**The Akkadian Lady - II**

Yasmin woke in a still half-dark room to see Max Devine talking to The Doctor as the latter pulled on clothing hurriedly.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, sensing the urgency in the *sotto voce* discussion.

“Mrs Anderson is missing,” The Doctor answered. Yasmin responded by becoming immediately wide awake and reaching for her own clothes. She didn’t bother with pointless remarks like ‘How could she be missing.’ Yasmin went straight to the important point of “How long has it been?”

“We’re not sure,” Max answered as all three of them hurried to the dining room where the staff were assembling in various levels of alertness. “Her bed HAS been slept in but the sheets are cold. It may have been hours.”

“That’s not good,” Yasmin said. “Mrs Anderson isn’t a woman who likes early morning walks. Not around here, anyway. Is the truck parked up? Nobody heard a vehicle? Has the whole house been checked?”

These were the questions that came to her police officer mind.

“All the unlocked rooms have been checked,” Max answered her. “Harry is checking his dark room and Ryan has gone to the workroom. Professor Anderson has gone to the Antika room, himself.”

The three men returned to the dining room almost as soon as she had finished speaking. Mrs Anderson wasn’t in any of the three rooms that were habitually locked.

Professor Anderson had one thing to report, however.

“There is a necklace and armlet missing from the Lady’s collection,” he said with obvious reluctance. “Both heavily ornamented gold, very valuable… or they would be if I had been able to attempt a valuation.”

“You’re sure?” Yasmin asked as the ugly implication of his words sank in all around the room.

“I’m sure. I itemised everything after dinner last night. I knew I wouldn’t sleep until it was done. Harry photographed each individual piece as I did so. Those two items are definitely missing.”

Which meant one of two things – Mrs Anderson had taken the jewels or a thief had taken them and somehow Mrs Anderson had interrupted the burglary and….

And what? Had she been kidnapped, murdered….

“We should split up and search outside the house,” Max decided.

“The men, you mean?” Professor Anderson asked, glancing at the three women in the room and getting steely expressions from them all. Possibly The Doctor recalled having chauvinistic ideas like those a long time ago, but this regeneration was making her appreciate the problem from the other side.

“All of us,” Yasmin answered. “And the people in the tents, outside, too. Mrs Abadi and her two daughters can stay here… in case she comes back.”

It was, she noticed, a few moments before anyone remembered that Mrs Abadi was the local woman who cooked all their meals. She and her two girls arrived early every morning and were already at work in the kitchen making breakfast.

“Good plan,” The Doctor said. “Professor, what sort of shoes was your wife wearing? That would give us an idea how far she could have walked. Assuming there has been no vehicle in the night.”

“Deborah….” Professor Anderson said his wife’s name in bewildered tones. “Deborah wouldn’t walk in the desert at all. But… I think she’s wearing bedroom slippers and her nightclothes.”

It made no sense to anyone, but they formed into groups. Ryan and Yasmin went towards the Tel with Ammar and Kouri Bitar, father and uncle of young Suffi, Ryan’s helper. Jean-Claude and Harry drove the truck towards the Mosul road. The Doctor, Max and Professor Anderson with native help, went towards two different parts of the Tigris, all of them dreading the very worst scenario along the river bank.

The sun was well up when they all returned to the house with nothing to report from any direction. Mrs Abadi had finished making breakfast while keeping watch and the need to eat overcame the growing anxiety.

“She’s dead!” Professor Anderson exclaimed halfway through scrambled eggs and toast. “I know you’re all trying not to say it… and your kindness and tact is appreciated. But I think we have to face facts. If we didn’t find her within a few miles of the house… then she must be dead.”

Max reached out and touched Professor Anderson on the arm and he accepted the gesture as it was meant. But having spoken aloud his fears it opened the subject up to everyone.

“I think we all hoped that Debbie had just… sleepwalked out of the house and would be found, dazed a d confused, within walking distance,” Jean-Claude ventured. “But….”

“But we all know what has to happen next,” Harry added, his usually cheerful face a picture of unhappiness. “We must report the matter to the police.”

Max sighed dismally. She had been putting it off. She had a guilty feeling she ought to have sent Jean-Claude to do that straight away instead of driving around the dirt track roads. But she had dreaded having to bring in the police as much as anyone else did. There was still a stern Glaswegian at the head of the Mosul police department, but most of the men were locals, and she wasn’t sure how they would view a possible crime scene involving a group of Europeans. She envisaged them hauling Anderson off on suspicion of murdering his wife while grilling everyone else about their movements.

“I’ll go with Jean-Claude,” The Doctor said quickly, cutting off Yasmin who was about to volunteer, perhaps curious to see how a police station in 1930s Mosul compared to one in modern Sheffield.

“I suppose….” Harry suggested. “The rest of us could get on with our work. It… would be better than… just sitting here… wondering.”

“I think that’s a very good idea,” Max agreed. “Let’s try to maintain a little normalcy for a while. Greg… we should continue evaluating the Lady’s jewels, if you feel up to it.”

Professor Anderson nodded and followed Max to the Antika room. Graham went with them to continue taking careful measurements of the skeleton. He wasn’t sure what that was supposed to prove, but it was what he was expected to do.

 Ryan and Yasmin went back to the workshop to continue the repairs on the clay tablets. They went on with the gluing together of shattered pieces mechanically, though, without any of the enthusiasm they had enjoyed before this troubled day. They were without Suffi’s assistance this morning. Since there was no work at the dig, and perhaps nervous of an imminent police visit, most of the workers had headed back to their village homes.

“I was wondering if it was him…” Yasmin said out of the blue as she held two pieces of tablet together until the glue stuck.

“Him…who?”

“Professor Newton. Maybe he came back in the night, looking for revenge. Maybe he intended to steal the gold… and thought Mrs Anderson would be just as good a way to upset us all.”

“I…. suppose that’s possible,” Ryan agreed, though doubtfully. Newton was a nasty minded racist, but theft and kidnapping seemed extreme even for him.

“But then why only two pieces of the jewels?” Yasmin continued. “He could have taken the lot and we would have known nothing about it until morning.”

“Maybe Mrs Anderson disturbed him. Maybe that was why he took her. He might have had something to knock her out with… chloroform I mean… not blunt instruments.”

But why would he have come to steal jewels carrying chloroform to kidnap women?

Both of them considered that flaw in their theory in silence.

“If it was him… then she’s alive,” Ryan said finally. “I’d rather it was that than… the alternative.”

Yasmin looked out of the window at the bright, burning sunlight as midday approached. “Out there… without water, no protection….”

“She couldn’t last an hour.”

“People can last a bit longer than that,” Yasmin contradicted. “But… if she’s not found by night-time…. Then there really is no hope.” She sighed deeply. “I thought she was a silly cow…. But I wouldn’t wish that on her.”

“I might wish it on Newton,” Ryan suggested. “But… The Doctor wouldn’t like me thinking that way. She expects us all to be better than that. So I’d better not think those kind of thoughts.”

Yasmin started to say something in reply to that when a familiar noise and a rush of displaced air distracted them both. They turned to see the TARDIS, still covered in hessian sacking from the Mosul freight yard, materialising in the corner of the workroom.

They were even more surprised by the message in felt tip pen written on the hessian.

“Don’t worry. I sent the TARDIS by remote control, otherwise Jean-Claude would wonder where I got to. Hoping to be able to trace Mrs Anderson with my alien tech. The Doctor.”

While they were taking that in a scream echoed through the corridor outside. They both rushed to the door and found Mrs Abadi crying out almost incoherently.

The only word they could understand was Anunnaki, repeated several times.

“No, Mrs Abadi,” Yasmin said, taking hold of the lady gently and bringing her to the dining room where there was iced water for her to drink and a chair for her to rest on. “No, there is no such thing as Anunnaki. They were what the ancient people thought of as their gods. But you’re a good Muslim woman. You know there is only one God, and he would not let anything harm you.”

“Anu…. What?” Ryan asked in bewilderment.

“What she said…. Anunnaki. It’s what the Akkadians, Sumerians, Babylonians, called their deities. Most of the pottery I’ve been assembling has images of them. Funnily enough I’ve heard of them before. I saw a documentary the other week about….”

She stopped that train of thought in the presence of Mrs Abadi. It could wait. She carried on talking to the distressed housekeeper, quoting soothing passages from the Koran that helped to calm her fears. Meanwhile, Max, Graham and Professor Anderson came to see what was happening.

“Mrs Abadi had a very nasty shock,” Yasmin told everyone. “She thinks she saw one of the ancient Anunnaki come through the dark room door…. As in THROUGH it without opening it first. I have assured her that the Anunnaki are old legends, but she is disturbingly certain about what she saw.”

“We’d better make sure Harry is all right,” Graham suggested. He nodded to Professor Anderson and the two of them left the room. Once they were out of earshot Yasmin had more to say.

“The Anunnaki… or whatever it was…. Looked like Deborah Anderson, Mrs Abadi says.”

“You mean she’s here… she’s alive?” Max gasped. “No… that can’t be right. Deborah can’t walk through closed doors. What DOES it all mean? What’s happening here?”

“Bloody good question,” Graham said. He and Greg Anderson half carried a semi-conscious Harry into the dining room where brandy was administered along with a cold compress on a nasty bruise over his forehead. “We found him on the floor… surrounded by a whole lot of ruined negatives and prints. Days of his work trashed.”

“This in a room locked from the inside,” Anderson added. “Yet… I’m sure he didn’t do the damage himself.”

“She did it,” Harry murmured. “She…. Destroyed my pictures. She…. Hit me when I tried to stop her.”

“She…who?” Max asked.

“Deborah…. Mrs Anderson….” Harry managed to say. Professor Anderson gasped in shock as Harry went on. “Except… it couldn’t have been her… not really. I tried to stop her…. And her face…. It changed. It was like… something evil… burning red eyes and… her mouth… twisted into a snarl like a rabid dog.”

“There was nobody there except Harry,” Graham said. Professor Anderson couldn’t speak. His face was ash grey and his lips trembling as he tried to say something, anything at all.

“Anunnaki,” Mrs Abadi said again, even though she knew for a fact that there was no such thing. “There is evil here in this house. The dead should not have been disturbed.”

“I’m not sure she hasn’t got a point,” Max said with a sigh. “Yasmin… can you take Mrs Abadi to lie down in one of the spare rooms until Jean-Claude gets back. Her daughters can sit with her. He can take them home to their village. Greg… you’re dead on your feet with lack of sleep and delayed shock. You should try to sleep. Graham…can you take Harry and get him to bed, too… Then maybe you could….”

“I’ll tidy up the mess in his dark room and see what can be saved,” Graham suggested.

“I’ll help,” Ryan volunteered.

Again, everyone had a job to do and they went to them. Afterwards, as an uneasy peace came upon the house, Graham, Yasmin and Ryan gathered in the workroom with the TARDIS in its hessian cover nevertheless providing a familiar and therefore SAFE haven in the troubling atmosphere of the expedition house.

“So… what is it with these Anunnaki,” Ryan demanded.

“You heard what I told Mrs Abadi,” Yasmin answered. “They’re not real. They’re just legends from an ancient time. This part of the world has been monotheistic for a thousand years. Believing in such things as the Anunnaki is practically blasphemy.”

“And yet, Mrs Abadi believed in them,” Ryan noted. “Or was that part of her fear? Knowing that she SHOULDN’T believe in such things? She won’t be punished for it, will she?”

“What sort of a people do you think they are?” Yasmin answered though with an edge to her tone.

“Sometimes it is hard to get rid of old ideas,” Graham said helpfully. “I mean, two thousand years of Christianity hasn’t stopped folk tradition like fairies, boggarts, leprechauns. And…. OK, I’m no expert, but all those old films about Sinbad, the old Ray Harryhausen effects ones…. They’re set in Bagdad, down the railway line from here. And they’re all about jinns and genies and mystical stuff, so I’m thinking that Muslims can’t quite dispel the old fashioned ideas, either.”

“No, I suppose not,” Yasmin conceded.

“This telly programme you saw about the Anunnaki….” Ryan left the question hanging in the air.

“Well…” Yasmin sighed deeply. “I don’t know what to make of it, to be honest. It was one of those conspiracy theory things that people like Jamie Theakston are always doing. Only this wasn’t one of his. I don’t think he’d do anything as lame as this one. It basically suggested that the Anunnaki with their funny shaped heads in the pottery and artwork, might actually be alien beings.”

“That, or the Akkadians were really bad at drawing heads,” Ryan suggested.

“And why would they be aliens, anyway?” Graham asked. “What would aliens want with an ancient human civilisation?”

“The people on the documentary suggested that aliens were manipulating humans… shaping their destiny. All of that kind of thing. Which would have been laughable if I hadn’t remembered that we KNOW an alien who loves interfering with humans.”

“I resent that implication,” The Doctor said, stepping into the workroom behind them all. “I never interfere with humans… well, almost never… Well, only when it is absolutely necessary.”

The three humans who had found their lives changed in so many ways by association with The Doctor grinned at each other and decided not to push their luck.

“Is it true then… about the Anunnaki?” Yasmin asked. “That they were aliens, I mean?”

“Not to my knowledge,” The Doctor answered. “The Egyptian gods are another story… and I don’t mean on the sci-fi channel. The Greek gods definitely were aliens. My lot… Gallifreyans. A bunch of seniors from the Prydonian Academy on their gap decade thought it would be funny to create a mythology where there wasn’t one. They were taken home in disgrace and expelled from the Academy.”

Again the human friends decided to say nothing.

“Anyway, the police were singularly useless,” The Doctor went on. “Mrs Anderson hasn’t been missing long enough for them to be interested.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Yasmin protested. “This is a desert. She could be dying right now.”

“Come on,” The Doctor responded. “Time for some alien interference.”

She pulled the hessian back and opened the TARDIS door. The three friends followed her inside.

“Can the TARDIS find Mrs Anderson?” Yasmin asked as The Doctor began typing furiously at the environmental console.

“No,” The Doctor answered. “There are several hundred people out there in desert villages. The TARDIS doesn’t differentiate between one ‘race’ of humans and another. Something you humans could learn from. What I’m looking for are traces of the ancient gold we think Mrs Anderson is wearing.”

“Makes sense,” Graham agreed. The other two said nothing. They watched and waited until The Doctor gave a triumphant exclamation followed by a puzzled one.

“I didn’t expect THAT!” she said. “Come on.”

The Doctor hurried off, out of the TARDIS, then out of the workroom. Her friends followed her to the Antika room where Max was studying Graham’s list of skeletal measurements. She looked up as The Doctor swept past her and stopped by a floor length double-doored cupboard. It was used for supplies of cotton wool, felt and other soft fabrics for folding valuable artefacts into before transportation.

It wasn’t normally locked, unlike the steel doored one where the higher valued artefacts, once catalogued, and sums of money for worker’s wages were kept.

It was locked now.

“Keys,” The Doctor murmured. “Keys… keys. No… never mind. No time.”

She held her sonic screwdriver in her palm so that Max couldn’t see it even when she looked. A brief high pitched buzz later the doors sprang open.

Several bolts of industrial silk fell out of the cupboard.

Deborah Anderson, folded at the waist like a high diver in pike formation didn’t fall out. Graham stepped past The Doctor and gently lifted the woman.

“Is she alive?” Ryan asked, waiting just long enough for the answer before turning and running to Greg Anderson’s room.

They brought Deborah to Max’s room because it was closer than her own. The Doctor examined her carefully using nothing but a basic medical kit that was kept in the dining room. She wanted to do a more in-depth examination with the sonic screwdriver in medical analysis mode, but there were too many people in the room.

Professor Anderson was at her side, clutching her unresponsive hand. He was barely holding back tears that answered a question everyone had asked themselves at some point. Clearly, as empty headed and vain she was, how little she contributed to his work, he DID love her, and was desperate to know why she wouldn’t wake up.

“She’s in a deep coma,” The Doctor said. “Brain activity is minimal.”

“Why? What happened to her? Did somebody attack her?”

“There’s no sign of trauma,” The Doctor assured him. “No physical injury at all. Whatever happened, its all inside her head.”

Anderson was an educated man, but he didn’t quite understand what The Doctor was telling him. He reached and removed the elaborate, multi-stranded necklace from around his wife’s neck, then reached to slide the armlet made of a long, twisted piece of gold, studded with carnelians and lapis lazuli, off the upper part of her right arm.

As he tried to move it, Deborah screamed as if she was in extreme pain and spasmed jerkily against the bed. The Doctor gently pushed Anderson’s hand away from the armlet and she became still again.

“What….” Anderson began. “It isn’t tight. Sliding it off shouldn’t have hurt her.”

“No… it shouldn’t,” The Doctor answered. “Not if it were ordinary gold and jewels dug from the soil of this planet, with no other properties than a really nice shine.”

“What…” Anderson began again. “Where else could they have come from?”

“Where, indeed?” The Doctor answered. She decided it was time to stop pretending anything about the situation was normal, least of all herself. She pulled the sonic screwdriver from her pocket and analysed the armlet with it. “I’d have to check the raw data, but I’m thinking somewhere in the Ophiuchus constellation.”

Anderson looked ready to say ‘what’ again. It was Graham who headed him off.

“You yourself said yesterday that you thought the jewellery wasn’t quite right for the Akkadian Empire. And the stuff going on today… ghostly apparitions of your wife wrecking the place while she’s been unconscious in a cupboard…. And… Max… you were very interested in my measurements before. Any reason why?”

“Because the skeleton isn’t quite right for a human… even an ancient Akkadian. The skull is the wrong shape. The limbs the wrong length proportionate to the spine. Either she was a very deformed woman or….”

Max sighed deeply. She didn’t want to say what she knew she was going to have to say.

“Yesterday, I would not have imagined myself giving this idea credence,” she said. “But I’ve heard it suggested that the ancient gods worshipped in this part of the world might be… people… advanced people… from other worlds….” She shook her head. “I’m a serious academic. I’ve worked hard to be regarded as such. Women in this profession are rare, After all. Believing in men from space… the stuff of HG Wells…. If I let the idea go beyond his room I would never be taken seriously again. But…”

She sighed again.

“But if accepting that one of the Anunnaki, using Deborah Anderson’s form has been wreaking havoc in this place would sound even less impressive to the archaeological community.”

Professor Anderson nodded. He, too, had been hampered by what he couldn’t allow himself to believe.

“What do we do?” he asked of The Doctor. “You seem to know something about these things….”

“Do you?” Max looked at her with an odd expression… something like betrayal. “You told me you studied at the University of Galway.”

“No, I told you I studied at a university on Gallifrey,” The Doctor answered her. “You heard what made sense to your understanding because its something humans do… filter the awkward truth. Yes, aliens from other worlds do exist. It would be a good idea if we kept that fact between us, for now. But we also want to help Deborah and find out what exactly is going on here. Isn’t that right?”

Max nodded. So did Anderson. It was as good as a sworn oath of solidarity.

“All right. Let’s get cracking. Ryan, Yasmin… I strongly suspect that the answers to a lot of our questions are in those clay tablets. Get UN-cracking.” She adjusted her sonic screwdriver and passed it to Ryan. “We don’t have time for glue. This will reassemble even the smallest fragments. Then get translating.”

“Right you are, Doc,” Ryan answered. “I won’t let you down.”

“I know you won’t,” The Doctor answered, but he was already out of earshot. Yasmin followed behind, glad to have a job to do that could help solve the mystery that had overwhelmed the expedition.

The Doctor turned back to the stricken woman, touching her pale cheek gently.

“Please tell me you can help her,” Anderson pleaded. “I know what most people think…what am I doing married to such a foolish, vapid woman who cares so little for my work… who doesn’t belong in a place like this where there are no parties, no fashion houses, no theatres. I know she’s the wrong woman for me. But I love her. It’s as simple as that.”

“And she’s a human being who needs my help,” The Doctor answered. “It’s as simple as that for me. Let me see what I can do.”

She reached out with both hands either side of Deborah Anderson’s face, her thumbs pressing gently but firmly against her temples. She closed her eyes and reached out mentally for what was still functioning within Deborah’s mind.

There were all of the automatous functions, of course – especially those that regulated the vital cardio-vascular system. That was to be expected. The entity controlling her, that thing that might like to be called by the name of Anunnaki, needed her alive.

But very little of those parts of the brain governing thoughts were allowed to function. They weren’t wiped completely, of course, just locked away for as long as she was useful.

There were just a few short term memories that could be ‘read.’ The Doctor saw Deborah’s desire to try on the exotic jewellery become the weakness through which the alien entity was able to get into her mind and use her. She had wandered from her bedroom to the Antika room. The door had not been locked. The Doctor wondered if the alien entity had enough telekinetic ability to manage locks. She doubted if it had been a human oversight. Not on the one night that something priceless was left in there.

She had put the necklace on first. It was the largest and most gem-covered piece of all, appealing to her vanity. But then, almost certainly guided by the entity, she had reached for the armlet.

And that was where her memories ended. As soon as the armlet touched her flesh she became no more than a tool of the entity. It must have allowed her enough mobility to put herself into the cupboard, but after that she was completely closed down. After that, a shadow using her form had stalked the house, creating mayhem.

But why? The Doctor tried to reach further, reach beyond Deborah’s limited consciousness to the greater mind that was in control of her.

She touched it. She felt the shape of it.

But then she felt the excruciating pain as it rebuffed her – pain worse than she had felt during any of her regenerations, even the most difficult of them.

She thought she heard her own screams echoing in her head, but if she did, it was only for a very brief time before her own brain shut down out of self-preservation.

When she woke, at least once all the strange lights stopped dancing in front of her eyes, she noted the red sunlight at the bedroom window. At first her mind went back to the view from a bedroom on Gallifrey that she hadn’t seen for more than a millennia.

The sunset over the Arabian desert was a lot like those sunsets on the planet she still called ‘home' despite being an exile for so long.

But there was no time for sentimentality. If it was sunset, she had been unconscious for nearly half a day, and that was bad for Deborah Anderson. The entity could only grow stronger the longer it had hold of her.

“You’re awake at last!” Yasmin said as she rolled over and sat up in a manoeuvre that was only slightly painful. “Come on to the workshop. We’ve got a lot to show you. We might have the answer to fighting the Anunnaki.”

“We are NOT calling it the Anunnaki,” The Doctor insisted as she stalked off leaving Yasmin to catch up with her. “Its not an Akkadian god and it has no right pretending to be one.”

“Do you know what it really is, then?” Yasmin asked.

“No, and I don’t much care,” The Doctor said as she wrenched open the workshop door and stepped in. Ryan and Graham were there, along with Max who was looking determined not to be left out of anything that concerned HER expedition. “It’s going to be evicted as soon as I find out how.”

“That’s where we ought to be able to help,” Ryan said to her. “Look….”

He pointed, proudly, to a worktable covered in clay tablets. They didn’t even have hairline cracks to show where they had been pieced back together.

“That one was crumbs at the bottom of the crate,” Ryan indicated proudly. “By the way, Jean-Claude got the truth out of Professor Newton, you know. HE broke the tablets, out of plain racist nastiness. He didn’t want somebody like me getting famous for translating such important stuff. He beat Suffi for the same nasty reason. But we beat him in the end. The sonic really did the business.”

“And wait till we tell you what’s written on them,” Yasmin added.

“You have to remember,” Ryan began. “The clay tablets came out of the grave top first and went into the crate bottom first. Then we took them out again top first. If you follow me….”

“Yes… you’re telling me that the story of our Akkadian lady starts with the top tablet and ends with the bottom one. The one that was reduced to crumbs.”

“Exactly,” Ryan answered. “The first half a dozen tablets tell of how a beautiful woman dressed in fine silk cloth and beautiful gem encrusted gold jewellery walked into the town at Tel Kafiya out of the desert at sunset. She told the people she was the living embodiment of the goddess Ezina-Kusu….”

“One of the Akkadian goddesses of agriculture and fertility,” Max interjected.

“She promised the townspeople abundant harvests and great prosperity if they worshipped her,” Ryan continued. “Which they did for about a dozen generations before her demands started to get a bit too heavy for their liking… stuff like sacrificing their kids… and they rebelled. They killed the embodiment of the goddess. Apparently, she was human enough for that. Only… it wasn’t enough to kill the problem. The goddess returned in a ghostly form, killing and wreaking havoc until….”

He paused. He looked at The Doctor.

“You’re not going to like this bit, Doc,” Ryan said. He picked up one of the tablets and read directly from it.

“In the red light of sundown, the people heard a noise as of a wounded animal and a wind that came out of no one direction, then from nowhere there appeared a box, blue as the sky to the west when the sun rises in the east….”

Everyone turned to look at the TARDIS, standing mutely against the workshop wall. Max looked about to speak then changed her mind.

“A door opened in the box from the gods, and a man stepped out, a man with skin of charcoal and dressed in strange cloth. He brought with him a magic stick which made a sound such as no man among us had heard, a sound that caused pain to the ears of all who were within hearing. The sound commanded the ghost of the goddess to return to her corpse and be still. When the people tried to thank the man, he would accept no reward, but returned to his heavenly blue box and was gone. This, the elders inscribe now as a true record to be buried with the bodily form of the goddess to forewarn any who might be held in thrall by her in generations to come.”

Ryan put down the tablet and waited to see what The Doctor had to say.

“It’s a recursive problem,” she said with a groan. “We have to solve it now, and then go back and solve it then.”

“It was the TARDIS, wasn’t it?” Ryan asked. “The blue box that appeared… and the man who came out of it….”

“First things first,” The Doctor said briskly. “We gave ourselves a clue. There is a sonic frequency that will fight the entity – without harming Mrs Anderson. I haven’t forgotten that the Akkadian townspeople killed the ‘goddess’. That’s not an option for us. But finding the frequency….”

“What do you need for that?” Max asked. “Anything at my disposal…”

“Nothing you can provide,” The Doctor assured her. She looked towards the TARDIS. Everyone did. “All the technology I need is in there. Graham, Ryan, you go and keep an eye on the skeleton. Max, Yasmin, go and stay with Professor Anderson and his wife. I’ll be interested to hear from you all about what happens. Ryan, let me have the sonic back before you go.”

Ryan gave her the sonic screwdriver before going to do her bidding. The Doctor headed to the TARDIS and began typing furiously at the environmental console.

It was a few minutes before she noticed Max standing at the doorway.

“You know from the tablets that there’s something special about the ‘blue box’,” she said. “I suppose you might as well know the rest.”

“The box… and you,” Max answered her, stepping forward and glancing round the much, much bigger space inside in the sort of awe The Doctor had come to expect.

At least she didn’t state the obvious about it being bigger on the inside – or smaller on the outside, which was equally true.

“You really did go to university on…”

“Gallifrey,” The Doctor said in answer to her prompt.

“Not Galway.”

“No.”

“I suppose… when we met last year… on the Nineveh dig… you couldn’t really tell me that. We might both have been thought of as delusional.”

“Something like that,” The Doctor agreed. “You’re not worried… about me being alien… what with the one we dug up causing havoc?”

“No… I think it’s obvious you’re on our side… us, in this house, and the human race as a whole.”

“I do what I can… without actually interfering in the destiny of humanity. That’s strictly against the rules… my own rules and my government, in point of fact. This little problem… it is a little problem, yet. She hasn’t killed anyone. She hasn’t demanded that anyone should be sacrificed to her. If we put a stop to her, now, once and for all….”

The environmental console gave out a decisive ping.

“Ah!” The Doctor said with a cautiously triumphant tone. “The TARDIS has come up with something. Keep an eye on that monitor, there… it should get interesting.

Max had never heard the word ‘monitor’ used to mean a computer screen, but she looked where The Doctor was pointing. After a moment or so she recognised a plan of the house with indications of where all the people were. Harry was still suffering from the aftermaths of his bang on the head and was resting in his room. Jean-Claude had taken over from the native staff in the kitchen and was making supper. Ryan and Graham were in the Antika room. There was a faint indication of a third presence. Max looked at The Doctor, who nodded.

“Yes, that’s your Akkadian Lady… part of her. The alien lifeforce is split between the Lady and Mrs Anderson. See, there….”

In the bedroom, there were the clear indicators for Yasmin and Professor Anderson. There was also a very dramatic hybrid of the human Deborah Anderson and the other half of the entity.

“Now, let’s see what happens….”

For a half a minute or more, very little happened. Max was aware of a shrill noise that was steadily rising in pitch.

“It won’t affect you in here. It is going to be unpleasant to everyone else, I’m afraid. As for the entity….”

Max watched the graphic on the screen for as long as she could before her curiosity got the better of her and she turned and ran out of the TARDIS. The Doctor stopped long enough to grab a box of man-size tissues from a cupboard under the console and followed her.

In the corridor they found Yasmin, nursing a bleeding nose and holding the gold armlet that had been firmly stuck on Deborah Anderson’s arm. The Doctor handed her several tissues from the box and asked her how the Andersons were doing.

“They’re doing fine,” Yasmin answered. “They’re wiping each other’s noses and crying a lot. Best leave them be for now. But… just before Mrs Anderson woke… just when the noise was making the wax in my ears melt… the entity sort of rose up out of her and floated through the wall. It wasn’t happy. The face on it… snarling with rage… but I don’t think it could help itself. It was being pulled away.”

“Just what I hoped,” The Doctor said. She carried on to the antika room in answer to a shout from Graham. She threw the box of tissues to him and he shared it with Ryan.

“The ghost… entity…. Anunnaki… whatever… came through the wall,” Ryan explained as he passed the tissues on to Harry and Jean-Claude who had turned up to see what was happening, both with bloody noses. “It sort of lay down and merged with the skeleton, and then…. Well, look….”

The Doctor and Max were already looking. At first glance the bones looked just the same except for a purplish glow. When The Doctor reached out to touch a femur it crumbled to dust. The rest of the bones, the skull last of all, began crumbling. In a half a minute there was nothing but dust.

“It’s gone.”

“Yes,” The Doctor said. “Sorry if it was painful for you all, but I gave it a really big dose of the sonic frequency. Its dead, gone, disintegrated.”

“Its over?” Harry asked.

“Not quite,” Ryan said. “There’s still….”

“Yes,” The Doctor answered him. “I’ve still to transfer the frequency to the sonic screwdriver. But there’s no hurry. Let’s have dinner first. Jean-Claude made it, after all. I’m sure everyone is hungry.”

They were. Hungry and relieved. The meal was a cheerful one. Professor and Mrs Anderson were enjoying a renewal of affection for each other that nobody wished to spoil. Harry, though still rueing the loss of so many of his photographs, was back to his natural ebullient self. Jean-Claude chatted to Yasmin and, of course, asked her to walk with him after dinner.

She accepted. Of course, The Doctor was going to take Ryan back in time to fight the entity when it first plagued the Akkadian townspeople, but she didn’t need to be there.

“Max went,” Yasmin said as she walked with Jean-Claude under the fig tree and listened to the pleasant sound of the Tigris meandering by. “She has spent her life reconstructing ancient civilisations from their ruins. She wasn’t going to miss the chance to glimpse one for real, even from the TARDIS door while Ryan takes the sonic and sorts out the village. It had to be him, of course. The man with skin of ebony mentioned in the tablet.”

“TARDIS!” Jean-Claude said the word with his French accent. “That is the name of The Doctor’s time and space travelling machine.”

“Yes. It’s an acronym for something, but knowing what it means doesn’t really make it easier to understand.”

“You come from the future. How far?”

“2020,” Yasmin answered.

“That’s such a long time. There would be no use in me asking you to ‘look me up’. I would either be very old or….”

“That’s the downside to our life. Leaving people behind in the past. We made friends with Mary Queen of Scots a while back.”

“But you MET Mary, Queen of the Scots,” Jean-Claude said. “And I have met you. Those are the compensations for any regrets.”

“Yes,” Yasmin agreed. “Putting it that way. Yes. Anyway, we’re not leaving, yet. There’s still most of the season to excavate the site. Graham still wants to find the Akkadian cemetery. He’s really got into the idea, even though he isn’t REALLY a paleo-anthropologist.”

“He isn’t?” Jean-Claude expressed surprise. “What is he, then?”

“A retired bus driver. And Ryan is an unemployed mechanic. As for me… you would never guess what sort of job they actually let a girl like me do in the future.”

“Tell me about it tomorrow night,” Jean-Claude said, in a tone of voice that made Yasmin glad that Ryan was five thousand years away. “We have had enough of the future as well as the past. Let us enjoy the present

“Yes,” Yasmin agreed readily.