

THE BEAST

PROLOGUE

Perivale: 19. November, 1989

17:35

‘Come on, Ace,’ the Doctor said as they clambered down the hill, ‘we’ve got work to do.’

And she looked up at him then, smiling there next to her with his hat jammed on his head, wiry hair poking out from under the brim, and she realised in the most profound way she had ever felt, she was hungry.

‘Can we get some dinner first?’ she asked.

‘Tea,’ he replied. ‘And crumpets.’

Ace grinned, and the Doctor slipped a fatherly arm across her shoulders. He felt cold.

‘Wicked,’ she agreed. ‘Where?’

The Doctor didn't reply, just took a finger and pointed it down the rolling slope of the hill. Ace followed it with her eyes.

Down below them, Perivale sat bathed in the amber light of dusk. She could see it all from up here - something she'd never noticed when she'd lived here. There was the pub, with a crowd of teenagers steadily gathering outside, and the supermarket beside it, still cheerfully advertising its wares. There were the little houses clustered around the main road, each with a family inside probably settling down for dinner and *Neighbours*. The trees rustled slightly in the early evening breeze, and the windows of the buildings caught the sunlight and cast its rosy glow back up to them.

It looked like a dump.

'There?' she asked, pointing her own finger down to the main road, to the TARDIS. Home.

'There,' the Doctor agreed.

Something rustled in the bushes. As she looked, a small black cat poked its nose cautiously out, ready to bolt if she moved too fast. Ace surprised herself by crouching down slowly and holding out her hand to it. She seemed to have developed a soft spot for the little fur balls. Big surprise.

It walked out, slowly, just in case, and looked up at her with two bright green eyes. Then

Ace saw herself, bathed in alien yellow light. She was looking up at herself, crouching on the floor, arm outstretched, sunlight glinting on the myriad of badges speckled across her chest. She saw the Doctor standing beside her, eyes to the horizon, and

‘It’s one of them,’ she said, shaken. ‘A kitling.’

The Doctor didn’t move - at least, she didn’t hear him move. The vision had passed, and she could no longer smell his emotions, strange and different in her mind. It wasn’t something she wanted to repeat: nor was the situation something she wanted to remember. The feline Cheetah people, piece, loyal, free, and doomed. It made her shiver when she remembered how close she’d become to being one. The kitling nuzzled its ear against her hand, and she didn’t dare move.

‘There’s bound to be a few still around,’ he said softly. ‘Scavenging. They shouldn’t cause too much trouble.’

‘I . . .’ the kitling rolled onto its back, offering up its stomach for inspection. Or the fatal bite. ‘I saw through its eyes.’

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor. ‘I did say you’d always take the planet with you. I shouldn’t worry. You’ll be alright. You didn’t fight.’

Ace found herself stroking the soft fur on the kitling’s belly. She hadn’t intended to, but somehow she was. Instinct. Even as she did it, she was looking up to the Doctor. He seemed like a giant, towering over her, leaning gently on his umbrella. The breeze ruffled his hair, slightly. It smelt of alien sands, and brimstone.

‘No,’ she said. ‘But you did.’

‘Yes,’ agreed the Doctor. For just a moment, Ace was sure his grey eyes flashed bright yellow.

ONE

Pyecombe: 29. July, 1998

11:32

It was a bitter morning, the sky clear and blue. The graveyard was practically empty, save for a solitary robin looking for its breakfast, and row after row of grey, silent stones. And the mourner.

He stood by the freshly dug grave, looking down in silence at the stone, grey eyes on grey granite. He wasn't dressed in the customary black, instead in an almost disrespectful pullover covered by a dark jacket. His dark, wiry hair was covered by a light Panama hat, whilst his hands twisted an umbrella nervously. Somehow, this didn't seem to matter.

'I'm sorry,' he said softly.

The gravestone said nothing, save for its inscription: Brig. Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart. Leader of men.

Most of the other mourners were gone now: in truth, not many of them had stayed after the coffin had been respectfully lowered, and the handful of dirt each tossed. There was only the lone mourner, and his young friend waiting outside the church: a young girl in a badge-speckled bomber jacket. She was patiently waiting for her friend to say his goodbyes, looking on with a quiet concern from behind dark tinted glasses, impotent. The mourner didn't move.

It hadn't been much of a service: without Doris to organise things, the military had gone for their standard old soldier's funeral. A smattering of old brass, and some ageing general saying as much about the Brigadier's exploits as D-notice and official secrets would allow. They spoke of the soldier, the husband, the father, and managed to say nothing of the man.

Hardly any of the old team had been there: the military had fallen out of touch with most of them long ago, and there was no-one else to tell them. The mourner supposed it was up to him to do that, now. Only Benton had made it, in the end. He'd sat quiet as a mouse at the back of the church, and politely declined the offer of saying a few words. He probably knew that no-one there really wanted to hear him speak. He nodded politely to the mourner once the ceremony was over - probably not even recognising him - and left soon after.

All in all, the military had done their level best to ignore anything that made the Brigadier who he was, and had instead settled for what was easiest. It shouldn't even have been in a church.

As it was, the funeral was a sham.

'I didn't bring any flowers,' the mourner said softly. 'I will next time. I know a wonderful little planet that does the most remarkable roses. You were

always partial to roses. You and Doris.'

Politely, the mourner doffed his hat to the grave's neighbour: Doris Lethbridge-Stewart, in loving memory. He could still remember that funeral, less than six months ago, relatively speaking. The church full of old friends, of happy memories, and the Brigadier - solid as a rock - standing where he was now, and saying goodbye. Or au revoir, as it turned out.

The mourner didn't return his hat to his head, instead using his free hand to turn the brim. His hands looked for all the world like they'd rather be juggling, or playing the spoons.

'So what else can I tell you?' he said with false cheerfulness, a cracked smile plastered across his impish face. 'The reunion went well. I haven't actually been there myself, yet, but I've heard great things about it. I'm having a bit of trouble getting in touch with Mike, but I've assured myself that he was there, so I suppose I'll have to persevere.'

His eyes darkened, perhaps stung by the bitter wind, perhaps not. He dropped his hat back onto his head, grasped his umbrella for support. He felt like he was drowning.

'I'm sorry,' he whispered. 'I'm sorry I wasn't there.'

He paused, a thought striking him.

'I wasn't there, was I?' he asked. 'I don't think I was there. It's so very hard to keep up with myself, sometimes. I'm sorry I haven't been there yet. There, that should cover it.'

'Excuse me, sir?' came a voice from behind.

The mourner turned, finding himself facing a stranger. He was a fairly

tall man, clad in a pristine blue Navy uniform. His hair was cropped so short that it was impossible to make out a colour, but his eyebrows were a brilliant flame red, resting above piercing blue eyes. Did he know anybody in the Navy? He couldn't recall.

'Yes?'

Out of the corner of his eye, the mourner could just make out his young friend hurrying over. She was the protective sort. But the stranger seemed harmless enough - probably just an old friend of the Brigadier's - or, more likely, the son of an old friend. He probably just wants to talk about old times.

'Are you Dr. John Smith?'

The mourner grasped his umbrella more firmly, drawing himself up to his full height, which didn't even bring him up to the stranger's chin. Despite that, he still gave the impression that he was a powerful man, someone to be reckoned with.

'Please,' he said firmly, 'call me Doctor.'

The stranger bowed in stiff acknowledgement, a slightly anachronistic gesture.

'I'm sorry,' he apologised. 'Are you the Doctor?'

The mourner, the Doctor, smiled warmly and doffed his hat. His friend appeared from out of nowhere at his elbow, glaring suspiciously at the sailor. Her long brown hair snaked down her back, darting this way and that as she turned her head, flicking like a cat's tail.

'Who's asking?' she growled.

The Doctor moved himself in between his friend and the stranger,

under the pretence of offering the sailor his hand. The stranger took it and shook it firmly.

‘I’m Captain Jötunson,’ he said, smiling warmly. ‘I’m with the UN.’

‘How do you do?’ the Doctor smiled back. ‘This is my friend Ace.’

‘Are you with UNIT?’ the young woman asked.

‘At the moment, yes.’

‘And you need my help,’ the Doctor said. It wasn’t a question.

Jötunson looked at the Doctor, all warmth suddenly gone from his face. The cold sun glinted in his crystal eyes, off his pristine polished buttons. He nodded solemnly. The Doctor grinned infectiously, swinging his umbrella up over his shoulder, and nearly decapitating Ace in the process.

‘Good,’ he said cheerfully. ‘You can tell me about it on the way.’

And he marched off, away from the grave. Ace gave the Captain a wary glance, and he smiled back at her. Despite herself, the young woman found herself smiling back, too. They both scurried after the retreating Doctor.

Softly, from out of nowhere, it began to rain.

TWO

"MG 4 JC"

Inscription on a tree.

Manchester: 28. July, 1998

21:20

As the sky slowly turned to black - through red, orange, gold and deepest blue - Mark watched a column of ants slowly make their way towards the doughnuts. They were grouping together at the border of the blanket, probably trying to decide whether to settle for the easy to reach sugar, or to make the more difficult trek for the jam filling. Before they could make their decision, he picked it up.

'D'you want this?' he asked.

Jade didn't move, just growling softly. He took that to mean he could have it, and took a bite. The jam trickled slowly down his fingers, and dripped onto her exposed neck.

'You might want to wipe that off,' she told him, moving her leg over his. It would start to hurt soon, but he wouldn't let it bother him for now.

He scooped the drop of jam up with a single finger, and tried to decide whether to drop it for the ants, or to have it himself. Jade took the decision out of his hands by lifting her head from his chest and softly licking his finger. He didn't complain.

'Raspberry,' she said, not entirely disapproving.

'Hmm,' he agreed. He was too relaxed for anything else.

It had been a good day, sitting out on the waste ground. Picnicking. Talking. The sun had been bright and hot, Jade complaining intermittently that she'd forgotten her sunglasses. Mark had leant her his, and spent the rest of the day squinting. Now it was starting to turn colder, but they didn't notice it. The picnic devoured, they'd degenerated into simply lying on the tufting grass, her draped over him, sharing their body heat.

Degenerated, or progressed, depending on your point of view.

He remembered the first time he'd seen her, across the smoke filled union bar. She'd been by the snack bar, trying to get a plate of chips. He'd been at the bar, trying to get a game of pool. The first thing he'd noticed was how small she looked, crowded by her much taller friends. The next was her long black hair, hanging down and covering most of her face. After that it had been how pale her skin was - briefly followed by idle musings about whether she was anaemic, or just a Goth. Just as he's been about to turn away, she'd

lifted her hair out of her eyes, and he'd seen them. Two brilliant emerald gemstones, glinting fire. He'd fallen in love soon after.

It had taken several months to find out all he could about her - that her name was Jade (named after those shining eyes), that her hair was dyed, that she did physics, that she was out of his league. Or so everybody thought - including Mark himself.

'What d'you want to do now?' she asked softly.

'Let's just stay here for a bit,' he said, not saying the first thing that came to mind. 'It's a nice night.'

'Hmm,' she purred, and nuzzled her head back onto Mark's shoulder. He shifted slightly, taking her weight, and her warmth. Solid.

The waste ground sighed softly, and looked back at them both.

He liked to think of it as his waste ground, just a simple bare patch of earth in the heart of the city, but he was the only person he'd ever seen there. And now Jade. It was probably the trek down that put most people off - pushing through thick undergrowth, trying not to fall down the steep slope to the footpath. At least, he thought it was a footpath. Either that or an old disused railway track. Whatever it was, it was mostly nature's now, crowded on either side by tall green leafed trees and nettles. The path little more than a streak of dust between the green.

He remembered Jade complaining as she'd struggled down, clinging alternately to the trees, the ground, him. He'd had it worst, of course, carrying his rucksack with the food in. Nothing fancy - just a bottle of wine, a corkscrew, a loaf of bread, some cheese, and the doughnuts of course. She'd settled as they walked down the path, arm in arm. It had the same effect on

him - all that nature, the birdsong, and even the occasional squirrel. When he took her to the waste ground, she'd practically died.

It was beautiful, especially now in the dusky light. A thin film of grass tried desperately to cling to the dry earth, joined here and there by patches of wild flowers. Daisies - of course - buttercups, and just by his elbow a tiny group of bluebells chiming gently in the breeze. Behind them the allotments, invisible behind the rise of the slope and the cover of the trees. In front of them, the housing estate that now doubled as an army base, also invisible. You could almost imagine you were out in the countryside.

One of the braver ants made a move up Mark's leg. Jade flicked it away casually, and it rejoined its fellows, massing for the assault.

'D'you know what they used to say about the sun and the moon?' Jade asked him, a hand resting on his chest. She could probably feel his heart beating.

'No,' he said, sounding calm. 'What?'

'They used to say that the sun was a chariot, made out of liquid gold. One of the gods carved it. I can't remember which one.'

'One of the gods?'

'Yeah. There were a lot more to go around, back then. They - that's the Vikings, by the way - they said it was pulled by two of the finest horses in creation, and driven by Sol, the most beautiful of all the gods.'

'What about the moon?' he asked, his hand crawling across his chest. It found hers, and rested.

'The moon was a chariot too, made out of ice, I think. It rode in front of

Sol as a . . .'

'Herald?'

'Yes, herald. Mani rode in that one, but it was Sol that everyone remembered. Are you going to kiss me?'

His heart started beating on his ribs to get out. He tried to ignore it, and found it incredibly easy when Jade turned her bright green gaze on him.

'I was thinking about it,' he said.

'Good,' she said, and kissed him.

It reminded him of the first times - the first for him, and the first with her. Warm pressure. That was the last thing he actually remembered thinking for a while.

He didn't even notice when the darkness started to look at them, with two yellow slit eyes.

Manchester: 30. July, 1998

14:20

Ace sat crouched over her bacon butty, tomato ketchup dripping stickily onto her plate, watching the city unfold before her. She'd never been to Manchester before, only knew about it from her youth as Madchester, and more recently as a photograph from the Doctor's newspapers: the shopping centre with a cloud of smoke over it, and policemen scrabbling away from the blast. Now there wasn't a sign of any of that. Sat right in the heart of the city, she could see row after row of shops, all crowded with opportunist shoppers.

Students, people off work early, mothers with children and shopping bags to balance. It made for interesting viewing.

For once, she was alone. It was an odd experience after spending so much time with a constant companion. As she sat watching young lovers walking arm in arm, the Doctor was probably busy dissecting the dead girl. She hadn't felt much like spectating, so had left him to it. Wolsey was somewhere down in Withington, prowling around the undergrowth, scaring the odd granny. If she concentrated, she could feel the pleasure he got from leaping out at passers-by, hissing at little children.

She remembered how Wolsey had scared her when he'd first found them - two months ago, now? It had been the Doctor's idea to bring him into the TARDIS - he told her that once the kitling found someone with the Cheetah gene, it would follow them until one of them was dead. They were bred that way. If she brought it with her, he'd said, at least she'd have some control over it. And she'd be able to name it.

The naming, she discovered, was one of the most important things with the kitlings, especially ones as young as Wolsey. It let them know what their sibling expected from them - a kitling named Killbynight was liable to do just that. Not that they understood the words, just the emotion the sibling put into it whenever they called. That was why she chose Wolsey - something dignified, but non-threatening. It surprised her how quickly she'd grown used to having him by her side, and in her head. Almost as quickly as she'd got used to wearing sunglasses no matter what the weather. It saved explanations when she went.

In her head, Ace felt a burst of joy as Wolsey found a rabbit to chase.

She hoped he didn't catch it - she was still quite disturbed at how good it felt to have flesh tearing between his teeth. He was little more than a kitten, but he was also a hunter, and nothing she could do would change that. She wasn't sure any more whether she wanted to.

The cafe itself was quiet, just herself, a pair of nodding students being served by the motherly owner and several monochrome film stars gazing down from the walls at her. The bacon butty nuzzling in her hand was warm and moist, the ketchup sweet and tangy: almost perfect. She took a ravenous bite, the red sauce dribbling from her lips. Pulling a disgusted face, Ace swallowed hastily and took a gulp of her tea to wash the taste away.

This was disturbing. It was getting so she couldn't even have a sarnie without tasting the chemicals, the plastic aftertaste, the general non-meaty taste of the processed meat. Her taste buds clamoured for the real thing, so she quieted them with another gulp of tea.

Pushing the plate away, she settled back to watch the world go by.

She was rather shocked to discover that the world was also watching her. He was tall and shaven-headed, his eyes hidden beneath round-framed sunglasses. He was standing outside the bookshop, hands in his pockets, dressed entirely in black. And watching her. She hadn't realised until that moment just how annoying sunglasses were: although she could see the set line of his eyebrows, the hook of his nose, the thin slit that was his mouth, she couldn't see his eyes and she couldn't tell what he was thinking.

Then she realised that he couldn't see hers, either.

Carefully, calmly, she reached down for her butty, and opened the part of her mind that was linked with Wolsey. Within a second, she could feel the

velvet pressure as he rubbed his head up and down her legs. She just hoped he hadn't brought the rabbit back with him to play. Taking a bite of the processed bacon, she felt the kitling's curiosity aroused: it wasn't very often she called him to her. Chewing hard on the butty, trying not to gag at the taste, Ace calmly told Wolsey to follow.

There was a time when a command like that would have needed repetition, maybe even a careful demonstration, but not now. Now kitling and sibling were one. Wolsey took a brief look at the target through Ace's eyes, and then was gone.

Calmly, Ace finished her tea, ordered another cup and a slice of apple pie, and sat back to enjoy the show.

'Show me,' she said.

Manchester: 30. July, 1998

13:50

The Doctor sat quietly in the darkness, and looked unblinking into the light. Somewhere out of the blank void, the soft strains of Herbie Hancock drifted out. The Doctor hardly noticed. All his attention was focussed on the girl's body in the light.

She was young - eighteen, nineteen, just past Ace's age - with lank dark hair spread over her face, masking the features. They weren't important. Her eyes were a brilliant shade of green, the pupils dilated and dead. The only thing she wore was a thin cotton sheet, and a look of absolute terror. It was

hardly surprising - her body was covered with claw marks, and her chest had been ripped open by razor sharp canines. Several of her internal organs were missing. It was up to him to discover why.

He was glad Ace had decided to go. He didn't want her seeing this kind of savagery. It would only make her worry, and she was doing enough of that as it was. Not for herself, of course. She never worried about herself, just leapt straight in to save him. He had a recurring nightmare, when he found the time to sleep, that one day it would be her laid out bare on a slab somewhere. And it would be up to him to wash her, and watch her, and avenge.

But not today. Today it was this stranger, and that made it easier. He didn't even know her name, just her number: victim number four. The latest, and the last? He doubted it. When they had discovered the first body, they had thought wild animal. Then the second had been killed and left inside a locked house. No way in, unless you had the key. She was a mother, her children staying over at their grandparents. Her boyfriend had found her. He was still in hospital. No, it was no animal, but no human could scratch out a living heart with such power and ferocity. So UNIT had been called in. After victim number three, even they were no wiser. Then somebody had remembered the Brigadier's funeral, and checked the guest list. He hadn't flown in a helicopter for several lifetimes, until today.

The army had settled in quickly. The first attack - the first murder - had only happened five days ago, and yet already they had a base of operations set up. A nearby housing estate had been commandeered, and with typically grand military thinking all the residents rehoused elsewhere. Now there were a handful of prefabricated huts set up in a ring around the motor pool. Jeeps,

vans and civilian hatchbacks all sat uneasy under the gaze of the military, they themselves under the unblinking gaze of the silent, dead houses. All the swings in the local patch of grass had been uprooted to make way for a helipad, at the Captain's request. They sat unwanted in one of the front gardens, where they had been thrown. The owners of the house were trying to grow tomatoes, without much success.

Jötunson had left almost as soon as he had briefed the Doctor about the situation - important matters elsewhere to deal with - but he had left him with a Major Domo to look after his needs. He was just a touch older than Ace himself, brown eyed and bristled haired, barely needing to shave in the mornings. Silent as the grave, as well.

'I assume you'll want to talk to her boyfriend first,' the Domo - Peters - had said, once they were inside. 'He's in the local hospital, broken leg and shock.'

'No,' he'd told him. Peters had simply raised an eyebrow. 'I'll need to see the body - I assume you have it?'

'It's in the Morgue. The others have been released to the families, after an autopsy. We didn't find anything unusual. It's not going anywhere.'

'No, but I'll need to see it,' he'd said firmly. 'Otherwise, how will I know what questions to ask?'

And so here he was, alone in the dark, trying to find the answer. Or, to tell the truth, trying to think of an alternative answer. There were tribes he had visited, back in the dark abysm of time, that believed the eyes retained an image in them after death. The last thing the dead saw in life. If it was true, he had never yet found someone who knew how to unlock their secrets. But still

he tried.

The door opened, casting a brief shadow of light across the body, a different perspective. Then it shut again, and the darkness hurried eagerly forwards.

'I admire your choice in music,' said Jötunson, invisible in the darkness.

'You have quite a collection.'

'A hobby. That's all.'

'An extensive hobby,' the Doctor said, not taking his grey eyes from the corpse. 'I haven't even heard of some of those recordings.'

Silence, nothing more.

'Do you know what I admire about Jazz musicians?' the Doctor asked, as if to break the silence. Jötunson didn't answer. 'The improvisation.'

Again, Jötunson remained silent. If he was still in the room, the darkness did nothing to show it. It even swallowed up the sound of his cool measured breathing. The Doctor didn't notice, or if he did he chose to keep it to himself.

'In most music styles it's enough to learn the songs, to practise, and to pray for that spark of inspiration. You still have to do all of that with Jazz, but then there's improvisation. The mark of a true Jazz musician isn't how well he plays the songs, but how he responds to the moment.'

'I can have a theatre prepared for an autopsy, if you want to,' Jötunson offered evenly.

The Doctor paused. For a moment, he saw Ace lying on the slab in front of him. Gently, he pulled the cloth up over her injuries, her face.

‘No,’ he said firmly. ‘There’s no need to upset the families any more.’

‘They’ve asked for the body to be returned. There’ll be a funeral next week.’

‘Have you got a blood sample?’

‘Yes. And a microscope waiting for you.’

‘Good.’

The Doctor headed over to the doorway. He could hear Jötunson follow, and Peters standing rigidly outside. If he really concentrated, he could almost everything that was happening around the base. Somewhere, a soldier was having a cigarette break, and two more were fighting. Somewhere else, a kettle was being brewed, whilst cups clanged together. The Doctor put his finger on the light switch.

‘What was her name?’ the Doctor asked quietly.

Silence, nothing more.

‘I don’t know,’ Jötunson said eventually. ‘I’ll find out.’

‘Thank you,’ said the Doctor. ‘Let’s go and visit her companion, shall we?’

And with a flick of his wrist, the Doctor turned on the darkness.

Manchester: 30. July, 1998

14:23

Ace sat back quietly in her chair and sipped on her tea. It was cold. It didn’t matter. With the eyes in her head, she could see the street, and the

bookshop crowding towards her. There was also the ghost image of the cafe behind her, reflected back from her dark glasses. And her own yellow eyes staring back at her.

With the eyes of the kitling, Ace could take a good long look at the man looking at her. There was a time, not so long ago, when this kind of thing was difficult. The power of the visions used to knock her to the floor, leave her vulnerable and useless. Not any more: she'd got better with practise. Stretched her muscles.

Wolsey stopped just in front of the man, staring unashamedly up at him. And unnoticed - the man's gaze was definitely fixed on Ace, despite his own sunglasses. Through Wolsey, she looked for the tell-tale bump of a gun under his long dark coat. Nothing. Perhaps he wasn't important, just a passer-by captivated by her mysterious beauty. And perhaps she'd fly to the moon. The shaved head practically stank of military - but if he was UNIT, he would have introduced himself. Had the Doctor arranged for a chaperone for her? Possibly - no professional would be so obvious, though.

Whatever, thought Ace. It's time to up the ante.

Putting down her cup of tea, and warning Wolsey to stay vigilant, she turned her head slightly. Despite the mask of her sunglasses, it was obvious that she was looking straight at her observer. Never one for subtlety, she raised her hand and gave him a coy little wave. She could practically hear him gulp from where she was sitting.

He turned sharply, and hurried off towards the shopping centre. Ace didn't move, simply thought: Follow.

Wolsey the Hunter padded softly through the busy streets, his eyes locked on his prey, and his sibling in his head.

He knew what his sibling wanted, and he knew how to get it. That was why he didn't draw attention to himself by stalking his prey like some siblingless kitten with a winged thing. He simply padded over the hard ground, ignoring the siblingless two-legs that crouched and stretched to reach his fine black fur, seemingly following his nose. His sister would be proud.

His prey hurried down the street, not looking back over his shoulder. Perhaps he was panicked, running blind. Or perhaps he was clever, and knew he was being chased. Wolsey wouldn't be fooled into losing his prey. Wolsey was clever. No matter how the black prey twisted through the siblingless two-legs, he would not be lost. He could even see as the black prey hurried across a busy track swarming with mindless four-wheels, and didn't panic when the mindless creatures forced him to pause, waiting for a gap.

A moment of doubt: shooting across the track, dodging the four-wheels, had he lost his prey? He stopped dead, head turning slowly this way and that. He could feel his sister in his head searching with him - with such combined prowess, the prey would not stay lost for long.

A siblingless two-legs crouched down right in front of him, arm outstretched, and gabbled:

'Hewwolikklepuddytat.'

Wolsey wanted to scratch them - nothing too damaging - but his sister restrained him. Sometimes he wondered if she knew anything about the hunt, and blood.

There she said, and the prey was found. He was flapping along towards the tall cross-building as his long black coat streamed out behind him, split like two dark wings. He was flapping towards a narrow passage-way between the cross-building and a blank faced glass-building. The perfect place for the kill.

Or an ambush, warned his sister. Wolsey purred soft reassurance - he would not be hurt, he was the best. He gave the stupid two-legs a sharp hiss, and tried not to purr as he saw her shocked face scurrying away. He felt his sibling make her strange happy growling noise in her throat, and purred at her instead.

Then he was off, slipping between the stone and the concrete, sniffing the footprints of his prey. They smelt strange. He felt his sister's excitement tinged with - was it fear at the sight of the cross-building's coloured glass eyes? Perhaps she feared for Wolsey the Hunter. She did not need to: Wolsey the Hunter was the best - nothing would escape him.

Which was why it came as quite a surprise to round the corner into the alleyway and find nothing but the alleyway staring back at him. Of his prey, there was not even a scent. Just the sound of flapping wings filling the air.

Damn thought his sister.

THREE

Manchester: 30. July, 1998

14:21

The Doctor stood staring out of the window. Across the road he could see row after row of empty rooms, resting above quiet shop fronts. In little more than a month, those rooms would be filled with students of all ages, the shops below bustling as they tried to buy a cheap meal, or drinks for the night ahead. Now, though, they were dead.

He didn't visit hospitals much. For him, medicine and repair were things to be practised in the field, or left to somebody else. The only times he visited hospitals were to visit people he needed to see, or when some misguided soul tried to put him in one. He'd had bad experiences with hospitals.

It was probably the mixture of dying flowers, rotting fruit, and antiseptic.

'You should be able to talk to him now,' said the nurse, straightening

up. She was a young thing, even tried to give him a reassuring smile. He returned it wearily.

‘Thank you,’ he said, and left the window.

She smiled again, and backed slowly out of the door. The Doctor caught a glimpse of Jötunson, waiting patiently outside, and then the door was shut again. Leaving him alone with the room.

‘Hello, Mark,’ he said softly.

The boy in the bed looked up at him, into his eyes. He was a tall boy - long hair cast casually over the pillow, thick lips and broken nose. Something in his blue eyes made the Doctor think of shutters on windows. He was covered in cuts and bruises, his left leg in plaster. He was lucky.

‘Leave me alone,’ he said weakly.

The Doctor took off his hat and rested it next to his umbrella on the chair. He didn’t sit, instead picking up one of the flowers from the vase and making it dance in his hands. He didn’t speak for a while, the silence breathing around them, alive.

‘I need to know what happened,’ he said finally.

‘Leave me alone,’ Mark repeated, more firmly.

The Doctor rested the flower back down with its fellows. He looked Mark firmly in the eyes. To his credit, the boy didn’t turn away, just glared right back into the abyss.

‘I’ve just come from your friend,’ the Doctor said flatly, and Mark looked away. ‘She was a very beautiful girl. I’m sure you loved her very much.’

‘Jade. Her name was Jade.’

‘I’m sorry. I’m sure you loved Jade very much. I’m here to stop whoever did this to her, but I need your help. Do you understand?’

Silence, nothing more. Then:

‘What d’you need to know?’

Manchester: 28. July, 1998

21:26

‘Quickly!’ he screamed. Jade didn’t answer, except in a panting half-scream. She ran quicker, through the darkness.

He held on tight to her hand, pulling her along behind him, his heart beating hard in his chest. His lungs burned acid. His eyes struggled to peer through the gloom. By the time he caught sight of something, they had already passed it. He couldn’t hear the creature behind them, but he knew it was there. Oh yes, he knew.

It had come out of nowhere. No, it had come out of the black undergrowth. He was stupid to have kept them both there so long, but he didn’t want to leave. It was so warm. And now . . . It wasn’t even human - just darkest shadows and two flaming yellow eyes. Eyes resting on them. Moonlight glinting off its teeth, sharp. Its howl was the sound of the lowest pit of hell. And it was chasing them. Hunting.

‘I can’t . . . any . . .’ gasped Jade. She was petrified, he could feel it. He was petrified. He pulled her harder.

‘It’s not far,’ he shouted over his shoulder. He couldn’t even look at her.

It was his fault.

‘It’s going to -‘

‘We’re nearly there!’ he shouted, pulling. His feet found the ground without his eyes even looking. Adrenaline pumped, his muscles screamed, and his heart was breaking. ‘You can see the road from here. Once we get there we’ll -‘

‘We’ll what?’ Jade sobbed. ‘It’s going to -‘

‘We’ll find a car. We’ll get the hell out of here. It won’t catch us. Come on!’

‘Mark.’

‘I know,’ he said. ‘Come on.’

That was the best he could do. When they hit the road, when they were in the car, he would tell her he loved her, that he was terrified something would happen to her, that he was so, so sorry. But not now. All he could do was run, and drag her along behind him. They were nearly there. They would be . . .

The bank.

He’d forgotten about the bank. Coming down was bad enough - going up again? With that thing behind them. They were going to die.

‘We’re nearly there,’ he shouted back to her. His voice cracked.

The steep slope loomed up before them. The creature loomed up behind them. The dry bank, clothed in stinging nettled, thorns, branches that grabbed and tore. There was no choice. They couldn’t stop, couldn’t fight. A car sped by overhead. There would be another, he knew it. They just had to

get up there.

He made a decision.

'You go first,' he shouted.

She didn't stop, didn't argue. She just squeezed his hand and sped on in front of him, her long dark hair trailing back behind her. If anything happened to her . . . She started climbing the slope, grabbing out with her hands and pulling herself up despite the thorns. He didn't stop, just raced up behind her. They went together.

The darkness reached in to swallow them, grasping at them with clawed hands. He felt the thorns tear his face, the bracken grab at his clothes. He saw Jade scrambling up in front of him, got hit in the chest by a branch she pushed carelessly back. The road ahead beckoned. They were going to make it. They were . . .

He lost his footing on the leafy floor, and tumbled backwards.

He tried desperately to grab hold of something, anything. He failed. He felt his stomach lurch, and his head swap places with his feet, and then he was in freefall. Flying. The branches whipped out at him, cracked his ribs and his head, and still he flew. Hours passed, and then he landed.

He didn't even hear the crack, just felt the fire shoot up his leg, and the stars burst in his head.

He lay there - how long - in the dark, crying, hurting, and praying.

'Mark?' she called down, terrified. Please god tell me she hasn't stopped. 'Mark?'

A choice.

'Go!' he screamed. 'Run!'

She didn't need telling twice. He saw her scramble up the side of the bank, not even looking back. Her skirt caught on the undergrowth, tore. A trickle of blood ran down her leg. She didn't pause.

'Go,' he said.

It dawned on him that he was going to die.

His heart exploded in his chest, and the pain cleared. He dragged himself to his feet. Fell as his leg buckled under him in a fresh burst of pain. He ignored it, rose again, dragged himself away. He didn't want to die. He was too young. He was too . . .

He heard the scream, and his head whiplashed up. He was just in time to see Jade pounced on by the night. Up on the road. It had doubled round on them. She screamed again, not even a human sound any more, just pain, and fear, and . . .

He fell, rolled under the bridge, and did nothing. It seemed like hours until the screaming stopped.

Manchester: 30. July, 1998

14:23

The room was antiseptic and white, and silent. The sunlight that filtered in through the window did nothing to warm it. It just picked out Mark lying battered and broken on his bed, and left the Doctor in shadow in his chair. He was leaning silent on his umbrella, staring at Mark with two cold grey eyes. His face was nothing but a pool of shadow.

‘I don’t want to tell you this,’ Mark said, drained.

‘You have to. Anything may be important. Anything.’

‘It’s got nothing to do with it. Nothing.’

Tears started to roll slowly down Mark’s linen white face. The Doctor didn’t move, if he noticed. His cold stare remained on Mark’s eyes.

‘I . . . I listened to it . . . to it . . . It should have been me.’

‘Why?’ asked the Doctor softly.

‘I loved her.’

It should have been answer enough. It wasn’t.

‘And?’

‘I listened to it kill her,’ he snarled. ‘I heard her scream. I loved her, and all I could think was . . . was I was glad it was her. Not me.’

Silence. The flowers in the vase slowly died, the fruit slowly rotted. Outside a car passed by. The Doctor didn’t breathe, just sat leaning on his umbrella.

‘The instinct for survival,’ the Doctor intoned.

‘I loved her. It should have been me.’

The Doctor stood, put his hat on his head. The brim covered his eyes in shadow. Nothing escaped of his emotions.

'I know,' he said. 'It wasn't your fault.'

With that, the Doctor walked to the door. His face was set. He knew his enemy.

'Will you kill it?' Mark asked softly.

The Doctor left the room.

FOUR

Manchester: July 30. 1998

14:32

The park was quite quiet, considering. Wilmslow Road buzzed with traffic behind him, half hidden by the trees, but hardly anyone came through at this time in the afternoon. The students would cut through come three o'clock, and their way home ready for another night in the pub. Bloody students, bloody loaded the lot of them. Posh trainers and the latest fashions, and never too broke for that one last pint before ringing for a taxi on their bloody mobile phones. They said they rot the brain, those mobiles, and having seen half the students outside Hardy's Well, he could well believe it. Bloody loaded sods.

But it didn't matter now. He was on his way to the pub himself, now. Not one packed full of students, mind. The Horse, nice and quiet and local, full of City fans, Christ only a stone's throw from the ground itself. Bloody students

were all United fans, weren't they. Even the foreign ones.

The lake spread out in front of him, geese and ducks flapping about on the surface. Nobody fishing, which was odd. There usually were, despite the fact he didn't know if there were any fish in there or not. Perhaps they were fishing for condoms, or just trying to spend a couple of hours away from the wife and her nagging. Either way it was odd to see them gone. Perhaps the clouds overhead had put them off. Threatening rain, even thunder. Let it bloody threaten, it didn't bother him. He could see the caravan park up ahead, and the pub was only a couple of minutes from there. He'd be safe and dry before the weather broke, and then he could sit it out there.

That was when he saw him.

Stood at the far end of the lake, a dark shape, not too tall, not too bulky. He was standing stock still, head up to the sky as if he was sniffing out the coming storm. Nice looking clothes, probably cost a bit, but they were starting to look a bit tatty and dirt encrusted. Must be a student – no one else with the money to buy clothes that good lets them get into that state. Probably got a couple of quid on him somewhere, enough for another pint or two in the Horse. He looked around for something useful, and found a large branch lying at his feet. God was smiling on him.

Picking up the branch, hefting it like a club, he started to advance on the dark shape on the horizon. Above him, the clouds rolled, bringing in the rain.

Manchester: July 30. 1998

15:01

Damn.

Damn.

Damn.

Ace barely saw as Wolsey rolled playfully onto his back, padding softly at her boot laces, warming his back on the hot pavement. Her head flicked this way and that, searching for some sign of the watcher. Nothing. Damn. She'd spent half an hour going over that little alley by the church – everything but getting down on her knees and sniffing the paving slabs. Nothing. None of the builders working nearby had seen anything, except a blond in a boob tube. He'd vanished into thin air, which was of course impossible. Except her and the Doctor did it nearly every day. Damn!

Wolsey soon gave up on her, this new game was no fun to play, and he was disturbed by dark thoughts that occasionally flashed his way. The game with the dark man had been fun, to start with, but had ended badly, with shame. He had never lost a prey before, and he didn't want to dwell on it. He wanted a new game, one he could win, and preferably one that ended with the taste of blood in his mouth. He padded again at his Sister's feet, but her mind was still on the lost prey, her eyes watching every two-legs that hurried by. No, this was not the game for Wolsey the Hunter.

Ace paid the kitling no heed, instead drawing her knees up to her chin and snarling to herself. She'd tried everything she could think of – doubling back, retracing her steps, then finally aimlessly wandering in the vain hope he might make his presence felt again. Nothing. If he was still watching her, he

was being a lot more careful about it. She hadn't seen anyone in the last ten minutes who was remotely like him. Instead she'd settled on a bench in Albert Square to try and plan her next move, fighting the urge to hiss at some passer-by and run them to ground just for the hell of it.

Her eyes fell on Wolsey, the jet black kitten crawling silently on his belly, stalking the statue at the centre of the square. He seemed to have put their failure firmly behind him, perhaps she should take a leaf out of his book? Or perhaps she should do what the Doctor would do. But what was that? Probably get himself captured, then get the mysterious stranger on his side to save the world. So at least she had a plan, albeit an impossible one. Impossible for anyone but *him* of course. Perhaps she should give up, slope of back to Perivale and get herself a flat over the corner shop. Perhaps she was getting too old for this game. And perhaps if she kissed Wolsey long enough he'd turn into a handsome prince ready to take her away from all this. Fat chance.

The kitling ignored all of this, all of his senses tuned perfectly on one single point, his ears swivelling forward to catch even the slightest of sounds. He could feel his heart beat speed, his pupils dilate, his mouth fill with saliva. At the foot of the statue, the winged thing seemed oblivious. Such was the skill of Wolsey the Hunter – it wouldn't see anything until it was too late, and its blood arched across the hard ground. His prey was large, yes, but it would be no match for tooth and claw. Its beak may be large and curved, but Wolsey could have his teeth in its neck before the black-eyed creature could caw in surprise. And the winged thing's attention seemed to be directed firmly elsewhere.

With a cold unblinking stare, the raven perched at the foot of the statue, and watched Ace.

She didn't notice, her eyes still scanning round ever more hopelessly for a man, not a bird. Her mind raced with possibilities, none of which offered an immediate solution. She knew there was nothing much else she could do here, but she was unwilling to admit defeat, unwilling to run back to the Doctor with her tail between her legs and say she'd failed. If, of course, she could find out where he was. Probably at the base, but probably not. He didn't like getting cooped up, and if there was a hunt, he'd be leading the pack. No, she was being stupid, acting like a spoiled teenager. Again. If there was something odd going on, the Doctor would want to know about it: disappearances and deaths, the Doctor's meat and drink. He'd want to know.

Wolsey the Hunter stalked ever slower, ever forward, his tail flicking about behind him like a whip as he prepared for the pounce. The raven was still oblivious, its ebony eyes still fixed on Ace as she lifted herself from the bench, hand in her pocket. The Doctor would want to know, and UNIT would know where the Doctor was. Muscles tautened, and Wolsey rocked slightly back, coiling into himself ready to unwind. A second later and he would be flying through the air, claws exposed. Then his would be at the bird's throat, and it would be over. But he never made his leap, the hunt blown out of his mind as the raven changed its stare. The head turned slightly, and those cold dark eyes fell on the hunter, fixing him to the spot. For the first time, Wolsey actually found himself afraid, afraid that his prey might be too much for him.

With an almost contemptuous snort, the bird opened its massive wings and casually flapped into the air, leaving Wolsey clinging to the earth, his

head filled with pictures of the bird's talons grabbing onto him, lifting him away for its chicks to feed on. A second failure in one day. By the time he managed to come back to himself, his Sister was already across the road. She had seen nothing of the bird, or the failed hunt. He could see no reason to let her know.

Reaching the telephone, Ace pulled out the pass she had been given and dialled the number on the front. It was too long to be a telephone number, but it started ringing any way. A blurred picture of a blond haired woman stared up at Ace, sensible and starched. Thinking like a physicist. The telephone clicked as somebody at the other end picked up. There was a second's pause – they were checking their computers to see exactly where the call was coming from – and then a crisp voice said:

'Allen Demolition, can I help you?'

Somebody's idea of a joke. Ace slipped the pass back into her pocket and nestled the telephone into the crook of her neck.

'Put me through to the Doctor,' she said, matter of fact. There was a pause on the other end of the telephone, that same pause she always got whenever she mentioned the Doctor to anyone in UNIT. It was the sound of their lives, flashing before their eyes.

'One moment,' the voice said, cracking slightly.

So Ace waited as Wolsey quietly padded up to her, and let her eyes wander again, half looking for her lost prey. And she wondered why it was she felt a thrill of fear from the kitling as her eyes fell on a huge black raven, perched on the top of one of the cafés nearby. A huge black raven that seemed to be watching her.

Manchester: 30. July 1998

15:57

The Doctor stood, his umbrella to his lips, his grey eyes looking down at the slab. Another dead body, another ruined life, another day's work waiting to be done. Sometimes he wondered how much longer it would go on being this way, before he felt he'd actually made a difference. Trying as hard as he could to hold back the tide, one day it would simply sweep him away.

'We picked him up in Platt Fields,' Jötunson said from behind him. The Doctor wasn't sure he liked the way the flame-haired soldier always lurked in the background, softly making his presence felt. It reminded him too much of somebody else. 'Local boy from the look of him. No ID. They found him with half a tree in his hand. They think he tried to protect himself with it.'

The Doctor shook his head softly.

'Such a waste.'

The body on the slab in front of him was barely recognisable as once being human. There were claw marks criss-crossing the face and hands – he'd obviously tried to protect himself by throwing his arms in front of his face. It hadn't worked. Some of the major organs were missing – how long had he lived after they'd been torn out of him with tooth and claw? Had he felt life seeping away from him, or had shock numbed him from the terror? There was no way of telling. The Doctor hoped he hadn't known his fate, that it had happened too quick for him to register, but he guessed that he was wrong. He

swore that he wouldn't let it happen again. No more bloodshed. The time had come to end it.

'The attacks seem to be getting worse. This one was practically torn apart.'

'He's losing control of it. Soon there won't be anything of him left.'

'Who?'

'Your "Beast", Captain. The creature who's behind all of this.'

Jötunson stepped into the light, his brilliant blue eyes fixed firmly on the Doctor, the light catching in his red hair. For just that moment, the Doctor was sure he remembered him, but the moment passed. He spoke firmly and urgently, and the memory faded.

'You know who's doing this, Doctor?'

His eyes in shadow, the Doctor looked down at the destroyed body on the slab. Softly, he whispered, his Scot's burr softening the hard words, his face set firm, unreadable.

'Yes,' he breathed. 'I think I've known from the start. It was obvious, this has his stench all over it. There's still some of him left, Captain. This whole thing has been set up to lead me to him, and I've spent too much time looking for another answer. But . . .'

'Doctor?'

'If he's gone this far, there may be no way back for him. I'm amazed he managed to set all this up, get UNIT here. He must have known you'd call me in. He wants it to end.'

'Who, Doctor? Who are we dealing with here?'

But it was too late, the Doctor was on his knees, overwhelmed by something bigger than even him. His eyes glowed bright yellow, casting an eerie glow on the ruined wreckage of the man. He gritted his teeth against the force of it, tried to fight it, regain control, in vain. He could feel pressure in his finger tips, claws he had no right having trying to force their way through the skin. He could smell the strange mixture of emotions waving out from Jötunson – fear, panic, joy – and the stale stench of the dead body. He could smell the fresh blood pumping around Jötunson body, and felt the desire to release it, see it arch across the white tiled floor. And he could see across the miles.

‘Doctor? Are you . . . ?’

‘Ace!’ he breathed, panicked.

And then it was gone, he was back in control. In a moment he was on his feet and heading for the door, his umbrella firm in a white-knuckled grip. Jötunson turned and tried to stop him with a hand on his shoulder. The weak grip was broken in a second, and the Doctor glared into the Captain’s eyes.

‘Stay here. This is something I have to do. I’ll call you when it’s over’

‘No, Doctor,’ Jötunson was firm, his jaw set. ‘This is our show. We’re coming with you.’

The Doctor paused for a split-second. More time wasted, and Ace didn’t have much left.

‘Alright, but stay out of my way. This is between me and him.’

And with that, he stormed out of the room, leaving Jötunson to mull on the Doctor’s eyes. They were still burning an intense yellow, the pupils two

long slits.

Manchester: July 30. 1998

15:45

Ace's mind was racing. She needed a plan and fast. She'd have to find the Doctor, he'd have to know. She only hoped it wasn't too late.

'Dorothea?' the voice on the other end had asked. A rich but clipped voice, full of concern. Brigadier Bambera.

'Ace,' she'd corrected. And then all hell had broken loose.

She needed to get to the Doctor – he'd need her. But she had no way of knowing where he was. They could've taken him anywhere in the city, or further with the 'copter they had. And she was stuck here with no way of knowing. Wolsey sat crouched a few feet away, looking at her without blinking. She could feel waves of concern, fear coming in from him. Probably just reflected back from her. He was growling softly, his way of asking if there was something he could do. Perhaps there was.

'You've lost the Doctor?' Bambera had asked, concerned. Probably scared of the unchecked damage he'd cause out on his own.

Ace picked up Wolsey into her arms. He was lighter than air, all fur and muscles. He immediately started purring. She stared into his eyes, directing her thoughts at him, even though all he understood was emotion. *Find the Doctor*, she thought. *Look for him. Show me.*

'And you think we'll know where he is?' Bambera had asked.

She felt herself go, her glowing eyes masked by the thick lenses of her glasses. She could see herself gazing down at Wolsey, her fear carved plain in every line of her face. And then she was gone, and the kitling's *sight* stretched out across the city, searching for other eyes to see through. And it soon found them, seeing the trees they saw, the open grassland, the walls, hearing the blare of the traffic outside the park. She winced at the sound of it, harsh and unnatural. There was only one man it could be.

'UNIT haven't got any teams in Manchester, Ace. I've never heard of any Jötunson.'

Find him, Wolsey, she thought fast and strong, take me to him. And Wolsey jumped out of her arms, opened up part of her mind and the world went white . . .

. . . as she slid onto the dry grass, feeling it give between her fingers. She could smell the fresh scent of it, feel the electricity in the air as the storm approached. And she could smell something else – fresh blood, mixed with a scent she hadn't smelt in . . . Part of her mind clicked, and she pulled herself quickly into a crouch, her teeth bared. Her eyes glowed bright yellow, as her muscles arched.

'Hello, Sister,' purred the rich velvet voice, 'have you come to join me on the hunt?'

And the Master crouched under the trees, still chewing the raw meat in his paw, his burning yellow eyes firmly fixed on Ace.

FIVE

Manchester: July 30. 1998

16:12

When the rain started, it came down as if it hadn't rained for a year, and it didn't know when it might get the chance to again. The city darkened, caught by an early nightfall, and droplets the size of acorns hammered down. The roads were soon slick with it, grassland the city over suddenly becoming flooded and soft. Children danced in puddles, adults hurried under newspaper umbrellas. The trees hissed with it, and rivers formed in the gutters, carrying the litter away with it.

Wolsey hated the rain. He hated the way it matted his fur, and hated the way it stole all the warmth from his body. But he stood stone still in it now, his green eyes fixed firmly on the siblingless Brother. He felt the hatred coming from his Sister in waves, the tinge of fear, and he remembered that

this Brother was the one who had taken the Sisters and their Siblings over, changing the ancient hunting grounds for new ones, just before the end. And he felt shamed.

He felt shamed because he had watched his Sister hunted by the Brother, and done nothing. He had felt the flash of adrenaline her body had produced as the Brother leapt for her, had seen through her eyes as his claws dug into her flesh, and had seen through the eyes of the siblingless Father as he had seen the two cats battle. And still Wolsey the Hunter had done nothing. Never mind that his Sister had ordered him not to with a burst of concern, never mind that a fully grown Sibling could never hope to defeat a Brother, let alone a kitten. His Sister had been in danger, and he had done nothing but watch. As he watched now.

‘Where is he, Sister?’ the Master asked. ‘Is he with you? Or has he abandoned you like he did me? No, he always had a fondness for your kind, didn’t he, Sister.’

‘My name’s Ace,’ his Sister growled.

The Master sniffed at her, smelling much what Wolsey too smelt. The rough leather of the ropes he had bound her with, the warm tang of her fresh blood as it dried on her face, the confusing mix of her heritage, both hunter and prey. And over it all, the wet overpowering stench of the rain. He smiled, revealing sharp canines.

‘Yes, but for how much longer?’ he purred softly. ‘Every battle you fight makes it stronger, and there’s no escaping it. One day it will claim you, as it did me.’

‘I didn’t fight,’ spat Ace. ‘You did.’

'It doesn't matter any more, Sister. It's in your blood, biding its time. I thought I could escape it too, but . . . The only escape is death now, Sister. I see that.'

'You'll die too, then.'

'Yes,' he sighed, glaring up at the rain, huddling himself into his lair to keep dry. 'But I will take him with me, Sister. He will know what it is to have been the greatest of all things, reduced to a stray, skulking around the dustbins of this world. And you will help me.'

'Fat chance, kitty.'

'He'll come for you, Sister. He always has before.'

And as Wolsey the Hunter watched, impotent, the MasterBrother reached out and dragged a single claw down the side of his Sister's face. It left a single trail of fresh blood, filling the air with its delectable scent. His Sister snarled at the MasterBrother, half in pain, half in anger. Her mind, Wolsey could feel, was on the DoctorFather.

'One day, little Sister, you'll give in. You'll submit to the call of the wild, and then . . .' his eyes fell to his own claw-tipped finger, the network of hard yellow bristles poking through his ruined clothes. And he smiled at her, with teeth too big to fit in his mouth any more.

Ace said nothing.

But with her mind, she said: *Find the Doctor. Warn him.*

And cursing himself for a coward, Wolsey the Hunter slunk through the undergrowth, until he was far enough away to open the corner of his mind without being seen, to feel the DoctorFather's eyes looking out at the road

and to slide between the distances to join him. The world went white . . .

Manchester: July 30. 1998

14:14

. . . And Wolsey the Hunter found himself sitting on hard concrete, looking up at the road, green eyes on the four green Range Rovers pulling up to the side of the road. They screeched to a halt with a bestial shrill of terror, and their doors spewed ten of the siblingless. And there behind them was the DoctorFather, his eyes dark, barely noticing the rain, followed by the scentless one.

‘The Master’s the most dangerous creature this planet’s ever likely to see, Captain,’ the DoctorFather said. ‘Leave him to me. Use your troops to keep everyone away. I don’t want anyone else getting hurt.’

‘Whatever you say, Doctor,’ the scentless one said.

With no more time to waste, Wolsey the Hunter leapt at the DoctorFather, landing clean in his arms, claws clutching his dark jacket. If he was surprised, he didn’t show it. Instead, he locked his eyes onto Wolsey’s, and their sight became one.

‘What is it, Doctor?’

The DoctorFather didn’t answer him, but with a voice powerful enough to control a pride of Sisters, he told Wolsey to do what his conscience begged him to. *Find her*, he said firmly, *and protect her*.

‘Ace is in trouble,’ Wolsey heard him say as he leapt out of his arms

and the world went white . . .

Manchester: July 30. 1998

14:15

. . . And he found himself back on the grass, in the rain.

He felt his Sister's presence, and her fear. The siblingless Brother was standing now, his teeth bared, his claws out to the air. His Sister was at his feet, pulling herself back, her hands tied firmly behind her back. He sent her a wave of comfort, so she knew he was back. She returned it, with an edge of fear. She knew the DoctorFather would be here soon, and she knew that he would prevail. He always did.

'He's here,' the Brother said, sniffing the air. 'He's coming.'

'He'll beat you. He always has before.'

The Brother smiled again, a glint in his yellow eyes.

'I'm counting on it,' he snarled. 'But I think I may have to provoke him a little first.'

He picked up the Sister easily with one hand and slit her bonds with a claw. She fell back to the muddy earth, losing her footing and finding it again in a split second. He towered over her, smiling. She didn't stand a chance against a Brother of such power, Wolsey knew. And if he knew it, so did his Sister. But he could still feel the adrenaline flowing through her body, feel her eyes burn as they changed, feel the snarl creeping onto her face.

'I like to give my prey a fighting chance.'

And, with a hiss of pure anger and energy, claws extended to their full length, fur stood on end against the rain, Wolsey the Hunter threw himself onto the Brother's face. His claws bit deep, filling his nose with the sickening tang of tainted blood, and his teeth tore a strip of his pale flesh from the Brother's face. He screamed in anger, and batted at the kitling with extended claws. They brushed Wolsey away easily, but his firm grip brought more of the Master's flesh away with it.

He stood, panting heavily and trying not to howl out loud with the pain of it, blood streaming down his face. He looked for the kitling at his feet, but it had picked itself up and bolted. So the cat had tooth and claw on her side – he hadn't thought her strong enough to control a kitling. He'd been wrong. As the rain washed the blood away, only to be replaced with fresh, he looked again for his prey. She had bolted.

Slowly, the Master smiled.

'So,' he purred, 'the hunt begins.'

SIX

Manchester: July 30. 1998

14:22

The Doctor raced through the rain, his feet barely touching the mudded ground. Two of Jötunson troops hurried after him at a respectful distance. The rest had stayed to cordon off the park. Nobody got in, nobody got out. It ended here, and now. His hearts raced, and he could already feel his lungs burning. His eyes were a bright glowing yellow, but he no longer cared. Something was wrong. He could feel it in his bones.

He was afraid, and he was too late.

He couldn't feel the Master in his mind, but it didn't matter. He knew where to run. He'd seen his lair through Ace's eyes, seen the bestial remains of a once proud Time Lord pouncing on her like a mindless plain's lion. He'd felt the overwhelming desire to tear flesh from bones that had flooded the

Master's mind. If he'd had time to think, perhaps he would have wondered that such a shadow of the Master could have prepared such a careful web to bring him to Manchester, but he didn't have time. He was too concerned for Ace, too afraid for what he might do. And he was too late.

He saw the mound by the lake immediately. A mass of damp blackness, turning the mud a deep rich red, the rain hammering down all around it. He saw the small wet shape of the kitling frantically trying to lick life back into her. Her face was cut, and her flesh was ragged. Her jacket had been torn clean off her back, and one arm was obviously broken, bent behind her back in a sickening shape. She was obviously dying, her face pale and her yellow eyes barely open. Her broken sunglasses had shattered into her face, blending with the claw and tooth marks.

'Ace,' he breathed. She didn't move.

The soldiers arrived ten seconds behind him, but he was already by her side, checking for any signs of life. They tried to get closer, but a small black cat with jade green eyes stood at the Doctor's back, hissing at them louder than the rain. Despite his small size, neither of them wanted to go anywhere near him. The Doctor was a frantic whirlwind of motion as they watched, his hands first here then there, desperately trying to grasp the life that was slowly seeping out of his friend. It was a losing battle.

'Doctor?' she breathed painfully.

'Shh, Ace. Shh.'

'He's turned, Doctor. It's . . .'

she coughed up blood, and the Doctor tried not to let himself wince. 'It's taken him.'

'I know. I know.'

She lay, dying. Her breath rasping, trying not to swallow the rain, her own blood.

‘What colour’re my eyes?’ she asked.

He looked into her burning yellow eyes, and said softly:

‘Brown, Ace, brown.’

‘Good,’ she said, and closed her eyes.

His own eyes glowing into the darkness, the Doctor was all activity again. He lifted Ace into his arms – trying to ignore how desperately light she was – and handed her to the startled Privates. Wolsey was still hissing at his feet, and the Doctor did nothing to stop him. He spoke to the Private holding Ace.

‘Be careful with her. Get her to a hospital. I’m trusting you.’

And just for a moment, the Private understood what a truly great thing that was.

‘Look after her,’ said the Doctor as he hurried off into the rain.

Foolishly, the soldiers thought he was talking to them. But Wolsey knew the truth.

Manchester: July 30. 1998

14:27

The Doctor strode through the thin copse of trees that divided the two fields, ignoring the rain that hammered down through the patchy cover, ignoring the brambles that caught at his coat. His face was set, his eyes were two suns casting strange shadows on his face. His mind was made up, he knew what he had to do.

He could feel the adrenaline rushing through his body, feel its dangerous passenger gradually changing his very being. He even began to think he could feel little yellow hairs pushing their way up through his skin, itching on his arms. Normally when he felt himself going, he could hold it back, if he concentrated hard enough. Normally he would think calm thoughts to bring him back from the brink, before he toppled over that edge, the one not even he would be able to climb back from. Now, all he could think of was Ace, lying, bleeding every precious drop of her life into the mud. He should have stayed with her, but he knew the Master was waiting for him.

‘It ends now,’ he said out loud.

There was no reply.

‘I’ve let you get away with too much, in the past. I’m covered in blood you’ve spilt. No more.’

Only the rustle of the trees, and the static hiss of the rain.

‘Come on! Isn’t this what you wanted?’

And then the trees burst open, and a smear of black launched itself at the Doctor.

He was knocked backwards by the sheer force of it, landing awkwardly across a broken tree stump, feeling the rotting wood splinter into his back. He could smell the flesh and blood on the Master's breath as he lay on top of him, snarling. His hair was lank and unkempt, full of leaves and grass from his life in the rough. His face was scarred with the wounds of his battle with Ace and Wolsey. The Doctor found himself hoping that she had hurt him a lot. He saw himself reflected in the glowing yellow eyes, and knew he must look the same to his foe.

'Ah, Doctor,' purred the Master, 'how good of you to join me. How's that little kitten of yours?'

The Doctor pushed his attacker away, with an effort, and sprang to his feet. He could feel his strength growing as the virus took hold. And he could smell the blood on the air. It made him growl with anticipation.

'I'm not playing your games any more,' he snapped. 'It ends here.'

'Good, good. How fitting that it should come to this after so many years, eh Doctor? How many times did I try to destroy you with cunning and guile, only for animal strength to do the job for me.'

'You've not killed me yet!'

The Doctor flung himself at the Master, and found himself on top of him, fighting the urge to lick his bleeding face. The Master fell easily, his legs twisting beneath him. It was as if all the strength of his first attack had melted away, leaving him defenceless as a kitten. But still he grinned his unnerving smile, canines glistening in the rain.

'Who said anything about *me* killing you?'

And suddenly the Doctor realised, but it was too late. The Master reached up and clamped his hands onto the Doctor's arms, the claws digging deep into the flesh. There was no way the Doctor could pull away, he was trapped in the Master's grip. And now he knew why the battered creature was smiling.

'You've realised, haven't you Doctor. Too late, as always. Can you feel the virus coursing through your veins? Bonding with your adrenal glands, such as they are? It's semi-sentient, you know. Those Cheetah fools never realised, but I did. I felt it, invading every little thought I had. It got so that all I could think about was tearing you apart with my bare hands, eating you alive. It does that to you, changes your thoughts so you fight more and more, each time making it stronger.'

'Let me go.'

'It's too late, Doctor. You're lucky I came to my senses in time – you can fight it for a while, if you're strong. I realised the only way to be free of it was to die. You're little kitten managed to help me there.'

The Master rolled slightly, still gripping the Doctor with all of his strength. Now the Doctor could see his foe's back clearly, and he could see the broken bottle sticking out, slicing cleanly into his primary heart. No, he corrected himself, only heart. His body was from Traken now, and they only had one heart. The Master was as good as dead.

'But I couldn't let her finish me. I knew you had to be there for that, Doctor.,' the Master smiled, as the Doctor made one last effort to pull free. 'Stop struggling, Doctor. The virus knows I'm dying, it's already preparing to leave. And you're the only other host around here.'

And then the Doctor finally realised that he was doomed, and the Master began to laugh.

Manchester: July 30. 1998

14:35

The Private pushed his way through the trees, his eyes peeled for any sign of the “Beast”, or the Doctor. The blood on his uniform was slowly mixing with the torrential rain, staining the whole thing a faded claret. He held a pistol in his hand, and prayed he’d have enough time to use it if a giant cat leapt out of the undergrowth.

When he saw the Doctor, he was knelt in the mud, blood streaming all over him. In front of him was the battered and broken body of a bearded man, dressed entirely in rags of black. His knees sank into the mud. The rain lashed down around him, on him. It soaked his hair, into his jacket. The water on his face, though, was his alone.

‘Doctor?’

‘He’s dead.’

‘Doctor,’ he managed to say again, before the wind stole the rest away.

‘We went to the Academy together,’ said the Doctor, not even caring if the soldier was listening, whether he could hear or not. He wasn’t talking to him. ‘We grew up together, we worked together. Then we grew apart.’

‘Doctor!’ the soldier yelled over the growing tempest, but could get no more out. The rain dashed the words to the ground in an instant.

‘But we kept meeting, again and again,’ the Doctor continued, oblivious. ‘And there were fireworks: we were an explosive combination. In the end, he was the one who really knew me the most. I must have thought he was dead a thousand times over the years. Now I know.’

There was a rush of air, and a bright burst of white light. When it died, the Master’s broken body was gone, transported away by a final burst of viral energy. He could’ve headed for anywhere from Salford to Skaro, the Doctor didn’t know which. The wind lulled for a moment, spent perhaps, or gathering itself for another assault. The soldier took his opportunity:

‘Captain Jötunson sent me, Doctor. He says you should know,’ he paused, breathing. Could he hear him? ‘Ace is dead, Doctor.’

And the Doctor through back his head, closed his glowing yellow eyes, and howled long and hard, the sound floating up past overgrown canines and up into the dark sky.

SEVEN

Manchester: July 30. 1998

14:40

Jötunson strode through the storm, barely even feeling the rain. It seemed to avoid him, as if even it was scared of him. His blue eyes danced this way and that, searching for something, masking a mind moving faster than the speed of light. His eyes fell on the Private, kneeling alone on the ground, eyes open wide, pistol by his side.

‘Well?’ asked Jötunson.

‘He’s dead.’

His blue eyes danced, his heart skipping slightly.

‘The Doctor?’

‘No, the Master.’

A sigh of relief, blown away by the wind.

‘Where is he?’

The Private looked up into the Captain’s eyes. He had a look that said he had seen too much, something that no-one of Earth should have to see. A look that said he would never fight again, for UNIT, for anyone. A look he would keep in his eyes until the day he died.

‘He had to go,’ was all he would say.

Jötunson jaw set, and his eyes blazed bright. He nodded firmly, with a quick glance around.

‘Come on, Private,’ he snapped. ‘We’ve got to move out before six. Orders from HQ.’

But the soldier didn’t move. He was still there when Bambara and her team arrived to work out what exactly had happened. He wouldn’t speak to any one in her team, except for one woman, dressed entirely in black. And he only spoke to her because she had the same look in her eye.

Stockport, July 30. 1998

17:35

He drove his car like he lived his life – fast, and with no regard for anybody else. He was on his way home from the city, having spent another eight hours feeding his bank account. One day, he’d run the firm and his life would suddenly become a lot more complicated. It would be a lot harder to make time for the women, the parties, the drugs when he had important work

to delegate. But that was at least a year away, plenty of time to worry about that later.

He was just haring down the A6 when he saw him, standing by the edge of the road. He was getting soaked by the rain, but he didn't seem to notice. His dark jacket was torn and smeared with mud and what could have been blood. His hat was battered and torn, much like the Paisley scarf he had tied around one of his hands as a makeshift bandage. His other hand was held out with a hopeful thumbs up.

You'll be lucky, he thought as he saw him. Until he saw his eyes.

'Where're you going, mate?' he asked, once he'd pulled over.

And the Doctor looked at him with slate grey eyes, and pointed down the road