

DOCTOR · WHO

Not Forgotten

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Sarah Jane Smith was about to die. She could barely remember the twisted

chain of events which had brought her to this, the frozen end of her wasted life. Once she had been an aspiring journalist, full of desire to investigate and expose the mysteries and conspiracies of the world. Then she had met the Doctor, an extraordinary man – more than a man, a unique alien who could change his face - who whisked her away to worlds more mysterious and wondrous than anything on Earth could offer her. For some time they travelled together, then, suddenly, without warning or hesitation, he had left her behind on Earth, simply saying he had to home and she was not allowed there. He had even dropped her in the wrong place. That was almost thirty years ago now. Since then she had tried to move on in her life, tried to return to her stories, her investigations, her mysteries. But nothing

was the same, nothing could compare to the life beyond the pale she had known, and the friend she could never replace. ***But did he replace me?***

Nevertheless, her life had trudged onward, she had forged ahead in her career, had kept in touch with her old friends at UNIT, and even seen some of the other Doctors, both earlier and later than hers, from time to time. But they had never stayed for more than a moment, had never bothered to answer her one, undying question: ***How could you abandon me?*** Maybe she had been looking for the Doctor all this time, hoping for the answer she might not like not had to hear, maybe that was why she started to listen to the mysteries again, studied the unexplained again, and involved herself in the investigation of a mysterious comet with a cult following headed for Earth aboard ***The Dauntless***, and experimental civilian shuttle. Too bad her fellow passenger and the pilot had been members of rival cults. Now, pilot and passenger were dead, the ship's guidance systems were damaged beyond repair, all communications with Earth were cut off. And it was getting very cold.

As Sarah Jane Smith huddled against the biting chill and the thinning air, she let her thoughts settle one last time upon the last time in her life she had been truly happy: to the days when she had been the Doctor's best friend, flying fast in his incredible blue box, its engines roaring just like the sound she heard now, as her thoughts disappeared and her mind slipped into the dark...

That same evening, Sir General Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart, former head of the British branch of UNIT, ever and always the Brigadier, stood with rapt attention in his living room, watching the Breaking News broadcast on the television screen before him. That silly civilian excuse for space-flight, *The Dauntless*, had somehow malfunctioned while attempting orbit. Lethbridge-Stewart knew many investors would be tearing at their hair over the failure of this voyage, but he had a more personal involvement in the catastrophe: Miss Smith was aboard that craft.

He had of course made an immediate rallying cry to Mike and Mr. Benton at UNIT HQ, and while NASA was scrambling to prepare a rescue attempt, thanks to UNIT's expert readiness in such crisis situations a recovery capsule had launched mere minutes ago with the mandate to succeed at all costs; if it failed those responsible would answer to him personally. But now all he could do was wait and hope for the best, anything to fight the helplessness he felt below. The minutes passed. Lethbridge-Stewart paced his living room. Still no word from HQ, still no results. *If only I could help!* he thought, pounding a fist into his palm, just as a frantic pounding at his front door shattered his concentration startled him back to earth.

The Brigadier hurried over to the door, not bothering check through the curtains to see who was on the other side, and threw the door open to reveal the Doctor – the same version he had encountered almost seven months prior during the Slitheen event- cradling in his arms the pale, space-suited body of Sarah Jane Smith.

'Help me, Brigadier,' the Doctor pleaded. Lethbridge-Stewart did so without hesitation.

'She was the only survivor; I only got to her just in time. I heard her ship's communications as I was passing through the Vortex,' the Doctor commented with folding arms and shuffling feet sometime later. Doris had removed Sarah Jane's space-suit and dressed her in a pair of her own pyjamas; Sarah Jane was now lying unconscious in the Brigadier's guest bed. Both he and the Doctor stood watching Sarah Jane as she slept.

'At least Miss Smith was fortunate enough to have you close by to rescue her. I understand her shuttle was stalled directly in the path of some sort of comet; did you have any difficulty with that?'

'No, I just used the TARDIS to throw the comet back along its own course. It should come around again in the next few years, though. I'd be on the lookout if I were you.'

'Oh, we at UNIT always are, Doctor.' The Brigadier studied his old friend, physically unchanged since their last meeting save for the colour of his jumper which a purple so dark it looked almost black. There was, however, something odd about the Doctor, something subtly unsettled, nervous, as if he were about to leap out of his skin. He had to ask. 'Are you in distress, Doctor?'

'No, not really. I'm just dying.'

‘Good heavens! What happened? Is the world in any danger?’

‘It’s nothing for you to spin your head over, Alistair! No, I was on a space station above the Earth in the year 200,100, long after your time, when the Daleks decided to invade. We stopped them though, a real show-stopper of an end too!’

The Doctor laughed, loud and long, and then he shuddered as his eyes brightened with golden light. As the dying Time Lord’s body stooped, the Brigadier caught him and supported his weight. The Doctor continued to speak.

‘My friend, Rose, you won’t have met her yet, she was the one who did it: absorbed the Time Vortex and sent the Daleks scattering, but her body couldn’t handle the power, so I took it away. I had to give it up though, we can’t have little old me running around with all that energy – I couldn’t have lived with myself. Looks the same way now, doesn’t it?’

The Doctor’s breathing was coming quick and laboured. The Brigadier’s heart ached to see his friend in such pain.

‘I can’t believe this is happening to you again, and so soon!’

‘Believe me, it’s been a lot longer for me than for you. But don’t worry, I’ll regenerate; it’s happened before! And you’ll see me again, my friend, me, and whoever else comes after.’

‘Is there anything I can do to help you, old friend?’

‘Yeah, take care of Sarah Jane for me, right? I wanted to stay and give her a sweet goodbye when she woke up, but I don’t think I’ll last that long. That’s why I brought her to you: I, we trust you to be good to her, until she gets better, ok?’

'I promise. But what about you?'

The Doctor grinned as he draped his arm over the Brigadier's shoulders.

'Just help me get back to the TARDIS. I've got a little something special for Sarah Jane. One last gift...'

Several hours later she awoke. In the darkness of the rising of the morning sun, she had reference to where she was except her last, confining memory and the cold bed sheets and blanket seeming like the suffocating covering of an icy coffin. She panicked, tried to rip the sheets off away from her. From out of the darkness, came a voice.

'Alistair, she's awake. The light.'

There was a soft click and her vision was awash with a soft, white light from a bedside lamp. Sarah Jane blinked. She was in a bed, in a small, clean, green-walled room with a white ceiling. Standing at the side of the bed were two faces she recognised: Brigadier Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart – her Brig - and his wife, Doris. Sarah Jane was amongst friends. She smiled weakly.

'There aren't enough people here for the Wizard of Oz ending.'

The Brigadier smiled and leaned down, holding Sarah Jane's hand between his own.

'Don't worry, my dear, Mr. Benton and Mike will be along soon to add their welcome.'

'But the ship, what happened?'

'The ship is being brought down by a UNIT recovery capsule as we speak. You were the only survivor, I'm afraid. NASA is being briefed on how to inform the world in the most mundane way of your rescue.'

Sarah Jane frowned and furrowed her brow.

'It's being brought down now? But then how did I get...oh my. I was right, wasn't I? I knew I heard him. I knew it was the Doctor! Where is he, is he here?'

'He's already gone, Miss Smith. He wanted to say hello, but he couldn't stay.'

'Oh no? After all this time, after leaving me here alone so long ago, he comes back now and keep me alive and he couldn't even say hello?' Already fatigued with physical stress, a wave of disappointment overcame Sarah Jane as bitter tears flowed from her eyes. She turned over on her side and buried her face in her pillow. Watching her crumple, the Brigadier frowned sadly, then took Doris by the hand and led her out of the room.

'She needs some time to herself, my dear.'

'You're right, Alistair. I think she's needed to grieve about this for a long time.'

'I only hope the Doctor's present will soften her...'

* * *

A short time later, just as the sun's first rays were about to break, Sarah Jane rolled over and sighed. Her heart was heavy. She felt old.

'Oh, Doctor, why do leave me so alone?'

Out of the corner of her eye, the early morning sunlight rose over the horizon and streamed through the guestroom window, slowly brightening the space around her. At first wished she could remain hidden in the darkness, alone with her sorrow. But she always had loved sunrises, and in a few moments she turned to her side to watch the sun's ascension. She gasped. On the windowsill, framed in the morning light, was the metal figure of K9 Mark III, a gift from the Doctor long ago, and so it seemed, once more today.

Sarah Jane got out of the bed and knelt by the dog, now quite old and rusty, and having fallen into disrepair long some years before. But he was here, he was real, and there was only one way he could have got there. Sarah Jane noticed a small white placard hung by a plastic thread around the mechanical dog's neck. She held it in her fingers and read the words scrawled on its surface in the faint light:

Sarah Jane: Lucky you I found you just in the nick of time. Sorry I couldn't stick around or clean the old boy for you; I'm a little busy with life changes at the moment. I'll see you soon.

The Doctor

Sarah Jane let go of the card and looked up into the now strong sunlight, letting bathe over her face, highlighting the new tears upon her face, tears of joy.

‘Thank you, Doctor, thank you for remembering me. Until we meet again; I’m counting the days.’

She had not reached a hundred before they did.