**The Lady Vanishes**

"How about this, Duchess?" Ben Jackson declared loudly, perhaps a little too loudly. He and Polly, carrying overnight bags on his instructions, had followed The Doctor from a rather dully lit 'hanger' where he had 'parked' the TARDIS into something rather magnificent. “It’s a bit of all right, innit.”

"Don’t stare," Polly whispered, but she couldn't help it any more than he could. They had stepped into the very definition of style. The huge room was octagonal with lots of polished mahogany and deep red leather in the comfortable sofas and coffee tables that surrounded a central desk where smartly dressed men and women attended to guests.

Smartly dressed robots, she amended. They looked human from a distance, but closer their plastic faces were pale complexioned and clearly unreal. The female versions had rouge and lipstick and eye make-up, but all of it very artificial looking, like the puppets Polly remembered seeing on Thunderbirds in the days when she lived one day at a time and did normal things like watching television.

But the robot staff were not the only remarkable things about this amazing hotel. Polly looked up at a burnished copper dome above the grand foyer, topped by a glass circle through which she could see Earth hanging in the sky, blue, green and white, glowing in reflected sunlight just as the moon did on Earth.

"Oh… my…" she whispered a little more loudly. "We're on the moon."

“It’s a bit different from the last time we were here,” Ben observed. “Not just because there are no Cybermen, either. The Moonbase people were living just like sailors aboard ship – cramped bunks, packets of food, water at a premium. This is a bit upmarket!”

Polly agreed. She was wondering whether they were going to be staying as guests, or were they just having a quick look about?

Maybe they were recruiting human staff and The Doctor was signing them up for the kitchen?

“No thanks,” she said to herself as a robot waiter passed her by bringing tea to a group of guests on one of the comfy sofas.

The Doctor turned from the reception desk and waved to his friends with a wide, impish smile they had come to know. A robot porter came for their bags now that they were officially recognised guests and they were conducted to a lift.

The lift was another surprise. It was glass on five of its six sides and offered an amazing view of the moonscape as it rose up the side of a building much taller even than the domed reception. Neither Ben nor Polly knew much about the geography of the moon, so they took The Doctor’s word for it when he told them that the Hotel Leuadau was built on the edge of the lunar alps on the ‘shore’ of the falsely named Mare Imbrium - Latin for "Sea of Showers" or "Sea of Rains” and clearly as dry and dusty as a desert.

“The word ‘Leuadau’ is Welsh for ‘moon’,” The Doctor continued. “A Swansea man had it built. He had the robots developed because he didn’t like the idea of humans serving other humans.”

“That sounds fine,” Polly said. “As long as the robots don’t get fed up of serving humans.

“So, this is centuries after the Moonbase and the Cybermen?” Ben guessed as Polly wondered about the possibility of a robot hospitality trades union. “And there’s a hotel here.”

“There is,” The Doctor confirmed. “It is the twenty fifth century and humans have reached the next known solar system with habitable planets, but for a relaxing holiday, Leuadau is the only place to be.”

“Is that what we’re here for?” Polly asked. “A relaxing holiday. There’s nothing else going on? No cybermen….”

“Those are long gone,” The Doctor assured her. “Only a few historians even know about the days of the Moonbase, let alone the top secret, classified events that occurred centuries ago. I thought you both might enjoy seeing the moon in its peaceful time.”

“It… looks good so far,” Polly agreed. The lift stopped and the doors opened. The robot porter led them through a glass door to a small landing and then unlocked the door to the beautiful drawing room of a full luxury suite of rooms. It was hexagonal with floor length windows on four of the six sides looking out over the moonscape towards the Sea of Rains. A large, round, smoked glass coffee table was partially surrounded by a semi-circular sofa capable of seating at least eight people. Within only a few steps was a bar with alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks and a library containing a selection of books, almost all of which had been written a century after Ben and Polly left Earth with The Doctor.

“Bedroom for you that way, Polly,” The Doctor told her, pointing to the doors leading off the drawing room. “With en-suite bathroom. You and I will share the other room, Ben.”

“Fair enough,” Ben accepted. He made drinks while The Doctor showed Polly a brochure detailing all of the hotel’s marvellous facilities.

“A swimming pool,” she enthused looking through the interactive hologram images of all there was to offer. “And a beauty parlour and boutique. Wonderful. Except… I don’t have any twenty-fifth century money, of course.”

 The Doctor smiled indulgently and gave her a small wafer thin card about the length and width of her middle finger. He told her it was a Universal Credit Card and would buy her anything she liked.

“So, you come to the moon and go shopping, Duchess?” Ben teased her before she departed. “What about us, Doctor? What shall we do to relax?”

“There is a holovid documentary in the conference centre about the history of moon exploration, followed by a moonbus tour of the Sea of Rains,” The Doctor suggested.

Documentaries weren’t really Ben’s idea of relaxation, but on the other hand he joined the navy because he was interested in seeing new places, and what was newer than the moon?

“Why not,” he agreed.

Polly’s first stop was the boutique, because she couldn’t go swimming without a costume. Twenty-fifth century fashion was figure hugging, high legged, low necked, silver fabric that felt like a second skin. She purchased two big towels as well and headed for the pool.

The swimming pool was a wonder in itself. It was hexagonal, like everything seemed to be in this hotel, each side fifty metres long, making the widest part far longer than any pool Polly had ever been in. It was at the top of the hotel, actually built part on and part off the roof, with a glass floor so that the swimmers could see right down to the moon surface. Above was a dome through which the whole glorious sight of Earth surrounded by an infinite starfield could be seen.

Polly decided a few lengths of backstroke would be pleasant.

There were only a few other swimmers, not counting the children in a separate pool. There were just two men swimming very fast and competitively and a young woman in a silver bikini who was practicing surface dives to the bottom of the deep end.

Both Polly and the bikini wearing woman finished their swim at about the same time. They showered and wrapped themselves in towels before going through to the sauna room.

Saunas were only just coming into fashion in Polly’s nineteen-sixties, and then mostly in exclusive clubs, so this really was a treat for her. She enjoyed the Turkish steam room and the quiet, fragrant sauna itself where she stretched out on her towel without even feeling embarrassed about being naked with just another woman for company.

Without even thinking about it she began chatting. She found out that her companion was Deborah Froy, Debbie to her friends. She was a diplomatic secretary for the Earth Embassy on Mars.

Polly was a little daunted by that. She was a secretary herself, but it sounded as if Debbie’s work was several grades higher.

It didn’t seem to matter, anyway. They talked about clothes, a universal subject, and hairstyles, again a subject that the centuries between them hadn’t affected significantly.

In short, they were two young women relaxing in a safe, uncomplicated environment.

“Polly….” Debbie said all of a sudden. “I know we’ve only just met… but… could I trust you?”

“Trust… of course. Why? What’s the matter?”

Polly sat up on the sauna bench and looked at Debbie.

“I… I’m not just a secretary,” she said with a suddenly nervous tone. “I’m… I’m… I can’t explain. But… if anything were to happen to me….”

Debbie reached out to Polly’s hand, pressing something into her palm. It was warm, because everything was in the sauna, but it felt like a metal disc, possibly a coin.

“What…” Polly began. “I don’t understand.”

“Please….” Debbie begged her with an anxious expression. Then she jumped up from the bench and ran out of the sauna.

Polly was bewildered. She got up and wrapped her towel around herself before following Debbie out into the shower and changing room meaning to get a full explanation from her.

Debbie wasn’t there.

She checked the showers, but they were all turned off and quite empty. So was the steam room.

The only other way she could have gone was out to the pool.

But Debbie was naked. She didn’t even have her towel. She left that in the sauna. Her clothes, in a small bag, were hanging on a hook next to Polly’s.

She opened the door and looked around. There was no sign of the fuss that might be made if a naked woman was wandering around.

She had no wish to attract that sort of attention herself. She ducked back into the changing room and hurriedly dressed before stepping out again.

The main pool was now busy with a water polo team practising. The children were having a swimming lesson in the small pool.

The lifeguards were robots just like the other staff. Waterproof ones, Polly thought. Otherwise they wouldn’t be much use.

She stepped up to one of them and was immediately chided for wearing outdoor footwear in the pool area.

“Never mind that,” Polly told him. “I’m looking for my friend. She must have come through here. She… might have found a towel….”

The robot lifeguard’s expression didn’t change. It was not surprised by the idea of a woman in a towel.

But it insisted it had not seen one.

“But she must have come this way,” Polly argued. “There is no other way out from the sauna suite. You must have seen her.”

The expressionless robot conveyed its apologies for not being able to help and suggested that she should try asking at reception.

She did that, even though it seemed pointless. At least she might get Debbie’s room number so that she could check if she was all right.

She was disconcerted when the robot receptionist told her that there was no guest in the hotel by the name of Deborah Froy.

“Yes, there is,” Polly insisted. “I was talking to her in the sauna. Then she ran off in a hurry. She even left her clothes behind.”

“There is no such guest,” the receptionist insisted. “I am sorry, madam, but I cannot help you with your request.”

“This doesn’t make sense. She said she was on holiday, just like me. She said….”

The receptionist’s unmoving face was too much. Polly turned away. She felt a whole range of emotions, none of which the robot staff could possibly express. She was worried about Debbie. She was frustrated by the lack of help she was getting from the staff. She was annoyed that she was in the middle of some kind of mystery when she had been promised a quiet time.

Mostly she was puzzled. How COULD a possibly naked woman just disappear without a trace. How could she not be listed as a guest of the hotel?

Could she have imagined it all?

No. She wasn’t the sort of person who was prone to hallucinations. She was Polly Wright, down to earth, sensible, reliable, not one for fanciful notions. She could scream when confronted by a cyberman, but she was not given to hysterics, and certainly not somebody who imagines a whole conversation with a woman and then convinces herself that it is real.

Besides, a sharp pain in the palm of her hand was proof that something had really happened. She opened her hand quickly, then closed it again, giving herself another sharp jab, but concealing the object that Debbie had thrust into her hand.

She turned and crossed the floor to the lifts. She wanted to get back into the hotel suite to think quietly and to examine what was in her hand privately.

But she didn’t have a key. The Doctor had given her the credit card, but not a room key, and he and Ben were planning to go off somewhere.

She turned back from the lifts and headed instead for the retail avenue with dozens of shops and services under a glass roof with Earth glowing prettily above. She went into the first boutique and picked two dresses before heading for the changing room. She hung the dresses on a peg and sat on the chair inside the cubicle. She opened her hand again and looked at the ‘coin’.

It wasn’t a coin. It was a sort of eight-sided star shape with rather sharp edges. They were what had jabbed into her palm so painfully. It was made of dull but strong pewter. The design in the centre on one side was a circle with an equal armed cross in the middle. The design shimmered in various colours as she turned it towards the light.

On the ‘reverse’ side there was a curved surface almost like a button that also shimmered in the light.

Polly pressed the ‘button’ half expecting nothing to happen. She absolutely didn’t expect a hologram to appear above it.

If Polly had been a seventies girl rather than a sixties one, she probably wouldn’t have been quite as surprised as she was by the miniature image of Debbie Froy. She might also have realised a little sooner that the image was looping around every few seconds because it needed a code command to open the full message.

She pressed the button again and the hologram disappeared.

She didn’t know what the whole thing meant, but she had a strong sense that she ought to be very careful not to let the star out of her possession until she could find Debbie or pass it on to somebody trustworthy.

 She reached into her shoulder bag and found a powder compact. She emptied the powder into a paper bag and set it aside, then placed the hologram star inside the case. She put it at the very bottom of the bag and pushed her other bits of make-up on top of it. It wasn’t the best of hiding places. If somebody REALLY wanted to find it, they would. But it was safe enough from the casual pickpocket.

She put the strap across her shoulders so that the bag couldn’t be grabbed easily and took the two dresses to the counter. She looked just like an ordinary shopper.

She went next to the restaurant where a tasty lunch menu was available. She sat in a window seat with a view over the mis-named Sea of Rains. She put her shoulder bag beside the window while she ordered food. She was hungry, but as well as that she was taking an opportunity to think.

The first thing she had to think about was why she was doing this. She had only just met Debbie Froy. Why did she care about what happened to her?

Well, that was easy to answer. She cared because she was a caring person. She cared because Debbie had put her trust in her. Whatever the hologram disc was for had to be important.

And it had to have something to do with her disappearance. Somebody wanted the information it contained.

And that meant that she had to do everything she could to stop them getting that information.

She was thinking about that when she noticed two men walking around the restaurant. People didn’t usually do that in restaurants. They sat down at a table or had a drink at the bar. These two seemed to be looking at the diners carefully.

They looked a little familiar, and a moment or two later Polly realised where she had seen them before. By good fortune the robot waiter came with her lunch order just as the two men passed her table. Her face was obscured and it was possible they weren’t expecting a blonde with long hair, anyway. She had been wearing a black plastic swimming cap in the pool when she had seen them doing those powerful lengths of the fast lane.

She had a good look at them. They were stocky, thuggish looking. One of them had a fresh black eye and the other a cut on his jaw from a well-placed punch.

Even if she didn’t have good reasons to avoid them she wouldn’t want to be in their company for long.

She stayed calm as they moved away and quietly ate her lunch, resisting the urge to run. They left the restaurant eventually and she was able to relax a little.

She had two cups of coffee before eventually leaving the restaurant. She couldn’t see the two men in the retail avenue, but that didn’t mean they weren’t around.

She wound through the crowds until she found herself in front of a hairdressers.

An hour later she emerged with a bob cut in a new shade of burnished red. If by any chance they WERE looking for a blonde they would be disappointed.

Two more boutiques and an accessories shop and she had changed her whole look with a smart black trouser suit and a men’s style trilby hat along with a shoulder bag with a zip and buckle fastening for extra security when she transferred her belongings to it, again pushing the compact to the very bottom.

She was feeling much safer as she headed back to the foyer to take the reception staff to task again.

As she stepped out of the lift, though, she saw the two men. They were at the reception desk. She turned away quickly. This was not the time to make the sort of fuss she had planned. Certainly, mentioning Debbie by name within earshot would be a bad idea.

“Duchess!” She turned as Ben called out to her. He crossed the floor from the hangar bay entrance in a few quick strides and caught her by the hand. “Blimey, you’ve gone to town on yourself. I nearly didn’t recognise you. That outfit looks good on you. And the new hair! What a change from the blonde look.”

“Shhh,” she told him as the two men looked around and paid closer attention to her. They couldn’t do anything even if they had recognised her, though. There was a sudden upsurge in concerned voices as a trolley was brought into the foyer. There was a body on it, decently covered in a cloth. A few women shrieked melodramatically. Some people removed hats respectfully. Even fewer crossed themselves or made other signs of piety as the body was wheeled towards a ‘Staff Only’ door.

The Doctor came in behind the stretcher party and hurried towards Ben and Polly. He seemed quite oblivious to her new look, but obviously there was something more vital going on to distract him.

“What happened?” Polly asked. “Who died… and how?”

“I was about to tell you all about it,” Ben answered her. “We were on the moonbus tour, a good ten miles out, when an old dear at the front started screaming that there was a body out on the ‘sea’. The driver stopped and he went out in a space helmet they have for emergencies and brought the poor geezer into the bus. It was too late, of course.”

“Well, yes,” Polly agreed. “No air out there. He’d be dead in no time.”

“He didn’t die out there,” The Doctor said with uncharacteristic grimness. “Come along, back to our suite. We can talk in private.”

That was what Polly needed to do more than anything. Flanked by Ben and The Doctor she noted that the two men had made themselves scarce. She travelled up the lift to the suite at the top of the hotel in safety.

Of course, Ben wanted to tell their story, first. Polly listened as he recapped the recovery of the body. As a trained first aider the young sailor had looked closely at the body before declaring that he was definitely dead.

“But as The Doctor already said, he didn’t die out there of lack of air,” Ben insisted. “Any medical officer would confirm it. There were marks on his neck. He had been strangled. Must have been a big, strong geezer. Our man was quite well built, sailor’s muscles. He had some bruises on his knuckles, too. He put up a fight. But he was overpowered eventually. There was probably more than one of them.”

Polly thought of the two men stalking her and the signs that they had been in a fight, but was that just a coincidence?

“The difficultly is knowing how long the body was out there, of course,” The Doctor added. “In a vacuum all the signs of decay take much longer. There are no microbes or bacteria, insects to lay eggs. Eventually the body would desiccate and mummify, but not for months or even years.”

“Couldn’t have been much more than a day,” Ben pointed out. “He wasn’t there when the last moonbus tour went past.”

Of course, day and night were meaningless on the moon, but the hotel clocks worked on an Earth twenty-four hour cycle and it was a ‘day’ since the last scheduled tour.

“We at least know who he is,” The Doctor said. “Michael Daniels, an officer of the Earth Federation police. He had a biometric identification card… and THIS. The lenticular symbol of a cross inside a circle is that of the twenty-fifth century Earth Federation.”

To Polly’s astonishment, The Doctor held up a small star shaped medallion just like the one she had buried in her bag. This was her cue. She gave a very fast account of her own adventure while retrieving the medallion from her compact.

The Doctor solemnly took it and compared it to the other one, then he held them in either hand and pressed the buttons.

The holograms of a man and a woman appeared above the medallions. This time the images didn’t just loop. A wiggly blue line appeared from the image of Deborah Froy and passed to the image of Michael Daniels. It lasted for about half a minute before both holograms switched off.

“So… Debbie was meant to meet Daniels and pass on some important information that was in her medallion?” Polly queried.

“What information?” Ben asked.

“That’s not our business,” The Doctor replied. “This belongs to the Federation police. They will doubtless be coming for their man once a report reaches them. I can hand it over to them and they will deal with the information as they see fit. What I think we should do is find Polly’s friend before she suffers a similar fate.”

“Yeah….” Ben had a thoughtful look. “You know, neither of you have thought about that. Deborah Froy…. Miss Froy.”

Both The Doctor and Polly looked at him quizzically.

“Neither of you are old film buffs?”

Polly shook her head. The Doctor rambled for a while about a time when he was an extra in Buster Keaton comedies.

“Not that far back,” Ben told him. “We sometimes get films on the mess deck, you know, out at sea when there’s not much to do. But they tend to be old ones, and on a long trip we tend to get the same films over and over. There’s this one from before the war, called The Lady Vanishes. This posh bird chats with an old dear in a train and then the old dear disappears and everyone else denies seeing her at all. Turns out half the train is in on it and the old dear had some information the government needed.”

The Doctor and Polly were still slightly puzzled but they waited for Ben to get to the point.

“I told you I’ve seen it a few times,” he continued. “I can remember that the old dear who vanished was called Miss Froy.”

“Oh,” Polly gasped.

“I reckon your bird knew that film, too,” Ben said. “And used that name as a sort of clue to what was going on.”

“So that explains why she wasn’t on the hotel register?” Polly guessed.

“I’m not so sure,” The Doctor answered her. “I have a feeling something else Ben mentioned about the film is relevant. ‘Turns out they were all in on it’. It’s easy enough to change a robot’s loyalty. Polly, my dear, I think for your own safety you should stay here in these rooms, but Ben and I are going to investigate a few things.”

Polly’s feminist hackles raised a little, but then she realised that The Doctor was right. She had done quite enough in evading what she was now ready to call enemy agents and she could take a back seat for a while.

“Somewhere on the telecast system, you might even find the film Ben was talking about,” The Doctor suggested, handing her the control box with multiple buttons. “Three hundred channels, there will be a vintage film section somewhere.”

Polly sat down to investigate a concept of entertainment hardly known in her time when there were only three television stations and all in black and white. Ben and The Doctor left her to it. They travelled downstairs to the foyer and headed straight for the ‘staff only’ door where the body had been taken.

A security robot immediately blocked them, but The Doctor held up Michael Daniels’ medallion.

“Earth Federation Police,” he said. “On official duty.”

The robot obviously had some kind of image recognition software in its programming. It accepted that The Doctor and Ben were from the authority that had jurisdiction over crime on the moon. It let them past.

They found the room where the body had been left, but there wasn’t much more Michael Daniels could offer up beyond his life. What interested The Doctor was that this room also had computer terminals intended for humans to use. There were chairs in front of monitors with keyboards for inputting or retrieving information.

Ben didn’t really know computers. The ships he sailed on were mostly about manpower. In his lifetime, assuming he lived one day after another to a good old age, even an able seaman would need to understand some information technology on ships almost entirely run by computerised systems that would rival the TARDIS console for complexity, but that was the future. In his time computers didn’t even have monitor screens or keyboards. Input and output was by punched cards and paper printouts, some of which would still need humans to translate.

So when The Doctor tapped a few keys and accessed the closed circuit television system from the public parts of the hotel in full high definition colour it was nothing short of a technological marvel to him.

The Doctor had found the film of this morning in the pool. He and Ben watched Polly swimming on her back.

“But there’s nobody else there,” Ben pointed out. “Not Miss Froy, not the two geezer who were following her. Just the kids in the small pool and the robot lifeguards.”

“This film has been tampered with,” The Doctor said. He pressed some more keys and the screen went blank momentarily before clearing again.

This time there were four people in the pool – Polly, of course, and a woman who must have been Miss Foy, and the two heavies pretending to be racing each other in the water but actually watching both women surreptitiously

“The video playback has been interfered with,” The Doctor said. “To make it appear that Polly was alone in the pool.”

Ben took his word for it since ‘video playback’ wasn’t a phrase he had ever used in his life.

‘Fast Forward’ wasn’t in his normal vocabulary, either, but he watched the images speed up to pass a full hour of poolside activity in a few minutes. Polly and Miss Deborah Froy got out of the pool in a few seconds and a minute later the two men followed.

“Hey….” The Doctor slowed the playback to normal and Ben watched as the men came back from the corridor with an unconscious woman wrapped in a large towel. The robot lifeguard did nothing to acknowledge the odd sight.

“She’s not in trouble in the water or breaking any pool rules, so the robot doesn’t see a problem,” The Doctor explained. “That’s the trouble with artificial brains. They can’t see beyond their programming.”

“So where did they take her, do you think?” Ben asked.

“If the CCTV is altered, perhaps the guest list is, too,” The Doctor suggested. He pressed more keys and the screen resolved into the electronic version of the hotel register. It took only seconds to find a room number for the clever Miss Froy.

“Since her existence in this hotel has been erased, where better to hide her?” The Doctor said. “Come along.”

“We’re just going to knock on the door?” Ben queried. “Those two thugs are probably there. Or a couple of accomplices.”

“We’ll see,” The Doctor answered. Knocking on the door was his plan, and when they reached the room on the third floor, a rather more modest one than the suite The Doctor had taken, that was just what he did.

Ben stood ready to deliver some old-fashioned street fisticuffs. He was surprised when the door was opened by a robot maid.

“Hotel inspector,” The Doctor said, again holding up the Earth Federation medallion that was recognised as superior authority by the maid. He and Ben walked past her and found Miss Deborah Froy, still wrapped in nothing but a large towel, gagged and tied to the bed with cruelly tight cords.

“Its all right now,” The Doctor assured her as he began to untie her bonds. “I’m The Doctor. This is Ben. We’re both friends of your friend, Polly.”

“I’m sorry I put her in danger,” Deborah said in reply once the gag was taken from her mouth. “But when Daniels didn’t meet me as arranged and those two thugs were watching me, I knew I had to pass the information onto somebody else. If they got it from me, there could be terrible consequences.”

“The information is safe,” The Doctor assured her. “But I’m afraid Daniels is dead.”

“Oh!” Deborah took that information calmly, but her eyes betrayed her sorrow at the loss of a colleague, and perhaps a friend. “But there’s no time to grieve. They know I don’t have the medallion. They grabbed me in the changing room. They must have already searched my clothes. They must know I gave it to Polly. She’s still in danger.”

“Yes, she is,” The Doctor agreed. “Ben and I will wait outside while you dress then we must all get back to her.”

Polly had actually found a colour remake of the film Ben had described, made in the early twenty-first century. It had taken her mind off her troubles for a while.

A knock at the door made her wary again. She went carefully to look through the eyelet. There was a robot waiter outside with a trolley.

She hadn’t ordered anything, and she was sure Ben and The Doctor hadn’t bothered with room service. It was obviously a ploy. The two thugs were probably out there, ready to force their way into the room.

She reached for the door chain and rattled it as if she was taking it off, then opened the door just the few inches the chain allowed. A very human arm pushed through the gap, trying to reach her. Polly pushed against the door. The potential intruder yelled in pain but didn’t pull back his arm. Instead he pushed against the door, straining the security chain to its limits. Polly pushed back with all her might, but she hardly had the strength he had. Sooner or later he would force her back.

The Doctor, Ben and Deborah reached the landing in time to see both thugs forcing the door open. Ben immediately charged at them, laying an upper cut on one chisel jawed face and shoulder barging the other out of the doorway. Polly slammed the door shut and Ben pushed the thug up against it as he laid several more blows on him that came from no rule book of gentlemanly fighting. Rules didn’t count with men who liked to rough up women in Ben’s way of thinking.

But there were two of them and it might have gone badly for him if The Doctor hadn’t stuck out a leg and tripped one of the thugs while Deborah pushed the robot waiter over on top of him and then sat on the waiter’s back for good measure. Ben knocked his man out with a last jab to the jaw and he slid down into an ungainly heap on the floor.

“You can come out now, Duchess,” Ben called.

“No, we should all go in,” Deborah contradicted him. “We’ll tie these two up and wait for my colleagues to get here.”

That idea worked just as well. Polly was so glad to see Deborah safe and sound as well as the two thugs dealt with that she didn’t mind making coffee for everyone. She even poured a cup for the senior detective who came to get their statements while his subordinates hustled the thugs off to a waiting police space shuttle.

“You have the medallion with the encrypted information recorded on it?” the detective asked The Doctor. He duly obliged by handing it over.

“I suppose we still can’t know what it was all about?” Ben asked.

“It is best you don’t know,” Deborah, also known as Special Investigator Deborah Andrews, who enjoyed vintage films when she wasn’t working as an undercover agent, told them. “But it was very, very important to Earth’s safety and security. You have all been a great help. Especially you, Polly. I can’t thank you enough.”

“That’s all right,” Polly answered. “I’m glad I could help. I think, though, after all the excitement, I would really like to have the relaxing holiday I was promised. What about a fortnight at the Grand Hotel, Brighton, with real, human maids bringing the room service and no scares? Do you think you could do that, Doctor?”

“I shall try very hard,” The Doctor promised.

“Don’t hold your breath for it, Duchess,” Ben added. “You’re probably better off sticking with the moon now we’re here.”

“You’re probably right,” Polly admitted. “Well, at least, perhaps, I could try a swim and sauna without any drama this time.”