

THE ESSENTIALS
RECURSION

Manchester, 21st April 1953, 09:59 –

Look at it from a distance. From across the street, from above, from space. Examine the scene from a safe distance, not part of it.

The rain is hammering down, pounding against the streets. Rivers carry leaves into the gutter. The trees droop with the weight of the water, and the dark skies still have more to lose. The rain doesn't soak your hair, streaking down your face and into your eyes. It doesn't rat-a-tat-tat against your leather coat, drumming against your shoulders. The wind doesn't chill you, numb you, make your fingers throb so much you think they might lose their grip. The weather does not affect you. You are not here. You're looking down on this, from a distance.

You are not kneeling in the road, clutching a body to your chest.

You are watching some stranger do this, from a distance.

Tears and rain mingle.

The Doctor is not a silent presence behind you, hovering just at the edge of your consciousness. He's wearing his bottle green frockcoat, the rain soaking into the velvet and creating new, dark patterns in the fabric. Dark stains bleeding into the fabric. You see this from a distance. You see him reach out a hand to touch your bowed shoulder, then pull it back just before making contact. You see the hand instead flick sodden curls out of his eyes. He barely knows you, this stranger, your best friend. All from a distance.

The blood isn't soaking into your shirt.

'Fitz,' the Doctor says softly. 'We have to go. They still have Anji.'

But that's okay, because you're not Fitz.

You're not Fitz Kreiner, and the body you're not holding in your arms isn't Otto Kreiner.

You're watching from a distance, and your father isn't dead.

'We have to go,' the Doctor says. 'Now.'

And that's what it always comes down to in your life: a thousand little tragedies that you never have the time to acknowledge because there's always something that has to be done, now. And now this. This deeper tragedy that you're floating outside of, half ready to race away from already for the now. There never seems to be enough now, and there's always something else pushing into it, taking you away from the then.

'Fitz,' the Doctor says again, not sure if he can order you.

'No,' said Fitz.

No longer watching, from a distance.

Manchester, 21st April 1953, 09:35 –

'I don't think this is a very good idea, Fitz,' the Doctor said, standing by the TARDIS door. His fingers were touching the peeling blue paint, as if searching for some kind of comfort. Fitz could understand that: there was a nagging feeling at the back of his brain that something wasn't right about this. He suspected the battered police box was the source of it.



He strode
ahead, determined.

'It's a great idea,'
he said confidently. 'We
find my dad, stop the
Host from killing him,
then go and find Anji. I'll
even let you save the
day. Five minutes,
tops.'

He nearly believed himself.

'Your father's dead, Fitz. You were there.'

Rain started to drizzle down from a distance, high above.

'My dad's alive. We've got half an hour, right?' the Doctor still wasn't

moving. 'Right?'

'I brought you where you wanted,' he said, his fingers toying with his curls, 'but –'

Fitz wasn't going to let him get started. Neither was the young mother in the raincoat stood just behind them. Her scream was so piercing, the Doctor had to stop mid-lecture and put his fingers in his ears. Fitz's heart did a quick somersault, and his head rubbernecked this way and that as he looked around for the hideous alien that must be reaching out for them both with slimy green tentacles. It was almost an anti-climax to see find she was screaming at a simple road accident: some people just had a nervous disposition.

'Fitz . . .' the Doctor said warningly, but it was too late.

Fitz had already seen.

Black drainpipes and comfortable leather boots lying still in the road.

Fitz found himself looking down at his black drainpipes and comfortable leather boots, before staggering across to the crowd that was already gathering around the body. He tried not to listen to the mumbled consensus that the poor bugger was done for as he pushed through the crowd. They parted around him, somewhat confused, leaving him to look down at himself, bloody and broken, lying in the road.

'I lost control,' a motorcyclist told whoever was listening. His helmet and leathers were dripping a sticky batter of eggs, milk, flour. 'There was nothing I could've done.'

'Was he your brother?' a hook nosed old woman asked Fitz, not

altogether kindly.

Fitz didn't answer, not even as the Doctor appeared behind him and placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. As if his mere presence was enough to take away the sting of staring down at your own dead body. Christ but the Kreiner family was getting whittled down today.

And then Fitz's dead twin started coughing and trying to sit up, and the spell was broken.

'Did anyone get the number of that bus?' Fitz's twin said, weakly, scrabbling around on the road to rescue a cigarette that had landed there. 'Anyone got a light?'

Fitz recognised the opportunity to be the coolest version of himself, and stepped forward holding his silvered Zippo aloft. The flame danced and flicked in the drizzle.

'Here you go,' he said.

'Thanks,' his twin said, slowly reaching up to cup the flame. His eyes met Fitz's just as their hands touched. 'Oh bugger.'

The air crackled electricity.

Fitz actually saw blue sparks flash between his and his twin's hands, and was briefly reminded of that painting of God reaching out to Adam. Then there was a brilliant flash of white light that threw Fitz through the air, sending him through the window of a not so nearby grocers. The glass shattered, raining down around him, and his memories were washed away. He was Fitz Kreiner, and he'd just watched his father die, and then . . . done something else he couldn't quite be sure of.

Somebody stood over him and sighed.

Then there was nothing else for a good few hours.

Manchester, 21st April 1953, 09:34 –

Fitz stood in the street watching the traffic go by, and tried to clear his head: it was uncommonly cloudy, inside his head and out, and he had the feeling that the Doctor knew something about it. He had certainly been acting strange when he'd made Fitz promise not to leave the TARDIS, before scurrying off somewhere himself. In fact, it was all very suspicious and the fact that the Doctor was obviously keeping something to himself made Fitz feel slightly better about lying to him. After all, his dad was out here somewhere, still alive: how could Fitz wait in the car and lose him all over again?

Yes, he definitely had to save his dad. Definitely had seen him die, and then . . .

It's getting cloudy again, thought Fitz as he flipped a cigarette into his mouth.

Standing on the kerb, looking this way and that for his dad whilst patting his pockets for his silver lighter. Which seemed to be missing. Now that was odd – he'd definitely had it earlier, because he'd had to hide it from his dad (just how was he going to explain how Fitz Fitzoliver had an older version of Otto's old silvered Zippo?) but now . . . And that nagging feeling that there was something big he was forgetting.

He caught the eye of a young mum pushing a pushchair across the

road, and winked.

She looked on in horror (obviously losing it, Fitzy).

Fitz turned just in time to see the motorbike come hurtling towards him.

'Oh yeah!' he said inexplicably, before the bike hit him.

Manchester, 21st April 1953, 09:34 –

The Doctor bustled down the road with his coattails flying out behind him, pad in one hand and stub of a pencil in the other. He really should have planned things a little more carefully – he did, after all, own a time machine: was it absolutely necessary to leave writing the note until the very last second? At this rate, he wouldn't have time to pin it to the TARDIS door – the *other*, earlier TARDIS that was – and hopefully stop the two Fitzes from meeting.

Hopefully his Fitz would do as he was told and stay in the TARDIS – the *other*, later TARDIS – otherwise things could get very confusing. He wasn't sure that even *he* had the grammar to unravel what might happen then.

'Some kind of natural phenomenon preventing a person meeting themselves,' the Doctor read aloud as he wrote 'The Kreiner Limitation Eff –'

The pencil the Doctor was using inconsiderately snapped half way through his theorising.

How annoying.

Looking up, he tried to find some sort of suitable alternative – he

couldn't have much time left to him, although he wasn't panicking just yet. There were still options: a man in a suit was nearly knocked over by a young boy running into the grocers – a man with a pen tucked neatly into his breast pocket, the Doctor spied. Perfect!

'Excuse me!' he said, hopping over to him in a couple of long-legged strides. 'Could I possibly borrow your pen?'

The man eyed him cautiously.

'I suppose so,' he said, reaching to his pocket. His fingers brushed the nib of the pen and came away blue. 'Urgh! The nibs broken.'

'Oh dear,' the Doctor said, crestfallen.

'Beep beep!' somebody shouted.

It was the boy – the boy who only a few moments earlier had rushed into the grocers, and was now rushing out, his arms filled with his purchases. The boy who was moving much too fast to be able to accurately steer around the gentleman in the suit he suddenly found blocking his way. The gentleman who would have been a good few yards down the road and out of the way if some long haired stranger hadn't asked him to lend his pen out.

With an almost slow-motioned inevitability, the boy raced straight into the suited gentleman.

They both tumbled to the floor, and the boy's purchases of eggs, milk and flour went flying into the air. The Doctor watched them turning slowing end to end as they arced up and then down. Then they landed on the helmet of a motorcyclist who was unfortunately driving by, the milk bottle and eggs smashing and making a rainy, lumpy batter with the flour. The motorcyclist –

understandably – let out a cry and, unable to control his bike, veered off the road and onto the far side pavement.

The Doctor watched open mouthed as the motorcyclist ploughed down a figure stood on the edge of the pavement, patting his jacket pockets whilst an unlit cigarette slowly moistened in the rain.

Somewhere, a young woman screamed.

‘Do you perhaps have a pencil?’ he asked the stunned gentleman with the inky blue fingers. ‘I’d like to work out exactly what the odds of that happening were.’

The inky-fingered gentleman said nothing.

‘I’ll . . . I’ll get an ambulance,’ the boy said, turning and fleeing.

Electricity crackled in the air, and with a hollow *FOOM!* a battered Fitz suddenly came flying through the air. He crashed through the window of the grocers and landed on a neat display of fresh vegetables. A King Edward rolled out from under his body and gently tapped up against the Doctor’s shoes, whilst the Time Lord shook his head in disbelief. He looked down at the poor, battered Fitz and let out a deep sigh.

‘Right,’ the Doctor said firmly.

And then he strode over to the prone figure across the road.

Pausing only to pick up the silvered Zippo lighter that had imbedded itself into the pavement.

‘Right,’ he repeated.

Manchester, 21st April 1953, 09:24 –

Fitz looked both ways and then again before he crossed the street, limping a little as he reached the other kerb. He could see Otto up ahead, just a couple of minutes into the mission the Doctor and Fitz had just given him. A mission that was meant to keep him out of trouble and safe, but that Fitz knew would lead him right into the arms of one of the Host's possessed teddy boys. He tried not to think about his dad lying dead in his arms as he hobbled up behind him.

Fitz tapped Otto on the shoulder.

'Fitz!' the old man said, confused. 'Is something wrong?'

'No,' Fitz answered, then stopped. 'Yes, yes. Change of plan: we need you to do something else. Something really important. We need you to . . . erm . . . sit in this café over here for about an hour. Have a cup of coffee.'

'Coffee?' Otto echoed.

'Oh yes,' Fitz nodded enthusiastically. 'It's important, believe me.'

Otto narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

'Where is the Doctor, Fitz?'

Oh, Fitz thought, that's easy: he's just down the road making sure that I don't meet myself and cause some kind of cosmic incident. And leaving a note with enough detail in to make sure we still come here to this time, otherwise we're going to create some other kind of cosmic incident. All without being seen, which might cause an entirely different kind of cosmic incident, but probably quite similar to the first.

‘It’s complicated,’ he settled for.

‘I see. I think I should get going, Fitz.’

‘No, wait, it really is important!’ Fitz grabbed his dad’s shoulder. ‘Okay, I’ll tell you the truth. Me and the Doctor, we’re not from the MoD. We’re time travellers. And space travellers, but that’s not important right now. The important thing is that I’m not Fitz Fitzoliver, I’m Fitz Kreiner and you’re my dad and if you go off now you’re going to end up dead.’

Fitz’s dad looked at him, goldfish mouthed.

‘On the plus side,’ said Fitz sheepishly, ‘I can teach you all the hits of the Beatles before they’ve been written.’

Gently, Otto removed Fitz’s hand from his shoulder.

‘What happened to you, Fitz?’ the older man asked softly.

Fitz looked at himself – battered, bruised and bleeding. His shirt was covered in dried blood, and his breathing was shallow as he was fairly sure he’d broken a couple of ribs. The Doctor had suggested a hospital, but Fitz had refused: if the Doctor carried out his end of the work correctly, Fitz would never have been injured and everything would be okay.

‘There’s this guy,’ Fitz began slowly, ‘who dresses up in tights and talks to children in the street. A friend of mine introduced me to him. And he’s got some really, *really* good advice that I plan to follow in the future. Or the past.’

‘I understand,’ Otto said, which surprised Fitz somewhat. ‘I understand what you have done to this man, Host, and I understand that you want to stop me doing what I must so that the Doctor can defeat you. But I won’t let you. If

you can hear me in there, Fitz, we will save you from this creature. I promise.'

And Fitz stood open mouthed as Otto turned and ran down the street.

'Right,' said Fitz. 'Okay.'

He sighed.

'Plan B then.'

Manchester, 21st April 1953, 08:43 –

The Doctor and Fitz stood outside the house, looking uncomfortable in blue boiler suits and carrying a canvas bag full on tools. Fitz checked the number on the door – 45 – and wrapped firmly on the knocker. He held his breath while he waited for the door to open.

'I don't think this is going to work,' the Doctor said.

'Don't be a pessimist,' Fitz hissed. 'The teddy boy who stabbed my dad was possessed by the Host outside the hardware shop, yeah? And he was only there because his fridge had broken down and he needed to buy a part for it, right? And we're fridge repair men with all the parts we need in our little bags, so nobody goes anywhere, nobody gets possessed and nobody ends up stabbed, right? It's easy.'

The door opened before the Doctor could offer any further comment.

A young man in his twenties looked at them mistrustfully, whilst Fitz stared at his almighty quiff. Forget the Host – that thing looked like it could take over the planet all by itself.

'Yes?' he growled.

'Hi,' Fitz said, his voice cracking. 'Fridge broken? We got a call from your . . .erm . . .'

'Mother,' the Doctor interjected politely, reaching out to shake the man's hand. 'I'm the Doctor, and this is my friend, Fitz.'

'Oh, right,' the teddy boy said, taken aback. 'Better show you the patient, then. You want a cup of tea?'

'Yeah, why not?' Fitz said, slipping into the house behind the Doctor. He was beginning to think this plan might just work.

'Right,' said the teddy boy. 'Kitchen's in the back. The milk's all off, so I'll just nip up the shops and pick us up a bottle. Won't be a mo.'

And the Doctor and Fitz stood in the hallway as the door slammed shut behind them.

'Change of plan?' the Doctor asked.

Manchester, 21st April 1953, 10:11 –

'Doctor?' Anji called hopefully, perhaps even believing this was all part of some elaborate plan. She'd only been with them a few weeks: she'd learn, in time.

If the Host didn't pop her head clean off her neck, of course.

Fitz watched as the Host took a step down from the Town Hall building, towards the Doctor. Its eyes were reflecting silver; its long clawed fingers were clamped tightly around Anji's neck. The way its long teeth glistened as lightning arced across the sky made it look all too hungry, and all too vicious

for somebody as effete-looking as the Doctor to be able to deal with.

The Doctor threw a withering look towards Fitz.

'On the bright side,' Fitz called back, 'he's still alive.'

The Host that now possessed what had once been Otto Kreiner's body took a step forward.

'Kind of,' Fitz said hopefully.

Manchester, 4th November 1945, 04:47 –

Fitz stood in the room, his hand toying nervously with the stubble on his chin: his two-day growth was starting to edge towards full beard territory. He was starting to lose track of just how long they'd been doing this for – he knew that they'd stopped twice for lunch and once for a sleep, but nothing more – and they still didn't seem any closer to finishing it. He could tell that the Doctor was getting impatient. Fitz supposed he couldn't judge him too harshly for that: he'd just spent one hundred years trapped on the same planet, and now Fitz had had him bouncing around the same two hours for God knew how long.

The last attempt hadn't gone well. Fitz's bright idea to create a distraction by shaking hands with his former self as the teddy boy attacked had caused a stunned driver to plough his delivery van through Otto *and* the teddy boy, and then continued through into the café. Twelve people had ended up dead, including the driver. After diverting the delivery van with a large order at the other side of town, they'd managed to get the death toll down to six (old woman on her way to visit grandchildren – spark plugs stolen)

and then four (motorcyclist – tyres let down in the middle of the night) but then it had been an ambulance, and no matter what they did they couldn't get rid of the ambulance without a man dying of a heart attack in Chorlton.

The Doctor had been adamant that nobody else could die in order to save Fitz's father.

That meant they were forced to get a little more creative.

'What exactly are you planning to do, Fitz,' the Doctor asked gently.

Of course he spoke gently: he didn't want to wake up the baby sleeping peacefully in its crib.

'Doctor,' Fitz said slowly, as if even he wasn't sure what was going to come out. 'This little baby here, it's not a real baby, is it? It's infected. Its parents have got some alien genes or something floating around inside them, and they've passed them on to this little boy here. It's growing inside him, and by the time he can talk, his first words will be "world domination". It's probably not even human now.'

There was a moment of silence.

'I knew another baby – another boy – who grew up with an alien influence inside him,' the Doctor said softly. 'He turned out okay.'

'In eighteen years, the Host will be in complete control of this boy,' Fitz carried on, regardless. 'And it'll tell a handful of teddy boys to stick a blade into my dad.'

Fitz turned to look at the Doctor. His eyes were red-rimmed raw.

'It's my dad we're talking about, Doctor,' he said. 'I just want to know

my dad.'

The Doctor's face didn't change.

'I'm not going to kill it,' Fitz said, 'I couldn't. But you must know somewhere we could take it, somebody who could help it. We could cure it, and bring it back. No-one would even know.'

'Hello,' came a shaky voice from the other end of the room.

Fitz's heart nearly jumped out of his skin as a little girl of about six years old crept out of the darkness, wearing the most hideous pink nightie he had ever seen in his life. In any other circumstances, he might've been tempted to crack wise. As it was, he was still trying to rearrange his features into something that didn't say: "I nearly soiled myself because a small girl said hello".

'Do you want your toy back?' the girl asked the Doctor, who beamed down at her.

'Yes, I think I do,' he said, and the girl handed him a small pink teddy bear. There was a note taped to its back, which the Doctor removed before handing the bear back. 'Why don't you keep this after all?'

Fitz didn't want to look at the note, knowing what it would say.

'The cure doesn't work,' the Doctor said, reading in the gloom. 'We were going to try quite a few different disciplines, apparently, but none of them have any great effect. Imprisonment is the best solution we can find, which will seem to work fine. Until about fifteen years later, in your lifetime, this little girl hunts you down and kills you for taking her brother away. She'll remember you clearly, it says.'

Fitz looked at the little girl as she batted tired blue eyes at him.

‘Go back to bed, sweetheart, everything’s okay,’ he said, and then turned to the Doctor: ‘Couldn’t we just . . .’

‘It says that sending the girl to her grandmother’s for the night seems to be the only discernable cause of a rise of fascism in the North-West that ultimately ends in World War Three in March 2005. Funny thing, time.’

Fitz sighed.

‘Plan W it is, then.’

Manchester, 21st April 1953, 09:55 –

Fitz and the Doctor sat hunched over a table in the back room of the pub: Fitz was staring out of the window at the street below through a pair of high-powered binoculars; the Doctor was using an ancient pair of opera glasses that he’d picked up somewhere in 1914. They were both watching as Otto Kreiner made his cautious way up the road, trying not to be spotted by the possessed teddy boy in the powder blue coat who was talking to a young Fitz and an unchanged Doctor. Fitz caught himself wondering casually why he’d ever thought he could get away with messy hair and an unshaved face. His current shaved head and beard combination worked much better – and had the added advantage of not being so easily recognised by his former selves.

‘Remember when you were going to use a stun grenade to knock out the teddy boy?’ Fitz growled conversationally. ‘I’ve just watched you find the note telling you not to.’

The Doctor shuffled, embarrassed.

‘Well it’s getting harder and harder to find decent hiding places,’ he said. ‘Every time I try and sneak behind a bush, I find out I’m already there. It’s most embarrassing. What exactly are you hoping to achieve with *this* endeavour?’

Fitz shrugged.

‘We’re running low on ideas, aren’t we?’ he answered, fumbling for a cigarette. ‘We’ve got the perfect vantage point here: I was hoping we might see something to inspire us.’

The air crackled with electricity, and Fitz turned to the Doctor.

‘Do you feel that?’ he asked, and the door opened.

Standing in the doorway was a one-armed man who seemed just as surprised to see them as they were to see him. He was so surprised, he dropped the leather briefcase he had in his hand and it clattered open on the floor, sending a spray of bullets rolling across the floorboards. Fitz assumed that they were meant to be going in the sniper rifle that the man had slung casually over one shoulder, so that made sense of that. Kind of. The man must have been going on fifty, with the kind of steely grey temples that Fitz had always wished he’d develop, in time.

‘Oh nuts,’ the one-armed man said loudly. ‘I forgot you two were here.’

Fitz recognised the voice as his own, a few years down the line.

At least that meant good news about the temples.

‘Fitz,’ the Doctor said, as if he’d just nipped down to the shop a couple

of minutes ago. 'What are you doing with that rifle?'

'Oh now don't start that,' the one-armed man said tetchily, and turned to his younger self. 'Recognise me, Fitz? How long you figure it took to get from you to me? Twenty years? Thirty? You think I've been doing anything other than this all that time? No? Well you can trust me when I tell you that I've tried everything – and I mean everything – to stop our Dad getting killed. Fact that I'm here now means that I haven't found anything that worked yet. So I figure it's time to try this way: you want to get in my way?'

Fitz reeled – thirty years? How many times could he come back to the same thirty minutes in thirty years? And he thought he was running low on ideas now!

'Fitz,' the Doctor said, and it took Fitz a moment to realise he was talking to the *other* Fitz, 'you can't do this. That man out there is only possessed by a fraction of the Host's mind. It's not the same as when the Host takes a new body: he can be saved.'

'Maybe,' replied the one-armed man, 'but in two minutes he's going to stab my dad. I don't think he deserves to be saved.'

'That's not your decision to make,' the Doctor said darkly, stepping forward to block the one-armed Fitz's path to the window. 'It's not for you to decide who lives and who dies.'

The one-armed Fitz looked at his younger self with a hint of a smile in his eyes.

'Yeah, that's what my Doctor said. Shall I tell you why he's not here now?' the Doctor faltered for a moment, but didn't move. 'Something about

seeing me like this – you know, one-armed and everything – set off a few reactions in his head. Set a few recollections bubbling up to the surface in that convoluted filing system he called a memory. Something about a big red button, I think he said. Mean anything to you?’

Horror filled the Doctor’s eyes, followed quickly by tears.

Suddenly, he clutched his head and fell against the wall, rocking and mumbling.

‘Yeah,’ said the older Fitz, ‘that’s what happened to my Doctor. Right before he killed himself.’

The older Fitz affectionately ruffled the Doctor’s hair and stepped towards the window. Fitz realised that he was still stood between the one-armed man and the table, and suddenly wasn’t sure whether he was going to move or not. The older Fitz shrugged the sniper rifle into his hand, and raised an eyebrow.

‘It’s our dad,’ he said, softly.

‘Yeah, I know,’ Fitz agreed.

‘You let me do this, you can get on your way, you know: go and pick up dad and save . . . what was her name?’

‘Anji.’

‘Yeah, Anji. Point is, you won’t have to keep doing this. You don’t have to be me, I just fizzle away into your imagination and we both get our dad back. And if I’m wrong, you just go back and stop me. You can aim to walk through that door right now, if you want.’

Fitz looked at the doorway, involuntarily.

Suddenly, nobody appeared in it telling them to stop.

‘Sixty seconds – you going to move?’ the one-armed Fitz asked.

Fitz thought about his father, and nodded.

‘Good,’ said the elder man, setting his rifle down on the table.

‘I can’t believe that you’d do this,’ the young Fitz said, his voice cracking.

‘Yeah, well, I’m doing it for me too, you know.’

Fitz’s heart skipped.

‘Let me shake you by the hand,’ he said, reaching out.

Manchester, 21st April 1953, 09:59 –

Fitz knelt in the road, pulling his father’s cooling body close to his chest, barely feeling the rain as it soaked into him. Two minutes ago, he’d been given back his father after a whole lifetime without him. Now he’d lost him again, before he’d even been able to tell him who he really was. Snatched away from him by an alien possessee with a knife. It just wasn’t fair. It wasn’t right. Tears rolled down his cheeks and he didn’t leap up and shout his impotent rage at the clouds. It just wasn’t right.

‘Fitz. We have to go. They still have Anji,’ the Doctor said, completely missing the flash of electricity in one of the windows in the pub across the road.

Fitz sat and hugged his father one last time.

‘We have to go,’ the Doctor says. ‘Now.’

And somewhere inside, something makes a decision for Fitz Kreiner. Something that knows that this isn’t fair and this isn’t right, decides that this wasn’t meant to be.

‘Fitz,’ says the Doctor.

‘No,’ says Fitz.

And he looks up, surprised – because it wasn’t him that spoke.

Standing down the road, in the rain, are two figures. They’re keeping their distance, but even so Fitz recognises them immediately. He should do: one of them is his best friend, and the other is the only living man who knows that he once tried his mother’s dress on to see what it felt like. But there’s something unfamiliar about them, too. Something beyond the fact that this Fitz looks both older and like somebody tried to cure his nits with a razor, and this Doctor has dried blood running out of his ears and nose. Something strange in the hollow eyes and lifeless expressions.

Fitz, still clutching his father to him, looks up at the Doctor.

The Doctor looks back, equally stunned.

The shaven-headed Fitz holds up a single finger:

‘Rule one,’ he says authoritively. ‘Don’t try to change the past. It’s bloody hard work, and the only thing you’ll get in the end is the sure and certain knowledge that it wasn’t worth the price. That goes for you to, Doc.’

‘I see,’ says the Doctor, nodding slowly.

‘Rule two,’ the shorn Fitz continues. ‘Should you meet yourself accidentally one day, for God’s sake don’t try and shake hands with them. Unless for some reason you want to both of you to be unconscious and amnesiac for a very long time. Which brings me to rule three: Doc, you don’t want your memories back.’

‘Trust him on that one,’ the other Doctor says, brittly.

‘Rule four,’ older Fitz says. ‘There’s plenty of time for funerals *after* you’ve saved the universe. Go and save Anji.’

Younger Fitz plucks up the courage to speak:

‘What’re you going to do?’

And the shaven-headed, hollow-eyed Fitz looks sadly down at his younger self, and his dead father. The rain draws tears on his cheeks.

‘Me? I’ll just fizzle away into your imagination,’ he laughs bitterly. ‘After the last few years, I’m looking forward to it.’

And the Doctor and Fitz turn, and walk fading into the rain.

Leaving the Doctor and Fitz looking after them.