

***Chapter Forty Seven***

“Come on,” Wilkinson took hold of Justin’s arm, “I’ve got everybody else outside. Good thing I was doing a last check or you would have been left behind.”

”You!” Justin pointed his finger at Wilkinson. “You were the man on the gate, protecting this whole place. You’re part of this.”

“I and my men were contracted to protect the plant. It’s the kind of job we do. Ex-soldiers really aren’t in demand for very much else. I take it you weren’t one of the people from the test chambers.”

“The test chambers?”

“Never mind, you’re in real trouble here if you stay. I think we blooded their nose for a while but they’ll be back. Now come on.” With a final tug, Wilkinson pulled Justin along behind him.

“I can’t leave,” Justin said, “I’m here to find someone. Maybe you’ve seen her, short, pretty dark haired woman. She has a strange kind of look in her eye, sometimes as if she’s seeing you differently.”

“Does she assume command easily? Do people follow her instructions almost without question?” Wilkinson continued to drag Justin behind him.

“You’ve met her!”

“Ms Smith. She saved us. Well I suppose it would be more accurate to say that she helped us save ourselves. Wonderful girl. If I was .... Never mind.”

“So she’s safe?”

“I don’t think any of us are safe anymore,” Wilkinson paused in his escape. “But she was well last time I saw her. I think she’s trying to save the world.”

“But...”

“I know, it sounds ridiculous doesn't it?” Wilkinson leaned his face close to Justin's. “You didn't see her,” his eyes glittered slightly as she spoke, “Ms Smith brought out the best in a group of people who were mostly ready to die. I can't imagine where all her energy comes from but ... well I for one wouldn't be the aliens. Now come on!”

Wilkinson's men held the wire mesh of the fence apart as they assisted the former prisoners through. They had chosen a spot where several buildings hid them from sight. Most of the badly wounded were already through and being carried into the nearby buildings. The more able bodied waited their turn.

“So many!” Justin said, as he watched the exodus.

“We only brought out the living,” one of Wilkinson's guards said. “Somebody's going to pay for this.”

“Why so many?” Justin asked.

“We were being tested,” the guard continued to usher people through the gap “how we coped with shock, violence, pain, loss, hopelessness. Only we found hope and it saved us.”

“But why?” Justin said. “Why go to the trouble? Why all the bother with the communicators?” Justin's mouth fell open. “They were finding our limits! Human limits.

They want to use us for something, but we wouldn't go along with it ... would we? Oh!”

Justin took two steps back towards the factory proper.

“Hey don't let them see you,” the guard said.

Justin turned back around.

“We have to let them see us. They won't believe us, otherwise.”

The Brigadier looked to his right and left. On the back slope of the small hill what was left of the Unit team were huddled around him. They were all still alive, at least for now. After all that had happened to the small military force the men looked quite keen to stay exactly where they were.

“I’m going to have a look over the top.” The Brigadier allowed a short moment for one of his men to volunteer to take his place. The moment was only short and despite the cold that seeped through the layers of his thermal clothing and the reluctance which tried to hold him in place the old soldier wriggled forward.

Slowly he lifted his head above the edge of the slope, his eyes firmly fixed forward. He ducked down again with much greater alacrity. Nothing happened. He repeated the action, again nothing happened. With more confidence than he truly felt he wriggled himself further forward and examined the scene more closely.

The container had been destroyed. That was clear, the snowy fields were littered with black debris, some of it still smoking. The huge iceberg still hung in the air. There wasn’t so much as a scratch or smoke smudge on the pristine white of its icy surface. It looked out of place now that the surrounding landscape had lost its virginal whiteness.

Lethbridge-Stewart slid back down the slope to land back amongst his force.

“Right,” his voice maintained his usual no nonsense tones and he was pleased that it didn’t tremble. “We’ve done enough for now. I think it’s time we left.” He made eye contact with each of the soldier before he continued. “Head back to the vehicle in pairs. I’ll go last, Sergeant Chin first so that he can get ready for a speedy getaway. If we have to abandon the vehicle keep heading south. Someone should be coming up to contact us after we’ve been out of communication for so long. It’s vital the information gets back. No heroics, keep yourselves safe and keep moving south.” He paused and the soldiers nodded their acknowledgements. “Sergeant Chin, lead off.”

The Brigadier lent back against the slope as he watched the first pair run through the snow, their bodies as low as possible as they made for the tree line. Inside his chest his heart beat was finally slowing down and he was able to recover his breath. There was more than one reason he would be the last to leave the position.

The Time Lord's craft steadied a few seconds after the assault. The Master's weapon discharged and the remaining pilot ducked back behind the console. He reached up to operate a control but another weapon burst brought a haze of sparks from the control panel and sent the operator tumbling backwards.

Jack struggled to hold on to the Master. Jack was clearly the larger man but the Time Lord moved to counter any attack he attempted as though he knew it was going to happen. The Master blocked another attempted blow and roared out his frustration. The wrist of his weapon hand was pinned in place by his assailant so he was unable to bring it to bear on his desired target. Jack, for his part, just held on.

Sarah watched unable to move from her prone position behind the hand rail. Another bolt of energy flared into the wall behind her and she let out an involuntary scream. She could see Maggie huddled behind the curved wall of the corridor. The nurse had her head tucked between her arms as she made herself as small as possible. Behind her a group of uniformed soldiers ran towards the console room, their weapons drawn, and grim expressions on their faces. Roughly they moved Maggie back out of the way and, mostly covered by the curved wall they steadied themselves and took aim at the two struggling figures on the floor below. "No, don't shoot." Sarah Jane struggled to her feet, the threat from the master forgotten in her attempt to save her friend. "Stop." She ran towards the soldiers, her hands raised. None of them paid her any attention and she still had several steps to go when they opened fire. The

floor around the combatants crackled with energy and Jack was flung backwards and into the console. A loud crack accompanied the collision and the Captain slid slowly to the floor.

The soldier moved the focus of their aims on Sarah and she skidded to a halt her hands raised above her head. In that moment the Master made his escape. As the soldiers turned back to relocate their original target he disappeared through the door to his tardis. The door slammed closed and the familiar whining sound of an old model tardis filled the console room as a section of wall disappeared to reveal an identical section behind.

One of the soldiers stepped forward and pointed at the remaining console operator.

“Dematerialise, we’re under attack.”

The robbed Time Lord hesitated. “The Major said ...”

The officer cut him off short. “The Major isn’t here. Dematerialise and establish the damage we have sustained.”

Reluctant to engage in any further argument the robbed man complied. He looked up from the console. “We have dematerialised but the devices are not with us.” He frowned down at the console again. “I cannot find their transport container.”

“That’s of no matter. Have we suffered any damage?”

The operator looked down at his console.

Sarah Jane made a quick pantomime to one of the soldiers who stood over her. He nodded his assent and waved her down to the console area. She arrived at Jack’s side just as he took a deep breath and opened his eyes.

“I thought they’d killed you.” Sarah brushed the man’s hair out of his eyes.

“I’m hard to kill.” Jack shook his head and got carefully to his feet. “Where’s Maggie?”

“I’m here, I’m okay.” She stumbled down the ramp Sarah rushed to steady her descent.

The officer turned her gaze on the three humans. “Take them away for questioning and get a reserve crew here.”

The movement of the soldier's weapons clearly told Jack, Sarah and Maggie what was expected of them. All three stood and raised their hands before they turned and walked out of the console room with the soldier close behind.

"Who was the madman?" Maggie kept her voice low and spoke from the corner of her mouth. The soldier seemed unconcerned about their conversation.

"It's a long story." Sarah breathed out a long sigh. "He ...". She paused, unable to continue for a moment. "He used some kind of mind control on me. Made me help him escape and then he brought me here."

"What happened to him? Why did he disappear? Was he killed during the shooting?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Stop." The soldier, his gun on them at all times, walked around the small group and opened a door in the wall. He then waved indicated that the three should walk inside.

"Back where we started." Maggie's voice cracked on the last word and she began to cry.

Jack and Sarah moved quickly to support her as her legs crumpled and she fell towards the ground. Carefully they lowered her to the ground just before the open door.

"Into the room." The soldier waved his weapon to indicate that the trio should hurry.

"She's in shock." Sarah turned to face the soldier but otherwise didn't make a move. "Fetch The Doctor."

It took a second for the soldier to process what Sarah said and then his eyes widened. "The Doctor?"

"Yes. I'm a friend of the Doctor. My name is Sarah Jane Smith, he'll have mentioned me."

"I've never heard your name." The soldier began to recover from the initial shock but it was already too late for him. A hand lifted pushed his gun arm to the ceiling and he turned to look straight into the eyes of Captain Jack Harkness. His expression changed from anger to fear in the space of a heartbeat. "You can't ...". The sentence ended with a crunch as Jack's fist met

the soldier's jaw. He staggered backwards away from his assailant a single blow not enough to put a Gallifraian down. His eyes were still locked on Jack's, his expression still full of horror when the Jack fired the weapon he had ripped from the soldier's hand during the brief fight. The soldier let out a sigh and then folded on to the ground.

Sarah Jane Smith quickly moved to the prone form and placed a hand on his chest. "It's a stun gun. Clever of you to notice."

Jack didn't answer. Instead he looked down at the weapon and frowned.

"We need to get off this ship. The people on board have a plan to take over everyone on the planet. I'm not sure exactly what it is but the Master helped them so it can't be good."

Maggie got to her feet and wobbled slightly. "I'll be fine." She brushed Jack's helping hand away. She looked at Sarah. "Which way?"

Sarah shook her head. "I'm not sure. If we go back to the console I might be able to remember."

"Or we could read the map." Jack indicated the graphic etched into the material of the wall.

Maggie looked at it closely. "I suppose all these shapes are letters or words. How can we use the map if we can't read it?"

Jack looked over at Sarah. "Care to have a look?"

Sarah shook her head in denial but stepped up to look at the alien graphic anyway. "I know nothing about alien languages but I'll ... Oh!" She squinted her eyes at the map. "I can read it." She broke into a smile. "I can read the map."

"You travelled with him for a long time, didn't you?" Jack smiled back at her.

Sarah met his eye and then turned back to the map an expression of wonder on her face. "He said it only worked because of the tardis."

"Take a look around you we're in a tardis."

“This isn’t a tardis.” Sarah rounded on him her feature changed completely. “This is a weapon, the tardis was never a weapon. He would never have allowed her to be a weapon.” She spun on her heel and headed off. “It’s this way.” She called back over her shoulder.

“Shouldn’t we do something to clear them up?” Sergeant Chin looked up at his superior. “I mean isn’t leaving them lying around is a bit risky isn’t it.”

The Brigadier didn’t get a chance to answer as another of the soldiers chimed in. “You can go and clean ‘em up if you want, Sarge. You won’t get me back there in a hurry.”

“Hmmm,” Lethbridge Stewart allowed a little of his displeasure to show at the break in discipline. “I don’t think we have anything to worry about, Sergeant Chin. After all whatever was in those pods is now scattered across the frozen wastes of northern Scandinavia. It’s not likely they’ll ever be found much less come into the hands of someone dangerous.”

The vehicle bumped over a rough section of the frozen forest floor and the conversation ceased as the Unit team hung on to their safety harnesses.

“Anything following us?” The Brigadier turned to look at the soldier hunched over the short range radar.

“I don’t think so, sir.” The soldier looked nervous about this answer so he hurried on. “There seems to be an awful lot of interference.”

The Brigadier lent forward. “Are we being scanned by radar?”

“I don’t think that’s it, sir. This is much more random as if there were hundreds of microwave sources throwing weak signals into the air almost at random. There’s no real pattern, just a lot of fuzz.”

“Fuzz?”

“Technical term, sir.”



“Hmmm.” The Brigadier turned away from the operator and back to Chin. “Any word from Jones?”

Chin shook his head. “Without the hard line, he’s basically on his own.” He looked back at his commander. “I wouldn’t worry about Jones, sir. He’s an elusive bugger and he has a snowmobile buried out there somewhere when it’s safe for him to leave.”