**Trapped**

Grace Holloway tried not to stare at the assortment of aliens around her. She knew she ought to be accustomed by now to the idea that purple scales or green cacti-like bumps were quite normal skin tones by now. Three eyes were perfectly acceptable, too, as was one giant eye and a body like a pencil case with arms and legs.

That was an Alpha Centauran called Alpha Rogan, Rogan to his... or ... her... friends. The hermaphrodite ambassador was quite charming, in fact, once she got around the problem of personal pronouns and the high pitched voice that made her wince every time it spoke. The Doctor was very happy to introduce her to Rogan... and then to wander off with a glittering female with gold coloured skin who allegedly wanted to talk about agriculture with him.

 Grace gave him the benefit of doubt about what the golden woman wanted and told herself she wasn’t jealous and had nothing at all to be jealous about. He was just doing a diplomatic thing on behalf of his Time Lord government.

She finally managed to extricate herself from the excruciating conversation, leaving Alpha Rogan talking intergalactic trade with a short man who had a head the colour and texture of a horse chestnut shell and more syllables in his name than the title of that irritating song from Mary Poppins. She was trying NOT to think about the song in case it got stuck in her head all day.

She grabbed a drink from a tray offered by a passing blue complexioned waiter and found herself a quiet space near the window to drink it.

The window went all the way around the hexagonal-shaped hospitality module of the Kanian Food Resource Institute, affording views all round of the amazing results of a ten year experiment in what they called Macro-Engineering.

A three-hour lecture before the reception had told her everything she needed to know about macro- engineering. What it essentially meant was growing things much bigger than they ought to be. Outside the window was a grove of trees fifty-foot high with oranges the size of pumpkins ripening. There was a field of wheat producing kernels the size of her hand as well as rice grains like missiles.

They also bred cattle the size of elephants and a bird a little like a turkey that was the size of a small car.

Grace wasn’t sure what to make of it all. A grain of rice that could feed a whole family was probably a unique solution to galactic hunger.

It was the probably that was worrying. Not so much with the fruits and grains as the animals. After a brief comical moment imagining a Thanksgiving dinner with a car sized turkey she knew there had to be an ethical question something on the same lines as battery hens or force feeding geese for foie gras.

She was not the only one with those sort of misgivings. Alpha Rogan had expressed several well thought out issues even if listening to them was hard work. Many of the delegates were of the firm opinion that growing giant crops was fine, but the animals a step too far.

“A storm is coming,” said a very tall man with silver complexion who made up for The Doctor’s golden friend. He introduced himself as Abran Sweet, a senior research farmer.

“Grace Holloway,” she replied. “Just a ‘plus one’ here with a friend. But what did you mean about a storm?”

“We’re in a five-square mile compound of research agricultural land built in the middle of a tropical jungle that is three thousand miles square. You’re from Earth?” Grace nodded. “Yes, I thought so from the accent. Think of this as something like eight times the area of your Amazonian rainforest. It is big enough to have its own weather systems.”

“But the weather looks good.” And it did. High above the giant orange grove the sky was pale ochre and two yellow Suns were shining. It looked ideal – at least as far as she could tell with ochre coloured skies.

“look at the sky from the east side. It’s a different story.”

She looked across the room to the windows on the other side, but she couldn’t really see without walking across there, and there was too much risk of being drawn back into Alpha Centauri's dull conversation. She would have to take Mr Sweet's word for it.

“Is it dangerous?” she asked.

“Not really, though we’ve been informed that the keepers have closed the pastures.”

 Grace recalled the huge fields where the giant animals were kept behind fences as high as prison walls. There were massive gates that the visitors passed through in a caravan of open topped cars. The gates could be locked with massive electronic bolts. The fences were electrified for good measure.

“That’s one of the worries about this project,” Grace remarked. “On Earth, nobody has ever died from being trampled by stampeding turkeys.”

Sweet laughed, and Grace let him take her comment that way, but she wasn’t really joking, and it wasn’t really the turkeys that concerned her as much as the herd of elephant sized cattle being spooked by the weather.

“Don’t worry,” Sweet told her. “We have everything organised. The animals are secured. This facility is perfectly weather proof. At worst, the executive planes to take you all home will be delayed. But there is enough champagne and luxury food to accommodate everyone until the sun comes out again.”

That was another unsettling thing. The TARDIS was thousands of miles away in the capital city. They had travelled here by plane with the other guests.

If anything happened they would be stranded here with everyone else.

But what could possibly happen? There was a storm approaching, nothing more.

“Would you like another drink?” Sweet asked her. He beckoned a waiter and took two glasses of champagne from the tray. He continued the conversation by asking Grace about her work and at least gave the appearance of being interested. She glanced around occasionally to see The Doctor still talking to the golden woman and had no qualms about enjoying some charming male company.

The promised storm moved over the hospitality centre as they talked. The sky darkened and torrential rain, driven by a fierce wind, battered the windows. Lightning split the sky, though any accompanying thunder couldn’t be heard through the exoglass panes.

“It'll be set in for hours,” Sweet confirmed. “But nothing to worry about.”

He was probably right, but even so, Grace moved away from the window and towards the middle of the room. Everyone seemed of the same mind. A widening ring of empty floor was rapidly forming around the edge of the room.

“Why didn’t they put curtains on the windows?” Grace asked. “We can’t hear the storm but it looks terrifying. Curtains would blank it out completely.”

“The idea was to allow visitors a three-hundred and sixty degree view of the facility,” Sweet explained. Grace gave him a quizzical look. “Yes, perhaps you have a point.”

Her point was further validated a moment later when the lights went out. There were several screams, not all of them from bone fide females. Grace was not one of them, but she did glance uneasily at the window where the lightning storm was thrown into high relief.

“It’s all right, “ Sweet assured her. “We have backup generators. They will kick in very soon.”

He was right. A few minutes later the lights inside the glittering overhead chandeliers came on again. There were relieved voices all around. The piped music restarted and the party atmosphere resumed. The void between the crowd and the window widened even further, however.

Then the lights went off again.

“Is there a backup for the backup?” Grace asked, but Sweet didn’t answer. She turned to see him hurrying towards the staff exit from the hospitality room.

“Grace, there's nothing to worry about,” said a reassuring voice that she usually believed. She turned to see The Doctor at her side. His golden friend was with him, looking nervous, but he had sought her out all the same.

“There’s a lot to worry about,” Grace answered. “Have you noticed how VERY dark it is out there. All the power is down. That includes the power to the electronic locks on the gates to Jurassic Park out there, and the electric fences, the security lights that ought to ward off animals frim coming into this area, and when my friend Mr Sweet shows up again, I just bet he will try not to tell us that there is no communication with the outside world. “

“Oh, you must be wrong about that,” said the golden lady introduced quickly as Larika Mari of Helonnica V. “There must be something that works on a different circuit. Even if there isn’t... Surely somebody will have noticed that there is a problem here. They'll send hover ships.”

“They can’t send any transport while the storm is ongoing,” Grace pointed out. “And let's not kid ourselves. There are worse dangers than the champagne warming up.”

“The air conditioning is off!” It was the distinctive and already high pitched voice of Alpha Rogan that rose above all others. “We’ll suffocate! “

As the murmurings of despair rose The Doctor swore in the country dialect of southern Gallifrey and stood on a chair to give everyone a quick, impromptu lecture on the properties of unpressurized and unsealed rooms with normal atmosphere outside.

“Nobody is going to suffocate,” he repeated as the crowd settled down again.

Then all of his efforts were undone. The lightning split the darkness again and in the brief whiteness those closest to the west side of the room distinctly saw one of the Fiat 500 sized turkeys run past. By the time the story reached those on the other side who didn’t actually see anything, they learnt that the creature had the dismembered arm of a keeper in its beak.

“Turkeys don’t eat meat,” The Doctor assured them, but now the rest of the turkeys flocked past the windows and any chance that he could make people listen to him was gone.

“What really worries me is what’s coming up behind those,” Grace pointed out. “As they said in the film. What are they flocking away from?”

“What film?” The Doctor asked vaguely. Grace gave him a look. “Oh… that film.”

He glanced at the window as two giant turkeys slammed against the glass in their hurry to go wherever the gestalt body was going. The sight of feathers and heavy flesh pressed so close was a more disturbing sight than it ought to have been.

“They have NOT been breeding Tyrannosaurus Rex,” The Doctor assured Grace. “Besides, that is exoglass. It is used in space stations. It can withstand solar hurricanes, exploding moons, all sorts of things. A herd of oversized animals can’t do anything to us.”

“Er….” Grace still didn’t scream, but many other guests did, the loudest and shrillest being Alpha Rogan, of course. The reason was the elephant sized cow that slammed headlong into the exoglass window. The thud was audible as was the distinct sound of glass cracking in a radial pattern from the point where the cow’s forehead had impacted hardest. As the animal shied away and ran after the turkey herd the sharp sound of the ever-expanding crack captured the attention of all within the peculiarly vulnerable room.

The Doctor uttered another Gallifreyan swear word and reached for his sonic screwdriver. He dashed towards the window and carefully applied what Grace could only assume was a widow repair setting. The largest of the cracks began to seal immediately and the smaller ones splitting off from those followed until it was as good as new.

“I suppose they don’t have rampaging cattle around those space stations,” Grace commented.

“They have debris at terminal velocity in space,” The Doctor replied as he took a reading on the sonic from a small fragment of window he picked up from the floor. “Exoglass is made to the very highest standards. This isn’t exoglass. It isn’t even regular bullet proof glass. I’m not sure I’d even trust this in the windscreen of your car.”

“You mean….”

The Doctor glanced out of the window. He could see the trees vibrating from something other than the wind. He stood well back.

“Everyone stay away from the windows,” he called out. “Get into the middle of the room. Put the tables on their sides and get behind them, get low down and keep really still and quiet. That means you Alpha Rogan.” He glanced at the large man with the cement skin. “Professor Ashini, just sit with your back to the window. That should do it.”

Ashini and some of the other stronger built people started to clear the buffet tables and tip them over, forming a barrier somewhat reminiscent of the wagons in a circle in Indian country or possibly the Last Stand at Rourke’s Drift. Everyone hunkered behind it as the main herd of genetically enlarged cattle approached at speed.

Everyone except The Doctor.

“Where did your silver-tongued friend go?” he asked.

“I don’t know, but I expect it was important,” Grace answered. “That door, anyway.”

She pointed towards one of the few sections of wall that wasn’t inferior plate glass. It wasn’t the same way they had entered. That had been through a glass porch with a large revolving door that was now stuck shut without power.

Not that anyone had any desire to go out through that door.

“I think I should see what he might be up to,” The Doctor decided.

He said ‘I’, not ‘we’, but Grace didn’t give him any options. She followed him and watched while he easily unlocked the door with the sonic screwdriver and they slipped through into a small cubicle with the unfinished look of grey block walls. There was a very narrow door at the back which, when opened, led to a very dark, very narrow stairwell. The Doctor turned the sonic to penlight mode. It didn’t do much to illuminate the gloom, but it was far better than nothing.

“Should we get everyone else to come this way?” Grace asked. They were trying to do as The Doctor said, but the sharp sounds of glass cracking again as the herd smashed against it and the even sharper sounds of Alpha Rogan squealing in terror echoed through the passageway.

“I don’t know where this leads… if anywhere. It’s certainly not a designated emergency exit. And I don’t like the idea of Alpha Rogan panicking on the stairs or Professor Ashini stuck in the doorway and everyone crushed together between them not knowing whether to go back or forwards. For the moment, they’re safer up there… I hope.”

“Hope?”

“Best I can do for now.”

The stairway led to a long corridor. Grace wondered about that ‘if anywhere’ The Doctor had let slip before. There were occasional doors either side, but all firmly locked. The Doctor didn’t bother opening them. If Sweet had come down here, it was to a room he had a key for.

That theory proved correct. The corridor led directly to a large control room with a domed glass roof through which the storm that had begun their troubles was still raging.

The stampede of angry, confused and scared animals was still raging, too. The sight of huge feet belonging to a sheep like creature the size of a jeep was unnerving, to say the least.

“I take it THAT glass is real, industry standard exoglass that can withstand just about anything up to and including nuclear explosions?” The Doctor asked with a hard edge to his voice.

“Yes, it is,” answered Sweet. “There’s no point in me reminding you that this is a restricted area, I suppose?”

“None at all. Who is responsible for putting plain old double glazing in the hospitality room windows?”

“Not me,” Sweet replied defensively. “Probably some pen pusher looking to save on costs. When we get out of here I’ll make sure it is investigated.”

“Great,” Grace sighed. “As if being in the middle of Jurassic Park meets an old episode of Thunderbirds, we’ve got the building code violations from Towering Inferno. We’re trapped in a collection of movie clichés.”

The Doctor laughed dryly and turned his attention to the work Sweet was doing by torchlight.

“You’re trying to reboot the emergency generators?”

“Yes,” Sweet answered. “If I can get the power back on, I can initiate an electronic shield around the building, to keep the animals away. We’ll be safe, then, until the hovercopters come for us.”

“Ok, show me what needs doing. Two heads better than one and all that.”

“Three heads, thanks,” Grace pointed out sharply.

“Three heads, even,” The Doctor amended. Sweet quickly gave them both instructions for what seemed an overcomplicated method of restarting the generators. It involved a series of levers, all of them hidden behind panels that had something like twenty screws each holding them in place. The Doctor used his sonic screwdriver which didn’t seem to remove them much faster than an ordinary Phillips.

“Damn, these are all threaded,” Grace complained. “What’s the point of being all space age sophisticated if old fashioned screws get in the way?”

“Excellent point, Grace,” The Doctor agreed. “Thunderbirds?” he added quizzically.

“There is an old episode. I’ve been thinking about it all day. There’s a laboratory in the middle of a swamp where a scientist has developed a chemical that makes animals grow huge – to solve world hunger and all that. Sounds a bit familiar already. Then there’s a storm trapping everyone there. Then this man trying to steal the formula accidentally drops some down the sink and the alligators in the swamp grow huge overnight and attack the laboratory.”

“Who builds a laboratory in a swamp?” The Doctor asked.

“A formula leaked into water wouldn’t make animals grow, and not overnight,” Sweet commented. “Our animals were modified genetically.”

“Even so, this wasn’t caused by somebody trying to steal your ideas or anything, was it?” Grace asked. “Because that would be really corny in the circumstances.”

“No,” Sweet assured her. “This IS just a collection of problems, one after another, that prove this facility isn’t as good as we thought it was. First the storm frightened the animals, then the power failure and the backup systems going down… which might be the cost cutting again. If there was any crime involved, I think it might be somebody creaming off money from the project, substituting cheaper glass, generators that fail… even these screws might be substandard. They shouldn’t be threading like this.”

“All of which we can bring to the proper authorities if we don’t get eaten by the animals you developed for food, the irony of which we’re none of us appreciating just now.” The Doctor grimaced and pulled away the first of the panels. “What happened in the Thunderbirds episode, by the way? How did they escape?”

“The usual,” Grace answered. “The Thunderbirds turned up, stunned the giant alligators, airlifted everyone out. I think the thief got eaten. Bad guys always come to a sticky end on television. It’s real life that doesn’t have neat moral solutions like that.”

“None of our animals are man eaters,” Sweet reminded her. “Food animals are usually herbivores.” He looked up at the roof where the stampede continued. “They don’t even mean to attack. They’re just scared.”

“That won’t make much difference if they break into the hospitality suite,” Grace answered. She got the last screw out of one panel and yanked it away. She turned to the next one, working quickly, but, it felt, not quickly enough. She tried not to imagine the carnage upstairs if the windows had caved in completely. The tables would not be any defence against those huge beasts, and except for Professor Ashini there wasn’t a species among the motley assortment that could survive being trampled and crushed.

The last of the panels came off with one effort from Sweet.

“Now we have to engage each of the levers in turn,” he said. “It has to be done quickly. If we each take four of them….”

They spread out along the length of the wall and got ready. Sweet pushed up the first four levers, then The Doctor did his share. But by the time Grace had started to push up her levers the first ones had slipped down again.

“It’s too slow,” Sweet complained. He was trying to hold two of the levers up at once but then the other two within his reach had flipped back.

“Who invented a system like this?” Grace asked as they all stared at the stubbornly turned down levers. “It needs eight people working at once?”

“I don’t think it was designed that way,” Sweet opined. “I rather think this is another example of substandard materials being substituted. But if we can just get all eight levers up for a few seconds it should hold and we’ll get the generator back on.”

“We could bring some more people down here,” Grace suggested. “Not Professor Ashanti, or Alpha Rogan or those two with the twiggy hands, but the people with ordinary fingers, at least.”

“We COULD try that,” The Doctor agreed. “But let me have a go first. Both of you stand back.”

Sweet was puzzled, Grace a little less so. She had seen The Doctor do things like this before. It went with his ability to read the future and know instinctively when somebody was lying.

As they watched him, he seemed to blur in front of their eyes. He had slowed time around himself. Now he moved almost faster than the eye could see, snapping up the levers in order.

He did it so fast the levers didn’t have time to slip back. Grace gave a cry of relief as the lights turned on, quickly followed by a shout of triumph from Sweet as he ran to the computer terminal and pressed buttons so frantically he almost matched The Doctor’s superhuman speed.

“Wow, that takes it out of me,” The Doctor whispered, leaning against the wall dizzily. Grace hugged him. That was the best medicine for the mental and physical exhaustion of his effort.

“Done it,” Sweet announced. “We have an electronic shield to keep the animals away. And I can send an emergency evacuation request now. We’ll be out of here in an hour.”

“I’m going back upstairs to see if anyone needs medical help,” Grace said. As The Doctor and Sweet double checked that the generator was running smoothly and the shield functioning her running feet echoed on the concrete floor. There were lights now and it was much easier going. Even so, she felt a relief as she emerged into the wide space of the hospitality room. She hadn’t realised until then just how claustrophobic she had felt down there.

She looked around to see that everyone was safe and unhurt. Every window around them was cracked, but only in one place had a significant hole formed. She tried not to smile when she saw that Professor Ashini was standing with his huge bulk of a body in the gap. The story of the little Dutch boy with his finger in the dyke flashed into her mind briefly.

“It’s all right, the shield is up,” she told him. “You can step away.”

Ashini nodded and a smiled cracked his huge face. He took Grace’s hand surprisingly gently as he stepped away from the window. She announced to the company in general that they would be rescued within the hour and there were jubilant cries. By the time Sweet and The Doctor came back upstairs somebody had opened a case of champagne and there was a sense of celebration.

“We’ve been able to contact the maintenance building,” Sweet said solemnly, even as he accepted the champagne. “Two keepers were injured when the stampede began. The animals are still rampaging loose, trampling crops, breaking into the forest undergrowth. The damage will run to millions of credits. The project will be set back at least five years, and there are all those questions about the building standards to be gone into.”

“Everyone is alive,” The Doctor told him. “Which is better than Jurassic Park, Thunderbirds OR Towering Inferno managed. Celebrate that and worry about the rest later. I’m still not completely sold on the idea of giant animals bred for meat. Maybe you should look at going fully vegetarian.”

“Maybe you’re right, Doctor,” Sweet agreed.