**Tegan and Mrs Neele – Part One**

“I don’t understand why the Time Lords have sent you to Harrogate in the nineteen-twenties,” Tegan said as the taxi from that northern town’s train station stopped in front of the elegant Swan Hydropathic Hotel. Not that she was complaining. The clothes and hats in her suitcase were to die for and this hotel looked like the place to wear them – especially the evening gowns she had carefully selected from the TARDIS Wardrobe. The Time Lords appeared to be sending them on a very nice luxury holiday.

“Not a holiday,” The Doctor said. “Unfortunately, there is a very serious mission from the Time Lords that brings us here.” Tegan and Turlough both looked disconcerted. “I’ll explain all when we’re settled in our suite.”

A bellhop came with a trolley for their luggage. Turlough helped him. Tegan’s hat boxes were a job by themselves!

The Doctor paid for the taxi then walked with his female companion into the hotel reception. The two-bedroom suite was duly signed for and they continued up to the second floor in a recently installed electric lift which was a proud feature of the hotel.

“I know what it is,” Tegan said as they were left alone in their private drawing room. “I know why we’re here. Today is December 4th, 1926. About an hour before we arrived a single lady booked into this hotel as Mrs Theresa Neele. I saw her name in the register. Her room is on the floor below us. Directly below if I’ve read the room numbering correctly. It’s a bit tricky because we have a suite and the floor below is single rooms, but I’m pretty sure.”

Tegan paused for dramatic effect which was wasted on Turlough who shrugged his shoulders as if the name meant nothing to him.

Which it almost certainly didn’t.

“Theresa Neele is the pseudonym used by Mrs Agatha Christie when she ‘ran away’ from home after her husband was found out as an adulterer and it all got too much for her. She picked the name of her husband’s mistress to … I don’t know… spite him or wake him up or something. She was thirty-six, already a famous writer, but not as famous as she would be by the time some of her novels got made into blockbuster films. There was a huge search for her, police knocking on doors, dredging lakes and ponds… her husband suspected of murdering her for a while.”

“And all the time she was here?” Turlough looked less impressed than ever.

“Not a fan, I’m thinking,” The Doctor remarked.

“I’ve read some of the short stories,” he admitted. “They’re a bit formulaic.”

“You try to write over a hundred books, short stories and plays without a formula,” Tegan answered. “I like them. Just the thing for dreary waits in airport lounges. And I think her husband was a rotter. She deserves this little escape. But what does any of it have to do with us, or the Time Lords?”

“Very complicated story,” The Doctor answered. There was a rhythmic rap on the door. “Hang on a minute. I ordered tea and sandwiches. ‘pas devant les domestiques’ as some of Agatha’s more snobbish characters would say.”

The tea was in a silver pot and the sandwiches dainty on a three-tiered stand. Tegan poured while Turlough ate three sandwiches at once. The Doctor sat back in an armchair and closed his eyes as he recalled the briefing he had received from the new Castellan.

“It started with something called the Deccidoma Schism. A piece of information that could be used for great good or great evil was split into fifty-five segments. These segments were harmlessly and unknowingly implanted into the minds of fifty-five people across the known galaxies.”

“People?” Tegan queried.

“In the widest sense of the word. One, at least, is an Alpha Centauran, and another from a world where flightless birds something like flamingos evolved into a shimmering pink sentient form. Also one of the Aphomera, a group mind living in a swamp on Aphomia X.”

“You must take us there sometime,” Turlough remarked between sandwiches.

 ‘Perhaps, but not now,” The Doctor answered, missing the sarcasm in Turlough’s voice, a clear sign that he was concerned with something important. “These fifty-five people live their natural lives without ever knowing that they carry such a great secret. Before their natural deaths, the segment passes to a child or near relative of the carrier, again without either knowing anything about it.”

“Then….” Turlough left the question hanging. It really didn’t need asking.

“Somebody who wants the secret to use for all the wrong reasons gained access to the names, locations and timezones of the carriers. The High Council of the Time Lords are among those promised to guard the ‘Secret’. They have sent agents to protect the carriers at what they judge to be their most vulnerable times. Since I have a certain affinity with Earth, I am tasked with looking after Mrs Christie, who happens to be one of the carriers. If I succeed, she will return to her public life in eleven days’ time as Tegan knows she does. If I fail… there is a potential alternative timeline where she is found dead. Not only are the bulk of her stories never written, but the traitor will have a segment of the Secret.”

“Oh, my!” Tegan gasped as the enormity of that scenario dawned on her. “So… what are we going to do?”

“Watch Agatha... or Theresa… like a hawk. Equally hawklike, we watch everyone else to determine who means her harm. I understand that most of her time here was spent dancing in elegant ballrooms by night and enjoying the spa facilities of Harrogate by day.”

“There’s no point in coming to Harrogate and not doing the spa treatment,” Tegan noted. “Auntie Vanessa came here once and had the full works. She said it took decades off her.”

As ever, mentioning her aunt, who had been needlessly murdered by the Master, cast a shadow over Tegan’s face, but she rallied quickly. “Most of those facilities are strictly segregated on gender lines. Lots of naked bathing and sitting in steamy rooms in big towels. So… you’ll need me to do the watching at those times, I suppose.”

“Could the ‘traitor’ be female?” Turlough asked. “If not, she’ll be safe in the spa?”

“The traitor may have gender mutating capabilities,” The Doctor answered. “So, yes, Tegan, I shall need to rely on you.”

“Consider it done, Doctor,” Tegan assured him.

“I don’t have to remind you that Agatha is keeping a low profile. Don’t…”

“….Corner her in the sauna and gush about how much I love Murder on the Orient Express?” Tegan smiled wryly. “Not that daft, Doctor.”

“Of course not. Silly of me to mention it.”

“Besides,” Tegan added. “Orient Express wasn’t published until 1934.”

By the time they had finished their private tea it was getting dark outside. This was early December, after all. There was nothing much for anyone to do except gather in the big, comfy lounge next to the dining room where the evening meal would be served. All the guests except those still availing of the hotel’s own Turkish baths and masseur were gathering to read newspapers, play Bridge if there was a ‘four’ or otherwise amuse themselves.

Turlough sat at the piano by the curtained window and played an Etude by Debussy that proved his benefactor’s money hadn’t been wasted on those ‘extras’ the Brendon School bursar sent invoices for. The Doctor was roped into one of those ‘fours’.

That left Tegan in company with two other women. One was a Mrs Carrey whose husband was in the Bridge game.

The other was ‘Theresa Neele’. Tegan decided to stop mentally inserting the inverted commas around her name. For eleven days, at least, she was Theresa Neele.

As the ladies fell into conversation, Theresa described herself as a widow with no children. She was building a character for herself. Very few details, yet. They would come bit by bit like a protagonist in one of her books.

Mrs Carrey was a semi-invalid, a martyr to lumbago, who came to Harrogate every year to find relief in the spa waters. Theresa admitted to some tendonitis in her right arm. Tegan wondered if that was from writing for hours at a time, but she couldn’t ask since Theresa was not meant to be a famous author.

As Tegan was explaining that her party were all just here for leisure purposes, another woman joined them. Her face had the pink glow of one who had just emerged from the hotel’s own Turkish steam room.

Actually, her face was a bright lobster pink that didn’t look entirely healthy. Her blood pressure must have been at crucial levels, Tegan thought as the new arrival sat next to the group of three women. She was morbidly obese. Tegan, even trying to be charitable, guessed her weight to be at least twenty-five stone. Her body inside a flowered cotton dress and cardigan was slablike with arms and legs like tree boughs. She had a double chin and almost no discernible neck before a huge head with dark brown hair piled on top.

Mrs Carrey introduced her to Tegan and Theresa as Mrs Waddington. The huge woman fixed on Tegan’s accent at once.

“You’re Australian. How wonderful. My late husband visited Sydney once before we were married.”

“I’m from Brisbane,” Tegan answered. “I’ve only really seen the airport at Sydney.”

Mrs Waddington wasn’t really listening. Tegan tried not to look too closely at how those chins wobbled when she spoke. She hoped they weren’t at the same table at dinner. She didn’t want to watch her eat.

Fortunately, Mrs Waddington had requested a table for one. Mrs Carrey and her husband were seated with the other pair from the Bridge game, a Mr Dalton and a Mr Englewood who were professional opera singers taking the waters for their voices.

Mrs Neele was seated with The Doctor, Turlough and Tegan, making a group of two men and two women which looked, superficially, at least, quite natural.

“Turlough, please swap seats with me,” Tegan begged. “Or I WILL find myself drawn to watching Mrs Waddington eating soup.”

Turlough didn’t mind. They were served their own soup and the conversation was casual. Theresa did venture to ask how a young Australian was travelling with two Englishmen.

“Turlough is my cousin,” she explained quickly. “The Doctor is his guardian since his parents died. We just… fell together in a way, enjoying the same sort of things.”

The explanation ended lamely, but Mrs Neele didn’t probe any further. Her own presence in Harrogate hardly bore much close examination, in any case. The rest of the conversation was far more impersonal, concerning the various spa treatments they were all looking forward to trying out tomorrow.

After dinner, assisted by Turlough on piano, the two opera singers entertained their fellow guests with selected pieces from their repertoire until a respectable hour for all but some stalwart card players to retire to bed.

“Are there any obvious candidates for the alien traitor?” Tegan asked when the three time travellers were safely in their suite.

“My money is on Mrs Waddington,” Turlough commented. “She must be from a species that evolved from elephants.”

“That’s not very charitable,” Tegan told him reproachfully, even though she rather agreed with him.

“You’re the one who didn’t want to watch her eat… and I wish I hadn’t. It was an ugly sight.”

“Even so, we really shouldn’t make fun of her behind her back. She probably can’t help it, really.”

“The two opera singers are a bit funny, too,” Turlough added, if only to get away from the subject of Mrs Waddington. “They are a bit ‘furtive’, always looking around, even when they were singing.”

“I think that may be because they have the sort of relationship that won’t be legal in this country for several more decades,” The Doctor answered. There was a brief, palpable moment while both of his companions caught onto his meaning before he continued. “We’ll leave them in peace, I think.”

“It doesn’t have to be a guest,” Tegan pointed out. It could be somebody working in the hotel, or the spa, or anyone in Harrogate, for that matter.”

“In principle, you’re right,” The Doctor told her. “But somebody who can get close to Mrs Neele is more likely than a random citizen.”

“Staff can get closer than anyone,” Turlough observed. “I’m not exactly a first born son of the landed gentry of England, but I lived like one at the Brendon School, and I couldn’t even tell you the hair colour of the maid who did our beds every day or the lad who cleaned our shoes. Staff are invisible.”

“Then it is your job to make them visible,” The Doctor told him. “Make friends with the lift boy and the bellhop. Get them to spill gossip about their colleagues.”

“You mean, hang about the hotel like a bored schoolboy dragged to a place full of middle-aged snobs against his will?” Turlough suggested.

“Would that tax your acting skills too much?” The Doctor asked him with a wry smile. This was, in truth, a dull place for an ordinary youth. So was the Brendon School with its social pretensions and snobberies. But Turlough was never an ordinary schoolboy. He merely slipped into the role. He could do so again.

Their assignments were understood. Tegan and Turlough retired to their beds. Tegan was only just decently under the covers in her nightdress when The Doctor slipped into her room.

“Your bedroom is directly over Mrs Neele’s room,” he explained. “And there is an easy climb down the ivy… if anything should happen in the night….” He pulled a comfy armchair to the window. “With your permission, I’m going to sit here in a light meditative trance and one ear out for anything that shouldn’t be going on in an unaccompanied lady’s bedroom.”

“That’s okay, Doctor,” Tegan assured him. “But… nobody really knows why she came here. Suppose she isn’t quite so ‘unaccompanied’? What if… she is... expecting a gentleman to join her? Plenty of women in her books did that sort of thing.”

“Then her gentleman will be suspect number one,” The Doctor answered. “Much as they would be in her books.”

“I was thinking more about… ‘discretion’,” Tegan pointed out. “You keeping a Time Lord ear on her room… as it were.”

“Discretion is my middle name,” The Doctor answered. “Well, not really. But for tonight, at least. Goodnight, Tegan, sleep well.”

“Goodnight, Doctor,” she answered and settled down to sleep, knowing that The Doctor’s silhouette by the window was the best guarantee of a safe night’s sleep she could wish for.

She slept well and breakfasted well the next day, though she passed on the bacon and sausages and avoided watching Mrs Waddington ploughing through a portion three healthy men could have shared.

Afterwards she and Theresa walked on a slightly drizzly and grey morning to the Royal Baths, Harrogate.

This was a much bigger complex of buildings than Tegan was expecting. Steam rooms and saunas in her experience were small rooms beside the swimming pool at the local leisure centre. This mixture of Georgian, Victorian and ancient Eastern architectural ideas with a central dome worthy of a cathedral was beyond imagining.

This was luxury treatment, not just a trip to the municipal baths. They were met by a woman dressed something like a nurse who brought them first to a comfortable lounge. Here they were to drink the ‘waters’ which had first made Harrogate a ‘name’ among the spa towns of Europe. Cleansing the body inside and out was the principle.

Tegan was relieved to see that Theresa was as dubious as she was about the odd smelling water presented in tall pint glasses.

“People have been drinking this for at least two hundred years,” Theresa pointed out. “All the same…”

The ‘nurse’, Miss Forrester, was attending to Mrs Waddington and Mrs Carrey from the hotel and a Miss Waring, an invalid lady in a bathchair who had taken a small private house for the winter season.

With a nod of understanding to each other, they poured the water into a nearby plant pot and sat back looking nonchalant.

The shared act of rebellion broke down the last bit of reserve between them. As they undressed and wrapped themselves in large towels in order to enjoy the three levels of hot rooms, starting with the ‘warm’ tepidarium’, they chatted easily.

There really wasn’t anything else to do but talk, anyway. The warm, damp air would quickly ruin any book or magazine. They lay on low, narrow beds with clean linen under their bodies and perspired gently and genteelly.

Tegan talked about Australian summers where temperatures soared even higher than here.

“But there is fresh air,” she explained. “This is enclosed, so it feels hotter. Even so, people in Brisbane would think we were mad lying about indoors without air conditioning.”

Theresa laughed and mentioned a visit to Australia when she was younger and South Africa where she had lived briefly. She understood about the heat of the sun in those countries and the need for at least a ceiling fan in the bedroom at night.

Tegan recalled that these were true accounts of Agatha Christie’s own life. She was cherry-picking details that fitted Theresa’s profile.

This was a Sunday. The kind of newspapers that would soon be excited about the celebrated author’s disappearance wouldn’t be printed until tomorrow. She had a day of grace before speculation and gossip began.

But the traitor with another agenda could strike at any time. Tegan resisted the sleepiness that lying in a hot room doing nothing but talking and perspiring could bring on. She had to be alert.

Mrs Carrey and Mrs Waddington entered the Tepidarium, too. Neither of them talked. They simply lay, looking up at the grey sky through the barrel shaped glass ceiling. Miss Forrester moved between the beds checking on them all while attendants in blue and white dresses changed the linen on the beds vacated by earlier patrons.

“They must go through a lot of linen,” Tegan commented. The sheet beneath her was already marked by the liquid rolling from her body. She wondered about Mrs Waddington’s sheets. Somebody as overweight as she was must be perspiring madly.

She glanced across at the large lady and noticed that she was lobster coloured already. She had no desire to examine the sheets.

Theresa and Tegan passed after a while into the Calidarium. This was a plunge pool lined with ceramic tiles. The water was steaming, but with their bodies already hot, slipping out of the towels and into the water was less troublesome than expected. It was just like getting into a hot bath. The only unusual thing was doing it with somebody else. But even that seemed unimportant after all.

“This is nice,” Tegan admitted. “But we’d better not stay too long. I don’t want to be boiled like a lobster.”

“Nor I,” Theresa agreed. “But I do feel wonderfully clean.”

Before they were completely cooked, they got out of the pool and wrapped fresh towels around their bodies before moving on to the Lacconium

This was another round of lying quietly and perspiring, this time in very hot, very dry air with a scent something like sea salt and vinegar that reminded Tegan ever so slightly of fish and chips at the English seaside.

There was nothing gentle or especially feminine about the perspiration this time. Faces and limbs turned shiny with the liquid that seeped from the pores, purifying them in the ancient way pioneered by the Romans who gave the Latin names to each part of the spa experience.

Again, they were joined shortly by Mrs Carrey and Mrs Waddington, who was starting to resemble a large beetroot. Mrs Carrey sighed happily and closed her eyes. Mrs Waddington stared at the ceiling.

“Don’t fall asleep,” Tegan said to Theresa. “Its so hot in here, you could get sick if you stay too long.”

“I do feel delightfully drowsy,” Theresa admitted. “But I won’t sleep.”

Tegan thought she could stay awake. She was from Queensland. She knew about being hot.

But this really was a different heat than a hot day on the Gold Coast. There was no breeze offering respite. The room closed in around her. Through half closed eyes shadows deepened and it became more and more difficult to focus her mind on staying awake. Far easier to give in to the drowsiness.

But those shadows that she could barely focus on grew oppressive. They were coming ever closer and they felt stifling. If she could only take a deep breath… if she could raise her arms to fight them off….

 Because those shadows weren’t just shadows. She saw something in them that frightened her more than anything ever frightened her before.

“Miss Jovanka….”

A cool wave of air wafted across her face. She opened her eyes and saw Miss Forrester, the nurse, looking down at her with a concerned expression.

She sat up and looked around. She was lying on a bed in a room that was at merely ambient temperature. Small palm trees in large plant pots added a touch of the exotic to what she thought might be called the ‘Tepidarium’, the ‘cooling-off’ room.

Miss Forrester gave her a glass of water. She was too bewildered to notice that it was ordinary iced water, not the spa water with the odd taste. She was too dry mouthed to care either way.

“What happened?” she asked when she had sipped enough water to feel relatively normal. She noticed now that she was wrapped in a dressing gown of cream coloured towelling fabric. On another bed next to her Theresa was sitting up looking dazed and very pink in the face. She was similarly clothed and drinking water slowly.

“You and Miss Neele both passed out from the heat,” Miss Forrester answered. “It is fortunate that Mrs Carrey noticed you were in distress and alerted me.”

“We both passed out?” Tegan queried. She looked at Theresa who nodded as if in confirmation of the fact.

“There were shapes… something moving around… coming towards us.”

“People sometimes hallucinate when the heat overcomes them. I’m afraid it is partly my fault. I didn’t realise it was your first time. I should have shortened your session in the Lacconium if I’d known. It’s not good to overdo it when you’re not used to it.”

“But…” Tegan shook her head slowly. She was starting to become more lucid, now, and the frightening shadows, the stifling oppression was more unreal and dreamlike.

But she still wasn’t quite sure. Was it real or not? Why had she been so frightened? The last time she had felt like that was when she was infected by the Mara and her mind twisted by their malice.

“Just rest up a bit longer, then you can go back to your hotel,” Miss Forrester told them both. “A nice pot of tea and a bit of lunch is what you need.”

That might have been true if Theresa hadn’t been the carrier of an intergalactic secret and Tegan tasked with looking after her. It might have been true if there was nothing more than Theresa’s secret identity to worry about. But with all that to think about, tea and a light lunch didn’t seem enough to put things right.

But it was the only thing they could sensibly do. They sipped water calmly for a little longer then went back to the changing room to shower and dress.

“After getting clean it doesn’t seem quite so nice putting the old clothes back on,” Tegan remarked as they left the Royal Baths complex and turned their backs to a December wind and a light drizzle and their faces towards Swan Street and the ‘Hydro’ hotel. “I should have brought something to change into.”

“I don’t have anything,” Theresa admitted after an awkward pause. “I… left home yesterday in a bit of a….” she paused again. “I was upset, you see. I didn’t stop to pack anything. I just went off to the station and caught a train… to… to somewhere new, where I could think straight. I… have money, of course. I’ve a cheque account I can draw on if necessary, but of course, the shops don’t open until tomorrow.”

“Oh, I see,” Tegan answered. She had known about Agatha’s ‘lost’ week for ages, but the fine details of how she disappeared, things like clothes and money hadn’t occurred to her. “Never mind. You’ll have a fun time tomorrow buying new things.”

“Yes, I expect I will,” Theresa admitted. “Perhaps… you could come with me. Clothes are much more fun to buy with another woman around, and Mrs Carrey is rather… middle-aged, and Mrs Waddington….”

“I’d love to help you choose some things,” Tegan said, passing over the difficulty of Mrs Waddington and fashion. In fact, a shopping trip was perfect for keeping close to Theresa for the day and fulfilling her obligation to The Doctor.

When they reached the hotel, their idea had been to lunch in the dining room, but as they passed through the foyer Theresa suddenly looked disconcerted.

“I’m not sure I could sit in there,” she said, though a reason why didn’t seem to form itself easily.

Tegan noticed the pile of Sunday newspapers on a table and made a guess. Perhaps the mystery of the missing authoress HAD made the press already.

“Come up to the suite and we’ll call down our order,” Tegan suggested. Theresa’s face lightened with relief and she happily went with Tegan in the lift that saved them a slog up to the top floor.

Neither The Doctor nor Turlough were about, so they had a pleasant lunch in the privacy of the drawing room. They had ordered a second pot of tea when both of the men arrived separately. Tegan related the incident in the Lacomium to The Doctor, who immediately lived up to his title and became concerned for both women, taking their pulses and assuring himself that they had suffered no lasting effects.

“Just a little heat stroke,” he confirmed. “You’re both young and fit enough to cope. If there was any history of heart trouble or blood pressure I’d be worried.”

“That’s the thing, Doctor,” Tegan said. “Why did WE get sick, while Mrs Carrey who is at least fifty… and Mrs Waddington who surely MUST have high blood pressure at least, were fine?”

“Hardier constitutions, I suppose,” The Doctor suggested. “Not that, for one moment, I would think of you as a wilting flower, Tegan, nor you, Mrs Neele, not that I know your medical history. But some people DO take badly to spa treatments.”

That was all certainly true, and it tied with what Miss Forrester had said, but Tegan felt as if there might have been more. She couldn’t really talk about it, yet, though.

Fortunately, Theresa made her excuses quite soon. She thanked Tegan for lunch and The Doctor for his concern for her health. She said she would have a lie down now and see them all at dinner tonight.

The Doctor sent Turlough to walk with her to her own room, ostensibly in case of any further dizziness, then as soon as they were alone he turned back to Tegan. She told him about the ‘hallucinations’ and the fear she had felt at the time.

“Was it just a dream?” she asked as The Doctor gently placed his hands around her face and looked deep into her eyes as if he could read the dreams through them.

“I honestly don’t know,” he admitted. “But I’m not going to dismiss it all as overwrought imagination as your Miss Forrester did. It might just as well have been a subconscious awareness of danger. You have a perceptive mind, Tegan. On the down side, that was why the Mara was able to get to you so easily, but on the upside, you can sense things instinctively, like other people’s suppressed emotions or approaching menace.”

“If it wasn’t just my imagination, does that mean that the traitor actually tried to get to Theresa… and that Mrs Carrey fetching Miss Forrester stopped it?”

“Yes, it could be,” The Doctor admitted. “That means that the Traitor daren’t reveal himself in public. That’s one advantage we have. The other is that you can scream louder than my granddaughter Susan can scream. And if you feel that frightening sensation again, you do just that.”

He smiled as he said that. She managed to smile back at him and felt a lot better.

“I suggest you go and have a lie down, now,” The Doctor told her. “Theresa is doing the same. I can keep my Time Lord ear open for you both as I did overnight.”

Tegan smiled a little more certainly. She trusted The Doctor to do just that.

“Did you find out anything from the staff?” The Doctor asked Turlough when Tegan had left them.

“Not much we didn’t know already. The chambermaids know full well that our two opera singers are sharing a bed. And they don’t like doing Mrs Waddington’s bedsheets. Apparently they smell badly.”

“Smell?” The Doctor queried. He thought about that but he couldn’t imagine how it might connect to their own mystery. “She must have some sort of gland problem. Most people at a spa hotel have ailments of some sort, of course. Nothing else… nobody moving around the hotel at odd times, no….”

The Doctor sighed. The trouble was his remit had been too vague. He had no way of knowing what would count as unusual behaviour.

And that worried him for one very specific reason.

“If we can’t identify the traitor, then we have no option but to wait for him to make his move. Which could put Tegan and Theresa in very grave danger.”

Turlough nodded sombrely. He understood the problem only too well.

But until they knew something more, there was nothing they could do except mingle with the hotel guests, playing their roles as fellow members of the spa set.

That meant dinner in the dining room, again sharing a table with Theresa. She and Tegan were now friends in adversity after their experience at the sauna. After dinner there was dancing in the ballroom.

Theresa didn’t want to dance. She still had nothing suitable to wear in the evening. She sat quietly in The Doctor’s company watching Tegan enthusiastically joining in the popular dances of the mid nineteen twenties. In a dress of salmon pink silk and chiffon she had no shortage of partners, the ballroom being open to the public as well as hotel guests. Turlough had a partner or three as well, but he wasn’t much of a dancer, and shone best when the five piece dance band took a break and he took to the piano and accompanied Messrs Dalton and Englewood in a performance of ‘Marble Halls’.

With Theresa safely by his side The Doctor was able to watch the guests, all potential suspects, carefully. He was certain Mr and Mrs Carrey were ordinary humans. He was sure about the two opera singers, too. Mrs Waddington was a physically repulsive person, but surely no threat to anyone.

One by one he ruled out every likely suspect and was forced to admit he had no clue, nothing at all to go on.

He wondered if he was, for once, in above his head. Had the Castellan given him a mission he might, actually, fail at. Quite apart from an innocent life at stake, and countless other lives at risk if the Deccidoma Secret was lost, he really dreaded the thought of admitting defeat to the High Council of Time Lords. Too many of them would enjoy his fall from grace.