. To the year 1850. The middle of a fabulous century for medical science. The century of x-rays, of bacteria, of penicillin, the development of anaesthesia, the era of Florence Nightingale and Louis Pasteur. If they can't cure you, no-one can'

There was a bump.

'Here we are, we've arrived'.

The Doctor stretched over Wil and Clara and unlatched the door. They stepped out.

They were in a dark corridor, of about the same dimensions as the one they had left in the hospital. But it was much darker. The floor was made of wooden blocks, and the walls were lined with wooden paneling. There was a smell about the place which reminded Freddy of that smell you get in swimming pools – that heavy atmosphere that can sting your eyes. They made their way to the end of the corridor. A tall man was coming in the opposite direction, accompanied by a smaller woman. The man was wearing a black suit and tie, a white shirt, a tall black hat, and he had the longest white whiskers they had ever seen. He pulled a watch out of the pocket of his waistcoat. It was attached by a chain.

'Eleven of the hour, precisely, step forth this way if you please'.

He was looking at Hardy, and it seemed like he was expecting them. The Doctor smiled.

'Dr Crippen, good to see you after all these years',

'Absolutely, Who, spiffing to see you too. Now, which one's the patient?'

Hardy, despite his discomfort from the journey, had managed to straighten himself up. He tried to stand behind Freddy and Wil and blend into the background, but as he was the only one wearing pyjamas, that was impossible.

'Ah, *you* are Hardy, are you', said Dr Crippen sinisterly, 'in here please'.

He pushed at a door to his left and they went through. They found themselves in a large room. Candles were burning in holders on the walls. There was a single bare light bulb hanging from a winding flex in the middle of the ceiling. The room was dark. Dark wooden walls. A dark wooden floor, slightly damp, so that when they walked on it, their feet just stuck before coming off the floor again. On one side of the room a row of cabinets running from floor to ceiling. Dusty bottles on the shelves. Larger bottles with specimens inside. A skeleton hanging on a stand by the door. A bench up against one wall, with an array of medical instruments lying on it. Bowls, scalpels, spikes, saws.

And in the middle of the room, a large slab, or maybe a table.

‘Come now, young man, onto the operating table’.

‘I don’t need an operation, I’m f-f-fine’, stammered Hardy.

‘Oh come now, there’s nothing to worry about, we just need to examine you,’ said Dr Crippen, reaching over to the bench and picking up a large claw-like implement.

Suddenly six men entered the room. They were all dressed exactly the same as the first Doctor, in black suits, white shirts, and top hats. And they all had immensely long whiskers. Not one of them was under seventy years old.

Hardy started to panic, and moved towards the door. But resistance was clearly futile, as the six men descended upon him with a speed and enthusiasm that belied their age, and lifted him onto the slab. They held him there, fast. He couldn’t move.

The door opened again, and a slightly younger man, but dressed the same, entered the room. He marched over to where Hardy was lying, quivering, on the table.

‘*Hmmm*,’ he said, shaking his head.

He lifted up the front of Hardy’s pyjama top and looked at his stomach.

‘*Nay*’, he said, shaking his head again.

‘*Nay, nay, nay*’, he said, louder this time. He looked up at Dr Crippen, shouted ‘*Nay!*’ one more time, whispered something in the doctor’s ear, and left the room.

‘*That was the famous Dr Nay*,’ whispered Doctor Who to Wil, who was standing next to him. ‘All he ever says is ‘*Nay*’. Quite brilliant though.’

Dr Crippen looked a little disappointed, but he went over and replaced the claw-like thing he had enthusiastically picked up.

‘*Take two of these, twice a day*’, he said, passing a relieved Hardy a handful of small white tablets, ‘and come back in two weeks if you’re not feeling better’.

‘Y-y-yes, thank you,’ muttered Hardy as he climbed down off the operating table.

‘See you again, Who!’, said Crippen cheerfully.

‘Absolutely, my good man’

As they made their way back along the corridor, Hardy looked at the tablets in his hand. Each one was stamped with a large ‘C’ and the sign of a skull. He showed them to Freddy.

‘Well, I know I wouldn’t take them’, said Freddy helpfully.

‘Shhh!’, said Hardy, surreptitiously dropping the pills into a pot plant handily stationed on the corner where they had left the police box. The Doctor was striding well ahead of them so could not see what he had done.

Immediately, the plant drooped, and with a sort of sighing sound, fell gently to the floor. Hardy looked at Wil. They ran, without looking back, and joined the rest of the group back at the police box.

'Please take us back to 2006, please...' Hardy was almost crying.

'Well, how are you feeling, did the tablets do any good?'

'Erm...well...I may be a bit better....but....'

'There's only one thing for it', said the Doctor decisively, turning dials and pressing buttons, *'let's go!'*. He pushed the big handle forward.
