**The Beast of Loch Rannoch**

Loch Rannoch was a long dark gash between the mountains, except for the silvery path reflecting the full moon in a clear sky.

There were few people around to look at the Loch this late at night. Nor was anyone around to hear the fierce snarls of an unknown predatory creature or the panicked cries of the prey – perhaps a wild deer, perhaps a sheep from a local farm. Whatever evidence of the creature’s night hunt that might be found in the light of morning would be put down to a stray dog by most people.

Only a few might remember it was full moon and talk about the ‘Beast of Loch Rannoch’.

Peri was unhappy. She was cold, wet, tired and rapidly losing faith in The Doctor’s ‘unerring’ sense of direction – which she suspected was erring quite significantly right now. Among many reasons for her annoyance was the way he strode along confidently while she struggled to keep up, stumbling constantly as her fashionable shoes, inadequate for walking in the Scottish Highlands even on a fine day, were pinching her toes and threatening to lose a heel at every step.

“You should have worn more suitable walking shoes,” The Doctor told her. Peri screamed with rage, her voice barely audible over the driving rain and wind.

“I wasn’t expecting to go WALKING,” she reminded him. “We were meant to be arriving at a four star Country Hotel. I should be sitting in a nice warm lounge drinking hot butter rum or Irish coffee, or whatever they do in Scotland to warm up frozen guests. YOU parked the TARDIS three miles across country from where we should be and decided we might as well walk.... Even though it was raining so hard the famous Loch was hardly visible.”

The Doctor looked at her and smiled infuriatingly.

“Well, we’re here now,” he told her. “There we are… Rannoch House Hotel.”

The sturdy grey-stone house that he indicated did look reassuringly occupied with lighted windows in the gloom of a fast falling evening, but it didn’t actually look like a hotel. The suspicion grew as they drew closer. There was no Tourist Board recommendation and no star rating for its restaurant.

And the door was locked. Not terribly welcoming, after all.

The Doctor pulled a bell rope that jangled somewhere inside. Peri wasn’t very hopeful, but it took only a little while before the door was opened by a liveried butler.

“Good evening,” The Doctor said. “We are a little lost. Might we step inside and perhaps borrow a towel?”

To Peri’s surprise after the flippant towel remark, the butler graciously invited them into what was very definitely not a hotel reception but the hallway of a private house with stairs going up to a long window on a landing before turning both left and right. Heavy sideboards lined the walls and above them glassy eyed stag heads with expressions that matched Peri’s mood just now.

“We were looking for a hotel….” Peri added to what she considered The Doctor’s inadequate explanation of their predicament.

“Hotel?” The butler looked surprised. “There’s no hotel anywhere near Kinloch Rannoch… only the village inn, and that isn’t the sort of place a respectable young woman would want to stay.” He studied their drenched outer clothing perceptively. “Did your car break down?”

“Something of that kind,” The Doctor answered. He was about to say something else, possibly another request for towels, when an inner door opened and a couple, a young woman in a day dress of pale peach linen and a man in tweeds came forward and looked at the two wet visitors curiously.

“Your Grace, your Ladyship, this lady and gentleman have had car trouble. They may also be somewhat lost as they were expecting to find a hotel.”

“You poor thing,” the woman said, stepping towards Peri with a friendly smile. “How utterly frightful it must have been. Donald, they must stay the night. It will be quite dark in half an hour and we couldn’t possibly put them out in this weather.”

“No, of course not,” his Lordship agreed. “That being so, introductions are in order. I’m Donald, Duke of Rannoch, this is my wife, the Duchess, who likes to be known just as Lady Harriet.”

“I LIKE to be just plain Harry,” she pointed out good naturedly. “That’s what my friends call me.”

The Doctor introduced himself and Peri who was finding the prospect of food, drink, and a bed for the night, all very reassuring even if everything else was still a little confusing.

“I expect your luggage is in the wretched car,” Lady Harriet said. “Come along, Peri, I’ll find you something to change into before dinner.”

“My brother left some clothes that will fit you, Doctor,” Lord Rannoch added as the two young women headed for the stairs. “Cranley will take care of you.”

Why his Lordship’s brother had left clothing was another question for later. Very quickly the two visitors were swept away and a little while after that were brought to a drawing room with a huge, blazing fire and drinks ably mixed by the versatile Cranley.

Peri was happy with the pastel blue chiffon dinner gown that Lady Harriet, or Harry to her friends, had found for her. She felt nicely feminine for the first time in absolutely ages.

The Doctor was looking civilised for once in a good quality dark suit, devoid of clashing colour schemes.

Only one thing worried her.

"Doctor," she whispered when their hosts were out of earshot. "It is 1981."

"It is?" His surprise was genuine.

"Right place, wrong time," she continued. "Not a huge error by your standards. We’re on the right planet, at least. But this isn't Rannoch House Hotel, yet. It's still Rannoch House, occupied by Lord Rannoch and his wife."

"Well…." The Doctor mused. "Perhaps its serendipity. Your quest might very well be better served here with an actual Lord of Rannoch than poking about a hotel."

Peri thought about that for a moment or so, and knew he was almost certainly right. But she still wasn't letting him off putting the TARDIS down three miles and nearly eight years out from their destination. Only the announcement that dinner was served saved him from further approbations.

There was already one diner at her place in the dining room, an elderly lady in a wheelchair who, despite age and infirmity had bright, inquisitive eyes and almost certainly a keen mind behind them. Lord Rannoch introduced her as his mother, the Dowager Duchess Lady Eileen.

“Delighted to make your acquaintance, your Ladyship,” The Doctor said, shaking her hand. Peri did likewise, accepting the close scrutiny of the Dowager before they took their seats at dinner.

“Peri has become rather shy now that we are here,” The Doctor said casually during the soup course. “But the reason we came to Rannoch was to allow her to see where her forebears came from. She has Rannoch blood on her father’s mother’s cousin’s side or something.”

“Really?” Lady Harriet was the one who managed a reply. Lord Rannoch and the Dowager both looked a little disturbed by the remark. Perhaps, The Doctor thought, they suspected a gold digger looking for claims to inheritance.

“My great-great grandmother on my MOTHER’s side, actually,” Peri explained. “In Edwardian times. She was a daughter of the then Lord Rannoch. She went to America to visit friends but met a man and fell in love.”

“Great heavens!” the Dowager exclaimed. “She means Catherine Rannoch, Donald. Your grandfather’s sister. I remember her when I was a little girl and I visited Rannoch with my parents… long before I was engaged to young Donald, your grandfather, the heir to the title. She was very independent and determined to have her own way with everything. The Duke, your great-grandfather, was so angry when she wrote to say she was staying in… where was it…. Baltimore.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Peri answered, knowing she would have to sort out all these grandfathers and great-grandfathers another time. “She died just before I was born, in the sixties, but my mother remembered her as a very busy, active woman even though she was born in the reign of Queen Victoria.”

She glanced at the Dowager Eileen and wondered if she was born in the Victorian age, too, but if so, she didn’t consider it an insult to point it out.

“That is wonderful,” Harriet said when nobody else commented. “You really ARE a Rannoch. Donald… don’t you agree?”

“Wonderful, indeed,” Donald Rannoch’s tone was pleasant, and he smiled at Peri. Even so, there seemed, to The Doctor, watching the faces around the table, to be something doubtful in his eyes. But, again, it might simply be suspicion of an American stranger who turned up at his door out of the blue claiming to be a long lost relative.

“His Grace swore he would not let Catherine set foot in the house again,” the Dowager said, referring to the Edwardian Duke, not the current holder of the title. Then she, too, smiled. “But that was a long time ago, and you are more than welcome, Peri, dear girl.”

This acceptance by the Dowager was clearly what Donald Ranmoch, for all his position as the present Duke, Lord of all he might survey, patriarchal head of the household, was waiting for. Now he opened up, talking about his family line, from the scandal of the Edwardian Rannoch daughter who went her own way, to the death of two younger Rannoch brothers in the First World War, and another, Donald’s own father, during the D Day operations, leaving him as the hereditary Duke before he was five years old.

“His brother, Fergus, was just a baby,” the Dowager added. “My poor child. He never knew his father at all.”

“Aye… Fergus….” Donald Rannoch murmured sadly. The Doctor, wearing one of Fergus’s suits that he ‘left behind’ felt as if he ought to ask about the younger brother’s ‘departure’ but his Grace had passed on from the subject and was telling Peri that there was a portrait of Catherine Rannoch in the library. He would be glad to show it to her after dinner.

“Do I look much like her?” Peri asked.

“No,” Donald answered her. “Perhaps the eyes… but no, I’m afraid you are much more the product of your American family line.”

That might have been a put down. Peri’s blood was not pure Rannoch, but a product of America’s melting pot of migrants from all over the world.

She decided not to let it worry her.

“That’s probably just as well,” she admitted. “Looking at such an old picture and seeing myself in it would be a bit….”

She broke off, wondering if she would be insulting the family honour by suggesting that a resemblance to Catherine Rannoch would be ‘creepy’.

“Quite right, “Harriet said. “I’m sure there must be more than the one portrait in the house. There are simply dozens of family photograph albums going back to the beginning of photography. There must be pictures of Catherine. The old Lord Rannoch wasn’t SO angry he’d get rid of them, was he?”

“No, not THAT angry,” the Dowager admitted. “I sometimes wondered if the anger really hid more of a grief. She was his youngest child and he was fond of her when she was little... so my dear husband told me. I think it was the fact that she had gone so far away from him that broke his heart and his pride. The Atlantic ocean felt so much bigger before the age of aeroplanes. She was lost to him forever.”

“How sad, for them both,” Peri said. And that seemed to sum up the whole topic. They talked of less personal matters for the duration of the meal. Afterwards, the Dowager Eileen was taken to her ground floor room by a nurse-attendant while the Duke invited The Doctor and Peri to enjoy a brandy in the drawing room and opened up the idea of them staying beyond the one night.

“You want us to stay?” Peri asked.

“Yes, of course,” Harry told her. “If you want to find out about the Rannoch history, you really must stay with us. Besides, I’d love to have your company. Rannoch House is a lonely kind of place. In the old days, there would be hunting parties and all of that sort of thing, but now it’s just me and Donald kicking around the old place.”

Peri was on the point of saying that the house might feel fuller with children in it before wondering if that would be a sore point. Donald was in his late forties, but Harriet was in her early thirties at the most. Was a new generation of Rannochs an impossibility? It was probably better not to ask.

"Tomorrow, we should head back to the car and collect our luggage, if we're staying on," Peri said. "You have lovely clothes, Harry, but a girl does like her own things. The Doctor ought to stick with borrowed suits, mind you. His idea of tasteful attire is dreadful."

The Doctor opened his mouth to protest but saw Peri's expression and changed his mind. Harriet offered the use of her Fiat runabout in case it was still raining in the morning. Donald predicted it would be a nice day.

"We say, here in Scotland, if you don’t like the weather, wait a wee while and it'll be different."

Donald was right. The morning was clear and crisp, a complete contrast to the evening before. They took the Fiat, anyway, since Peri had thought of several outfits she just HAD to bring back and The Doctor didn't feel that lugging suitcases was at all dignified.

"It is absolutely lovely in good weather," Peri said, gazing across the Loch from the road as they headed back to Rannoch House. "But…."

The Doctor was concentrating on his driving – something he hadn't done a lot of since his Third Incarnation's exile on Earth. He glanced quickly at Peri as the '… ' stretched out and she failed to finish her sentence.

"There's something a bit funny going on at Rannoch House. Last night… well, the middle of the night, really… the rain had stopped and the moon was out between the clouds. I heard a noise, not too far from the house. Something really fierce was snarling and howling. I looked out but there was nothing to be seen except for Crawford creeping out from the kitchen with something on a tray… it looked like a whole pig's head. He left it by the wall and ran back in as if he were scared of something chasing him. I watched for a little while. And I saw a shadow against the wall… and a sound I could only describe as… visceral."

The Doctor said nothing, but not because he was ignoring her, more because he was thinking over what she had said.

"There are no wolves or bears in Scotland in 1981," Peri continued. "And those are the only sort of animals I can think of that make snarling noises and eat like that. And… I looked while you were getting the car out. There's nothing there now except a sort of pinkish streak… as if blood had been watered down by early morning dew."

"What's your best guess?" The Doctor asked.

"Would a werewolf count as a BEST guess or a really silly one?" Peri asked. "Is there such a thing outside of horror movies?"

"Yes, there is," The Doctor told her. "I've no personal experience of that particular creature, but the TARDIS data files cover all kinds of cryptids – capybara, swamp beasts, yeti, sasquatch, the Loch Ness monster… I can actually vouch for Nessie….”

“And werewolves belong in that list?" She wasn’t going to rise to the bait about Nessie.

"Yes."

"And there could be one here?"

The Doctor again said nothing.

"I'm trying to think of any innocent reason for Crawford leaving out meat in the middle of the night… meat that isn't there in the morning?"

"And you can't think of one?"

"No."

"Nor can I," The Doctor agreed. "Loch Rannoch has a werewolf."

Peri shuddered.

"What should we do?" she asked.

"We SHOULD turn around and go back to the TARDIS, fly off and never come back," The Doctor answered her.

"Yeah… we should. But you would never do that," Peri said. "And… neither would I. As much as I hate being scared of creepy horrible stuff, we can’t just abandon Donald and Harry, not to mention every innocent man, woman, child, sheep or whatever… in the area."

"The big question is - how much do Donald and Harry know about it?" The Doctor pointed out. “If their butler is in on the whole thing, they must surely have an idea. If nothing else, the bill for pig’s heads in the food budget must be noticeable.”

"Even bigger question… how do we ask them? They're our very generous hosts. We can't just come out and say 'do you know there's a werewolf that visits your backyard at night?’"

"Absolutely not," The Doctor agreed. "Especially since it MIGHT be a relative of theirs."

"What?"

"They are really reluctant to talk about Donald's little brother, Fergus."

"Oh… I hope not," Peri said fervently. "That would be awful."

"Let's not jump to any conclusions," The Doctor said, slightly contradicting his last statement. "But… if we can surreptitiously investigate… ask questions in a subtle and non-alarming way…."

Peri had never associated The Doctor with either surreptitiousness or subtlety, but she was willing to give it a try.

She had a chance in the afternoon. Donald was called out on what he termed ‘estate business’ leaving Harry to show Peri the library with its family portraits and photograph albums. The Doctor left her to it, saying that he would like to spend a little time with the Dowager Eileen.

Peri enjoyed Harry’s company. She was a lively, friendly woman who genuinely did feel lonely as lady of the Manor in this huge old house. She made the most of the chance to chat while they looked at old Rannoch family portraits and photograph albums going back as far as photography existed. Peri discovered that she looked nothing like Catharine Rannoch or, indeed, any historical Rannoch at all. She showed a keen interest in the family, nonetheless, especially the latest generation, in pictures taken during and after the war when the present Duke and his brother were children.

“Fergus looks a strong, healthy boy,” Peri remarked about a picture in which the younger sibling was climbing a tree, gamely keeping up with the teenage Duke. “What did he die of?”

“Die?” Harry was suddenly flustered. “Fergus didn’t die. What…. What made you think….”

“The way your husband and his mother talked about him at dinner,” Peri answered. “The Dowager Eileen calling him ‘my poor boy’ and the ‘when my brother went away’ bit from Donald. I thought it was a coy way of saying he’s dead.”

“No….” Harry hesitated and looked around as if making sure there was nobody to overhear them. “Oh, look, you might as well know the truth. But don’t talk about it, please. Donald is as old-fashioned as his mother about these things.”

“What things?”

“Fergus went… well… mad, plain and simply said. He had to be sent to an asylum… a hospital… for treatment.”

“Oh… so he really did ‘go away’,” Peri responded. “Now I get it.”

“You don’t get how somebody like the Dowager Eileen thinks about mental illness… as something that taints the family blood… something that might be inherited. It is why Donald and I haven’t had children, yet. She is convinced the same ‘defect’ might manifest itself in our offspring. Donald thinks we should wait until after… you know…. She’s old…. After she’s… gone.”

“Oh… that… is sad,” Peri said. “The Dowager is such a nice lady.”

“I know. I love her to bits. It is awful to think of her that way. But…as I said… Donald is old-fashioned like her. I sometimes think he’d rather risk the Rannoch line dying out than risk it. And… you can imagine what a wrench that is for him with….” Harry waved at the portraits around the library. “With all his ancestry.”

“Did he never take YOUR feelings into account?” Peri asked, guessing that it was a source of anxiety for a woman with a body clock running out with every year they waited for the Dowager to pass away. “Besides, nobody believes that mental illness is hereditary these days.”

“I know,” Harry admitted with a trembling lip and tears pricked back in her eyes. “But as long as THEY do…. It is quite hopeless.”

“I am sorry. If there is anything I… or The Doctor… especially The Doctor… can do…. He’s good at helping people with problems. Mostly because he’s an incurable busy body and nosy parker, but also because he’s brilliant at nearly everything. I know he doesn’t look it. At first glance you’d think he’d got left behind by a circus, but when you get to know him you realize he’s something really special.”

“I’m… sure you’re right,” Harry answered. “But I’m not sure even he could help us. We’re a hopeless case.”

“That’s the kind he’s best at,” Peri assured her.

Later, The Doctor shared with her what he had learnt from the Dowager Eileen

“She is a marvellous woman,” he said. “Reminds me of a great-great-great aunt of mine. So proud of her noble lineage. She talked about Rannochs who went right back to Flodden.”

“And did you tell her about your mighty Time Lord ancestors who fought dragons?”

“No,” The Doctor replied with a grimace. “I did finally get her to talk about the twentieth century Rannochs, though. Her son, Fergus… he’s not….”

“Dead. Yes, I know. I’m surprised she told you. Harry says she’s a bit precious about it… a madman in the family is a shame on them all.”

“I have a persuasive charm,” The Doctor insisted.

“Anyway, poor Fergus isn’t the werewolf. But there IS one, we’re sure. What do we do now?”

“Last night was only the first full moon of the month. The second is tonight.”

“And we do what?” Peri asked, not quite liking the sound of that. Were they meant to go out hunting the werewolf by moonlight?

“Nothing so crude, my dear Peri,” The Doctor answered. “But certainly we will maintain a vigil and see if the butler has any odd duties, again, tonight. Your room has a double aspect, with windows looking out over the west and the north, both with gates leading towards the high moor... the most likely place a cryptid might be hiding.”

"So, you're staying in my room all night?" Peri gave him a quizzical look. "Not quite the done thing in the country house of a Scottish lord," she added.

"On my honour as a Time Lord…." The Doctor began, but Peri grinned and let him off.

"It’s all right, I trust you," she said. "Besides, it's better than blindly wandering about a Scottish moor at night. We can be ready for action when it happens… IF anything happens."

In the meantime, they were treated as honoured guests by Lord and Lady Crannoch and the Dowager Eileen. Dinner, again, was excellent. Afterwards, the Doctor played chess with the Dowager Eileen, who stayed in the drawing room instead of retiring to her own rooms. Peri and Harry looked through more old photo albums with his Lordship making occasional remarks about old pictures and the Dowager telling a long story about being Presented as a Debutant to the ‘old king and queen'. The old King and Queen in that story were George V and Queen Mary, proving that the Dowager was a very old lady.

In due course, the ladies all retired to bed. Lord Rannoch and The Doctor waited up a little longer, out of custom.

When The Doctor tapped politely on the door and then slipped into Peri’s bedroom, she was sitting by the west facing window, fully dressed in a sweater and jeans with the sort of walking boots she had really needed on their first damp arrival by the Loch. The Doctor regarded those preparations and nodded his approval before sitting on a brocade covered window seat by the North window. He had a perfect view of the courtyard where his Lordship's Land Rover and Harry's Fiat were parked. A brick wall with a wide gate in it bordered the courtyard and beyond it was an unlit road quite devoid of traffic at this time of night. Peri's west view was of another length of wall was a footpath leading up into the high moorlands. All this was almost as clearly defined as in daylight with the bright silvery moon and a clear starlit sky. There was nothing moving outside and the only noises to be heard was a distant sound of cattle and the occasional call of a night bird.

"So…" Peri said as the silent vigil lengthened. "If nothing at all happens we both look dead tired with stiff necks in the morning and Harry will think the worst of us both."

"I know a series of exercises perfected by Xenian monks that relieve that sort of stiffness " The Doctor replied. "They need it after their long periods of kneeling in silent prayer. They also imparted to me methods of rapid mediation that will allow my body to refresh itself in a few short minutes before breakfast."

"So, just me, tired and stiff, then," Peri remarked. "That's nice."

"You could go to bed. I wouldn't blame you if you didn't want to sit up all night… let alone rush out there into the dark should anything occur…."

"As if it’s the dark I have to worry about. Don't worry, Doctor…. Whatever it is, I'm with you."

The Doctor smiled just a little slyly as if his reverse psychology had given exactly the right result - Peri ready and willing to jump into the fray alongside him.

They talked quietly in that same half-goading mood as the hours passed slowly by. Peri's eyes, to say nothing of her whole body drooped from time to time, then she would become fully awake and alert, thinking that there had been movement on the shadowy, moon-defined moor, but every time it had been nothing more than her over-eager imagination – or once, a feral cat crossing the courtyard to investigate the dustbins.

She was getting to the point where she thought she might have imagined the whole thing when The Doctor gave a sharp whistle. She came to his side and watched what definitely WAS a movement of something more than any nocturnal animal. A dark clad figure carrying a bag or rucksack of some sort passed the north gate in a somewhat furtive manner and then disappeared behind the boundary wall. Peri and The Doctor both moved to the other widow in time to see the man reappearing much further away on the path up to the moor.

“A common or garden poacher, I suspect,” The Doctor commented. “The sort of man who would know every pathway across country in the dark.”

“Definitely Human, not werewolf,” Peri remarked. “Do you suppose....”

Her question was forgotten as a terrible howl rended the air, one that could not be dismissed as any domestic dog left out in the night.

The poacher halted in his tracks and looked about warily. The Doctor turned from the window quickly.

“We've got to warn him. The creature may have his scent.”

Peri followed behind him as he raced down a flight of back stairs that led directly out into the courtyard. They were nearly neck and neck as they crossed it, aware of the bite of the cold night air.

As cold as the night was, the blood-curdling scream they heard as they reached the gateway froze the blood even more completely.

"Peri…." The Doctor said, making a sudden decision. "Call me a male chauvinist pig and all that later…. But for now, stay here."

Before she could react, he had sprinted ahead of her. She stood by the gatepost wondering whether to break the habit of a lifetime and obey or whether to run after him.

A door opened behind her as she was still debating with herself. She turned to see Crawford crossing the courtyard with another pig's head on a tray. He hadn't seen her until she moved from the shadow of the gatepost.

"I think its too late for feeding time," she said to him as another terrible scream reached them and another long drawn out howl. Crawford dropped the tray with a clang of metal against flagstone and stared at her in consternation.

"I… I don't… know what is happening," he said, though rather unconvincingly.

"I think you probably know SOMETHING," Peri answered him. "But it will have to wait, just now."

It wasn't The Doctor who had screamed. Peri knew that much, but she was still fearful until she saw him returning from the moorlands path carrying a man's body.

"Is he…." she began, before she saw the ghastly wounds to the neck and shoulder that made the question redundant.

"Let's get inside," The Doctor said grimly. "All of us."

The dead poacher was laid out with as much dignity as possible in the unused 'smoking room'. Lord Rannoch, roused from his bed, looked grimly at the man then joined his wife and mother, as well as The Doctor, Peri and a very anxious Crawford in the drawing room.

"There was never a life lost before," his Lordship said. "Sheep, deer, even an occasional head of cattle… but never a human life. It's one life too many."

Crawford nodded in agreement with his master. Harry looked puzzled. The Dowager Eileen just looked very, very worried.

"What's going on, Donald?" Harry asked her husband. "What is it? What do you know?"

"Something I never wanted you to know about," Donald answered. "But it's gone too far, now."

"Yes," The Doctor said quietly. "It has. You'd best tell the whole story, now."

Lord Rannoch told them. Harry was shocked to the core. Again, the Dowager just looked worried.

"You knew?" Peri said to her. "You kept the secret all this time?"

"For Donald's sake," she answered. "Yes, I did."

"There's no use in recriminations," The Doctor said. "What's done is done. The question is, what will you do now?"

"Is there nothing you can do, Doctor?" Peri asked, clinging to a last vestige of hope.

"No," he answered. "No, there isn't. The only solution to a werewolf is the one men have secretly known about for centuries. The only question is who has the courage to implement it."

"I do," Lord Rannoch answered. "I ought to have had that courage years ago… but… when it's family…." He shook his head sadly. "We'll set off at dawn."

Before dawn the local police had been informed that Sam MacIlroy, a known poacher, had been found dead, mauled by a dog. A party of officers with pistols checked out of the station armoury set off in the first light to search for the animal before it attacked livestock or, heaven forbid, any other human victim.

At the same time, Lord Rannoch, Crawford and The Doctor set off in the Land Rover with a more definite and a more terrible mission.

The Rannoch women, including Peri, waited behind, mostly in silence. Only once did Harry speak, somewhat accusingly, to her mother in law.

"Why did you let me believe your son, Fergus, was in a mental institution when all the time he was living up on the moor in some old cottage?"

"It… seemed the best way," the Dowager Eileen answered. "Besides, what he did… WAS madness… sheer madness."

"I'm not sure it was," Peri said quietly. "I think… I think it was… sort of… sort of noble. I know the secret is one you will all have to carry for the rest of your lives… but I think you can do so with pride… not shame."

The Dowager Eileen looked not quite convinced. Perhaps she wanted to believe what Peri was telling her, but long years of thinking the worst were hard to shake off.

It was several hours before the men returned. The Doctor, who Peri knew so often with a laugh in his eyes and an infuriating grin on his face was sombre, his eyes looking almost haunted and his lips pressed together grimly.

His expression was nothing, though, compared to the ash-white, shaken faces of both Crawford and Lord Rannoch. Both men, incredible as it might have been to anyone who thought Scotsmen were taciturn, stoical, unemotional, were close to tears. It told in their eyes and in their voices when they were able to speak.

"The Beast of Rannoch is dead," his Lordship croaked and sipped at a coffee laced with fortifying whiskey that his wife pressed upon him.

"You killed her?" Harry asked, because the one fact that she and Peri had found most surprising was that the werewolf wasn't Lord Rannoch's brother, Fergus, but Crawford's daughter, Caitlin. She had been infected with lycanthropy when she was just eighteen, a beautiful, vivacious young woman and, despite being the butler's child, newly married to the younger Rannoch son. It had been Fergus who had sworn his brother and mother, as well as her father, to secrecy and taken his young bride to live in a remote former gamekeeper's cottage on the moor where he could guard her on those terrible nights when the animal urge came upon her. Crawford had visited regularly, bringing supplies to their hermitage and, on THOSE nights, making sure there was food to satisfy a creature that might otherwise ravage the livestock of local farms and cause questions to be asked.

"Twenty years…." Crawford said. "Twenty years without any loss of life bar a few sheep that might be put down to wild cats or a stray dog. But… we knew… one day… our luck would run out."

"Fergus knew that, too," Lord Rannoch added. "And he knew, tonight, that it was the end. Before we reached the cottage he’d done it… shot her through the head with a silver bullet. He'd kept one… for the black day when it would be needed. He had an ordinary lead one for himself. He… he waited until we were there… Caitlin wrapped up in his arms as if she were just sleeping. He told me to give you his love, mother… then before we knew what he meant to do, he…."

Lord Rannoch broke down with those last words, and the unmanly, unScottish tears fell unchecked. He went to his mother and they cried together while Harry silently went and put a kindly hand on the butler's trembling shoulder while she waited her chance to comfort her husband.

Peri looked at The Doctor with questioning eyes.

"I said there was only the one end to a werewolf," he said. "They didn't need me to tell them what it was. All I could do was bear witness to that end."

He could be infuriating. He could make her swear that she hated him. But Peri jumped up from where she was sitting and hugged him.

"Thanks for being there for them," she said.

"The police will probably come to the cottage in search of their fictitious mad dog," The Doctor added in quiet tones. "They'll find two people dead from a suicide pact. Fergus wrote a note to say that it had become too hard to go on. I dare say there will be a certain amount of gossip about why it was too hard to go on, but that will pass, eventually."

The Doctor was right. An inquest a few days later concluded that Fergus and Caitlin Rannoch had died of their own hands with nobody else involved. The same coroner's court recorded 'misadventure' as the cause of the poacher McIlroy's death. The mad dog was never found. Quiet and dignified funerals took place for all three, the poacher buried in a simple grave, while Fergus and Caitlin were laid to rest in a family vault along with several generations of Rannochs.

The Doctor and Peri attended those funerals before they said goodbye to Donald and Harry and the Dowager Eileen and sent on their way.

As the TARDIS entered the time vortex, The Doctor promising a quiet holiday somewhere sunny, Peri quietly accessed the TARDIS database. She found electronic copies of several documents that told her what she needed to know.

First, she read with a certain sadness of the death of the Dowager Eileen some eighteen months after they had said goodbye to her. Of course, she was very old, and her death was peaceful at the end.

Only a few months after that, Rannoch House was sold to a hotel chain looking for properties in rural Scotland. After providing Crawford with a modern bungalow and a generous pension, Lord Rannoch and his wife moved to a very nice house with four bedrooms and a big but manageable garden. Two years after that, the first of two children, a boy named Fergus, was born, followed in due course by a girl called Caitlin.

She nodded in satisfaction and turned her thoughts to wondering if The Doctor would manage the warm, sunny holiday or strand them on some kind of hostile iceworld.

Knowing him it could go either way.

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