**Two Doctors and Christmas**

“Where are we?” Polly Wright asked as she looked at the view on the TARDIS screen at a snow-covered hill dropping down into a valley in deep evening shadow. “Is this Earth? It looks like Earth. Are we back in the nineteen-sixties?”

“I don’t think so, Duchess,” Ben answered her. “Look at that old donkey cart, there, and the geezer driving it.”

They watched as the cart passed quite close to the TARDIS. The ‘geezer’ was dressed in what looked like a muddy old sack with some sort of dull coloured leggings and rags tied around his feet for ‘shoes’. The donkey looked healthier and had more teeth.

“Got to be medieval,” Polly agreed. “Oh, dear.”

“Actually, the medieval period in Europe was over by the late fifteenth century,” The Doctor answered. “This is 1617, the Reformation era. We are in Lancashire, since you’re asking.”

“It’s started snowing,” Polly noted. “And it’s getting dark, quickly. It’s obviously winter?”

“It’s Christmas, in fact,” The Doctor answered. “Christmas Eve, 1617. Go and see what you can find in the way of mid-Jacobean clothing. Something for party-wear.”

“A Jacobean party? Groovy,” Polly remarked.

“Well, I’m not so sure about that. I don’t believe the word ‘groovy’ has yet been coined,” The Doctor said. “But I am sure it will be interesting.”

Ben and Polly hurried away to find that rather magical room deep inside the TARDIS where clothes for all occasions were readily found. The Doctor knew he would have to change his clothes, too, but first he took a long, long look at the view outside, one he recognised from a past adventure.

Recognised very well. Even the snow seemed familiar.

“Of course, I shouldn’t be doing this,” he told himself. “Absolutely against the rules. But rules were made to be broken, after all.”

He played a short tune on his recorder. If anyone with knowledge of seventeenth century music had been within hearing they would have identified it as a French tune fitting a dance called the Galliard.

Nobody was within hearing. He put the recorder down on the console and went to change from his usual careless, hobo clothing to something that would command respect in a time when poor people wore muddy sacking and the rich wore satin and velvet.

Polly looked a picture in a russet red satin gown with a tightly cinched waist and wide skirt topped by a velvet cloak for facing the snow-covered land outside. Ben was the very essence of a Jacobean gentleman in a blue doublet and jerkin with matching knee length hose and long boots that almost reached the knee and didn’t reveal very much of the ‘nether hose’ which looked too much like ladies stockings for his liking. He had a short cape-style cloak that he slung across one shoulder rakishly as he posed for Polly’s approval.

The Doctor wore all black with silver detail in his doublet and cloak. He wore a hat that put the name ‘Guy Fawkes’ into the heads of his two companions. It suited him well enough and made him look a little taller than he was.

“Perfect,” he said. “Though, of course, if we stay for the whole twelve days of Christmas we shall need to pop back to the TARDIS to get new outfits each evening. It would not do to wear the same for two feasts in a row.”

“Twelve days of feasting?” Ben queried as they stepped out of the TARDIS and watched it shimmer and turn invisible, something it only rarely did. The Doctor said that the ‘stealth’ mode was bad for the engines. But being found out as the owner of a magic box in a time when witchcraft was a capital offence was bad for everyone.

“From Christmas Eve to Epiphany – the sixth of January,” The Doctor explained.

“And where are we doing this feasting?” Polly asked, wondering about her figure after such extended excesses.

“There,” The Doctor answered, pointing to a great edifice revealed as they came past a stand of trees. In the fast-falling dusk flaming torches lit the path to the battlemented wall and a huge open gate through which an even more brightly lit courtyard could be glimpsed.

“A castle?” Ben queried. “We’re visiting a castle?”

“It looks a little less fortified and more like a Tudor family home beyond the gatehouse,” The Doctor promised. “I have been here before… twice. This is Hoghton Tower, currently the home of Sir Richard de Hoghton, First Baronet, the honour given to him by King James some six years ago.”

“James VI of Scotland, I of England,” Polly recalled. “I know two things about him – the gunpowder plot that goes with your hat and the knighting of the ‘sirloin’. Although some people say that never really happened.”

“Oh, it happened,” The Doctor assured her. “It was in August of this year, right here at the Tower when the king visited and was honoured with a magnificent banquet. I remember it well. That beef really was delicious.”

“You were there… I mean… here… six months ago in Human time?” Ben asked.

“That… must have been before you… changed,” Polly suggested. “Because we’ve been with you since then and you didn’t bring us here.”

“Yes, it was,” The Doctor answered then became very quiet, as if he was not telling them quite everything.

“Anyway,” he added. “Come along and meet Sir Richard de Hoghton. He’s a nice chap, though a little pious.”

Polly and Ben wondered who The Doctor was going to introduce himself as. If Sir Richard knew him as the elderly man they had first met, before his regeneration, then wouldn’t that be a problem?

They held their curiosity as a liveried page showed them to the great hall where a grand party was just getting going. An ensemble of musicians in the gallery above was playing quiet music while ladies in beautiful gowns and men who almost outshone them for colour chatted and mingled and sampled some of the food and drink piled high on long tables against one wall. This was mere snacking, yet, whetting the appetite. Real feasting was yet to begin. Four servants carrying a whole side of roasted ox on a platter the size of a door had to move several large puddings aside to make room.

The Doctor whispered in the ear of the page who announced them formally to the suddenly quiet crowd.

“John de Smythe, cousin of Sir John Talbot of Malahide, his nephew, Benjamin Jackson, esquire of London, and his ward, Mistress Polly Wright.”

“Malahide?” Ben asked as the chatter resumed. “You mean, in Ireland? I’ve heard of it in the Shipping Forecast.”

“Big family in these times,” The Doctor replied. “Big enough to impress an only recently made baronet like Sir Richard.”

So it proved. The First Baronet de Houghton, resplendent in purple and gold doublet, moved through the crowds like Ben’s Royal Navy ship cutting through the waves and greeted them with a deep bow. The Doctor replied with a perfectly executed and slightly less deep bow. Ben copied him less exactly and Polly bobbed a curtsey.

“Any kin of the Malahide Talbots are welcome to my home. Come, sirs, and sample the fruits of my wine cellar or, if you prefer, the best October ale in Lancashire. Dear lady, let me introduce you to my wife. I am sure you will enjoy her company.”

Polly found herself separated from the men and brought to talk to a pretty young woman – far younger than Sir Richard himself, who was in his late forties. She was Jane, Sir Richard’s second wife, and as she had only recently given birth to her first child by her husband, was not dancing but sitting quietly by the huge open fireplace that warmed the great hall. Polly looked around at The Doctor and Ben as they sampled the wine and some huge platters of roast beef. They seemed fine. She accepted a goblet of wine and a plate of sliced meat and chunks of pie as she chatted with her new friend.

There was dancing of a very formal sort between the eating of rich food. Polly supposed that was what stopped everyone getting really fat. But her idea of dancing was the sort done on the dance floor at the Inferno. She really didn’t want to get involved in these complicated steps and careful positioning of arms and hands.

“Richard doesn’t approve of dancing as a rule,” Jane told her. “It goes against his Presbyterian views. But at Christmas he relents as long as nothing too lewd goes on. The very risqué dances like the Volta and the Branle are strictly banned from the Tower.”

Polly had no idea what either of those were, but she supposed that ‘risque’ in 1617 and in her own Swinging Sixties were very different.

Ben tried his hand at the dancing and cut quite a dash, but The Doctor was the best of the two. He stepped lightly and confidently and found himself partnered by any number of well-dressed ladies in the course of the night.

Near midnight, the music mellowed to a single stringed instrument. The dancers cleared the floor, some of them taking the opportunity to get more food or drink, but most of them just waiting expectantly.

Sir Richard stepped forward to the fireplace where a chair was set. Beside the chair a goblet of wine and a gold coin were placed. Polly, with Ben who had come to stand by her, wondered about this preparation.

“It is for the First-Comer,” Jane explained. “You do not have this tradition in London?”

“We do not,” Ben answered. Jane went on to explain that the wine and the coin were for the first man to come to the house after midnight. He was First Comer, and depending if he were a generous or a mean-spirited man the year ahead would be blessed or blasted.

“It is a country tradition,” Sir Richard added. “And not quite in keeping with a godly house. It is very nearly a pagan superstition, after all. But it is expected as part of the festivities and I allow the indulgence.”

Midnight came and went while expectation grew. Then there was the sound of knocking at the outer door. A page went to greet the First-Comer.

This might have been anybody, but the very LAST person Ben and Polly expected was the one they knew so very well as…

“The Doctor?” Ben whispered, grasping Polly’s hand as she stood and stepped back from the group by the fire. He looked around and spotted the Doctor they had come with hiding himself in the group by the depleted ox roast. He was watching the new arrivals keenly.

It WAS The Doctor, the elderly, often grumpy, sometimes frail, grey-haired man that they had first met in London when the War Machines had entangled them all in a plot for world domination.

“He looks a little younger,” Polly noted. “Less… fragile. Look how he holds his head up as if he belongs in a castle like this.”

The Doctor had taken off his cloak to reveal rich clothing beneath. His companion, a slender, dark haired girl of very tender years divested herself of her travel cloak and every woman in the hall looked at her with interest. Her dress was coral pink satin decorated with dozens of glittering pearls. It was by far the most beautiful dress in the whole room and the envy and admiration was almost palpable.

“I’ve seen that dress in the Wardrobe,” Polly whispered. “It doesn’t fit me. She’s so… petite. I couldn’t get into that bodice if I slimmed for a year.”

“Who is she? And… how is HE here… as well as… HIM?”

The first question was answered straight away. The Doctor bowed to Sir Richard who bowed even lower, recognising a man of higher status than himself. When he straightened up he greeted The Doctor as a familiar friend and then introduced him to the revellers as the Lord du Temps and the girl in the stunning dress as Susan, his granddaughter.

“Lord du Temps?” Polly queried. “Lord of… TIME?”

Ben shrugged. It made as much sense as being named for a shipping forecast region.

“Obviously, he’s come here in HIS TARDIS, and we’ve come in ours,” Ben added as The Doctor was told he was First Comer and ceremonially offered the goblet and the coin. “Well, you know, the SAME TARDIS but he’s EARLIER… long before he knew us.”

“Of course,” Polly recalled. “He SAID he had been here before… twice.”

“But if he knew that he was going to be here….”

Susan had been given a seat next to the fire and food and drink was brought to her by young men with hopeful expressions. Around them the eating, drinking and dancing resumed. Ben and Polly cut through it all and found what they both mentally called THEIR Doctor slipping up a staircase that led to the gallery above the party. There he could watch his earlier self and his granddaughter without being seen by either of them.

Not being seen was obviously important.

“You and… him… shouldn’t be here in the same place, surely?” Ben told him when he and Polly caught up. “It’s… well, it’s like… I don’t know what it’s like… but….”

“It would be a paradox if we were to meet, and it would upset Susan, for certain. I don’t want to do THAT. But I need to keep an eye on them both.”

“You knew this was going to happen,” Polly told him. “You brought us here deliberately.”

“Yes, yes, I did,” The Doctor admitted with an open smile that was at once apologetic and unrepentant. “You see… something occurred here when… well, when I was him… down there with Sir Richard. It involved Susan as well as me, but she wouldn’t tell me anything, except that I would understand in time… when I would see it all through different eyes.”

“That’s cryptic, all right,” Ben said. “So, you came to keep an eye on your old self and… she’s really your granddaughter?”

“She is.”

“How old is she?” Polly asked. “She looks like a teenager.”

“Fourteen,” The Doctor answered. “This was before we settled in London for a while. Before the events that eventually led to our meeting. I promised to show her Christmas at Hoghton. It is… as you have seen already… something quite spectacular.”

Polly wanted to ask why his granddaughter was no longer travelling with him, but the question stuck in her throat as she saw his wistful expression looking down at her. His other self was being drawn into conversation by Sir Richard and Susan into the dancing with what were, presumably, eligible young men.

“I’d want to keep my eye on that lot,” Ben said. “With her so young as that.”

“Susan isn’t interested in any of them,” The Doctor answered with absolute assurance. “There was one who DID cause me concern, but I don’t see him at the moment. Sir Richard was a bit of a nuisance. He took me off to his private room to talk politics. I really would have preferred to stay closer to Susan.”

“Well, you’re watching her now,” Ben told him. “And we can help.”

“I hope so,” The Doctor said. Then his expression stiffened. Ben and Polly both followed his gaze to a man who had approached Susan and brought her into the dancing. He was white haired, prematurely so, since he was young, and his doublet was black and gold, a direct contrast to Susan’s dark hair and white dress.

And even from the gallery there was something about his face that bothered all of the keen watchers.

“Of course, physiognomy, the pseudo-science of reading character in faces is absolutely without foundation,” The Doctor said. “But something about that man….”

“Predatory,” Polly said. “That’s the word for him. Like a bird of prey… not a beautiful one like a hawk or kestrel… but… some sharp beaked, black feathered thing that sits watching for a chance to pounce.”

“Yes,” Ben agreed. He moved away quietly and slipped back downstairs. As one tune ended and many dancers changed partners he slipped in and took Susan by the arm, drawing her away from the man. Polly, meanwhile, went to talk to Jane who was alone again with her husband and The Doctor away in a side room.

She wasted no time asking about the black clad, white haired man who was without a dance partner now but had not stopped looking at Susan.

“He was announced as Gerard Howells,” Jane answered. “He is a secretary to the Earl of Derby, I understand.”

“Just a secretary?” Polly queried. “He seems a bit full of himself….”

“Lathom, where the Earl resides, and from where he administers the whole county of Lancashire, is palatial. To be a mere secretary there is akin to being at the Court of the King himself. Such men are... as you put it… full of themselves... a most apt description. Though should any of them fall foul of his Grace they would soon find themselves without means. Most are second or third sons with no title or lands of their own.”

“Men who would need to marry a woman with means?” Polly suggested. Was that his interest in a young girl with pearls sewn all over her dress? Could it be that simple?

But if The Doctor’s granddaughter was heiress to anything tangible, any land or income, it was on another planet. The Doctor had never talked about his past except in little hints. Was he a rich man where he came from? Were dresses with pearls something he could buy there? Or had they visited a planet where pearls were commonly found and worthless.

Anyway, a suitor looking for advancement was out of luck.

Polly left Jane, intending to report what she had learnt to The Doctor. As she passed the dancers, though, she felt a hand on her arm. It was Howells asking her to dance.

“I’m… not very good at it,” she protested. But she felt herself unable to refuse him. Predatory was one word for him. Persuasive was another. She felt compelled to fall in step with him on the floor.

“You are from London, I understand,” he said to her. “The second lady from that city I have danced with today.”

“The other is hardly a lady,” Polly reminded him “A mere girl.”

There was a clear tone of disapproval in her voice. Howells took the hint.

“You did not arrive together. None of you were acquainted before this night? Yet your young gentleman is dancing with Susan, now.”

“He has danced with almost every lady. And I expect she will dance with every man.”

“Yes,” Howells agreed. “It is so.”

He contrived to move them closer to Ben and Susan before the dance was over. He fully intended to swap partners. He was foiled by The Doctor… THEIR Doctor, who took Susan’s hand from Ben. He, in turn, came for Polly, leaving Howells frozen out again. Polly risked a look at him as they turned. He was still watching Susan intently, though he also examined The Doctor closely and occasionally glanced at her and Ben, too.

“He needn’t think I’m second choice if he can’t get her,” Polly said.

“You’re nobody’s second choice, Duchess,” Ben answered her. “Definitely not mine.”

“I know. But when this number ends you have my permission to dance with Susan again. Anything to keep him from her.”

“Too right,” Ben agreed, and when partners changed again he got to Susan before any other man while The Doctor took Polly’s arm. As they danced she told him what she had learnt.

“Secretary to the Earl?” he queried. “Maybe. I’m not so sure. Easy for a man to call himself anything in these times. I’m not at all certain about Master Howells.”

Polly couldn’t disagree. But they were accomplishing their objective of keeping Susan away from him until the party began to wind down at what must have been close to four o’clock in the morning. Then, many of the visitors left for their own nearby homes. Howells appeared to be one of them.

Both versions of The Doctor had arranged to stay at Hoghton Tower for the night. Polly was pleased when she found herself sharing a chamber with Susan. Her grandfather was given a room elsewhere, as were The Doctor and Ben, but it meant that she had an opportunity to keep an eye on the girl.

“It was quite a party,” Polly said as they undressed to the plain cotton shifts beneath their layers of finery.

“Yes… quite,” Susan answered, hesitantly, shyly, quite becoming a girl of her age, and perhaps also disguising the fact that she was something of an imposter, having no more right to be here in seventeenth century Lancashire than Polly had.

She wished she could tell Susan that she was here as a time travelling visitor, too, but she couldn’t reveal her Doctor’s identity. That would be too strange, too frightening, for the girl and perhaps dangerous for them all.

“Your gown was beautiful,” Polly added. “Have you one just as nice for tonight’s ball?”

That was a bit of a trick question since neither of them had brought luggage to the chamber. Susan was really unsure how to answer it.

“Never mind,” Polly relented. “It will be a real surprise to everyone. Meanwhile, let’s get to sleep. There is a church service tomorrow morning and all sorts of things going on in the afternoon. We don’t want bags under our eyes.”

“No, we don’t,” Susan answered, relieved not to have to make conversation any more. They both climbed into bed and blew out candles before pulling curtains around their two four poster beds and going to sleep.

When Polly woke the next morning, Susan wasn’t in the room.

 She went to the window to get an idea of the time by how high the sun was, since she had left her modern wristwatch in the TARDIS. She saw Susan coming out of one of the stables to the right of the courtyard below. She had changed into a simple black dress with a plain white collar – the sort of thing a lady might wear to church on Christmas Day.

They had parked their TARDIS in the stable? Polly thought that was much more convenient than their own which was going to be a bit of a walk to dress for the party later.

Then she saw Howell approaching Susan across the courtyard. She tried to avoid him, and had clearly told him to go away, but he persisted.

Polly’s hand was on the window latch, ready to call down, when she saw Ben and The Doctor come through the gate carrying leather bags that must contain more clothes for their stay at the Tower. Ben called out to Susan, who turned to greet him with obvious relief. Howell scowled at the two men and then turned away, heading back out of the courtyard.

Presently, Ben knocked on the chamber door. Polly opened it and he passed a bag in to her.

“Day clothes and another grand gown for tonight,” he said. “Dress quickly and come down to Sir Richard’s sitting room. Susan could do with some female company.”

Polly did just that. When she got down to the pleasant, well lit sitting room she found Susan sitting with The Doctor. THEIR Doctor, not her own grandfather, who had, apparently, gone out riding with Sir Richard earlier to look at the countryside around Hoghton. She was talking to The Doctor, though keeping to her cover story of being from seventeenth century London. She didn’t know who he was.

Polly wondered if she would have been more or less nervous if she did know that this was her own relative who loved her very much and was concerned for her welfare.

“I really am unharme,” she insisted. “I just didn’t want to be alone with that man… Howells. I don’t feel quite right around him.”

“Quite so,” Polly agreed, sitting beside her. “He ought to have known better than to approach you like that when you were on your own.”

“He was asking me where my grandfather was. And I didn’t like the way he asked, at all. Grandfather has no business with him, with anyone around here. We are just visiting Sir Richard socially.”

“He came here just to ask about the D… about your Grandfather?” Polly queried. “That’s odd. What is he up to?”

“No good, if you ask me,” Ben commented.

“I rather must agree,” The Doctor added. “We shall have to keep an eye on him. Susan, your grandfather will be back in time for the church service. Howells won’t dare be a nuisance with everyone around you.”

Sure enough there was a sound of footsteps in the hall and Sir Richard calling for hot wine. The Doctor and Ben both slipped away quietly before the other Doctor came into the room to find his granddaughter and Polly.

Susan said nothing about Howells. She didn’t want to worry her grandfather. She introduced Polly to him, but he was distracted by Sir Richard and barely glanced at her. Polly was glad of that. She had wondered if meeting him now might cause problems when it came to that first ‘proper’ meeting in 1960s London.

Walking to the church in Houghton village was easy enough. They walked with Jane and two of her maids in a women only group. There wasn’t much conversation. They were going to church, after all, and Sir Richard’s piety extended to silence on the way. The Doctor and Ben were with some of the other menfolk. Susan’s grandfather was with Sir Richard, making a very stern and staid pair.

Gerard Howells was conspicuously absent. He wasn’t to be seen in the church. Again, Polly and Susan shared a wide pew with the womenfolk while the men were separate. The old Doctor with Sir Richard and some other men of rank had their own place right up front under the pulpit. The Doctor and Ben were at the back, sitting with the churchwardens. That contrived to keep the two versions of the same man apart.

The service was old fashioned and a bit laborious, but it WAS a Christmas service. Polly remembered going to church with her family when she was a child and felt a tinge of nostalgia.

Walking back to the Tower was more relaxed than going to the church. The women were allowed to talk quietly among themselves. The men, too, discussed politics, deer hunting and other manly topics as they trudged back to their cold collation Christmas Day lunch.

“Look…” Susan gasped. “It’s him… Gerard Howells.”

Polly looked and then stepped forward to shield Susan from him. Jane and her maids did, too. All of them felt that his attentions were unsuitable.

But he wasn’t looking at Susan. It was her grandfather whose path he cut across, forcing him and Sir Richard to stop.

Before The Doctor could say anything, Sir Richard had words for Howells.

“You were not at church this morning,” he declared. “I presumed you had left the parish, but since you have not, there is no excuse for your absence.”

He paused, nevertheless, to hear any mitigating circumstances Howells might have.

The scowling man said nothing.

“Then be off with you,” Sir Richard told him, barely containing his rage so as not to profane the Holy Day. “You are not welcome in my home. Remove yourself from my lands forthwith.”

Howells said nothing, again, but contemptuously spat at Sir Richard’s feet.

“Be off with you or I shall rouse the Constable from his Christmas dinner,” Sir Richard insisted. Again, Howells stood his ground, briefly, at least. Then he spat again and turned on his heels. He was watched closely by everyone until he was out of sight.

“Make sure the gate is guarded against his return,” Sir Richard ordered his servants. “Do not let that man near my home and my guests.”

Susan was not the only one relieved by those orders from Sir Richard. The party that returned to Hoghton Tower was much happier than it had been. The cold collation lunch was a cheerful affair at a table long enough for The Doctor and Ben to easily set themselves at the bottom end while Susan and Polly with the OTHER Doctor were at the top next to Sir Richard and Jane. The rest of the extended household stretched between them, enjoying a convivial meal.

Afterwards, many of the household chose to get a little rest. There was another party tonight that would go on until the early hours. Polly was happy to take off her tight bodice and lay down in the looser undershift. Susan, too, came for a little sleep. She looked as if she needed it.

Again, when Polly woke up, Susan wasn’t in the room. Again, when she looked out at the torchlit upper courtyard she saw the girl heading towards the stable, again making her think that the other TARDIS was there and that Susan was going to get ready for the evening’s festivities.

But she wasn’t alone out there. A figure slunk through the shadows. Polly recognised him at once and knew he had slipped past Sir Richard’s servants somehow. He was following Susan.

She didn’t bother about putting on any more clothes than her undershirt. She didn’t even wait to put on the complicated laced contemporary shoes. She ran, in a deplorable state of undress and painfully barefoot when she reached the wintry courtyard. All she could think of was stopping that man from doing any harm to The Doctor’s granddaughter.

When she reached the stable, she knew it was very nearly too late. Howells had the petite girl in his grasp and a long threatening knife turned towards her as she burst in.

“Get back,” he said. “Get back, now, or I’ll kill this girl.”

“What are you doing?” Polly demanded. “What do you want?”

“I want The Doctor,” Howells replied, quite unexpectedly.

“What?”

“What?”

Polly and Susan both exclaimed at once.

“You mean… her grandfather?” Polly asked. “How did… YOU… know he’s called The Doctor?”

“How do YOU know that?” Susan asked, surprise overriding her fear.

“Never mind that,” Howells said. “You… if you know who I want… go and get him. Get The Doctor.”

“No need, Polly, I’m here,” said The Doctor leaping up from behind the stall where Sir Richard’s horses ate their oats with steady disinterest in the drama going on. At the sane moment Ben dropped from the hayloft above and grabbed Howells by the knife arm and knocking him in the side of the head. He collapsed to the floor as Susan quickly stepped away from him and was gathered into a protective embrace by The Doctor.

“Oh,” she cried. “It… it’s you… grandfather. It’s really you. I felt… last night when you danced with me… and this morning in the sitting room… I felt so safe with you, as if… I’d always known you. And I have. But….”

“It’s all right, my dear,” The Doctor assured her. “I know what you’re thinking. I shouldn’t be here. I’m breaking all the rules. But the two of us already broke a few, and I had to find out what happened this Christmas Day.”

“What happened… was my grandfather was here to look after me, just like always,” Susan said in a choked voice. “Thank you, so very much.”

“What I don’t get is how he knew about you,” Ben said. “About The Doctor, I mean. And why he wanted you… or the other you.”

“Well, if we wait a minute for him to come around, we may find that out,” The Doctor suggested. “You and I, anyway.” He glanced towards the far wall of the stable where hay had been stacked high around a rectangular shape. A small amount of blue was giving away its identity to anyone who knew. “Susan, why don’t you tale Polly to the Wardrobe, and both of you find the most beautiful gowns you can find, and the brightest jewels to decorate them. By the time you’re done this business will be over with, and we can all enjoy the Christmas Day festivities. I believe the mummers will be calling tonight. None of us want to miss that.”

Polly thought she would have liked to know what all this was all about, too, but The Doctor obviously wanted Susan to be protected from it all. She accepted the suggestion with all the enthusiasm of a young woman who liked putting on nice clothes.

Susan’s gown tonight was pastel green with thousands of glittering diamonds. Polly’s was crimson and yellow with a ruby necklace setting it off. The two of them shared the envy and admiration of the other women and danced with almost every man in the room.

The mummers with a colourful and lively play about the spirit of Christmas came and went, rewarded with silver from Sir Richard’s purse. While the dancing resumed, Polly got Ben alone in a side room and had the whole story of Gerard Howells from him.

“Well, his name wasn’t Howells,” he explained. “And he definitely didn’t work for the Earl of Derby. He wasn’t even human. He comes from the same planet as The Doctor. He’s a political criminal of some sort. He wanted to persuade The Doctor to join with him in going back to their world and overturning the government in a coup. He said he had men ready to follow them if The Doctor was up for it.”

“Why would he need The Doctor?” Polly asked.

“I don’t completely get it, but apparently, on their world, our old Doc is quite high born, like aristocracy, and people really WOULD rise up if somebody of his rank would lead them.”

“The Doctor?” Polly smiled. “Hard to believe, looking at him. He doesn’t look like he could command an army.”

“No, but wherever he goes, people DO sit up and listen to him. Even looking like a mad clown as he does, now, they see something in his eyes. I think he very well could.”

“But he wouldn’t, of course.”

“No, he wouldn’t,” Ben agreed. “When he heard what Howells… or whatever his real name was… had planned he was so angry… like I’ve never seen him angry. He called him a traitor and matinee and backstabbing… well, I’m not sure what the word was that he used, but it sounded like something bad.”

“What happened to him?” Polly asked.

“Turns out there were THREE TARDISes parked around this place. I helped The Doctor take Howells to HIS one. The Doc did something to the controls, so that it would go straight back to their home world. He said the authorities there would know what to do with the likes of him.”

“What would they do?” Polly asked. “Do The Doctor’s people execute prisoners?”

“I think they might. He looked scared enough. But if Sir Richard got hold of him in these tines he might be no better off. Anyway, serves him right. Treason against his own government… and trying to get our Doctor involved.”

“Mind you, I have often wondered if The Doctor was some kind of political exile himself… you know, like defectors from Russia. He has never really explained why he travels around in his old police box.”

“Well, if he is, he still knows what’s right and wrong, unlike that man. Anyway, he’s gone, and this has been one heck of a Christmas.”

“Still another ten nights of it,” Polly reminded him. “Susan told me she and her grandfather aren’t staying the whole time. They’re going off tomorrow morning. She said she wasn’t going to tell him anything. She doesn’t want him to worry about the whole paradox thing, the two of them being here. And even if he didn’t find out about that, she’s fourteen, going on fifteen, and doesn’t want him thinking he can’t let her out of his sight around men. Either way, its better for her if he doesn’t find out… at least not yet.”

“Our Doctor’s going to miss her when they go. I think he’s liked seeing her.”

“I know. That’s a shame. But I suppose he’ll get used to it. She must have left him once already.”

“Another mystery about our Doctor. What happened to his granddaughter.”

“She met a man he approved of and he let her go and make her own life,” Polly answered. “I hope so, anyway.”

“Yes, me too. Anyway, come on, Duchess. Let’s dance again. We’re both getting quite good at the old Galliard. They’ll be giving us the prize for best dancers in Lancashire by January.”

“Yes,” Polly agreed. She stood up and let Ben take her hand. As they went to leave the room, Sir Richard and The Doctor came in, the former talking about the tobacco leaf he had imported from the New World. Ben bowed a very exact bow and Polly curtseyed, ensuring that eye contact was avoided.

“Merry Christmas, Doctor,” Polly whispered as she passed him without leaving any memory of her face that would complicate their meeting in his future and her past.