**Edward Graves: Temporal Detective**

By

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**Chapter One: Future Present**

Jessica Lazarus ran down the decrepit hallway at break-neck speed, bounding over broken furniture and barely slowing down as she made a sharp left turn onto and ancient, rickety flight of stairs. She flew down the upstairs corridor so fast that she nearly missed the library door, which she pushed open with a great heave and then took her place opposite Edward, puffing like a girl three times her age.

“They’re coming,” she said through short gasps of breath. “I don’t think they’re happy, Edward.”

Edward Graves pulled a set of bronze goggles over his eyes and then straightened his cravat. “Yes well, I don’t suppose they would be.”He crouched down to fiddle with the controls of a small machine that lay at his feet. “All’s well at my end,” he said.

Jessica had regained control of her breathing and was now lowering her own goggles into position. She kneeled down and examined her own machine, identical to Edward’s and set exactly thirteen metres opposite it, with a ring of brass connecting them. “Ready at my end,” she said.

Suddenly there was an ear-piercing scream and Jessica’s hands immediately rose to her ears, trying to protect her from the offensive audio. She couldn’t think clearly but she could feel the wood beneath her shoes beginning to vibrate and she could have sworn that some of the floor boards were beginning to splinter.

She dropped to one knee, barely able to keep herself upright and managed to open her eyes and cast a glance at Edward. He too was down on one knee with his teeth grit tight, but one hand was reaching for a red lever on the machine in front of him. Jessica came to her senses and looked down at the machine in front of her and its identical red lever. The sound intensified tenfold as she extended her right hand and grasped it.

She looked over at Edward who managed to give a nod and then, just as she was sure that her skull was beginning to crack, they both pulled their levers and the machines began to pulsate with calming, blue energy. The energy rippled out in waves, passing through Jessica’s clothes and leaving her skin cold and covered in goose bumps.

The light began to intensify and expand until it was a burning white, rather than a cool blue. Then with one final pulse, the light shot up into a column that passed through the ceiling and into the night.

The light sent out a shock-wave which sent Jessica tumbling back and shattered the already broken windows of the old house...

The funny thing about time is that it doesn’t necessarily happen in chronological order. It doesn’t happen in any order really, it’s just there. There is no such thing as the past or present or future, those are all just concepts that have been invented to explain time in a linear and understandable way.

The fact of the matter is that every point in time is happening at once. Therefore, while Jessica Lazarus and Edward Graves were working on a case inside a haunted house in the 1970s, they were also just about to meet for the first time nearly fifty years later...

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Jessica Lazarus was bored out of her mind. She had mentally recited the title of every book on all twenty seven bookcases in the shop. She had organised the files and folders stored behind and beneath the desk. Yet no matter how hard she tried to distract herself, she was just unable to ignore the pounding of her mother’s voice, which persisted like a trumpet in Satan’s orchestra.

“Yes mother I’ve been eating well,” she said with a roll of her eyes. “All food groups present and accounted for.” She looked at her watch and made the frightening discovery that she’d been on the phone for nearly fifteen minutes.

“Listen Mum,” she said, “I’m sorry but I’ve really got to go, I’m at work.”

There was a sigh on the other end of the line that carried more meaning than a thousand words could have. It was a single sound; a single exhalation of breath which told Jessica, for surely the millionth time, that her mother was disappointed with her choice to remain working in a book shop at eighteen years of age, rather than attend university, wasting what she often described as her daughter’s “untapped potential.”

Finally she ended the call and slid her phone back into her handbag. She was just about to pull out a book to read when she heard a smooth, English accent drifting from beyond the shelves. “Tough call?” said the voice.

Jessica hadn’t even heard anybody come through the door so she was a little startled. She must have failed to see him while her mother was forcing her to contemplate jumping under a moving van.

“Just my mother,” she said. It was only now that she saw the owner of the voice, and he was a remarkable man indeed.

He looked to be in his mid-twenties and was a good ten centimetres taller than her - probably around one hundred and seventy-five centimetres tall. He had a full head of light brown hair which hung down to his eyes in parts; eyes which were the brightest blue that she’d ever seen. Most noticeably though, he was dressed in Victorian Era clothing: a green frock coat, grey waistcoat and matching trousers, spats, a red cravat, a white wing collared shirt and a silver pocket watch. The Victorian look was completed by a cane which he was clutching behind his back.

He smiled gently as he placed two books on the counter, one was *The Time Machine* and the other was *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

“Hello,” he said warmly.

“Hi,” responded Jessica. She couldn’t help but notice that his eyes were lingering on her, but the gaze was more like that one of an old friend than that of a man on the prowl.

She scanned the barcode of the first book. “Oh I love this book,” she said, “I’m pretty sure that it was the first book that I ever read, well the first novel anyway.”

“I’ve always liked it,” the man said, “Fantastic bloke, Wells. Didn’t have a particularly realistic grasp on time travel but he knew how to spin a good yarn. Sharp dresser too.”

“Yes, well,” said Jessica a little tentatively, “everybody loves a good time-travel story don’t they?”

“Oh they do,” said the customer, “in fact I think that time travel provides the single greatest plot device in the history of literature. With time travel all of the rules can be thrown out the window; narrative structures can be arranged however the author sees fit.” He looked into her eyes with a sly smile on his face, “With time travel anything is possible.”

Jessica just smiled politely as she scanned the second book, “So you’re finally catching up on how it all ends, eh?” She held up the Harry Potter book before she placed it in the plastic bag and printed out a receipt.

“On the contrary, I’ve never read any of the Harry Potter books in all my life.”

“Oh so is it a gift?” It made sense, maybe he was going to a fancy dress birthday party.

“No, no, it’s for me. I just find that sometimes endings can make the best beginnings.”

Jessica forced a laugh, “But you won’t be able to follow what’s happening if you haven’t read the other books, nothing will make much sense. I wouldn’t depend on the movies too much either if I were you. A lot gets left out when they make the movie versions, not that I’m biased or anything.”

“No, it’s not that young lady,” said the man, “I simply find that sometimes to fully understand how something began, we have to look at how it’s all going to end. Then we can better see the paths that are laid out before us.”

Jessica smiled at the strange man, he was odd but interesting; she liked him. “Well you’ve got a very unique way of looking at things, sir. That’ll be $33.80 please.”

The man handed Jessica a fifty dollar note but told her to keep the change. “Oh” said Jessica, genuinely stunned, “thank you sir, that’s very nice of you.”

The man waved his hand, “Think nothing of it; I just can’t ever be bothered with change.” He grabbed the bag that contained his books and thanked her, yet he didn’t leave, he just kept looking at Jessica for a while, smiling. It felt a little bit creepy to her. “Well, have a nice day,” she said, trying to move him along.

“Time travel,” he said. “It would be a wonderful thing, don’t you think?”

Jessica was surprised that he was returning to this again but thought it best to humour him. “Yeah, like I said, everybody loves time travel stories.”

“Yes,” said the man, “but what if time travel were real, don’t you think that would be amazing?” He spoke with a kind of awe and wonder rarely heard in the voice of an adult.

“Oh of course, it’d be great, I’d love to time travel, wouldn’t you?” said Jessica, hoping that the conversation wouldn’t take too much of a turn for the strange.

The man just lowered his head and smiled, “Well you never know, you may get your chance one day.”

She laughed, “Yeah maybe, you never know, somebody might invent a time machine one day. I know,” she said with mock enthusiasm, “if time travel’s ever invented then I’ll come back to this point in space and time to prove it to us.” Jessica just stood there smiling for a few seconds while looking around the store. “Oh well, I guess not.”

The man gave a chuckle, “Well you never know, maybe your future self just got the dates mixed up.”

“Maybe,” she said with a smirk.

“Anyway,” said the man, “I have a feeling that things are going to change for you very soon.” He started walking towards the door, “and I think that you’re really going to enjoy it.”

Jessica wasn’t sure how to interpret this statement. “Ah... thanks?”She said.

Suddenly he doubled over and grunted in pain.

“Are you alright?”

“Fine, fine,” he said through gritted teeth. He straightened up and smiled. “I think it’s time for me to go.” He looked at his left hand, flexing his fingers.

He gave her one last smile before opening the door, but he kept staring at her and Jessica couldn’t help but stare back. There was something familiar about him, she felt at peace as she looked into his blue eyes. She felt safe, like he were an old friend. “Excuse me?” she said, “Have we met before?”

“Yes,” he said. “But also, no.”

“What do you mean?”

The man stopped looking at her and stepped out the door. “Goodbye Jessica,” he said.

She was startled to hear him say her name and wracked her brain trying to figure out how she knew him and how he knew her. She ran out the door and looked up and down the street, but he was gone.

For the rest of the day her mind was occupied by thoughts of the Victorian Englishman. He was there when she served customers, he was there when she closed up the shop and he was there with her on the walk home. But eventually she was able to push him out of her mind so that she could focus on another, more present man.

She arrived at La’ Amore at 8pm sharp, precisely as agreed and was directed to an outside table for two. Sean was already seated and perusing the menu and Jessica didn’t mind thinking that he looked rather fine in his bespoke suit jacket and silk shirt. She ran a self-conscious hand down the front of her black dress, trying to smooth out any creases that had stowed away. It was tighter than what she usually wore and she was worried that the material would cling to her in all of the wrong places. She walked clumsily and without experience in her high heels and noted how her skin looked even more pale than usual in contrast to her dress, oh the woes of being a redhead.

“Hey,” said Sean as he stood up and pulled her chair out for her.

“Hey,” responded Jessica, “I hope you haven’t been waiting for too long.”

Sean waved his hand dismissively, “Not at all. Well, actually yes. Between you and me, I was a little nervous so I arrived a bit early. But it gave me a chance to get all of the excessive sweating out of the way.” He looked Jessica up and down as she took her seat and said, “Wow you look amazing.”

“Oh I just threw something on,” said Jessica modestly. She neglected to mention the twenty minutes she had spent applying make-up, a practice which she wasn’t accustomed to. Nor did she tell him about the hour and a half that she had spent trying to style her flowing red hair which she usually just let lay over her shoulders. Nor did she mention the three days she had spent shopping for the perfect dress and shoes.

Jessica stared at Sean for what seemed like entirely too long so she picked up the menu and decided to stare at that instead.

“Would you like to order some drinks?” asked a brunette waitress with glasses.

“What do you think, Jessica?” asked Sean, “Champagne? Wine?”

“I’m not actually much of a drinker,” said Jessica, “so I think I’ll just stick with lemonade.”

“Well, alright then,” said Sean, “a Lemonade and a Scotch please.”

The waitress left and again they were alone, but they had yet to choose their meals. So they spent their time browsing the menu and then the waitress returned with their drinks and they ordered their meal and then, for the first time for the evening, they were alone in awkward silence.

“So,” said Jessica as she drummed her fingers on the table and her right leg danced a jig beneath it.

“So,” echoed Sean. “Are you always as nervous as I am on first dates?”

Jessica laughed and took a sip from her lemonade. “Well I’d like to answer you but I wouldn’t know, seeing as this is my first ever date and all,” she said.

Sean looked taken aback and gasped, “No, really? Well then it is my honour to take you on your first date ever. I’ll do my best not to disappoint you.”

As the rest of the night moved on Jessica became more and more comfortable with Sean. They laughed and exchanged stories - some interesting, some embarrassing, even some sad. By dessert she felt like she had told Sean everything there was to know about her which felt odd because she was usually such a guarded person.

“So,” said Sean as he scooped up some Chocolate Mousse, “let me get this straight. Your mother is disappointed in you because she thinks that at the ripe old age of eighteen, you’re too old to be working in a bookshop?”

“That about sums it up,” said Jessica. “She thinks that I’m wasting my time and my mind in that place. She was alright with me working there part time while I was in high-school but she thinks that I should have gone to university and studied, gone into academia or at least attempted a career of some sort.” She paused to take a bite of cheesecake and then continued, “but despite what she thinks, I’m not unmotivated or unfocused, I’m just happy doing what I’m doing. I love books so there’s no job that I’d rather have.”

“Your Mum’s not a big reader then?” asked Sean.

“On the contrary,” said Jessica, “she’s a Professor of literature at Sydney University. It’s just that she’d much prefer if I were writing books or teaching about them, rather than just selling them.”

The conversation continued and then it began to wear thin and eventually the cheque arrived at the table and the night was all but at a close.

Sean drove Jessica back to her unit but before she got out of the car he told her that he wanted to give her something. Now, being a wary young lass, Jessica wasn’t sure what to make of this and as such she grabbed the door handle with one hand and formed a fist with the other, just in case she had to quickly make an exit or clobber him.

“I want you to have this,” said Sean and much to Jessica’s surprise and relief he produced a dazzling blue pendant, a gem of some kind, suspended from a slinky silver chain.

“Oh my goodness,” said Jessica in genuine amazement, “thank you! But it’s only our first date, I can’t accept this.” She was still wary of what strings may be attached to the gift. Her mother always told her that there was no such thing as a free meal. Metaphorically speaking of course.

“I insist,” said Sean as he moved to put the necklace around her graceful neck. “Don’t worry about my intentions either; I assure you that this is just an honest to God gift, no strings attached.”

Still feeling a little unsure, Jessica nevertheless lifted her hair up and allowed Sean to pull the necklace around her neck. It felt cold and hard against her chest and it looked like it was glowing in the dark with a pulsating, azure luminescence.

Letting her Ruby hair drape back down to its resting place, Jessica thanked him, gave him a polite kiss on the cheek and walked up to her second floor unit, No. 4 at 42 Hitchhiker’s Street, Adamsfield.

She entered the unit, switched on the lights and threw her horrible heels into a dark corner, hoping to never see them again. Then she went into her room and admired the mesmerising glow of her new necklace for a while, contemplating the connotations of being given such a gift on a first date. Just as she was about to remove the gem to put it in her jewellery box, she heard an odd sound. She walked out into the lounge room and yelped.

“Welcome home, young lady.”

A group of three men stood in the middle of the room. They were stocky men in old-fashioned pin-striped suits, the type that old gangsters wore in movies. What was it with people in old-fashioned clothes today?

One man stood casually before the others with his hands in his pockets. He was a bald Asian man with a thin moustache and a smile as fake as a car salesman’s.

“Please forgive us for the intrusion,” he said with a faint accent. “We did not intend to startle you.”

“Who the hell are you and what are you doing in my home?” snapped Jessica. She looked over at her phone sitting in its cradle on the kitchen counter and then considered her mobile which was sitting on her bedside table. She wondered whether she would be able to make it to either one before being grabbed and came to the conclusion that it was best not to try anything rash. Not yet, anyway.

“Please stay calm,” said the bald man, “we aren’t going to hurt you. You were given something tonight - a blue gemstone necklace. All we want; all we *need*, is for you to give that necklace to us.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Jessica.

The bald man lowered his head and pinched his temple. He looked tired. “Please do not waste my time Miss Lazarus.”

The other two men, both Caucasian and dark-haired, produced guns from their jacket pockets and began to move towards Jessica. Guns, real guns! Jessica had never seen a real gun before, much less had two of them pointed at her. She began to slowly back up towards her bedroom as her heart pounded faster than it ever had before, threatening to break free of her rib cage.

“You’re such a pretty little thing,” said the bald man, who was now meandering around the lounge room, looking disinterested and almost bored. “Smart too, I wager. So why are you being so stupid? Give us what we want and that’ll be end of it, you’ll never see us again and you’ll be free to carry on with your merry little life.”

Jessica couldn’t help but see the logic in his argument and she stopped backing up and stood in her bedroom doorway. The men with the guns also stopped but kept their weapons raised.

She swallowed hard and tried to steady her body as best she could, she didn’t want to display the intense fear that was currently seizing her. She tried to distract herself by focusing on the feel of the soft carpet beneath her feet. “Alright, I’ll give you the necklace but can I at least know why you want it? What makes it so special?”

The bald man walked slowly up the short hallway, keeping his hands in his pockets the whole way. “That really isn’t any of your business, now is it Miss Lazarus? But I will tell you that you need to keep a better brand of company. The man who gave you that necklace has wronged us both, first by stealing from my boss and then giving the stolen item to you.”

“Wait, you’re saying that Sean stole that necklace from you? An up and coming investment banker stole a necklace from a bunch of guys who break into a girl’s flats and wave guns around?”

The bald man ran a hand over his head as if to smooth back hair that was no longer there. “I have no interest in going into the details of the situation any further Miss Lazarus.” He held out his hand, “The necklace, please.”

Jessica gave a slight nod and turned to enter her room then turned on the balls of her feet and slammed the door shut and slid the latch into place.

She ran to her phone and started dialling triple zero but then realised that she didn’t have a signal, which was weird and more than a little alarming.

*Brilliant!* She thought. *Now what, genius?*

There was a continual thumping on the door and the occasional swear word or threat from the angry men on the other side.

Panicking, she looked around her room for something, anything to help her. She ran to the window and looked down at the garden below. There was a hedge that ran along the side of the building and she was pretty sure that she could jump onto it relatively unscathed.

The door began to shake and splinter, it sounded as though they were ramming it now. Panicking and knowing that she was short on time, she grabbed her phone and clutched it in her left hand, before opening up her bedroom window and making the two story drop to the hedges below.

**Chapter Two: NO ORDINARY NIGHT**

Jessica wouldn’t say that jumping out of a window was her worst idea ever, but she would never do it again, that was for sure. She rolled out of the hedge as graciously as she could and cringed at each fresh scratch then landed on the ground in a crouching position. She dusted herself off and gave herself a once over and when she was satisfied that she was uninjured, apart from a dozen or so small cuts, she checked her phone but saw that there still wasn’t a signal. Cursing under her breath, she headed to the entrance of the building, hoping to borrow a neighbour’s phone and take refuge behind a locked door.

“Locked door!” she gasped. It suddenly hit her that the main door was locked at 6pm and it was now well after 10. She patted her dress hopelessly, knowing full well that she did not have her key tucked away on her person; it was hanging from a hook upstairs.

What’s more, she now saw the men making their way down the stairs and towards the glass door. Not knowing what else to do, she spun around and ran down the driveway and into the street. The rough pavement and then asphalt were killing her bare feet, but she pushed it back with the rest of the pain she was feeling, under the category ‘to be dealt with later’.

Once she was on the road it dawned on her that she didn’t actually know where she was running to. She took a glance at her phone and saw that she was still without signal. Not seeing any other course of action, she ran up to a door and began pounding on it furiously.

“Hello,” she called, “I’m being chased and need to call the police, please let me in!”

She waited, shifting her weight from one foot to another and anxiously looking back towards her flat.

She tried knocking again and then rang the doorbell. “Hello, please, this is an emergency!”

Nothing! No movement, no lights coming on, no muffled voices.

She couldn’t waste any more time so she continued running down the street and then made a left turn onto the adjacent street, a cul-de-sac with a laneway at the end. If she were lucky then they wouldn’t know that she’d turned into the cul-de-sac. If she were unlucky then at least one of them would check down there. But if she could just keep ahead of them then she could get to the Police Station in about five minutes. She just hoped that she could last that long; suddenly she wished that she hadn’t been ‘sick’ for every P.E class she had in high school.

She allowed herself to smile as she entered the laneway but then nearly screamed as two of her pursuers appeared at the other end. She came to a dragging halt with the rough concrete path threatening to tear the skin off of the soles of her feet, then spun around and started running the other way. Her heart sank when she saw the bald man standing there with his hands tucked casually in his pockets.

She came to a halt and her heart threatened to burst from her chest. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed a blue light coming from below. She looked down and realised that it was coming from her chest – it was the necklace, glowing even brighter than before. Then before she could think twice about it, there was a shimmer of blue light as a figure began to phase into existence, coalescing from a blue blur, into a distinct figure. It was the Victorian man from the shop – now complete with Top Hat. He grabbed her hand and said, “Hello, I’m Edward Graves, time to run!” And with that he charged past the bald man, pulling Jessica along as they ran out into the street.

“What was that? Where did you come from? How did you do that?” she bellowed in rapid succession.

“Do you really think that now is a good time for a Q&A session?” the man yelled back.

“Point taken,” said Jessica

They bounded up the street like bats out of hell and despite the pain in Jessica’s feet, she never even considered stopping.

“Where are you taking me?” she yelled.

“Away from them,” said the man, calmly.

The silence of the night was shattered by the sound of gunfire and Jessica instinctively cringed as bullets whizzed past her. Bullets, real bullets! She’d never seen real bullets before, let alone had them shooting past her.

They ran for two blocks, with the gunmen never far behind them, until they ran into a small park and stopped. Jessica was thankful for being able to rest but she knew that the crazy gun people would be upon them any minute.

“What are we doing?” she asked, trying to catch her breath.

“I thought that we might talk to them,” said Edward Graves.

“Are you crazy? They’ve got guns,” she said.

The man shrugged, “True, but they’re terrible shots.”

She checked her phone again. “Damn it! Why don’t I have a signal?”

“Stasis Field,” said Edward. “They’ve frozen time for everyone except for us; or to be more accurate, they’ve cut us out of time temporarily.”

“That’s insane!”

“One man’s insane is another man’s Thursday afternoon.”

Jessica panicked when she saw their pursuers coming towards the park, slow and out of breath, but still persistent.

Edward stood tall next to Jessica with his hands resting softly on top of his cane. Jessica didn’t know whether he was incredibly brave or unbelievably stupid. Either way, she felt compelled to follow his example and so she stood by his side, doing her best not to tremble from pain, fear or cold.

The bald man wiped the sweat away from his forehead and then walked up to Edward and stared directly into his eyes.

“You’re interfering in Black Glove business detective,” said the bald man. “Unless you want to risk starting another war, I’d let us retrieve what is ours. Then we’ll be on our merry way and we can all be happy.”

Edward smiled and stared back at the man from under the brim of his top hat. “Here’s a counter offer Mr. Mordecai. How about I arrest you and your goons and take the Eternity Stone back to its rightful owners?”

The bald man sneered and leant in close, so that his nose was practically touching Edward’s. “Do you really want to do this detective?” he asked in a barely audible whisper.

“Why not? My schedule’s clear for the evening.”

The bald man, Mordecai, pulled out a revolver, planted it on Edward’s temple and pulled the trigger.

There was a loud bang that echoed through the still night.

“No!” screamed Jessica.

The body of Edward Graves flopped backwards and crumpled into a clumsy heap. He lay motionless as blood began to pool on the ground beside him.

Jessica’s legs started shaking and then gave way completely. She fell to her knees and desperately wanted nothing more than to throw up. With trembling hands, she reached out for the lifeless body by her side, but at the last minute she closed her fists and drew them close to her chest.

“You monsters,” she whimpered. She had hoped that her words would sound a little more fierce, but alas, her body had refused to cooperate.

Oddly, the men kept their guns trained on Edward’s body the whole time.

“Don’t drop your guard,” said Mordecai as he turned his gun to Jessica. “You’ve both heard the stories about him. Though, I’m fairly certain that even he can’t survive a bullet to the head.”

The only dead body that Jessica had ever seen before had been her Nan’s, when she was six years old. But while her Nan had looked peaceful, Edward looked mangled and distorted.

“Now, we may not have much time, so if you could be so kind?” Mordecai stretched out his hand impatiently, while shooting sidelong glances at Edward’s body. His other arm kept his gun trained on Jessica the whole time.

Now Jessica’s survival instinct kicked in. A man had just been killed in cold blood, right in front of her. She didn’t want the same fate to befall her, not for a necklace – no gem was worth a human life. Yet, Edward had seemed to think that this particular gem was. Why? Why would he die for a rock?

With shaking arms and hands, she slowly reached back and began to unclasp the chain from behind her neck.

“Yes, good,” said Mordecai, looking anxious.

Just as she was about to unhook the chain, something caught her attention. Out of the corner of her tear-filled eye, she could see a faint, blue light coalescing around Edward’s body.

Despite the grave peril of the situation, she turned her head with her arms still reaching behind her neck. The men tensed and Mordecai turned to see what was commanding Jessica’s attention. Then, the most unexpected thing happened - Edward’s body arched back as that same blue light raced up his body and then exploded from his mouth and eyes. He dropped flat to the ground with his eyes shut. A second later, he arched again and gasped, like he’d just taken his first breath after emerging from water. He sat up and grinned.

Mordecai and the others were stunned, giving Edward the chance to roll over and smack the gun out of Mordecai’s hand with his cane. He struck him on the back of his head and then shackled him with a pair of silver handcuffs. It all happened in one swift, smooth movement.

“I hate it when they play hard to get,” said Edward, shaking his head. “What about you boys,” he asked the remaining two men, “are you going to come along quietly or are you going to resist arrest?”

In the space of a second Jessica saw the other two men squeeze their triggers and open fire, before she felt Edward grab her and then pull her behind a brick BBQ. “Alright, resisting arrest it is then,” Edward called to them.

Jessica stared at him with her mouth open. “You – you – you were dead!”

“Technically speaking, yes.” A bullet sparked as it struck a brick above his head, causing him to cringe. “I might be again in a little while.”

“But how did you...how did you come back to life?”

“I’m a little bit immortal.”

“How can you be a little bit immortal? That’s like being a little bit dead!”

“Well I can still die, technically, I’m just better at shaking it off than most people.”

Two more bullets hit the concrete, one narrowly missing Jessica’s left foot. She yelped and drew her arms and legs in as tightly as possible.

“OK, I guess the questions can wait for later.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

“So what do we do now?” she asked.

“We wait for them to flank us,” said Edward as he looked around at the ground.

“You mean you want to wait for them to get a better shot?”

“Are you a Cricket kind of girl?”

“Excuse me?” said Jessica.

“I was always more of a batsman myself, but I used to have a decent bowling arm too. At least Don always said so.”

Jessica shook her head, “What are you talking about?”

Edward held up two rather solid looking rocks. “What I’m saying is, how’s your over arm?”

The two men reloaded their weapons as they made wide arcs towards the BBQ, coming around on either side. Their boss was on his knees, motionless and shackled; it was like he was in a trance. They exchanged signals and on the silent count of three they made their move.

“Now!” yelled Edward and Jessica hurled her rock at the head of a greasy-haired man with a pencil-thin moustache. She scored a direct hit and the man’s head flew back with an audible crack. He dropped his gun as he brought both hands to his nose; blood gushing everywhere.

Jessica lunged at the weapon and stood up, holding it firmly in both hands. It felt lighter than she had expected.

“Hands up,” she said, mustering every ounce of machismo that she could.

The man laughed with a mouth covered in blood, “You don’t even know how to use that thing.”

“No, but I do,” said Edward, “so I’d listen to her if I were you.” He had shackled the other man and was now holding out another set of silver cuffs.

The man stood in defiance but then reluctantly put his hands behind his head and dropped to his knees. Edward closed the handcuffs around his wrists and the man suddenly went completely still, his face locked in a permanent sneer. It was disconcerting to Jessica.

“Wipe that stupid look off your face,” she snapped.

“He doesn’t have a lot of say in the matter,” said Edward. “They’re Time Restraint Cuffs, they lock the wearer into a single second of time. He can’t move or even think right now, all of this is happening at super velocity from his perspective.”

“Right,” said Jessica, a little confused.

Edward extended a hand and said, “I think that we can get rid of that now.”

Jessica looked down at the gun in her hand and slowly passed it to Edward, who took hold of it like a dirty sock, emptied it of its bullets and stuffed it into his pocket. “Guns are despicable things, I despise having to touch them, let alone use them.”

Now that the immediate danger was over, Jessica felt all of those suppressed aches and pains rise to the surface. She hunched over and gripped her knees and then leant back against a sturdy Gum Tree and just slid down until her backside was planted firmly in the dirt. She didn’t care that she was going to ruin her expensive new dress.

A breeze began to rustle through the trees and Jessica quickly became aware of just how exposed her arms and legs were.

“The Stasis Field’s been broken,” said Edward. “Mordecai was the one keeping it up.” He noticed her shiver so he immediately removed his coat and wrapped it around her shoulders. “It’s been that kind of night hasn’t it?”

Jessica looked up at him and ran a hand through her hair, she wanted to yell or cry or vent her emotions in some way, but she felt too tired to do any of that. “What’s all of this about?” she asked.

Edward sat down next to her and took off his hat, placing it in his lap. He had a head of thick, brown hair which was neatly styled with gel or oil of some kind. But the style and length seemed slightly different to what it had been at the shop.

He gently took hold of her hands with one hand and with the other, he touched her chin softly. Then he held up the glowing, azure necklace. “This is what it’s all about,” he said.

“What’s so special about a necklace?” asked Jessica, “And while you’re at it, why is it glowing?”

Edward smiled, “I’m afraid it’s rather a long and fantastic story, you probably wouldn’t believe me.”

“You’d be surprised by what I’m willing to believe right now,” she said.

He thought about it for a while, with the blue light of the stone dancing across his face and bringing out the equally brilliant blue of his eyes. “Alright, but don’t say that I didn’t warn you. This necklace, specifically the gem hanging from it, is called the Eternity Stone.”

“Alright, keeping up with you so far,” she said.

“I’m a private detective of sorts and I was hired to retrieve it after it was stolen from a museum.”

“OK so far, nothing too weird.”

“A museum in the future,” said Edward.

“Ah,” said Jessica.

“By a time-travelling criminal,” he continued.

“Right.”

“Those men were also time-travellers and work for a criminal organisation called The Black Glove Society,” continued Edward. “They’re the ones who hired the thief who stole the Eternity Stone, but he double-crossed them and ran off with the stone and his payment.”

“OK so why is it glowing?”

“The stone is time-sensitive,” said Edward, “meaning that it reacts to Chronon Radiation, which time-travellers such as myself tend to be soaked in.”

“Time-travellers such as yourself? So you’re an immortal *and* a time-traveller,” she said. She had a distinct feeling that she should have been questioning all of this, or be getting excited or scared or something. But honestly, she felt too tired and sore to muster up much of a reaction at all.

“Hang on, if the stone was stolen by a time-travelling thief then how did it end up here?” she asked.

“Good question,” said Edward. “How did you come into possession of that necklace?”

“It was given to me by a guy I went on a date with...oh.”

Edward patted her hand, “Oh, indeed. Would you mind telling me the name of this young man?”

She felt a little hesitant but then realised that she didn’t owe Sean anything, especially if he was the reason for her being chased by gun-wielding maniacs.

“His name is Sean Hendricks,” she said. “Do you think that he has something to do with all of this?”

“Well I don’t want to worry you,” said Edward, “but I think that you may have gone out with a thief for hire from the forty-ninth century. But never mind, I’m sure that that doesn’t say anything about your judgement of character.”

“I knew it, I just knew it!” said Jessica.

Edward raised an eyebrow, “Really?”

“Well I didn’t *know* it exactly, but I had a feeling that there was something up with him. I didn’t even want to go out with him; he just kept coming in to the shop to ask me out every day for a week! I only agreed in the end so that he’d finally stop.” A thought struck her, “Does this mean that he gave me this necklace so that these Black Glove guys would come after me?”

“More than likely,” said Edward. “He covered his tracks pretty well when he came to this time period, but not well enough. I was able to track him down and, evidently, so were those Black Glove agents, but he was probably tipped off that he was being tracked down. He knew that if we found our way here then we’d be able to find him by tracing the unique radiation of the Eternity Stone, so he gifted it to you to create a decoy.”

“So he could sneak away, what a little parasite!” It would be an understatement to say that Jessica was disappointed with the results of her first ever date. “So is that why you were in the shop today, because you were tracking Sean?”

Edward cocked his head, “I’m sorry, what shop?”

“Horizon Books,” she said, “the bookshop where I work. You came in today and bought some books, acting really odd.

“Are you sure it was me?”

“Hello, how many Victorian dandies do you think are wondering around the Western Suburbs of Sydney?”

“Fair point,” he said then crossed his arms and stroked his chin, “that is interesting. It seems that you and I are destined to meet again at some point.”

“Well, you said...”

“No, don’t tell me anything about what I said. That was a future version of myself that you encountered and as such I can’t know anything about it.”

“I get it,” she said as she rubbed her eyes, “paradoxes, gotcha!”

“You seem to be taking this talk of time-travel rather well,” said Edward. “Most people would have doubts.”

“Well I saw you appear out of nowhere surrounded by blue light; time-travel’s as good an explanation as any,” she said with a shrug. “Besides, I’d like to think that a lifetime of over-exposure to Science-Fiction and Fantasy have left me, not only with an over-active imagination but also an open mind. Trust me, as soon as I get over the all of the near-death terror, I’ll be going full fan-girl on you.”

Edward just laughed and muttered, “Indeed.”

They just sat there in silence for a few minutes as she let everything sink in. The feelings of anger and betrayal that she felt towards Sean; the fear and desperation that she had felt while being chased by the Black Glove; and finally the hope and wonder that she felt knowing that time travel was real.

“Say,” said Edward, disrupting Jessica’s thoughts, “how would you like to help me bring this low-life boyfriend of yours to justice?” asked Edward.

“Oh boy, nothing would give me more pleasure,” said Jessica. “But he’s not my boyfriend!”

“That settles it then,” said Edward as he sprung to his feet and dusted off his trousers. He extended a hand to help Jessica to her feet. “Go home and get some rest,” he said, “tend to those cuts and bruises; have a lovely bath, a nice cup of tea and a good night’s sleep. I’ll be in touch tomorrow.”

“How exactly will you get in touch?” she asked.

He smiled, “I’m a detective, I’ll find you.”

Jessica started to take the coat off but Edward raised a hand to stop her. “Keep it,” he said. “I’ll retrieve it tomorrow, you shouldn’t be walking home in the cold unprotected. I would usually escort you, but unfortunately I need to deal with these three first.” He indicated the three men, all still motionless in their shackles.

He placed his hat back on his head and spent a moment adjusting it and then corralled all three men into a tight group. “It just occurred to me,” he said, “we haven’t been formally introduced. I’m Edward Graves: Temporal Detective, at your service.” He removed his hat again and bowed.

“Oh well, I’m Jessica Lazarus: Bookseller, pleased to make your acquaintance.” She did a mock curtsy, well as best she could in the dress that she was wearing.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Miss Lazarus,” he said. “Until we meet again on the morrow.”

With that, Edward and his three prisoners began vibrating into a blur of blue light, before disappearing completely. Then Jessica was left alone to make the journey back to her unit.

Her unit was one of four in a squat, modest brick building on a quiet street littered with squat brick buildings, nestled in the Western Suburbs of Sydney. Her second-floor flat, No. 4 was a cosy, one-bedroom affair complete with a kitchen, bathroom and lounge room, with a communal laundry located downstairs. Her mother had been very vocal in her disapproval of Jessica’s moving out of home, but when she turned eighteen, nearly a year ago, she finally convinced her to let her leave the nest. Despite this independence however her mother, Dianne whom lived only fifteen minutes away by car, still called her daily to check up on her.

When Jessica got home she only wanted to do two things: take a bath and then collapse onto her bed. She toyed with the idea of skipping the bath seeing as she’d had a shower before going out. But she needed to relax and she was desperately looking forward to feeling the hot water on her sweaty skin and aching muscles.

She walked into the bathroom, undressed, then reached down to the bath and turned the hot water on, ignoring the cold water tap altogether and then stepped in. She let out an audible sigh as she lowered her right foot into the water, wincing as it made contact with the cuts on her soles. It felt incredibly refreshing to have the near-scolding liquid smother her taught muscles, taking the edge off of her aches and pains. She felt that with her freshly washed body she could face anything.

She lowered her head back and let the water cover her hair and ears, stretching her legs out until her feet were touching the tap at the other end. As she absorbed all of the healing warmth into her body, she began to reflect on her night.

*Time travel is actually possible!* She thought as she began to dab at her cuts with a damp face cloth.She thought about all of the documentaries she’d seen about time travel and whether or not it could be possible. She thought about all of the books that she’d read and movies that she’d seen; for more than a century people had been speculating about what it would be like to travel through time and now it turned out that it already existed. How did he do it? Was there some kind of machine? Was it some kind of natural, innate ability?

She looked over at the blue frock coat that hung on the bathroom doorknob. She had a billion and one questions to ask when Edward returned.

She sat up with her wet, red hair cling to her back and began to wash the cuts on her arms, legs and feet. “Time travel is real!” she gasped suddenly, “That’s fantastic!” Once she was happy that she wouldn’t get any infected cuts she laid back down in the water. “Everything I thought I knew about the world is absolutely wrong, isn’t that marvellous?” she squealed.

After a few minutes she climbed out of the bath, let the water out and then dried off. She wrapped one towel around her body and another around her hair. After she applied some antiseptic to her various cuts, she slipped into her pyjamas and walked out onto her small balcony. She looked up at the stars and just stared, a smile still etched onto her face.

*Despite the date with a con-artist and then being chased by mad time-travelling gunmen, I think that this has been the greatest night of my life,* she thought. *Because tonight I’ve learned that there is more to the universe than what we can see and hear around us; there is still some wonder out there.*

That night Jessica fell into a deep sleep and for the first time in a long time, she had dreams; sweet, real dreams.

**CHAPTER THREE: KNOCK, KNOCK!**

The man who called himself Sean Hendricks sat on the edge of the bed in his small hotel room, desperately waiting to hear a knock on the door.

He was waiting for one of his partners, Barnabus Griffyn to arrive with everything he’d need to establish himself in a new time. He was five minutes late already.

*Damn you Barney,* he thought, *what’s taking so long?*

He turned on the TV, not that he was particularly interested in this idiotic form of entertainment, but he needed something to take his mind of things. He’d been on edge ever since Barney had called him the previous day and told him that the Black Glove had put a tracer on the Eternity Stone. He’d told him that he’d arrange for a new identity to be established for him in another time period, probably the 14thcentury. Sean wasn’t crazy about the 14th century but Barney had assured him that it would be a good place to lay low for a few months.

*Why now? Things have been going good; I was just beginning to settle into this life.*

Sean began thinking about Jessica, it was a pity that he’d had to get her involved because he actually liked her. He thought that she may have been a good girl to settle down with, but he’d never know now. He just hoped that the Black Glove didn’t harm her and that they’d just take the Eternity Stone and leave her alone.

*I was stupid to think it’d be this easy, why did I have to get greedy?* Sean’s thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. He switched the TV off again and leapt off of the bed.

He bounded to the door and yanked it open. “Finally!”

He was taken aback when he saw Jessica standing there. She had her flowing red hair cascading over her shoulders and was wearing jeans and a light brown jacket, which covered a blue t-shirt that referenced some movie or another.

“I didn’t realise that you were expecting me,” she said.

“No I wasn’t, I’m expecting somebody else actually. Maybe you could come by later?” he said.

“It’s OK I won’t stick around for long,” she said as she slipped by him and into the room.

She looked around the lavish room and let out a whistle. “Wow your hotel room is better than my unit!”

“Yeah, you know, just wanted somewhere nice to stay while I’m looking for my own place.” It dawned on him that she wasn’t wearing the necklace.

“Say, I noticed that you’re not wearing the necklace I got you. I hope you’ve got it somewhere safe,” he said.

“Oh,” she said as she rummaged through her brown, leather handbag, “you mean this?” She held out the silver chain with the brilliant blue Eternity Stone attached. It glowed with a dull, pulsating luminescence that was nowhere near as brilliant as it had shone the previous night.

Sean cringed a little upon seeing the azure gem and immediately thought of the danger it put him in. “Ah you’ve got it with you? Good, good.”

He half expected Black Glove agents to appear in his room at any second. Panicking, he looked at his watch. “Well like I said Jess, I’m actually kind of busy, so maybe you could...”

Suddenly there was a brilliant flash of blue light which made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. He stumbled backwards and reached into his grey suit jacket to pull out a small handgun. He pointed it at the figure that flickered into existence and fired.

The man dived out of the way just in time and did a roll before springing up in front of Jessica. “No, no,” he said, “you’re supposed to say hello and then introduce yourself. Like this - Hello, I’m Edward Graves: Temporal Detective, pleased to make your acquaintance.” Then he kicked a chair straight into Sean’s chest, knocking the gun from his hand. Sean made a move for the weapon but Edward smacked his hand with his cane and then picked up the gun himself. “I seem to be picking up a few of these things lately,” he said. The gun flickered and faded away into a haze of blue light and then it was gone, leaving Edward’s hand empty.

Sean, looking panicked, closed his eyes and his body began to flicker and vibrate as he was bathed in a dull blue light. He started to laugh, until Jessica lunched a fist right across his jaw, returning him to normal and leaving him on his backside, rubbing his jaw. He stared up at her with features formed of pure astonishment.

“You didn’t need to do that,” said Edward. “I told you that I’d seal off the room so that he wouldn’t be able to Flux out.”

“Yeah, well sometimes it feels good to hit a jerk right in the face, especially one who’s left you to be killed by a crazy time-travelling criminal syndicate.” Jessica rubbed her wrist, hoping that she hadn’t broken anything; she’d never punched anyone before.

“Jess,” said a still startled Sean, “what’s going on? What are you doing with him?

“Well, he saved me last night. From the gun-toting killers who were after the super timey-wimey magic rock that you gave me!” Jessica had not intended to yell, but she was kind of glad that she had; Sean looked like he was going to wet his pants.

“Well,” Edward interjected, “technically it’s a time-sensitive Crystalline...” He stopped short when Jessica shot him a penetrating gaze that could melt steel. “Never mind, I’ll stay out of it,” he said.

“So you know then,” said Sean. “You who and what I am?”

“If you’re asking whether I know that you’re a time-travelling thief from the future, then yes.”

Sean shifted uncomfortably and then made to get to his feet but Edward whipped his cane down in front of him, sending him back to the carpet. “Please remain seated Mr. Hendricks,” said Edward. “Or would you prefer your usual moniker, Geoff Proton?”

“Geoff Proton?” said Jessica. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Well, he is from the future.”

“Listen Jessica,” said the thief formerly known as Geoff Proton, “you have to believe that I didn’t intend for you to be put in harm’s way. Did I hope that it would throw the Black Glove off of my scent while I scampered to a safer time and place? Yes. But I knew that they wouldn’t hurt you, I knew that they’d just take the stone and leave.”

“You know, the more you talk, the more I have to fight the urge to punch you again,” said Jessica.

Geoff flinched, which made Jessica smile. Then Edward produced a set of silver handcuffs, just like the ones which he had used the previous night. “As much as I would love to let you mete out your own brand of Justice Jessica, I need to take our thief into custody. But I assure you that he will be punished for his crimes. All of them.”

“Come on man,” said Geoff, “Have you seen the Council’s prison uniforms? They’re grey! Nobody looks good in grey.” He didn’t say another word as Edward clicked the silver shackles into place around his wrists, leaving him frozen in time.

“So is this what you do for a living?” asked Jessica. “Are you some sort of time cop?”

“Well I prefer the term Temporal Detective, but yes, I suppose this is what I do. I investigate crimes committed by other time-travellers, or Archaics as we call ourselves. Not just crimes though, I also investigate mysteries that can’t be solved as well as the odd reality threatening crisis.”

Jessica nodded slowly, “OK, so if you’re an Archaic, what does that make me?”

“Well,” said Edward, “you’re a Linear; somebody who can only take a linear path through time.”

“So how do you do it?” she said excitedly.

“What, time travel? It’s all down to genetics,” said Edward. “It’s believed that everyone has the Archaic gene, it’s just that it lies dormant in most. For we lucky few who can utilise it, it’s as easy as one, two...” He flickered away into blue light. About thirty seconds later, he vibrated back into existence. “Three.”

“You think you’re pretty impressive, don’t you?”

“Are you saying that you’re *not* impressed?” he asked.

Jessica bit her lip, trying to hold back the excitement that had been building up inside her since the previous night. But then it was as if her emotional damn had broken and everything came flooding out.

She squealed so loud that Edward had to actually cover his ears and nearby dogs were sent into a frenzy. “That is so cool!” she bellowed. “I can’t believe it, I always, *always* knew that there had to be more to life than just...this!” She swung an arm around, indicating a wall with a painting on it.

“You knew that there was more to life than paintings?”

“No, this! The world; boring, mundane everyday life,” she exclaimed before flopping down onto a lounge chair. She leaned back and ran her fingers through her hair as her heart threatened to explode. She sat up and faced Edward, her face now turned serious. “Do you think that you could teach me to do what you do?” she asked.

“Sorry, as I said it’s genetic, it isn’t really something that can be taught.”

Jessica frowned, “Well, that sucks!”

“Believe me,” said Edward, “if you were an Archaic I would teach you everything that there is to learn about time and how to move freely through it. But unfortunately we can’t change who we are. But having said that, there’s nothing wrong with being a Linear. You’re young and you’ve got your whole life ahead of you and the world laid out at your feet. So go ahead and be extraordinary.”

Jessica shrugged and gave a tight-lipped smile, “Still, I could be even more extraordinary if I could time travel.”

Edward laughed and touched her chin ever so lightly. “Would it be alright if I took the Eternity Stone now? There are some very worried people who would like to have it back.”

Jessica looked down at the blue stone and then handed it over to Edward. As soon as he took it she saw its glow increase threefold.

Edward took Jessica’s hand and placed a gentle kiss upon it. “It’s been a pleasure Miss Lazarus. But we’re destined to meet again, that much is apparently certain.”

“See you later,” said Jessica. “Or should I say earlier?”

Edward smiled and then, with his hand on Geoff’s shoulder and the Eternity Stone stashed in his pocket, he flickered away into a blur of blue light.

Jessica had thought that would be the end of it, but then she felt her body begin to vibrate. She wasn’t in pain but she could feel her body resonating at an impossible speed. She looked down at her hands and saw them moving in slow motion but also leaving a blurred after-image behind as she moved them. Panicking, she tried to grab hold of her left wrist but her hand passed straight through it, temporarily distorting her arm. She screamed but her voice came out as a distorted echo that startled her even more.

She spun on the spot and looked at the room around her where everything was covered in a blue tinge and looked like it was being shaken from side to side, like she was inside a baby’s rattle.

She tried to move towards the door but her feet were useless bricks of lead. She wanted to scream; to cry, but she knew that she wouldn’t help herself that way. She thought of Edward and how he would be able to help her if he were here. She prayed and wished and hoped for him to help her figure this out.

Then funnily enough, her feet transformed from lead to clouds as she felt her body, or whatever corporeal form she was in, drift up into centre the room.

Then ZOOM!

The world below her began to race by at an astonishing speed while she stayed still, albeit still vibrating. People raced around like ants; buildings, trucks and structures of all sort passed harmlessly through her as she hung there, suspended like a fish in a tank. What’s more she could see the world changing as it moved. Buildings grew and shrank, streets turned into meadows and rivers swelled. The people that raced past her were moving through an array of fashions and the cars were becoming progressively older.

Then she was over the ocean. Well at least she thought it was the ocean, with nothing but blue beneath her. But then, everything was blue so how could she be sure? She saw old, wooden Tall Ships skirting around beneath her and then before she knew it she was back over land, passing deserts and jungles and ancient cities. She tried to look ahead but could only see blinding blue light on the horizon.

She could feel the world around her slow down as she entered a grey city of soot and chimneys. Now instead of cars there were horse-drawn carriages and people on foot all around, passing through Jessica as she floated over cobblestone streets. Her ghostly form drifted through a bakery and came out on a quiet street – which a sign identified as Mistfall Crescent - lined with terraced houses and was startled to see one glowing with a fierce blue energy, far brighter than all that surrounded it. She felt herself sinking back towards the ground as she neared the door of the house, a well maintained and stylish looking place, which a series of golden numbers identified as number one hundred and twenty-one. But just as she thought the bizarre ride was over, she felt a burst of pain wrack through her body and she rebounded off of the door and then tumbled backwards down the stairs.

Jessica cursed, which caused several respectable passers-by to stare at her in astonishment before hurrying on their respectable way. Meanwhile, oblivious to the social disruption she was causing, Jessica rubbed the back of her head, surprised at the lack of blood. She was even more surprised when she noticed that her body was no longer vibrating and that the world around her had lost its blue hue. An odd scent filled her nostrils; a strange smoky smell.

Pulling herself to her feet and collecting her handbag as well as the contents which lay sprawled on the ground, she trudged up the small set of stone stairs to the door. She hugged herself in a futile attempt to fight the cold and then, shivering, she raised a fist. But before she could knock, the green door swung open to reveal a dashing gentleman standing in the door way.

“My,” said Edward Graves, “this is unexpected. Would you care for some Tea?” Jessica just stared at him in a state of shock and disorientation. “I’ve got biscuits too,” said Edward as Jessica just stood there, wobbling a little. “I could make some little sandwiches if you’d like,” he offered. Still she just stood there, looking as white as a sheet which was even whiter than her usual shade of white. “Jessica?” said Edward as he waved a hand in front of her face.

“Milk and two Sugars please,” said Jessica. Right before she lunged to the small porch railing and vomited all over a rather lovely Rose Garden.

“So that’s a ‘no’ for the sandwiches then?”

**CHAPTER FOUR: AN OMINOUS MEETING**

Hayden Crawlfield hated the cold and he hated the wet. He was therefore rather unhappy to be trudging through a patch of wet, grassy parkland that was currently enveloped by a thin layer of fog. Even if the fog hadn’t been present it was unlikely that visibility would have improved in any way, not at that time of the morning.

His feet made squelching sounds as water pressed up from beneath them, by his guess the rain couldn’t have stopped more than fifteen minutes ago and judging by the sky it was getting ready to start again. His old bones were beginning to ache from the cold. *A man of my age shouldn’t be sloshing through mud like some bloody sewer rat,* he thought.  *I’m One Hundred and eight years old for crying out loud!*

“He sure did pick a fine place for this meeting didn’t he?” Crawlfield said begrudgingly with frost clinging to his voice.

The man to his left, Vinnie looked down at him, clearly unsure whether he was supposed to answer this question. Crawlfield dismissed his worries with a wave of the hand and they continued on walking, the silence broken only by the squelching of their feet. Vinnie had risen through the ranks of the organisation fairly quickly and was clearly still intimidated to be in the presence of Mr. Crawlfield.

Now he looked up at the man to his right, a rather tall man, especially compared to Crawlfield’s short stature, named Isaac Flannigan. Now Isaac was a man who knew how this business worked and for nearly twenty years he had served loyally as Crawlfield’s personal bodyguard.

Crawlfield looked towards the lake that they were now approaching; it was large, flat and grey. One might even say that it was picturesque in its morbidity. Of course, that One would probably be a very dull person, the kind that you avoid at parties.

*I still can’t understand why somebody with the ability to go anywhere in time and space would chose to have a meeting on such miserable patch of earth at such a miserable time.* He was reminded of the works of Poe which he had enjoyed as a boy.

The fog made it difficult to see but as they neared their destination Crawlfield was sure that he could see a man standing by the lake. Suddenly Isaac’s hand came down over Crawlfield’s chest, signalling him to stop. “Wait here Sir; I’d better make a sweep of the area.” Crawlfield brushed Isaac’s enormous hand to the side, “It’s okay Isaac, I know who I’m dealing with. In fact, I want you two to stay here; you’ll proceed no further, understood?”

“But Sir...”

“No buts! I want you to stay here, but make sure you keep an eye on the situation and stay fully alert. Do I make myself clear?”

Both Isaac and Vinnie straightened their backs, “Yes Sir!” they both said in unison.

Crawlfield began trundling down towards the lakefront, trying desperately not to slip, like some sort of drunken penguin. It was even muddier down there and flecks of wet mud continued to splatter onto his fine leather shoes and tailor-made pin-stripe suit. Crawlfield was really starting to get annoyed.

He walked up to the man by the lake; he was facing the water and wearing a black leather coat. A wide-brimmed hat was pulled over his eyes and a red scarf was wrapped around his neck and face. Crawlfield didn’t even know his real name; he had just been told to call him Harbinger. Crawlfield thought that made him sound like an egotistical git.

He stopped right behind Harbinger and made a noise like he was clearing his throat. “Right, now what’s this about?”

The man in the hat and coat glanced over his shoulder at Crawlfield. He was holding something in his hand - a paper bag - which he presented to Crawlfield.

“Care for some bread? I absolutely love feeding these little creatures, don’t you?” His voice was heavy and coarse, surprisingly clear through the thick scarf. Crawlfield was fairly certain that he was changing his voice artificially.

Crawlfield took a step closer to see three ducks which were waiting expectantly just off of the lake shore. *He’s got to be joking*, thought Crawlfield. Neither man moved for nearly a minute, staring into each other’s eyes the whole time. “No?” asked Harbinger, “well suit yourself.” He turned back to the lake and began throwing pieces of bread into the water, just as another duck came to join the feeding frenzy.

Crawlfield had had enough of this, “Listen here! While you’ve been here feeding your precious little birds, I’ve been trying to get back the artefact that you hired me and my people to retrieve. You assured me that you had a plan and that nothing could go wrong, well guess what? Using the kid as a scapegoat, that was your idea and what do you know? It didn’t work, it backfired! And now, now we have the Temporal Detective to deal with too! This was meant to be a straightforward job with minimal risk to my organisation, that’s what you told me!”

Harbinger smiled beneath his scarf, “Well I guess that this must be the minimal risk that I mentioned.”

Crawlfield moved between the man and the lake, “I’d hardly call Edward Graves ‘minimal risk’. My organisation has had plenty of dealings with him in the past...and the future; He’s not like your average History Enforcer. I’ve heard stories about him from years ago, things that happened to him during the War; things that he did in the War. Hell, I *saw* some of the things he didin the War.”

“I’m well aware of Mr. Graves’ reputation. But honestly, who did you think the museum would call? Our little thief operates across various centuries, zigzagging through time. The regular Enforcers wouldn’t have a hope in hell of catching him. Only the best could catch him. Mr. Graves is the best. You knew exactly what you were getting yourself into.”

Crawlfield kicked a small pebble into the lake, scaring several ducks. If only all of his battles could be that simple. “Well, we didn’t expect the kid to double cross us. You’d have to be a complete idiot to betray The Black Glove.” Crawlfield raised his black-gloved hand and clenched his fist.

Harbinger threw some more bread towards the ducks, “I didn’t call you here just to hear you complain about your own incompetency in dealing with a simple thief for hire. I called you here to tell you how to deal with the *consequences* of your incompetence.”

“Well what exactly do you have in mind because I’m starting to have second thoughts about this ‘alliance’ of ours?” Raindrops started to fall onto Crawlfield’s head and shoulders.

Harbinger tipped the paper bag upside down, emptying out the last of the bread crumbs into the water. The ripples on the water were increasing as the rain continued to steadily fall. “Oh trust me Mr. Crawlfield, when I tell you what I have in store for Mr. Graves, then you’re definitely going to want to stick with me.”

The drips of rain had now developed into a steady downpour. “Fine, I’m listening. But we’re getting out of this bloody rain first!”

**CHAPTER FIVE: THE FIRST LESSON**

Jessica accepted the piping hot cup of Tea with shaking hands. “Thanks,” she said with half a smile.

“In all of my travels,” said Edward, “I’ve yet to find anything anywhere which can heal the body, mend the soul or sharpen the mind, as swiftly and powerfully as Tea.”

“That’s so English of you,” said Jessica with a slight giggle.

She was sitting in an armchair with a blanket draped around her shoulders, facing a roaring fire. Edward had assured her that it was a beautiful Spring day outside. Jessica begged to differ. It didn’t help that she’d had to let Edward take her jacket to be washed. Let’s just say that the rose bush hadn’t been the only thing to suffer from her time-travel sickness.

The Library, in which she sat, was a cosy room absolutely crammed with books. The walls were lined with innumerable bookcases, stuffed with volumes of all sizes. In the centre of the room there sat a grand desk with intricately carved designs, atop which even more volumes lay, opened or closed, well-kept or falling apart. At the far end of the room there was a large window through which light streamed over a grand piano, the polished wooden floors and the sheets of paper that lay strewn over it.

It was a beautiful room, no doubt about it; a bit cramped maybe and messy for sure. But despite the mess there was something about the wood grain texture and the crammed bookshelves that just made everything feel homely. It was probably the books. Jessica had always been comforted by books.

Edward sat in the chair next to her and placed a silver tray of biscuits on the small table between them. The chairs were positioned to allow exposure to the fireplace, as well as fireside conversations.

“There you go, freshly baked this morning,” he said, indicating the biscuits. “Well at least I think it was this morning. It could have been this morning. Might have been yesterday, actually. Or last week, maybe next week. The point is that they were baked fresh at one stage or another, when that point was remains to be seen. I tried keeping a day-planner to keep track of these things once, but it didn’t work out. Just look on the bright side, the worst case scenario is that they’re horribly out of date and you end up violently ill. And seeing as you’re already violently ill, I’d call that a win-win situation, wouldn’t you?” When he spoke, it was as if each individual word was pushed forward into the word before, so much so that Jessica was amazed that his tongue didn’t tie itself into a knot.

“Mr. Graves,” said Jessica.

“Please, call me Edward,” he said cheerily.

“Edward, you are by far one of the strangest men whom I have ever met.”

“Why thank-you, I do what I can,” said Edward.

Jessica took a biscuit with a trembling hand and examined it; she was unsure whether her stomach could handle anything yet. But the shortbread smelled so good; the scent wafted through her nostrils like nothing she’d smelt before. Somehow it just smelt fresher, more homely than anything she’d ever encountered. She ate it. Then she ate another and another. It turned out that, not only did her nose enjoy them, but her tongue and stomach did too.

“So what happened to me?” asked Jessica. She wasn’t sure whether it was the sickness she felt in the pit of her stomach or the warmth of the fire or the sweet taste of the Tea, or the smell of the biscuits, but she felt a lot calmer than she thought she should have been.

“Well it’s all very complicated with big words and fidgety sciencey talk,” I wouldn’t want to bore you.”

“Try me,” said Jessica.

“Well you see,” said Edward. “You were in your time. Then, now this is the complicated part so try to keep up. Seriously stop me if you can’t follow this. Then through a complicated system of interconnected forces that govern the physical world as we understand it and as we don’t understand it...”

“You don’t know,” interjected Jessica.

“Now hang on, I never said that. I knew that you’d be thrown off by the science.

“Admit it,” said Jessica. “You have no idea how I wound up here.”

“That’s not...strictly true. Then again, it’s not strictly untrue. I think that the truth is a muddled concept which we can all interpret differently.”

“Do you ever give any straight answers?” asked Jessica.

“Not if I can help it,” said Edward.

Jessica gave him a look that was equal parts ‘too dazed to scream right now’ and ‘if you don’t answer me I’ll smack you with the thickest book I can lay my hands on.

Picking up on this, Edward placed his own cup on the table and then stared into the fire for a time before speaking, his fingers gently pressed together into a triangle. “By my best guess, you’re dormant Archaic gene was awoken by my Flux.”

“I’m sorry, your what?” asked Jessica.

“It’s what we call it when we time-travel,” said Edward.

“Oh,” she whispered. “So does this happen a lot?”

Edward thought about this for a while before responding. “Not that I’m aware of. But I think that this may have had something to do with it.” He reached into his waistcoat pocket and pulled out the Eternity Stone by its light, silver chain. It glowed with its familiar dull blue luminescence, contrasting with the orange light from the fire.

“The Eternity Stone? Do you mean that somehow, when you...Fluxed, the energy from you and from the Stone somehow activated my Archaic gene? Then what, I followed you back here?”

“That’s my working theory,” said Edward. “It’s quite remarkable if it’s true. Usually an Archaic will discover their true nature by the beginning of puberty, often during times of emotional distress or excitement - All of those shifting chemicals and hormones and whatnot. I’ve never heard of somebody discovering their Archaic nature this late in life though, nor by artificial means. Huh, I guess there’s a first time for everything.”

Jessica took a moment to appreciate all of this while taking a sip of her Tea. “So what does this mean for me now? Will I be able to get home and if I can, then what?”

“Oh don’t worry, returning home will be simple,” said Edward. “Even if you have difficulty doing it voluntarily, you’ll automatically return home after forty-two hours. That’s the Third Law of Time, it reduces the risk of paradoxes. Beyond returning home, what this means for you is that you’ll need to be trained and taught.”

Jessica nodded, “So is there, like, a Hogwarts for Archaics? Will I get to go to a special Time-Traveller School?” she asked enthusiastically.

“Well usually Archaics train at the Watch, the headquarters of the Temporal Council. But I don’t think that’s what’s best for you. They’re a bunch of old codgers who don’t know a thing about the real universe. You’d be much better off being taught by a charming, sophisticated gentleman with bucket loads of intellect, world experience and rugged good looks.” He smiled and then said rather swiftly, “How would you like to become my apprentice?”

“You’re apprentice?” said Jessica. “No way!”

“Excuse me?” said Edward, hurt.

“I think I’m more partner material, don’t you?” she asked.

Edward cocked his head. “It sounds like your upset stomach is causing delusions. You can’t even Flux by yourself and you want to be *my* partner? Then there’s the other half of what I do. Mastering your Archaic talents is one thing, but I’m a detective. To be a detective you’ll need to perfect your skills of observation and deduction; you’ll need to become an expert in the art of detection and that’ll take some training. I mean, go ahead, try making one deduction about me. Go on.”

Jessica nodded and then said politely, “I’m sorry about your wife and children.”

Edward’s back stiffened slightly and the corners of his mouth dipped a bit, but apart from that he remained unmoved by what she said. “What makes you think that I have a wife or children?”

“Well you’re wearing a wedding ring for starters.”

Edward looked down at the simple golden band on his left ring finger.

“Then there’s the giant family portrait above the fireplace.”

Edward cast a glance up at the large oil painting which depicted himself, a woman and two children – a boy and a girl.

“Nobody likes a smart-aleck.”

“Plus, I noticed that you’re wearing a kind of bracelet made of coloured strands of twine. It looks homemade and well-worn, like something that a child might have made a long time ago.”

“Alright, then how do you know that they’re no longer with me?”

“Seriously?” Jessica said, indicating the messy state of the room.

“OK, fair point.” He sighed. “Not exactly an amazing deduction, but there’s something about you that I like. I get the impression that you’re easily impressed, so you’ll probably heap a lot of praise and admiration on me, so you’re in.”

“I feel a little bit insulted, but I’ll take it. This is awesome!” squealed Jessica before lunging onto Edward in the biggest hug imaginable. “This is going to be great, Jessica Lazarus: Temporal Detective reporting for duty!”

Edward’s arms flailed about and his face stretched into a grimace before he slowly and with great hesitation, lowered his arms to pat her gently on the back. “Just be warned that this isn’t all going to be fun and games,” he said as he was released from Jessica’s death grip. “Well there’ll be some fun and games. OK maybe fifty/fifty. OK it’s mostly fun and games. But serious fun and games. Think of the most serious game imaginable and that’s what this is. It’s Mouse Trap, no Monopoly! It’s like Monopoly, except that it’s nothing like Monopoly.” He thought for a minute, “I’ve forgotten where I was going with this.”

“How about you just tell me what we’re going to do first,” said Jessica.

Edward shook his head. “That’s such a Linear way of thinking, why start at the beginning. I know that it’s a very good place to start, but come on, show some imagination and originality. We can start anywhere, anywhen, why stick to the boring old beginning?”

Jessica rubbed her head. “Why do I feel like this is going to give me a headache?”

Edward played with the Eternity Stone, which was still in his hand and then said, “Alright we’ll go slow and easy for you. How’s the tummy feeling by the way?”

“Much better,” said Jessica. “The Tea helped.”

“Good, because I need you to be in tip-top shape to help me close this case.”

“Isn’t it already closed? You got the Eternity Stone back and apprehended the thief.”

“True, but I feel like I’m still missing something. Why were the Black Glove so interested in one little piece of jewellery, I mean sure it’s valuable, but there are a lot of other valuable pieces in the Archfield Museum, what made it so special? That’s why when we return the stone to the museum we’re going to have a bit of a chat with Dr. Churchill, the Curator.”

“You mean that we’re going to a museum in the future? Do you have any idea how trippy that is?”

Suddenly there was a loud tolling sound as a grandfather clock in the corner struck noon. It was only now that Jessica became aware of the multitude of timepieces scattered throughout the room, all set at different times. The grandfather clock was the biggest and most ornate though and stood in a special corner all on its own. Now that she was aware of them, she could hear the constant, soft cacophony tick-tocking resonating throughout the room.

Edward checked his pocket-watch to confirm the time . “How about some lunch before we start today’s lesson? do you think that you’re stomach is up for some Victorian cuisine?

“Did you really just ask me out to lunch in Victorian London? Hell yes!”

“Excellent,” said Edward as he stood up, “stay right here and I’ll fetch you something a little more appropriate to wear.”

Jessica looked down at her Star Wars t-shirt and jeans and said, “I suppose I’d cause a bit of a sensation walking out there dressed like this eh?”

“Well it’s 1876 outside, you’re practically naked. Besides, your delicate 21st century Australian skin would freeze,” said Edward. “Now stay here and don’t touch anything. Anything! Not even one little touch of one tiny thing, got it?:

“Aye, aye, cap’n!” said Jessica with a mock salute. Natuarally though, as soon as Edward was out of the room and the heavy wooden doors were closed, Jessica decided to snoop around. Because, who wouldn’t?

She steadied herself against the fireplace and then slowly began walking around the room. She examined the books on the shelves and oh what a varied collection it was! There were dusty old manuscripts, barely held together by leather binding; first editions of various classic works of literature; popular works of “modern” fiction; there were reference books and educational tomes on history, philosophy, war and science. There were books that Jessica recognised as new releases, yet were tattered and well-used. There were old classics which seemed brand new. Then there were all of the titles which she had never heard of; she wagered nobody from her time had. Most of the titles were in English, but some weren’t. The more she marvelled at the books, the more she forgot her pain and discomfort. She considered the possibility that she had actually died and this was her Heaven.

About three-quarters of the way around the room she came to a large, burgundy book that sat upon a bronze pedestal. A string of simple golden letters spread out across the cover: *The History of the Archaics- vol IV: The Intra-Temporal War.*

Jessica began to run her hand over the cover and felt a tingle run up her arm. She ignored it and moved to open the book up.

“What happened to not touching anything?” said Edward, standing behind her with a beautiful purple and white dress hanging over his arm.

Jessica smiled as innocently as she could manage. “Would you believe that I was sleepwalking?”

Edward raised an eyebrow.

“Come on, I’m a bibliophile! You can’t leave me in a room full of books and not expect me to take a look around.”

“Well sometimes books can be dangerous.”

“Edward, I sell books for a living and obsess over them in my spare time. What are you worried about, paper-cuts?”

“No. But books contain knowledge, knowledge is power and any form of power can be dangerous when not treated correctly. Besides, I told you not to, so there!”

“Wow, for a second there I thought that you were being mature,” said Jessica.

“Don’t worry,” said Edward, “there’s no danger of that happening any time soon. Now kindly change into this so that we can step out like a respectable couple. I can’t afford to have another scandal. No matter how much I told Cleopatra to put that dress on, she just wouldn’t listen. Maybe my Egyptian was just a bit rusty. A few of the neighbours actually fainted, can you believe it? That’s Victorian sensitivities for you.”

Edward took Jessica to a room where she could change in privacy and after a good fifteen minutes and several offers of help from Edward, Jessica emerged triumphant.

“What do you think?” asked Jessica as she gave a little twirl. Edward stared at her softly and smiled, his thoughts clearly far from her. “Edward?”

“Sorry, you just reminded me of somebody, that’s all. You look splendid. Or gorgeous rather; ravishing even. Though I must admit that it is a little provocative, but it’s the only thing I had that I thought would fit you. Still, it’s more conservative than your shirt.”

Jessica stifled a laugh; with her exposed arms and neck, she’d probably look like a working woman to the locals. She hoped that Edward would manage to save her from being arrested for indecent exposure.

Edward gave her a pair of black boots and a beautiful black cape and bonnet to protect her exposed parts from the English weather and possibly to protect his reputation as well. He then pulled a grey frock coat over his white shirt and black waistcoat and fixed a black Top Hat firmly on top of his head. Then with his cane in one hand and her arm linked through his other arm, he escorted her out the door and into the street.

Besides a minor flash of embarrassment as they passed the Rose Bushes, Jessica was ecstatic. She pulled away from Edward and ran into the middle of the road. “I’m in Victorian London!” she screamed, twirling around the cobblestone street. A pair of well-to-do Londoners shot her a look of indignation before carrying on their way, eliciting a laugh from Jessica which she had to muffle with her hands.

“Zounds!” said Edward, “So much for being inconspicuous.”

“I’m sorry,” said Jessica, “but I just can’t help it!”

She beamed as she looked around at the neat line of terraced houses and the cobblestones; the chimneys, boy there were a lot of chimneys. And soot, quite a bit of soot, the air was thick with it. It actually made Jessica choke a little, but she didn’t care. To her it was all so beautiful. The grey streets and even greyer sky might as well have been all the colours of the rainbow, for that’s how she saw them.

“So when are we anyway?” asked Jessica.

“Monday, 17th of April, 1876,” said Edward with a twirl of his cane. “It’s Easter Monday as a matter of fact.”

They walked down the street, well Jessica practically bounced, as Edward took her on a tour of all that is and was Victorian London. Though, he made a deliberate decision not to show her some of the darker aspects of his home: The workhouses, the prostitutes, the poorer areas of the city. It wasn’t that he wanted to hide the shameful parts of his home from her; he’d be the first to admit that they were there. It was just that she had a joy and energy brought about by her romanticised notion of what his home was like and, selfish as it may sound, it made him feel all gooey inside to see her so happy.

They didn’t return home until the evening, so by the time Edward had treated Jessica to some Victorian home-cooking for dinner, there wasn’t a whole lot of time left for teaching. Still, he felt that it was important to at least get a start on things, so once they were well fed he escorted her back into the library for class to begin.

“Moving through time is a lot like moving through space,” said Edward as he paced back and forth in his waistcoat and rolled up shirtsleeves, twirling his cane loosely between his fingers. “Think of time as a piece of string. No wait, that’s too cliché, think of it as a roll of duct tape. No, scratch that, that’s a terrible metaphor! I know,” he said excitedly. “A city! Think of time as a city. Most people, Linears, can only walk down one particular street. It’s pitch black in front of them, so they can’t see ahead, but it’s well-lit behind them, so they can look back. They can only walk in a straight t line and they have to keep walking forwards at a constant speed and once they reach the end of the street, wham-bam, thank-you Ma’am, they get hit by a bus.”

“Sometimes literally,” said Jessica, still in her borrowed clothing and sitting in the armchair she was in earlier. Though now it had been moved into the centre of the room.

“Precisely,” said Edward. “Archaics, well we have the run of the city. We can walk or run wherever we want, move forward or backwards. That blue-tinged world that you moved through when you came here? That’s our city Jessica, that’s Timespace.”

“Timespace,” Jessica echoed. “Don’t you mean Spacetime?”

“Nope,” said Edward. “Completely different. Timespace is a different dimension to the one we usually inhabit, think of it as a copy of the normal world but with a whole lot of shortcuts. While you’re in Timespace moving through time is as easy as moving through space and moving through space is as simple as thinking.”

Jessica remembered how she had floated halfway around the world in a matter of seconds and how everything had flowed in reverese at incredible speed. Then she remembered how her body, not to mention everything else, had been vibrating and how she had passed right through solid objects.

“I was vibrating while I was in Timespace,” she said. “I was able to pass through solid objects.”

“That’s because you were out of phase with reality. Time is motion, that’s why we appear to be vibrating when we Flux. Timespace is close enough to regular space for you to be able to use one to travel through the other, but distant enough from it to not be bound by its laws.”

“That is so cool,” said Jessica. “So can we go anywhere we want?”

“More or less,” said Edward. “As long as you can think about it or imagine it then you can go there. Space is a little trickier than time. If you don’t have some way of visualising *where* you want to go then you pretty much have to take the long way. You were only able to get here so easily because you followed me. Which leads me to temporal defences.”

Jessica remembered how she bounced off of Edward’s door. “You mean like the one that knocked me onto my ass?”

“Excactly. And mind your language, it’s unbecoming of a lady. The first lesson you need to learn, before I teach you anything to do with travelling through time, is how to protect yourself against other Archaics. They’re not all as good-looking as me and they’re not all as well-meaning as me. But a lot of them are as intelligent as me, well nearly. The Thomas Edison to my Nikola Tesla.”

Edward helped Jessica to her feet and held her hands gently. “Firstly I want us to synchronise.”

“I’m going to pretend that that doesn’t sound creepy,” said Jessica.

“It means that our timelines will match one another. Once we’ve done this we’ll only be able to meet in the right order. And the same amount of time will have to pass for each of us. I won’t be able to go without seeing you for five years and then go back to one day after I last saw you, understand?”

“That sounds a little restrictive doesn’t it?” said Jessica. “Not really,” said Edward. “It’s no different to being Linear. The advantages are that it’ll make it a lot easier for us to keep track of one another and we can communicate through Timespace with one another. All you have to do is reach out through Timespace with your mind and we’ll be able to make a link.” He paused. “I should tell you Jessica that synching our timelines is a deeply personal thing and it should only be done with somebody you completely trust. It’s kind of like giving somebody your phone number. Do you trust me?”

Jessica thought for moment and then nodded. “You haven’t steered me wrong yet,” she said.

“Alright then,” said Edward. “Close your eyes.”

Jessica complied but then she took a peek with one eye. Edward had his eyes closed but he immediately said, “No peeking!”

“Just testing you,” she said. She shut her eyes again. Tight.

“I want you clear your mind of all distractions,” said Edward.

“Easier said than done,” Jessica scoffed.

“Just try,” he said. “Try to focus on me and nothing else.”

She did her best to empty her mind. But then the *Firefly* theme song popped into her head. She managed to push that aside and once again her thoughts were clear. But then she remembered that she had to go to lunch with her friend Jenny in about one-hundred and forty years. She shook her head, as if she could physically shake the distractions out and then she focused on Edward. She could hear his breathing. It was slow and steady. Measured. He was a man completely in control of his body. She felt his hands. They were soft but not delicate. They were lined and scared in ways which she hadn’t expected. They felt like those of an older man who had worked hard his whole life, hidden beneath the facade of a young man’s hands. She smelled his scent, some sort of cologne or aftershave. It had the faint aroma of cherries. She hadn’t noticed it before but it was pleasant and not too overpowering.

“That’s it,” said Edward. “Now I want you to focus on you, your life. Think about the moment you were born. Your childhood; your past and future; where you’ve been and where you’re going. Think of all the time you’ve been on this Earth and all the time you hope to have left.”

Jessica’s mind was flooded with memories, some beautiful and some terrible. She pulled her hands away and opened her eyes. “I’m sorry,” she said. “Some of this stuff, a lot of it actually, is personal. I don’t know whether I can just share it so freely.”

Edward kept his eyes closed and his hands open. “I understand Jessica, but this requires us to be completely open to one another for it to work. I’ll be letting you in to my life as well. I’m just asking for your faith and trust. Having said that, if there is anything which you don’t wish me to see, simply lock it away. It’s your life and you’re in control of how much I can see, but keep in mind that the more I see the stronger our connection will be.”

Jessica swallowed hard and then nodded an affirmation. She held Edward’s hands again and she closed her eyes. Once again she felt memories flooding through her mind. She remembered primary school and the day her father left, she remembered high school and meeting her best friend Jenny. She remembered being bullied by Tawny Catsbridge and her first crush, Jason Singh.

She began to feel an energy flowing down Edward’s arms and into her. She could see it now, a bright blue light pierced the darkness of her mind and she began to see things which weren’t memories but were somehow still from her life. She saw her mother, beaming and covered with sweat, holding her as a baby with her father embracing them both. She saw herself as a five year old kissing Billy Evans on the cheek, her first boy kiss. She saw herself making her Captain’s speech at her year twelve graduation.

Then the images mingled with other, less familiar images. A baby with wispy hair was nursed by a tired woman in a night-gown, sitting up and smiling softly. She saw a little boy in a flat cap and braces peering over a counter at a balding man with a kind smile. She saw a fire engulfing a bookshop and the same boy, now a few years older, screaming in the snow. Another flicker of the image and the young boy was Edward, albeit a teenager, in a library with a kindly old man. On and on the images came, now Edward was in a sterile white room wearing a grey jumpsuit, taking a written exam of some kind. Then he was laughing with a group of other young people. Then he sat in a park with a woman, both in full Victorian dress. She gave him a present; a pocket watch. They kissed. Then there were children; a boy and a girl. But then they were gone, so was the woman. Edward was filled with hate and rage. There was fighting; a war. Endless bloodshed the likes of which Jessica had never seen. There was a friend turned enemy; a fight. Things started to get confusing. There was darkness, memories that had been locked away. Then there was sadness and loneliness and a never ending eternity. Oh god, there was pain without end. Never ending life!

There was a searing flash of blue light behind her eyes and Jessica gasped and took a step backwards, opening her eyes.

“I think that went rather well,” said Edward with a smile. “Did you really play the tuba?”

Jessica pressed a hand to her head and then straightened herself. “Mum made me get a lesson, but I hated it so it was just a one off. Edward, I’m so...”

He raised a gentle hand and said, “Don’t. I’ve lead a long and interesting life and it’s not your responsibility to make apologies or offer sympathy. And don’t worry, my life will fade from your mind, like a dream. I bet it already has.”

“But all of those things that happened to you...you’ll still have to live with them.

“We all have our crosses to bear, Jess.’

Suddenly her knees buckled and she began the swift journey to the floor, but Edward caught her just in time.

“Easy now,” said Edward. “I think that’s enough for tonight.”

“Yeah I think I’m a bit jet-lagged,” said Jessica sleepily.

“Well, get some rest Sleeping Beauty,” said Edward as he escorted her to a spare bedroom. “Tomorrow, the real lessons begin.”

**CHAPTER SIX: SLEEPING IN...THE PAST**

Jessica awoke early the next day, fully recharged and barely able to contain the excitement that bubbled within her. But despite the immense surge of adrenaline running through her body, she kept her eyes closed for a long while after waking. She couldn’t be sure whether what had happened the day before was just a dream or not. She could hear a soft ticking sound coming from across the room and slowly she began to open her eyes. To her joy she was not greeted by the usual sights of her bedroom. Rather than her usual Queen Double with TARDIS bed covers, she found herself lying in a large four poster bed in a comfortably sized room that had a dressing table and mirror against one wall and a grandfather clock against another. Directly across from the bed Chrystal could see a beautiful wooden wardrobe and she giggled as thoughts of Narnia entered her head. A Monet hung on the wall, in roughly the same place as her Doctor Who poster was adhered in her room.

She sat up in the bed and sorted through the events of the previous day. Edward had taken her on a tour of the streets of London. He’d synchronised his timeline with her own. She’d found out that he was four-hundred and fifty-three years old, despite the fact that it was less than thirty years since his birth. The quirks of time-travel and immortality.

*Speaking of time*, she thought. *What time is it anyway?* She looked at her watch. Edward had equipped it with a time-tuner, a device which would let her watch reset itself every time she entered a new time period. She could also keep track of her time from her own period through the use of a secondary setting, allowing her to avoid confusion. The display read 8:06am. *Thirteen hours! I’ve been asleep for thirteen hours!* Time travel obviously took its toll on the body.

She swung her legs off the bed and felt her bare feet sink into the plush carpet which was so different to the one in her unit. Having slept in her borrowed dress, she gathered her own clothes, including her freshly cleaned jacket and headed for the bathroom. Edward’s house was what Jessica assumed all English Terrace Houses of the era were like. It had three levels plus a basement, with an assortment of rooms and several features which would not be found in a modern house, such as a Larder. Having said that, Edward had made some minor improvements through the use of time-travel. Thankfully for Jessica, one of those improvements was a modernised bathroom with indoor plumbing. After making use of the bathroom, including a quick shower, Jessica mad her way downstairs.

She found Edward sitting in his sitting room, browsing through several newspapers that were spread across a table. “Good morning sleepy head,” he said cheerily. “I’m beginning to think that you’re not a morning person.”

Jessica tried not to yawn as she looked at her watch, “Well, it is 6am where I’m from.”

“Hmm, yes we’ll sort that when we finish our sync up. Once you’ve returned home, I’ll visit you on a time and date that corresponds to the time and date here. Then we won’t have to worry about confusion in that area.”

Jessica nodded, “Cool.” She looked at the newspapers on the table, “What are you doing anyway?”

“Job hunting,” he said as he sprang to his feet. “My current case is nearly at an end so I need to find something else to occupy my time with.”

She took a closer look at the newspapers, which were from several different cities and years. “So this is how you pick up your cases? You go around buying newspapers from throughout history? You must be missing out on a truckload of cases from the pre-Gutenberg era.”

Edward looked up at her, “Actually this is just one way in which I look for cases. Sometimes, rarely, the Temporal Council will ask for my help. But mostly ordinary people, both Archaics and Linears, come to me for assistance. I don’t mean to brag but I have got quite a reputation among the Archaic community.”

“But you said that Linears come to you too, how do they know about you?”

“Let’s just say that there are some Linears out there who have a greater understanding of the world than others,” said Edward.

This fascinated Jessica. “Really, there are normal, non-time-travelling people out there who know about this? How come it’s not public knowledge then? I mean, why does everything need to be kept secret?”

Edward scrunched up a handful of newspapers and tossed them in the unlit fireplace. “Let me ask you a question Jessica, if I may? What do you think would happen if the population at large knew that not only is time travel possible, but there exists a select group of individuals who are capable of performing this amazing feat naturally? The first possibility is that we’d be accepted by the Linears and asked to work with the governments and emergency services of the world. We’d become tools, used to help ‘make things better.’ But it doesn’t take long for a tool to become a weapon. They’d ask us nicely to help them win wars and conquer death. They’d want us to help them change history and ‘make a better future’. Many of them will believe that they are doing the right thing without realising just how stupid they’re actually being.” He paused for a moment. “You have no idea how many psychopaths and dictators have honestly thought they were doing the right thing.

Jessica could see the truth there. Time travel could be a very dangerous weapon in the wrong hands. Most people just wouldn’t be able to see the dangers until it was too late.

“What’s the second possibility?” she asked.

“Simple” he said. “If the first thought is ‘how can we use it?’ Then what’s the next thought you think someone might have after discovering something new and powerful?”

Jesssica realised immediately what he meant, it was the problem which had plagued the thinking of mankind since the dawn of time. When you find something new there are two questions to ask, ‘how can we use it?’ and...

“How can we kill it?” she said slowly.

Edward gave a grim smile. “Exactly. It’s the oldest and most primal fear of our species; the fear of the unknown. Especially if it can be used as a weapon. If we made ourselves known then the Linears would either want to use us or kill us, plain and simple.”

“Ok,” said Jessica, “I guess I can see the need for secrecy then.”

Suddenly Edward grabbed her hand, “I’m sorry, how rude of me! I didn’t even ask how you slept in the guest room, what a terrible host I am! I hope everything was to your liking up there.”

“Yeah, it was fine” said Jessica. “I slept like a baby actually, I didn’t even realise how tired I was.”

“Yes, I imagine you’re feeling quite hungry too.”

Jessica put her hand to her stomach. It rumbled. “Now that you mention it...”

“Well how about I fix you some breakfast then.” He spoke as he walked out of the room. “Breakfast and then your next lesson,” he called out.

Edward made her a large breakfast of bacon, eggs, toast and pancakes with tea to wash it down. Then when she was done they moved into the Library again, where Edward taught her about temporal defences. He taught her how to shield her timeline so that it couldn’t be tampered with by outside forces, well not easily anyway. This would prevent her being killed as a baby and the like. He also taught her how to shield her home, workplace and anywhere else where she did not want intruders. That was all pretty easy really and simply entailed her entering Timespace, which was just a matter of willing herself there with a good level of concentration, then setting up certain mental and metaphysical barriers.

“OK,” said Edward, “before we move on to Fluxing, you need to understand the three main laws of time.”

“I would have thought that there’d be a lot more than three,” said Jessica.

“There are one-hundred and twenty-seven of them,” said Edward.

“Oh,” said Jessica.

“But fortunately, there are only three which you *really* need to know off the top of your head. They’re usually called the Cardinal Laws of Time or just the Three Laws.”

“An Archaic must not deliberately, or through inaction, bring harm to a human?” Jessica ventured.

“No,” said Edward, “but I will give you a high-five for the Assimov reference.” He did. “The First Law of Time is the Law of Temporal Displacement: A Time-Traveller must return to their own point in the timeline within forty-two hours. As I told you before, this is to reduce the risk of creating paradoxes, which could have devastating consequences for the timeline.”

Jessica looked up from her notepad. “So what happens if you don’t return in time?

Edward made a strange face, like he was picturing a particularly disturbing image in his head. “Let’s just say it wouldn’t be good. Have you ever seen the *Back to the Future* trilogy?

“Of course,” said Jessica.

“Well, it’d be a lot worse than anything that happened in any of those movies, that’s for sure.”

“How much worse?” She asked hesitantly.

“Try to imagine the entire timeline unravelling and eventually imploding in on itself as all of history slowly falls apart into a big primordial mess.”

Jessica just stared with a shocked look on her face. “Oh. So that kind of worse then.”

“People just don’t realise how important they are in the grand scheme of things. Everything we do and every decision we make has repercussions which affect the future. While we Archaics are outside of our own time zones we’re temporarily shielded from the consequences of our actions. It’s like the universe pauses causality for a while, well at least that of events that are directly related to us. But if we don’t return to our natural places in time then the whole chain of cause and effect becomes infected. The effects of this vary depending on the life that the person lived or would have lived. It can range from changing events to destroying the universe.”

“Has that ever actually happened before?” she asked.

“No, never.” Edward said. “Well, maybe once or twice.”

“Once or twice!”

“Well it obviously wasn’t that bad was it? You didn’t seem to notice.”

Jessica got the feeling that Edward wasn’t going to elaborate on this. She was right.

“Next, the Second Law of Time: The Law of Non-Interference. We cannot do anything, deliberately or accidentally, to alter the timeline from its original course; no changing the past or the future.”

“Right,” said Jessica, “I’d better not go back in time and kill Hitler.”

“That’s right,” he said as he straightened his cravat, “we can’t right every wrong ever written. We can however, act to stop the timeline from being altered or to set it back on course. Now we come to The Third Law of Time: The Law of Personal Linearity. Essentially, we aren’t permitted to return to points in time and space where we run the risk of meeting ourselves. If you were to do that then you’d be caught in an Intrinsic Loop. The two selves would collapse in on each other and said person’s own timeline would fold in on itself.”

“And the universe the implode, right?” Jessica added.

Edward shook his head lightly, “Actually no. An Intrinsic Loop is dangerous to the individual involved but luckily it is self-contained. Because it’s localised to one timeline, the universe puts it in a sort of quarantine, cutting it off from the rest of time and space. Once that happens the individual ceases to exist in space and time, as if they never existed at all.”

“Yikes, nasty!” said Jessica. “So what actually happens to the poor guy or girl once their Timeline’s folded in on itself?”

Edward dusted some lint from his sleeve. “No one really knows, it’s hard to say for sure. It’s most likely that they would simply cease to be; they’re consciousness and physical form will evaporate and coalesce into something else. Although it is also possible that they could go in surviving in one way or another, inside some sort of bubble universe or alternate dimension outside of our own. Hopefully neither you nor I shall ever have to find out.”

Jessica finished scribbling notes in her notebook, then stuck her pen behind her ear and read aloud a summary what she had written. “Back home in forty-two hours, don’t mess with the past or future and don’t meet your past self, gotcha. You know, that really is Sci-Fi time travel 101.”

“Yes and for good reason. Time is delicate and in constant state of flux, but also perfectly balanced. Make no mistake Jessica, Time is bigger than all of us, we do not have control over Time, we are merely able to move through it a little more efficiently than others. But when it comes down to it, Time is an organism which allows us to live inside of it and that is why we need to treat it with respect.”

Jessica nodded and then said, “I’ve noticed that you sometime refer to the Timeline, Timestream, Timespace and sometimes just Time. Is there some sort of difference?”

“Yes there is,” said Edward. “By ‘Time’ I mean, just what it sounds like, time in general. The Timestream refers to the natural flow of time, from the beginning to the end. Timelines are the entirety of an individual’s life, from beginning to end. The Timelines are part of the greater Timestream. Finally Timespace, as you’ve seen, is an overlap between Time and Space; an extra dimension through which we can take shortcuts through the Timeline.”

Jessica scratched away on her notepad, furiously trying to get all of this down. “There isn’t going to be a test, is there?”

“Not a theoretical one,” said Edward, “but I think it is time for a practical examination. I want you to try Fluxing two minutes into the future.”

Jessica blinked and placed her pen and paper down on the desk besides her. “OK,” she said, “sure. It can’t be that hard, right?”

“That’s the spirit,” said Edward. Then he stepped to the middle of the room and drew a large X with some chalk. He grabbed Jessica by the shoulders and steered her to the spot.

“You could have just told me where to stand.”

“Yes, I suppose that I could have,” he said thoughtfully.

Jessica started feeling a little anxious. “If I wind up stuck one hundred million years in the past, you have to rescue me before I become T-Rex food. Deal?”

“Of course,” said Edward. “I’d never miss the chance to rescue a damsel in distress; it helps me build up my hero reputation. Oh and T-Rex didn’t exist one hundred million years ago, just so you know.”

“Is it hard being such a pedantic know-it-all, or does it come naturally?”

“You know, it does require more work than most people imagine,” said Edward. “Speaking of work, let’s get started. Are you ready?”

Jessica shook her body loose and then said, “Ready.”

“OK now close your eyes and clear your mind,” said Edward.

Jessica closed her eyes and pushed everything to the back of her mind, allowing only Edward’s voice to enter her head. She felt him rest his hands gently on her arms and his voice came from just behind her left ear.

“Time is motion,” he said. “It carries us from one point to another and if we focus, we can feel it all around us. Reach out with your senses, feel Time flowing all around you; all over you; through you.” Edward’s voice was little more than a whisper now and it was moving around her, steady and deliberate. “Feel it lapping at the back of your senses, like the gentlest of waves touching the shoreline.”

Jessica could feel the faintest of motions somewhere at the back of her mind. It was an odd sensation, unlike anything she had ever felt before. She went to say something, but she felt a finger press gently to her lips. “Shush, focus,” he said softly.

“Once you can feel it, focus on Fluxing into it. Feel the frequency of time as it flows over you and try to match it – become one with it. Let your body resonate with it.”

She began to feel a physical sensation, as the seconds flowed over her skin. She did her best to focus on the way it felt and tried to match her body to it. She couldn’t explain it, but it all felt so natural to her.

“Once you’re in Timespace, visualise where and when you want to be and go there - just move through the intervening time as easily as you would through physical space.”

He body began to vibrate and she felt warm, blue energy flowing over her body and permeating every particle of her being. She opened her eyes and saw the room become engulfed in the familiar azure light. She began to float forwards and the room stretched out in an impossible way, narrowing towards a pinpoint on the horizon. It wasn’t just one room though, there were hundreds of them. Well, kind of. They were all Edward’s library, conjoined and flowing from one to another in an endless, seamless chain. Each was identical, well nearly. She could see Edward standing in each one and after every dozen or so he seemed to be a slightly different position.

It was then that she realised that each room was how the library existed at a particular second, stretching out towards infinity behind and before her. Everything around her vibrated, as did she and she could feel a strange frequency to it all. It was like she was more in tune this time, like her own resonance matched that of the space around her. She began to drift forward and she could feel the frequency change, like she was an antenna and she was being adjusted.

She took a deep breath and focused on her destination again. *Two minutes into the future.* The endless line of libraies began gliding silently beneath her with only the softest displacement of blue energy.

She could see Edward moving in stop-motion, leaving the room for a length of time, returning with his watch in his hand and then moving to stand right in front of her. He was smiling and looking directly into her eyes and then she felt a pulse push through her stomach and there was a bright flash of blue-white light and her feet were planted firmly on the floor, centimetres from Edward. Her body stoped vibrating and the blue energy dissipated instantly.

“Welcome back,” said Edward. “Did you enjoy your trip?”

Jessica wavered a bit, her feet felt a little unsteady. She tilted a little too far back but her right foot caught her weight just in time. Edward extended a hand to offer assistance but she assured him that she was fine.

“That was amazing!” she said. “It was kind of like the ending of *Interstellar*. And I’ll tell you what, it’s a lot better when you’re actually in control of it and you’re not just being pulled through history like a fish on a hook.”

“I think that you’d make a very cute fish,” said Edward. “But hopefully this is how you’ll Flux from now on; in full control. Now how about you have a go at going backwards? Go back two minutes in time, but go to your bedroom wait for me to meet you there.”

“Wait, my bedroom?” asked Jessica.

“Yes, well I get the feeling that you’ll be spending a fair bit of time here in the future, so you might as well have your own room. If you didn’t like the one that you slept in last night then I can offer you another one.”

“No,” said Jessica, surprised, “it’s great, thank you!”

Edward nodded, “You’re welcome. But I can’t believe that that was the only part of my instructions that you found confusing.”

Again, she closed her eyes and focused on matching her resonance with the flow of time around her. She felt the now familiar wash of Temporal Energy flow through her body and opened her eyes to blue, fluctuating world of Timespace.

She turned around and looked at the infinite number of identical libraries stretching out into the past. This time however, after the appropriate version of the room had slid effortlessly under her feet and she could see her past self, bathed in blue light, she drifted out of the room and up the stairs. She passed through the closed doors of her room like a ghost and with an effort of will, she passed back into the physical world, her feet touching down with a soft thud. She felt like the wind had been knocked out of her and once again, she stumbled back a little, but was able to catch herself on the bed post. She took a few deep breathes and then straightened herself out just as Edward entered the room.

“Excellent,” he said, “another success, I see.”

“Yeah,” she said a little shakily, “but it kind of takes it out of you, eh?”

“You’ll get used to it with time. Now, do you think you have enough left in you to get back to where you started from, roughly,” he checked his watch, “one minute from now?”

She took a deep breath, nodded and then smiled. “Piece of cake.”

By the time she returned to her unit that night she felt like a professional time traveller. She had practiced with Edward for hours, gradually taking bigger and bigger leaps into the past and future. So when the time came to return home she was completely confident in her ability. Well...mostly confident.

Jessica stumbled into her room and laid spreadeagled on her bed, still in her clothes. Time-travel really did tke it out of you. She was still finding it hard to believe what had happened over the last few days, or was it the last few centuries? Who knew? All she knew at that moment was that she was tired as hell and the only place she wanted to travel to, was dreamland.

**CHAPTER SEVEN: THE VANISHING DETECTIVE**

“Jess.”

“Jess?”

“Jessica!”

Jessica suddenly became aware of one Jenny Jones, her best friend since high school, who was staring and yelling at her. They had just gone out to lunch together and Jenny had insisted on escorting Jessica back to work. “I’m sorry,” said Jessica, “what did you say?”

Jenny just folded her arms and furrowed her brow in that particular way she always did when considering a problem at hand. Her short brown hair hung down the sides of her face, held in place with a yellow headband which matched her yellow top. Combined with her orange skirt and white knee length socks, it looked like she was rocking the Velma Dinkley look.

“You seem very distracted today, everything alright?”

“I’m sorry” said Jessica apologetically, “I’ve just had some stuff on my mind,” a massive understatement, she thought, “What were you saying again?”

Jenny gave her a worried look. She knew something was wrong but she was too polite to push the matter. She had always been like that; so polite and respectful of other people’s feelings and always wanting to help people. It had been no surprise to Jessica when she had decided to study Social Work at university, so that she might become a Councillor one day.

“I was talking about my Aunt Maggie’s seventy-fifth birthday party, remember? You said you’d help me with the decorations?”

“Oh. Right!” said Jessica. “Of course I remember.” She couldn’t believe that she had forgotten about it. To be fair, she reasoned, she had been dealing with a fair bit over the last few days.

“Good,” said Jenny, “so you’re clear on the details then?”

Jessica nodded her head and gave the biggest smile she could muster. Then she shook her head instead. “Actually, do you think you could run over it just one more time? You know, for safety.”

Jenny rolled her eyes, “You really are off with the pixies today, aren’t you?” She sat herself on the edge of the counter, which Jessica didn’t think her boss would appreciate very much, but she didn’t say anything. “My parents are taking Aunt Maggie away for a cruise on the fifth of next month and they’ll be gone for four days. During that time it’ll be up to us to sneak into her house and unleash some interior design magic. We’ll be like decorating ninjas, hiya!” jenny jumped up and swung her leg into the air, nearly knocking over a display in the process. “Oops, sorry!”

Jessica just laughed; Jenny had always been like this for as long as she had known her. She always seemed like she’d just consumed a bowl of sugar, but a kinder soul one would be hard-pressed to find. Most people in school had thought she was weird, but then again they had thought Jessica weird too. It was this mutual exclusion by their peers which had forged their friendship in the early days of high school, a friendship which still held strong.

Jenny looked at her watch, ‘Right-o, I’ve got to ship off, but I’ll see you at lunch tomorrow. Ciao!” With that she was out the door, running up the street instead of walking. Jenny hardly ever walked, she’d often say that there are too many amazing things to see and do in a lifetime and she couldn’t waste time by walking to them.

Besides a small mid-afternoon rush, the shop was pretty quiet for the rest of the day and at Three O’ Clock Sara, Jessica’s boss left for the day, leaving Jessica alone with the books. As she busied herself with organising the history section, she noticed a book entitled *Revolution and Evolution: An English History* by E.L.Barnes. She picked it up and looked at it. A thought struck her. She picked up another book, *England, 1799-1899- A Complete History* by Evelyn Marwood. Before long she had pulled out every book she could find on English history, specifically ones that covered the nineteenth century.

She sat on the floor, cross-legged, pouring over the books, looking for any mention or allusion to Edward Graves. For fifteen minutes she skimmed through three different books with no results. But then she picked up a book titled *Secrets of the Victorian Era*. Two chapters in, she found mention of a private detective who had operated out of London in the nineteenth century, who had retrieved the crown jewels after they vanished in strange circumstances in 1869. In the next chapter she found another mention of that same private investigator, this time about his rescue of a kidnapped Danish royal in 1872. The royal had disappeared without a trace, with no ransom requested or list of demands left behind. She couldn’t be certain, but she was sure that Edward was the detective in both cases.

A thought struck her and so she moved to the True Crime section and located a book on great detectives of the past two centuries. She skimmed the table of contents and found something that looked promising: Chapter Four- The Vanishing Detective. She flipped through to the appropriate page and her heart skipped a beat when she saw a grainy old picture of Edward, staring at her from the chapter’s title page. She carefully read through the thirteen page chapter and learned about a detective who had operated out of London in the Nineteenth Century. He had been involved in several strange and unusual cases during the period, including the disappearance of the Crown Jewels in 1869 and the vanishing of a Danish Royal in 1872. It was noted in the book, that most of the cases which he was involved in centred around someone or something of note simply disappearing without a trace. This was one of the reasons why he became known as the Vanishing Detective, the other reason being because he himself would disappear upon closing a case, even before receiving payment. He often left instructions for his payment to be donated to a charity, hospital, workhouse or the like.

“Wow,” said Jessica, “I’ve met a man from a history book. And Mum always said that I wouldn’t meet any nice guys by planting my head in a book all day.

Once she had read and re-read the chapter twice, she put the book back on the shelf, slid behind the desk and hopped on the computer.

“Let’s see what the internet has to offer,” she said to herself.

She went to Google and searched for Edward Graves. Nothing. There were lawyers, students, Facebook profiles, but no Temporal Detectives.

*Ah!* She thought and tried searching for Edward Graves: Temporal Detective. Still nothing. There were some websites related to a book series called *The Temporal Detective Agency* and a short film of some kind, but that was it. Jessica decided to give it one last shot and so tapped away at the keys until the phrase ‘The Vanishing Detective’ appeared in the search bar.

The tope result was a website called, [www.whoisthevanishingdetective.co.uk](http://www.whoisthevanishingdetective.co.uk). She clicked on it. The homepage was covered with various photos and sketches of Edward that come onto the screen and then vanished again, being replace by new ones. Some photos showed his face explicitly and were relatively well lit, while others showed only the back of a man in a long coat, or a shadowy figure in the distance. “Whoa,” she said and immediately clicked the ‘about’ tab.

‘Who is the Vanishing Detective?’ the description read, ‘In the Nineteenth Century, a mysterious stranger stalked the streets of Queen Victoria’s London. A man of great knowledge and skill, he was called upon by governments and citizens alike to solve the most perplexing mysteries and dastardly crimes of the age. Bizarrely though, he always seemed to disappear at the conclusion of a case and never received payment for his work.’

*A little over-dramatic,* thought Jessica, *but there’s nothing wrong with that*. *So far this is pretty much the same as what was in the book*.

She continued reading. ‘Stranger still, there have been accounts of the same man appearing, albeit less commonly, as recently as 2009 and as long ago as 1786. Many experts, such as myself, believe that the Vanishing Detective is in fact a Time-Traveller, moving through time and correcting the misdeeds of history. Always hidden in the shadows of time, whispers of the Vanishing Detective can be found in a large number of history books. His picture has been found in photos taken over the last one hundred and fifty years and witness testimonies have been made, describing him in detail. These same testimonies have placed the Detective at many historical events, and many not so historical ones. The one thing common in all descriptions of the Vanishing Detective is that he always on the side of the oppressed and always fights for justice. Whoever he may be, there are many who would like to meet him and thank him for all that he has done. If you have information regarding the Vanishing Detective, please contact me.’

She clicked on the photos section and began skimming through the multitude of images. They had all been scanned from the original hard copies by the looks of it. Some were faded while others were in relatively good condition. Many were in black and white or sepia, but surprisingly there were several colour photos too. Suddenly an image caught her eye; she clicked on it to see it full size.

“Wait a second...no!” She couldn’t help but laugh, “That’s fantastic,” she said. She was staring at a black and white picture marked November 2nd 1902. A crowd of people were gathered near a building. At the back of the crowd there was a handsome man in a top hat; Edward for sure. But what was more amazing was who was standing next to him. A small woman with, what Jessica assumed to be red hair, was looking off to the side with a concerned look on her face.

“I can’t believe it,” she yelled. “I’m a part of history. That’s trippy.”

She couldn’t believe it, this was her future. This was her future and it was in the past. It was her future, in the past which she was viewing in the present. It was all so exciting and confusing. She wondered what case they were working on; what was going on out of shot that had her so worried.

She scrolled down to look for more photos of the same incident, but to no avail. Something else caught her eye though. It had to be the best picture of Edward on the site, but also the one that most piqued her curiosity. Edward was staring directly at the camera and he actually looked a few years younger than he did now. He was smiling, which was uncommon in photographs of the era. He wasn’t wearing a hat so she could see his neat brown hair. Next to him was another young man of about the same age. He had dark hair and was dressed in similar Victorian style clothing to Edward. They looked like they were close.

She peered closer at what was scrawled in faded ink on the bottom of the photo: ‘Edward and Alexander- 1870’. *I wonder who that is,* She thought.

The next morning, her day off, Edward knocked on the door at Nine O’ Clock on the dot, exactly as planned. If everything worked out the way that Edward said it would, then their Timelines would be synchronised now.

She opened the door and he was standing there in a burgundy frock coat, matching waistcoat, brown checkered trousers and a gold cravat with a silver pin. His hat, which could be collapsed, was tucked away inside his coat and his cane was clasped gently between his hands.

“Hey,” said Jessica.

“Good morning, I see that you made it back safe and sound,” he said cheerily.

“Yeah,” she said, “no problems at all.

“Excellent,” he said before picking up a book from one of Jessica’s many bookcases and flicked through the pages. “I didn’t think you would have any trouble.”

“Say,” said Jessica, “just out of curiosity, have you ever heard of ‘The Vanishing Detective’?

“Can’t say that I have,” said Edward. “Should I know him?”

“No, I was just curious, it doesn’t matter. Take a seat, I’ll be ready in a minute.” Jessica gestured to the two seater lounge in front of the entertainment system. Edward kept looking around as he made his way to it and took a seat.

“Nice place you have here,” Edward called out as Jessica walked into her bedroom.

“Thanks,” she said as she clipped two purple studs into her earlobes. She stepped back so that she could see herself fully in the mirror. She had chosen to wear something nice and pretty for her first trip into the future, seeing as she didn’t need to worry about being conservative she thought that she could get away with it. Plus she was meeting a Curator, an important man from the sounds of things, so she wanted to look her best. She wore a pale green dress that billowed out below the thick belt which held it in at her waist, hanging down to just above her ankles. Then a thought occurred to her. “Hey Edward, what will the weather be like?” she yelled.

“We’re going to the 6th of August, 2918, in what is today known as Canada,” bellowed Edward. “It’ll be a bit chilly.”

Jessica looked at her arms, which were exposed except for her shoulders and decided to ere on the side of caution. She pulled on a yellow cardigan and some black stockings and then slipped into a pair of flats.

“Alright, ready,” she said as she emerged from her room and picked her handbag and keys off of the kitchen counter. She looked over at Edward and stopped dead in her tracks. “What are you doing?”

Edward was kneeling right in front of the TV, his coat and cane laying on the lounge. His face was mere centimetres away from the screen. “Fascinating,” he said. “This program seems to be for children...but I find it utterly terrifying! I mean, look at those eyes, zounds they’re huge! I mean, whose idea was it to superimpose a real mouth and eyes over an animated body? The whole thing just feels...wrong!” Edward gave a shiver with the last word.

Jessica covered her mouth to stop herself from laughing. “Don’t worry, I think that show scares anyone over the age of 10.”

Edward slowly began to rise but he kept his eyes fixed on the screen. “It’s like a train wreck, I want to look away but I just can’t. Oh no! She’s singing and look, now there’s more of them! Jessica,” he whimpered, “I think that they’re stealing my soul!”

Jessica turned the TV off and tried not to laugh. “Kids shows aren’t what they used to be,” she said.

“No,” said Edward as he straightened his cravat, “They certainly are not. I’ve seen some horrors in my time, but that thing was pure evil.”

Putting the evils of modern children’s television aside, Jessica offered Edward a drink, which he declined and then gave him a brief tour of her modest little home. Jessica though that it was rather unimpressive compared to Edward’s sprawling and refined home, but Edward insisted that he found it positively charming.

Then, without further ado, they moved to the most open space in the unit, between the kitchen and lounge room and prepared to Flux. “You really should have a dedicated space for Fluxing,” said Edward, “it’s quite a turbulent process after all.”

“Sorry, but small unit remember,” said Jessica. “So where and when am I aiming for again?”

“9am on the 6th of August, 2918, the Archfield Museum in New Plains, what is today Ontario, Canada. But don’t worry too much, I’ll be here to guide you through Timespace. Ready?”

“Ready,” said Jessica. Then she closed her eyes and focused on the resonance of everything around her. She sensed time flowing through everything and she thought about where and when she wanted to go. Then her body began to vibrate with a blue glow and they Fluxed out of existence.

**CHAPTER EIGHT: THE MUSEUM OF FUTURE HISTORY**

“Keep your eyes closed,” Edward said as the blue light around them began to abate. “This is your first trip into the future and that’s a very special moment that only comes once.” Jessica could feel the resonance of her body slow down as she began to return to regular space-time. Her feet touched the ground again - grass she was pretty sure - as weight returned to her body. She could feel the warmth of the sun on her face and the insides of her eyelids turned red from the light. A cold chill danced around her body and she was thankful for her cardigan and stockings.

“You are now standing in another country, nearly a whole millennium from when you were born.” Edward spoke with a smile in his voice, his excitement barely contained.

Jessica moved a foot forward and felt the alien grass crush beneath her feet, heard the sound of thousands of tiny ice crystals shattering with the blades. She drew a deep breath. The air was cold and tasted different somehow, felt different in her lungs. It carried indistinct scents which were unfamiliar to her. She exhaled and could feel frost clinging to her breath.

“The air,” she said, “it’s different somehow; it’s fresher; cleaner.”

“Air Filters,” said Edward. “By the 24th Century the atmosphere was so toxic that it was dangerous to walk around outside for more than two or three hours without a mask. There was a global effort to build dozens of large air purifiers, powered by clean Fusion Reactors, situated around the globe at strategic points to clean the air. The air that you’re breathing is cleaner than it’s been in over twelve-hundred years.”

She could hear a cachophony of sounds - birdsong, some casual chatter and the low humming of engines of some sort, gliding by every once in a while.

“Are you ready?” asked Edward. “Ready to see the future?” She could practically hear him smiling ear to ear.

Jessica nodded lightly and she felt Edward’s hands press softly on her shoulders, she could sense his head right next to hers.

“Open your eyes,” he said softly, “and see.”

Jessica thought that she had readied herself for the culture shock which was in store for her, but she soon realised that nothing could prepare her for the reality before her.

“Oh my God,” she said softly.

“What do you think?”

Jessica just stared, slack-jawed, for a moment and then said, “It’s beautiful!”

It was like something out of a dream. They were atop a small hill in a park; a vast park covered in frost, so that the grass and trees, coloured in shades of green, were also flecked with dazzling white that glinted in the sun. Above their heads, small, sleek vehicles sliced silently through the air with majestic ease, criss-crossing above and below one another with an intricate rhythm. The air rippled softly behind them, leaving subtle trails of silver or rainbow coloured light. Further above the sky traffic, the sun blazed with an odd, warbling and distorted radiance.

Ahead of them, sat upon another small hill, was what looked like a gigantic snow globe. It was a glass dome about five or six kilometres in diameter and inside it stood what could only be described as a tower, or group of towers of different heights, piercing through the sky towards the roof of the dome.

“It’s a New Neo-Classical-Modernist design,” said Edward, “a popular architectural movement in the 23rd Century, with a bit of a revival in the 24th Century, all towers and spires and whatnot. The dome was a product of the time, for a time all buildings used to have their own sealed off air supply.”

Jessica just nodded and then she smiled and then she squealed and gave Edward a huge hug. “Thank you!” She said. “Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

Edward’s arms flailed and his back clenched, “Ah,” he gasped, “you’re welcome.”

“I always thought that we’d pretty much screwed up the planet; that we wouldn’t survive another hundred years, let a one a thousand. Or if we did then it’d be some sort of Dystopian Apocalypse or something, so thank you Edward, thank you so very much.” A tear actually formed in the corner of her eye.

“That’s just it Jessica,” he said as she released him, “that’s exactly what makes this period so special. This is the other side Jessica. Humanity went through some terrible times, Global Warming, Ozone depletion, pollution, several World Wars, overpopulation, but then you know what? We made it through, we found a way. The planet is slowly returning to normal, off-world colonisations is finally easing the congestion on Earth and a new era of cultural, spiritual and scientific enlightenment has begun. This is the light at the end.”

“That’s beautiful,” she said. She just stared down at the beautiful expanse before her and smiled.

“Well,” said Edward, are we going to stand up here all day or are we going to take a closer look?” He held out his hand. Jessica smiled and grabbed onto it then, both grinning, they ran down the hill towards the Museum.

It seemed that every step she took, revealed a new wonder to Jessica. The path that they followed was lined with flags that advertised the museum, but upon closer inspection, she realised that they were holographic and a trail of pixels sprinkled from their ends as they waved in the breeze. The silver park benches, she noticed, were actually hovering, staying in a fixed position, save for when somebody sat down or got up, when they would sink or rise ever so slightly.

Though, the people themselves weren’t as different as she expected. Many were dressed in slim-fitting jackets in shades of grey, silver or blue with upturned collars and a zip running down the middle. Others wore similarly sleek and shiny clothing but there were many people wearing clothes not unlike what was normal in Jessica’s time, even some from the 1950s and 60s. She also noticed that practically everyone was wearing sunglasses.

“I can’t believe that people are dressing like that a thousand years in the future,” she said as they passed a woman who looked like she had stepped right out of a home appliance advertisement from 1952.

“It’s nearly the end of the Third Millennium,” said Edward happily, “people are getting nostalgic, looking back at the beginning of the millennium, even a little but further towards the end of the last one. It’s called New-Retroism.”

They watched as a man walk past them, wearing a blue denim three-piece suit, an open-necked shirt made out of a silver, plastic-looking material, sandals and a scarf designed to resemble a large green Boa-Constrictor, complete with forked tongue. “Well,” said Edward, “obviously some people are better at mimicking the look than others.”

They continued down the path, bounding more than walking, then Jessica looked up at the sky and thought of something. “Edward, is it just me or does the sun seem different here?” she asked.

“Ah, so you noticed that then? You are an observant girl!” He responded cheerfully. “The sunlight refracts and scatters in a slightly different way to what you’re used to; it’s the Ozone Generators.” He pointed his cane in a skywards direction as he spoke.

“Ozone Generators?” Jessica asked.

“Yes, they were deployed during the twenty-fourth century, about the same time as the air filters. Over one hundred stations positioned at various points around the globe, hovering up there in the atmosphere, all working to recreate the Ozone Layer which was practically non-existent by that point.” Edward laughed, “People will never cease to amaze me. We trap ourselves in a corner and just when all seems lost, wham-o! That’s when we become our most innovative. We’re quite a resilient race you know!”

They climbed up a slight incline and then, standing before them was the magnificent glass dome and the impressive reach of the towers inside. A holographic display floated before the dome, reading, ‘The Archfield Museum- Celebrating 600 Years: 2318-2918’. A large, arched glass tunnel extended out from the dome with a line of eager visitors slowly making their way inside. Edward and Jessica bypassed the line, earning the ire of dozens of people.

They entered the dome and walked through the beautiful gardens that surrounded the actual building, then climbed the stairs up to the grand, wooden doors which stood open. They made their way through the main entrance doors only to be halted by a sturdy man with greying hair and bulging arms, wearing a blue and grey uniform. He held up a hand and said, “Sorry folks, entrance passes are on sale at the desk to your left, please join the end of the line and await your turn.”

Jessica cast a glance over at the ticket desk to the left and was met with several angry stares and shaking heads from people in the line.

“Oh I don’t think that will be necessary,” said Edward. “You see, we have an appointment with Dr. Churchill.”

The security guard raised an eyebrow and then taped a spot just above his right ear, twice. There was a shimmer of blue light in his left hand which formed a translucent rectangle, before solidifying into a thin sheet of light. The guard turned the light like a page and it faded away, leaving another sheet beneath it. “Name please?” he asked.

“Edward Graves: Temporal Detective,” Edward said, rocking on the balls of his feet.

The guard mulled this over for a moment while studying the sheet of light, before saying, “Graves- 9:30am, hmm doesn’t say anything about your lady friend here.” He indicated Jessica with his head.

“This is Miss Jessica Lazarus, my new partner in training,” said Edward. “She’s assisting me on this case.”

“Well I think we can just stick with partner and lose the ‘in training’ part,” said Jessica.

“Whoa! Not so fast Cowgirl,” said Edward.

“Alright,” said the guard with a hint of frustration in his voice, “you’re clear. Dr. Churchill’s office is on the fourth floor, main tower.” He stepped aside and allowed them to pass.

Jessica wasn’t really sure what she expected the inside of the museum to look like, but so far it looked pretty normal. The lobby and entrance hall were fairly classical, all wood grain walls and a marble floor with a mosaic of Herodotus, the father of history on it. To their left, beyond the ticket desk, there was a gift shop and beyond that there was a corridor or wing, with an identical one to their right there, each stretching out as far as Jessica could see.

They continued walking straight ahead and climbed a flight of stairs, continued across the landing and upwards to the first floor. They entered through another large arch which led to long gallery filled with paintings and statues. She could see doors set on either side, leading to different exhibits and there was already a steady flow of people moving between them. As they stepped into the gallery, a holographic projection of a vaguely feminine form appeared before them, informing them that this was the first floor followed by a list of exhibits that could be found there. Edward continued walking through the projection so Jessica kept in step.

There were some soft benches in the room, presumably for resting and Jessica also noticed a set of three silver circles set into the floor on either side of the floor, each with a green light next to them. One of the lights turned red and then a few seconds later there was a buzz and spark of white light and suddenly there was a large man there, wearing a loud shirt and shorts that there two sizes too small. He stepped out of the circle and Jessica realised that he also had a small boy with him, eating an Ice-Cream cone.

“Short range Tele-pad,” said Edward as they walked. “The elevators of the 30th Century.”

‘Right,” said Jessica, “cool.”

She looked at some of the exhibits that they were passing and one in particular caught her eye. “*21st Century Wing (2000-2099)*,” she read aloud from the holographic display. “Edward can we take a look in there?”

“Hmmph, what?” He looked at the exhibit. “Oh no, sorry Jessica, not a good idea. Besides, we’re here on business remember?”

She stopped and looked at the entrance to the exhibit then she looked at Edward, who was still striding down the corridor, cane swishing in his hand. She continued after him but craned her neck back for a moment before moving at a slight jog to catch up with him.

“Why did you say that it’s not a good idea?” she asked.

“Because,” said Edward, “knowing your near future is dangerous. It’s one thing to see what the world will be like in a thousand years, but it’s another to read about what’s going to happen in five.”

“What, so I can time travel, but I’m not allowed to visit anywhere less than a century away?”

“I never said that,” said Edward. “You’ll just need to be a little more prepared first that’s all. It can be quite a shock, maddening even, to know what’s just around the bend.”

Jessica was about to retort but Edward veered to the left and said, “Here’s us.”

They were at another archway, but this one had a large flight of stairs inside it which spiralled up towards the sky. Next to the arch were two Tele-pads and another holographic sign, one which read: ‘Main Tower: Neo-Nihilist Art, Scandinavian History, The Anglo-Icelandic Wars, Administration.’

“Are we beaming up?” asked Jessica.

“Never really trusted those things myself,” said Edward. “The only person I want fiddling with my atoms is me, so if it’s all the same to you, I think we’ll take the stairs. Besides it’ll be good exercise.”

Good exercise was right, four floors and nearly two hundred stairs later, they emerged from an archway, Jessica slightly out of breath while Edward had barely broke a sweat.

“Next time,” she huffed, “I’m getting my atoms scrambled.”

“Oh tosh,” said Edward with a dismissive gesture. “You Generation Y kids!”

As they stepped through the arch they passed through a hologram that read: *Fourth Floor: Administration- Authorised Personnel Only*. It suddenly occurred to Jessica that there was a lack of lights in the museum, yet it was very well illuminated. She couldn’t pinpoint the light source, it seemed to be everywhere. She hadn’t noticed any light fixtures to speak of in the stairwell, or the rest of the museum for that matter.

This floor was much like the others except that, being in a tower, it was much smaller and the doors that ran down the corridor did not lead to exhibit wings, rather they were offices. Holographic banners floated outside each door announcing the name of the person who worked there, along with their job title.

“I’ve been meaning to ask you” said Jessica, scanning for a light bulb of some sort, “where does all this light come from?”

“Noticed the lack of bulbs, have you?” Edward said as he looked at each door that they passed, skimming over the name. He stopped and stretched his arms out, like a showman presenting some foreign spectacle. “The light comes from all around us. Light bulbs of any kind are made obsolete by the end of the twenty-sixth century. You see, the walls and ceilings of this museum are coated with a special substance. This substance allows for the transmission of light from any angle, meaning that every part of the museum is illuminated in varying degrees from every possible angle. It’s all quite interesting but it ruins the old light-bulb jokes. I mean I’ve tried, ‘how many Archaics does it take to install a photo-electric panel?’ but it just doesn’t flow as well.”

“Oh I’m sure that you can make it work,” said Jessica.

The curator’s office was at the end of the floor, with a hologram proclaiming it to be the office of Senior Curator Dr. Nathanial Churchill- Meeting by Appointment Only. Edward took out his pocket watch and declared it to be 9:23am. “We’re a bit early but I’m sure he won’t mind,” said Edward. He stepped up to a small orb that was set into the wall by the door.

A red light blinked to life and then a translucent red hologram appeared before them, witht he vague, faceless appearance of a businesswoman holding a clipboard. “Welcome to Dr. Churchill’s office, how may I help you?”

“We have an appointment with the Curator,” said Edward.

“Please state your name, appointment time and nature of your appointment.”

“Edward Graves, 9:30am, regarding the theft of the Eternity Stone,” said Edward.

The hologram flickered for a moment, glancing down at its clipboard and then said, “I’m sorry there is no appointment listed for Edgar Gates at 9:40am regarding the left of the eternally sewn. Would you care to make an appointment?”

Edward and Jessica looked at each other. “Try speaking a little more clearly,” suggested Jessica.

Edward cleared his throat and repeated his name, appointment time and nature of his appointment, making sure to speak as loudly and slowly as possible, breaking up each word and stretching every syllable.

“Unknown response, please try again.”

Edward’s face twitched, “Bloody machines!” His face turned pink and he apologised to Jessica for his language.

“Why don’t you let me have a go,” said Jessica. “I have a way with machines.” Jessica cleared her throat, “Edward Graves, 9:30am, the theft of the Eternity Stone.”

Once again the hologram flickered and once again it proved to be utterly useless. “I’m sorry, voice is not a match for the vocal record of, Edward Graves. Would you care to make an appointment?”

They toyed with the idea of dismantling the stupid thing and then just kicking down the door, but Edward thought that that might be misconstrued as rude and possibly aggressive. They decided to give it one last shot and so Edward cleared his throat once more and tried again.

“Welcome Mr. Graves,” said the hologram finally.

“About time,” said Jessica.

“I’m sorry but your appointment does not commence until, 9:30am, current time, 9:29am, please take a seat.”

‘You’re kidding me, right?” said Jessica with indignation.

No sooner had Jessica said this, had the large wooden doors swung open, revealing a man who stepped out to greet them. He wasn’t quite what Jessica had expected a museum curator to look like; he was the exact opposite actually. Rather than being an overweight middle-aged man with grey hair and a beard, he was in fact a tall, handsome man with dark hair, dazzling blue eyes and a patch of rugged stubble. His satin suit was a strange ensemble of navy blue with black tiger strips, which contrasted against his tanned skin. Rather than a jacket though, he was wearing a long coat that danced about his ankles as he walked, with two small shoulder pads protruding out to the side. The whole outfit was topped off with a pair of red joggers and a tie that was far wider than what was fashionable in Jessica’s day. He looked like he had stepped right from the pages of a bizarre fashion magazine.

“I’m terribly sorry about Cheryl,” he said. “I’ve heard that she’s been giving you a bit of trouble.” The man marched towards Edward who had his arm outstretched, but the curator bypassed it and went straight for a hug, causing Edward no shortage of physical displeasure. “These admin-o-grams and info-bots can be such trouble sometimes,” he said as he finally released Edward. “And who might this lovely vision of scarlett beauty be?”

“Me?” said Jessica as blood rushed to her cheeks. She turned her head away to hide her embarrassment, however she found herself unable to stifle a giggle that slipped out of her lips; she wasn’t used to being complimented like that.

“This is my partner in training, Jessica Lazarus.”

Jessica regained her composure and offered her hand to Dr. Churchill. “Pleased to meet you sir,” she said.

“Oh my dear, the pleasure’s all mine.” He grasped her hand and planted a gentle kiss on it, “A true pleasure indeed.” Now Jessica felt like her cheeks were going to explode, she didn’t know what to say. She wasn’t going to lie, she thought he was hot! Edward cleared his throat rather loudly and Jessica turned to him. His head was cocked and an eyebrow was arched. She suddenly felt very self-conscious and hastily removed her hand from those of Dr. Churchill’s. “Um thank you,” she said.

Dr. Churchill nodded. “Now,” he said, “shall we get down to business? I take it that you have the Stone Mr. Graves?”

“Certainly,” said Edward, “Shall we adjourn to your office?”

Dr. Churchill shook his head, “There’s no need for that, we can settle this out here. I’m sorry to sound rude but I’ve been cooped up in there all morning,” he said with a reassuring smile. “I need to stretch my legs for a bit. Besides, I’m afraid that it’s a bit of a mess in there, I’ve been redecorating.”

“Oh we don’t mind the mess, do we Jessica?”

“No, not at all,” she answered.

“Besides, my poor companion here has weak circulation in her legs and could do with a bit of a sit down, couldn’t you Jess?”

“No, I’m fine,” she said, giving Edward a quizzical look.

“Well maybe I’m the one with the circulation problem, that’s probably it. You live to be as old as me, you tend to start picking up a problem here and there, things stop working as well as they used to. Don’t get me started on my joints, shot to pieces they are! The point is that I’m very grateful for your offering us a seat. Shall we?”

Edward took a step towards the Curator’s office, but Dr. Churchill blocked him off. Jessica saw the Curator’s features contort into a facade of pure, blood-chilling anger, before returning to their previous state. The change only lasted for an instant, but it was enough for her to be shaken free of any disillusions she had about Dr. Churchill. There was something wrong about him, the charm had all been an act and Jessica had fallen for it.

“I apologise Detective,” he said, straightening his tie. “I’ve been a bit out of sorts of late. I’ve been under a lot of pressure from on high to get the Eternity Stone back.”

“Completely understandable Doctor, don’t you think that it’s completely understandable Jessica?”

Jessica was beginning to understand how Edward’s subtle hints and cues worked; he looked at her in a certain way, with a particular smile which told her to just play along.

“Oh yes,” she said with a nod, “completely understandable. Your job must be a tough one, I mean the responsibility that rests upon your shoulders must be enormous. I guess that’s why you need those big shoulder pads.”

Edward laughed, “Oh Jessica you old joker, you!”

Dr. Churchill gave a slight, forced laugh and then said, “Yes well, if you could be so kind as to give me the Eternity Stone then you can be on your way. I’m sure that even Archaics such as you two have busy schedules to keep.”

Edward checked his pocket watch and said, “Yes, the hour does seem to be getting away from us. Very well then.” He pulled a small leather pouch out from his coat pocket, untied the knot and removed the Eternity Stone from within, throbbing with a pale blue light. Jessica thought that something seemed different about it, she didn’t get the same feeling as she had when looking at it before. “You do recall my standard fee, yes?”

“But of course,” said Dr. Churchill as he took the Stone and admired it for a moment, before placing it in a small, opaque container. “I’ll organise your payment.”

“I’m kind of sad to see it go,” said Jessica. “Maybe we could come back to see it once it’s back on display.”

“You would be most welcome,” said Dr. Churchill with a smile and a slight bow.

“Just one more question Dr. Churchill,” Edward said with his index finger pointing to the ceiling. “Nothing too important, just want to satisfy my idle curiosity. Curiosity’s a bit of an occupational hazard when you’re a detective.” He began pacing in small circles, twirling his cane.

The curator looked a little agitated but he did his level best to hide it. “Yes of course, anything Detective.”

“That pin,” said Edward, pointing to the Dr. Churchill’s chest with his cane. “That one, right there on your lapel, does it say NH*C*?”

Jessica hadn’t noticed it before, but now that Edward had pointed it out, she could see that the Curator was in fact wearing a lapel pin which consisted of an N, an H and a stylised letter C.

Dr. Churchill looked down at his chest and said, “Why yes it does. Is that all Detective?”

“What does that stand for exactly?” asked Edward. “I’m sorry, Mum always said that if I were a cat, then I would have used up all of my nine lives on a fatal curiosity overdose years ago!” Now he was walking in wider arcs around Jessica and the Curator.

“It is one of your fatal flaws,” said Jessica. “That and talking too much.”

“I do tend to talk too much,” said Edward.

“Yeah, you ramble on quite a bit.”

“Well, I don’t know whether I’d call it rambling.”

“I don’t know,” she said, “you’re doing it right now.”

“Am I?” said Edward. “Oh dear, sorry Dr. Churchill, you were going to tell us about your pin.”

The Curator held a very forced smile for a few moments and Jessica could see beads of sweat beginning to run down his forehead. Strangely, she could have sworn that his face was actually flickering a bit at his hairline, where the sweat was appearing. He cleared his throat and said, “It’s the logo of the National History Committee.” He smiled.

“Ah! Of course,” said Edward. “Thank you. You learn something new every day, don’t you Jess?”

“I’ve learned a tonne in just the past forty-five minutes alone,” said Jessica.

“Excellent,” said Edward. He was now standing behind the Curator. “You should always leave a museum having learned something invaluable. Whether it be about the Aztecs or the Great War...” In one swift motion Edward had brought Dr. Churchill to his knees and slapped a pair of shackles onto his wrists.

“Or that the Curator is an imposter?” offered Jessica.

“Oh good, you really did learn something. Oh and you’re lessons for the day Mr. Imposter, are as follows. One, I don’t charge for my services, something which I made clear to Dr. Churchill. Two, you should always wear your pin the right way up. It’s not a C, it’s a crescent moon it’s the logo for the Lunar History Nerds. Before you say anything Jessica, nerd just means an expert these days”

“And your lesson for the day Mr. Graves,” spat the imposter curator, “is that you shouldn’t overestimate your abilities.”

Two men appeared in the doorway behind Edward, both wearing the distinct pin-stripe suits of the Black Glove and both carrying a distinctly scary looking pair of handguns.

“Oh, Zounds,” said Edward.

“It’s not the word that I’d have used,” said Jessica, “but close enough, I suppose.”

**CHAPTER NINE: FIGHT AT THE MUSEUM**

One of the men kept his gun trained on Edward and Jessica, while the other one set about removing the shackles from Dr. Churchill, or the imposter Dr. Churchill, with a fancy looking lock pick.

Keeping her hands raised, Jessica leaned in to Edward and whispered, “So what’s the plan now?”

“The plan comes in two parts,” whispered Edward.

“OK, let’s hear it then.”

“First, we come up with a plan. Second, we enact that plan.”

“You’re not exactly filling me with confidence you know.”

“Hey!” yelled the man with the gun. “What’s with all the whispering? Keep quiet!”

“Sorry,” said Edward, “I was just saying to my colleague here, this is my colleague by the way, say hello Jessica.”

“Hello, Jessica.” She could be sarcastic when she was nervous.

“Anyway, I was just saying to Jessica here, that we were outwitted by a truly superior force. In fact,” Edward brought his arms down and clasped his hands together. The man with the gun made a sharp motion and Edward put his arms right back up. “Sorry, I tend to talk with my hands.”

“You and your hands talk too much Detective.” The imposter curator was free of his shackles and was rubbing his wrists. His face was distorted around the edges.

“Why do people keep saying that,” muttered Edward.

“Gee, I wonder why,” whispered Jessica. There was that nervous sarcasm again.

They were marched into the Curator’s office and made to sit down on a red leather couch. The office was quite nice; it was just a pity that they weren’t visiting under better circumstances. It was almost cavernous in its size, complete with a mini bar at the far end of the room. The walls were covered with masks, artworks and other artefacts, while five large arched windows allowed the morning sun to stream over the polished wood grain floor. The couch which they were seated upon was in front of a large wooden desk and adjacent to another couch. Jessica couldn’t help but notice the man lying on the other couch, gagged and bound at his wrists and ankles. It was Dr. Churchill. The real one, presumably. He strained against his bonds and made some muffled, unintelligible sounds.

“Dr. Churchill, I presume?” said Edward.

The Curator just rolled his eyes.

The other Dr. Churchill, the fake one, walked into the room with his hands in his pockets. His face was beginning to hiss with static. “This was supposed to be simple,” he said. “We were just going to take the Stone and leave. But no, you had to get smart didn’t you?”

“Sorry,” said Edward, “occupational hazard. And to be fair, you can’t really blame us for your rubbish plan not working, now can you?”

One of the other men, a tall blonde guy, said, “He has a point you know.”

The Imposter just glared at him and the blonde man shifted uncomfortably and took a better hold of his weapon, pointing it right at Edward. He muttered an apology and hen remained silent.

“So what are you going to do with us?” asked Jessica. “And what about Dr. Churchill for that matter?”

“You probably shouldn’t have asked that,” said Edward.

“Well,” said the imposter, “as you probably know, we can’t Flux out of the museum; we need to leave the dome first. And seeing as we can’t have you getting in our way, then I’m afraid that we need to remove you two from the equation.”

Jessica hadn’t been threatened a great deal in her lifetime, but there was definitely something ominous about how he had said that last sentence.

“I told you that you shouldn’t have asked,” said Edward.

“Wait, so you’re just going to kill us in cold blood?” she gasped.

The man sat on the edge of the desk and began to play with a paper-weight or some such thing. “Trust me; nothing would give me more pleasure than to kill the great Edward Graves and his little girl Friday. Unfortunately, my boss would drag me over the coals if I broke our truce with the Council.” He tossed the paper-weight over his shoulder and then jumped to his feet. Jessica heard something smash behind the desk. “So you can rest easy doll- face,” he said to Jessica, “you’ll get to keep your pretty little brain inside your pretty little head for a while longer.” He leant in close to Jessica and she could smell a burning smell coming from his face, which looked even more distorted than before. He touched her chin with a large, calloused hand and Jessica withdrew her head immediately.

“Hey,” said Edward, “I’m the genius, immortal gentleman detective here; she’s just my partner in training. I demand that you act sleazy to me!”

The imposter just smirked and stepped back, ignoring Edward’s words. “We’ll just leave you two tied up in here so that we can make our escape unabated.” He whistled and one of his two men, a lean fellow with shaggy brown hair, holstered his gun and fetched four lengths of rope and two white cloths.

“Edward,” Jessica whispered nervously, “I’ve never been tied up before.”

“Don’t worry,” whispered Edward, “it was *bound* to happen eventually.”

“Did you seriously just make a pun at a time like this?”

“Jessica, if there’s anything that I’ve learned in my long life, it’s that there is never a bad time for a pun. Besides, it distracted you for a moment, didn’t it?”

Jessica tried not to laugh, but failed. She just shook her head, smiling. “You’re an idiot, you know that?”

The man with the rope began tying a knot around Edward’s ankles, Jessica wasn’t a knot expert, but she knew that it looked complicated and probably difficult to escape from.

“Be especially careful with him,” said the imposter, “he’s a wily one.”

“Don’t worry Jessica,” said Edward, “everything’s going to be alright. I’ve gotten out of tighter scrapes than this.”

The man finished tying Edwards’ ankles and then moved on to his wrists. Then once the imposter had checked the strength of the knots and was satisfied, he moved on to Jessica. The ropes were thick and felt tight against her skin, she was freaking out inside but she did her best to keep her breathing under control and to maintain a passive expression.

“This is farewell detectives,” said the imposter. He hauled the real Dr. Churchill to his feet and pointed a gun casually towards his head. “The Curator will be coming along for the ride, just in case you happen to get free and want to try something stupid.”

“Well, seeing as we’re on friendly terms then why don’t you show us your real face? You’ve been hiding behind that morph-mask for too long, it’s starting to malfunction. That’s the trouble with those disposable ones, they only last twenty minutes tops. You should’ve sprung for the more permanent model, would have solved your little Bizarro face problem.”

The imposter just shook his head and said, “Perhaps some other time Detective.”

“Well you can at least tell me why The Black Glove wants the Eternity Stone so badly.”

“You’re a detective, why don’t you figure it out?” He ordered one of his men to pick up the container with the Eternity Stone inside, while he hauled Dr. Churchill towards the door.

“Maybe I just wanted to stall you long enough for me to free myself of my bonds.” Edward raised his hands and grinned, letting the rope which had bound them, fall to the ground. He swiftly bent over and slipped his feet out of the ankle bonds, leaving his shoes and spats along with the rope. Before anyone could react, he dove forward and tackled the blonde haired man into the desk and grabbed his gun and tossed it to Jessica.

“What am I supposed to do with this?” she squeaked as she fumbled it into her hands.

“Aim the dangerous end at the bad guys,” said Edward, “and pull the trigger if they come near you. Preferably in the leg.” He grabbed his cane and whacked the container with the Eternity Stone out of the brown haired man’s hands, then scooped it up with his free hand. The brown haired man pulled his gun out and pointed it at Edward. “You want it?” asked Edward. “Catch!” He threw the container at the man, who fumbled with it and dropped his gun in the process. The man tried to recover it but Jessica kicked him in the head with her bound feet. There was a sharp crack when her shoes made contact and then he tumbled backwards and slammed his head on the edge of the desk, dropping the container and letting the Eternity Stone spill out onto the carpet. Then he just lay there, moaning.

Edward picked up the container but then the blonde man, still looking disorientated, made a wild charge for Edward.

“Watch out!” called Jessica.

Edward saw the man and then just took a step backwards, leaving the man to fly past him and flip over the couch, landing in a heap on the other side.

Then there was a clicking sound as the imposter thumbed back the hammer of his gun and shoved it into Dr. Churchill’s head. “You’re quite the escapologist Mr. Graves, but the time for games is over.” Dr. Churchill had sweat pouring down his face and he struggled desperately against the arms of his captor.

“OK, let’s not do anything crazy,” said Edward. “Well, that might be a bit much to ask of you, so we’ll make a deal: You let the Curator go and then you go as crazy as you want in your own private cell. How does that sound?”

“As tempting as that sounds detective, I’m afraid that I’m going to have to pass. Butch, Simmons, get on your feet!” The brown haired man slowly rose to his feet, rubbing his head and using the desk for support. Meanwhile Jessica felt the back of the couch move as the blonde man also rose to his feet. They both moved over to their boss’s side and the blonde haired man picked up the Eternity Stone and placed it in its container. The imposter said, “Adios, Detectives,” then started hauling the Curator towards the door with his men in tow. “Oh and if you’re planning on leaving then you might want to make it soon,” he said. “I’ve heard a nasty rumour that some maniac placed a bomb somewhere in the museum, which may or may not be set to detonate in ten minutes.” With that they were gone and the doors slammed shut behind them.

“Well that complicates things,” said Edward.

“Do you think he’s telling the truth, Edward? Do you think that they’ve really planted a bomb?”

Edward set about freeing Jessica’s ankles. “It’s hard to say, he could be bluffing. But he knows that we can’t take the risk and by the time we find this bomb, or realise that it doesn’t exist then they’ll be well and truly gone. You can put that thing down now.”

Jessica realised that she was still clutching the gun and quickly tossed it onto the cushion next to her, just as Edward began to work on her wrist ropes. “Oh my god, I’m sorry, I could have shot you!”

“Possibly,” said Edward. “But guns don’t tend to work particularly well on me, especially when they’re not loaded.”

“Wait,” said Jessica as she stood, rubbing her wrists and ankles, “you gave me an empty gun?”

“Well, you didn’t expect me to give you a *loaded* weapon did you? You could have shot me. Besides, I told you that I find them disgusting and I would never use one myself, much less ask somebody else to. It was purely for appearances only.”

Jessica stood up and stretched, appreciating mobility a whole lot more now. “I think that actually makes me feel a lot better,” she said as she rubbed at the marks on her wrists. “So how are we supposed to find this bomb?” Jessica said, panicked.

“Firstly, take a breath. Panic leads to bad decisions, we need to remain calm.”

“How am I supposed to remain calm? We could be dead in ten minutes!”

Edward didn’t say a word, he just strode to the door and held it open for Jessica. “Well, ladies first.”

Jessica walked briskly through the door and Edward closed it behind her, then strode up on ahead of her, talking as he went. “If there really is bomb then it would be in a place where it can cause the most damage without being easily detected.” He snapped his fingers. “Of course!”

“What?” said Jessica as she struggled to keep up with Edward.

“Follow me!” he said and then hit first gear, racing down the spiral staircase.

“Wouldn’t it be faster to beam down?” asked Jessica as she bounded down the stairs after him, her voice echoing down the stairwell.

“Can’t risk a technical difficulty,” Edward called back to her. He was moving so fast that all Jessica could see of him was his frock coat flapping about as he rounded the bend.

They emerged out of the dim light of the stairwell and Edward darted for a small orb set into the wall, much like the Curator’s Admino-Gram. The orb floated out from the wall and projected the blue image of a vaguely African looking man in a sharp suit. “Thank you for accessing Info-Orb 38, how may I be of assistance?”

“What war exhibits are close to eating and/or resting areas?” Edward asked frantically.

“Searching, please wait.” The hologram threw his head back for a moment before speaking again. Jessica could feel each second ticking away laboriously and she began to shuffle anxiously from one foot to the other. She looked at all of the innocent people around her, especially all of the children. “The World War Four Exhibit is located conveniently next to the Explorer’s Lounge Cafe and the Lily Pad Playground.” Jessica’s eyes grew large and she looked at Edward with a look of terror.

“Directions?” snapped Edward.

“The exhibit is located in the West Wing, third floor. The fastest option is the ...”

“Thank you,” said Edward, cutting him off. He was already making his way towards the Tele-pads. “It looks like we’re going to be beamed up after all,” he called back to her.

“Don’t these things just go up and down?” asked Jessica.

“Nope, like I said, short range teleport, it can take us to anywhere in the museum.”

Edward’s hand danced over a silver control panel and a voice said, “Welcome to Tele-Pad Twelve...” before it was cut off.

“Sorry,” said Edward, “no time for pleasantries. OK step in.”

Jessica followed Edward onto the circular, white pad and she saw the light on the panel turn red and then everything streaked downwards in a white blur, like someone had suddenly shot her upwards. Remarkably though, she felt no force on her body whatsoever. In about the time it took for Jessica to process what was happening, they had made it to their destination. This floor was a lot different to the previous one and a lot busier too. People were darting about all over the place, entering and exiting exhibits, appearing and disappearing on the Tele-Pads. Directly in front of her was a large, elaborately designed arched doorway which read, *World War IV: 2519-2529- We Will Remember Them*. Just down the hall Jessica could see the large and very crowded cafe and accompanying playground.

Jessica ran after Edward, who was already entering the war exhibit and flicking his head from side to side, examining displays. “We’ll split up,” said Edward, “you go that way, I’ll go this way.” He looked at his pocket watch, “We’ve got less than three minutes.”

“What should I be looking for?” Jessica asked.

“Something that doesn’t belong,” said Edward. “Look for anything that doesn’t quite fit in with the rest, but not enough so that it draws your immediate attention. Good luck!”

*Great!* Thought Jessica as she left Edward and looked at some sort of weapons display, *I don’t know what any of this stuff is, how am I supposed to recognise what doesn’t fit in?*

She pushed her way through the crowd, trying to get as close to each display as possible, earning her the ire of even more people from the future. She scanned replicas of vehicles, collections of letters and cabinets full of equipment but it was hopeless. She looked at her watch; less than two minutes and she had no idea what she was even looking for. She wanted to just sit down and sob. *No!* She thought, *you’re not going to help anyone like that, now focus damn it!* She stood still and took a deep breath. She thought about where the easiest place to hide a bomb would be. *With other bombs!*

She pushed her way towards a display of the different types of explosive used in the war, there were six in total. The information however, listed only five types.

“Edward!” she called. She realised that one of them, and only one, had a blinking green light. In less than five seconds she heard a succession of ‘Ouches’ and ‘Heys’, each followed by a ‘Terribly sorry’ or ‘Excuse me’. Edward squeezed between a large man and woman and then appeared by Jessica’s side, his cane clutched firmly in his hand.

“What is it?” He asked.

“I think I may have found it,” she said, pointing at the grey device with the copper wires and the blinking light.

“Jessica, you’re brilliant!”

Before she could even make a smart response, he’d jumped over the rope partition and set about tinkering with the bomb. People were looking and pointing and Jessica saw a man in security uniform talking into some sort of radio on his shoulder.

“Edward, shouldn’t we get an expert in or something?”

“If you can find me a bomb technician in the next fifty seconds, then be my guest.” He pulled out a small screwdriver from his coat pocket and opened up a panel, revealing a set of wires and two switches. “Besides, you know what they say: If you can’t find an expert then settle for a madman.”

“But what if you blow us up?” she said.

“Well we could just wait forty five seconds and let it happen that way. Besides, I almost think that I might know what I’m doing.”

The security guard pushed past Jessica and yelled at Edward, “Excuse me sir, what do you think you’re doing?”

“Saving your life, now shush!”

“Sir I’m going to have to ask you to step out of the exhibit.”

“He’ll be blown out in a few seconds,” said Jessica.

The guard looked at her quizzically and said, “What are you on about then?”

“We have reason to believe that what my colleague has in his hands, is a bomb and he’s attempting to disarm it, so if you could be ever so kind and just *back off* for a few seconds, that would be great! Thank you!” Whoa, she had no idea where that had come from but it felt good. The guard just looked at her, stunned and stepped back slowly. Then, as if suddenly remembering his duty, he began speaking rapidly into his radio, mentioning various codes and emergency levels.

Meanwhile, Edward was studying the device in his hand, his brow furrowed, deep in concentration. He licked his lips.

*Oh my god*, thought Jessica, *he can’t do it!*

“Edward, how much longer?” she yelled.

He looked up casually, as if he had just become aware of the presence of other people. “Hm? Oh I disarmed it ages ago.”

“Jessica’s face went slack. “What?”

“These models are amazingly user-friendly, just need to flick this little switch here, see?” He indicated one of the two little switches, which was now in the ‘off’ position.

Jessica didn’t know what to say, she was speechless. “Well you could have said that already!” she yelled.

“I just did,” he said.

For the next hour and a half Jessica got to experience one of the other joys of being a Temporal Detective: Bureaucracy. They were shuffled between conference rooms and offices where angry men and women demanded to know who they were, why they couldn’t contact Dr. Churchill and why on Earth had they claimed that there had been a bomb scare. Apparently Dr. Churchill was the only senior member of the museum who knew about the Archaics, but fortunately Edward was listed in the museum’s records and security logs as the detective investigating the theft of the Eternity Stone.

They repeated their recount of events at least half a dozen times, giving an account of how they had come to return the stolen gem, only to discover that an imposter had taken Dr. Churchill’s place, and then kidnapped the real Curator, taken the Stone and left a bomb behind as a distraction.

Edward managed to convince them to leave the investigation in his hands, rather than going to the authorities. He told them that the criminals responsible were members of a very skilled and ruthless organisation, but that he specialised in dealing with such organisations. They gave him twenty-four hours to rescue the Curator and retrieve the Eternity Stone and he assured them that this was all the time that he needed.

They left the museum and returned to Edward’s place where Edward cooked up a feast for lunch. Then they set about reviewing the events of the morning.

“So I guess the case is still open eh?” Jessica was sitting in what she had now designated as her armchair, sipping a cup of tea; the fire raging beside her.

“Hmm well I suppose we are down a Curator now.” Edward was standing by the fireplace, his elbow rested on the mantle as he sipped at his tea. Orange light danced across his face and shadows flickered across his waistcoat.

“Well one Curator *and* one Eternity Stone,” clarified Jessica.

“Are you sure about that?” asked Edward.

Jessica cocked her head, unsure of what he meant. “Yeah, I saw the bad guys take it, so I’m pretty sure.”

Edward smiled and then finished his tea, leaving the cup and saucer on the mantle. “You can’t always trust what you see,” he said as he picked up his cane from beside him. “You should know Jessica that I plan for everything. Most of the time anyway.” He twisted the top off of the cane and tipped it upside down into the palm of his hand. Jessica could have sworn that she saw a blue glow coming from Edward’s hands clenched fist. He opened it to reveal the Eternity Stone, sitting there and glowing softly as he held it by its soft, silver chain.

“But how did you...?” she thought for a moment and then for another, “You gave him a fake?”

“Precisely, I called on an old acquaintance to craft me a replica Stone; a forgery. If something went awry I wanted to have the real Stone close by. If everything went smoothly then I wanted to see whether the Black Glove made a move for it again. If nothing happened within a few weeks of the Stone’s return then I would have informed the Curator and given him the real Stone back.

Jessica nodded, “You crafty bugger. But what will happen when the Black Glove realise that they’ve been duped?”

Edward slid the Stone back into his cane and screwed the brass top back into place. “Well I suspect that they’ll come looking for the real one, which means that we need to be on high alert. Did you raise those Temporal Defences at your home and workplace, as I instructed you?”

“Yes,” said Jessica, “and I had a go at masking my Timeline too, though I don’t know how successful I was.”

“Hmm,” Edward nodded, “well I can take a look, make sure that everything’s in place. But I don’t think that they’ll be so brazen as to make a direct attack on either of us, more likely they’ll set a trap of some sort.” He was silent a moment, like he was mulling something over in his mind, perhaps trying to figure out how best to speak his mind.

“What’s wrong?”

“Well it’s just that,” he paused again, “this case may be a little more dangerous than I had first anticipated. I mean, just look at what happened at the museum, it was a lot to deal with on your first day. I’ll completely understand if you’re having second thoughts about our partnership, though I should say that you performed remarkably well under the circumstances.”

Jessica just smiled. “What, you think that I’m going to return to normality and miss the adventure of a lifetime? You can’t get rid of me that easily, especially not when you just called me your partner. I knew what I was signing up for, remember the bad guys chasing me down the street?”

“Are you sure? Because although I can promise to teach you all that I can and to protect you with every fibre of my being, I still can’t guarantee your safety at all times.”

“I’ve never been more certain of anything in my life,” she said.

Edward just closed his eyes and nodded. “And I wasn’t calling you my partner, it was just a slip of the tongue.”

“Yeah, a Freudian Slip.”

Edward didn’t say anything and just shook his head.

Silence returned for a few more moments, interrupted only by the crackling of the fire and the clinking of fine china. Jessica finished her tea and placed the cup and saucer on the small table beside her. “Edward, why do you think they want the Stone so desperately, I mean it seems like an awful lot of trouble to go through just for a pretty rock.”

Edward looked up from the fireplace and smiled, the orange glow brought a calming warmth to his face. “You know what? I’ve been wondering the exact same thing. I originally thought that this was just a regular heist that fitted The Black Glove’s M.O; hiring a thief to steal a precious artefact and then sell it a few decades or centuries after it was stolen, once its value reached the highest point.” He turned and began to pace around the room so that Jessica had to stand up to keep sight of him. “But after that little stunt at the Museum today, I’m convinced that there’s got to be more than that, they wouldn’t go to that much trouble and risk the treaty that they have with the Temporal Council, just for a bit of jewellery.”

“OK so where do we begin to figure this out? Share your detective secrets oh wise one.”

Edward made a sharp turn on his heels and headed out the doorway, picking up his cane on the way. Jessica got the feeling that he wasn’t coming back, so she picked up her bag and followed him into the hall. “Flattery will get you everywhere,” he said. “As it happens, I do know a place where all manner of temporal gossip flows through and the owner is a good friend of mine.” He slipped into his coat and pulled his hat off of the hat stand.

“Sounds great,” said Jessica, “where is it?”

Edward looked in the hallway mirror and adjusted his top hat into just the right position, then spent a moment straightening his cravat and wing collar. Finally satisfied with his appearance, he picked up his cane again and said, “Do you like nightclubs?”

“They’re not really my thing,” said Jessica with distaste.

Edward smiled and gently touched her chin then said with a sly wink, “I think that you’ll like this one.”

**CHAPTER TEN: CHAIN OF COMMAND**

Vinnie Albertelli didn’t like working on Christmas Eve. Obviously he knew that this was not an uncommon feeling among his colleagues, yet he still felt as though it hurt him more than most. His mother was a devout Roman Catholic and he thought himself to be pretty religious and god-fearing himself. He knew that his mother didn’t approve of his working on such a holy night and he didn’t like to think of her and the rest of the family gathered around the fireplace without him. But what could he do? After his father had died in the Great War it had fallen onto him, the oldest of seven children, to take over as the man of the house. Working for Hayden Crawlfield hadn’t been his first career choice but he couldn’t deny the perks of the job. Not only did it provide his mother and the younger of his siblings with a good home, but it had also opened his eyes to a whole universe of possibilities which he would never have otherwise considered.

He wasn’t fortunate enough to have been born an Archaic, but he’d still seen his fair share of time travel during the ten years he had worked with the Black Glove. Sometimes he thought that it almost made up for nights like tonight, in which his sole job was to stand guard at a door while Mr. Crawlfield was having a meeting inside.

Vinnie had no idea what this meeting was all about but obviously Mr. Crawlfield was working on something big. Whatever was going on, all Vinnie knew was that it had something to do with the operation at the Museum earlier that day. He hadn’t been there, but apparently things hadn’t gone according to plan and Crawlfield had been in a bad mood ever since.

He stiffened as the sound of shouting began to waft from behind the door; the voice was instantly recognisable as Mr. Crawlfield’s. This wasn’t too strange a phenomenon as Mr. Crawfield often lost his temper during meetings. He often lost his temper outside of meetings too. The sound of something shattering however, was cause for alarm. Vinnie immediately grabbed his gun and flung the doors open, his finger on the trigger.

“Mr. Crawlfield,” he bellowed in a flat, even voice, “is everything alright sir?”

Crawlfield was standing by the fireplace with a poker in one hand and a glass of scotch in the other. The remains of a vase were scattered over the mantle-piece. Shadows danced across his face as he glanced up, adding to his already sinister complexion.

Crawlfield spat out his words in short bursts, “Fine, fine; everything’s fine.”

Vinnie looked at the other man standing on the other side of the room. It was the tall, broad-shouldered man – Harbinger – and despiet the roaring fire, he was still wearing his black coat, red scarf and broad-brimmed hat.

“I heard shouting sir,” said Vinnie, still looking at Harbinger.

“I said everything’s fine! Now get back out there and do your job!”

Although he was still unsure, Vinnie wasn’t stupid enough to blatantly question or disregard an order by Hayden ‘The Berserker’ Crawlfield. So he holstered his weapon and gave a respectful, “Yes sir,” then backed out of the room, pulling the doors closed with him.

He had become accustomed to Crawlfield’s explosive anger, those who didn’t weren’t long for the Black Glove, but this seemed different. For the first time in ten years, Vinnie Albertelli thought that Hayden Crawlfield seemed...rattled. With words about curiosity and cats flashing through his mind, he pressed his head against the door, trying to listen in on the conversation.

The voices were muffled by the thick wooden door, but he could just make out what Mr. Crawlfield was saying.

“All of that trouble, riskin’ the wrath of the Temporal Council and for what? I’ll tell you what for, a bloody fake; a pretty piece of costume jewellery!” There was a pause, presumably while Crawlfield took a sip of Scotch. “You were leadin’ this thing, you were there, it’s on your head, you hear!”

Now the other man spoke, impressively keeping his voice calm and even. “This is just a minor set-back, an unforeseen development. I didn’t realise that Mr. Graves would be as paranoid or resourceful as to have a replica Stone made.” There was a small pause, perhaps a deliberate attempt to work up some dramatic effect. “Trust me when I say that I shall not be so easily fooled next time.”

“You’re damn right,” said Crawlfield, because you won’t be leadin’ the next attack, I’ll hire a professional.”

There was another pause and then the other man spoke with a barely restrained ferocity; it sounded like he was grinding his teeth. “Now listen here little man, just remember who is in charge of this operation. You’re just a two-bit gangster, an Al Capone wannabe who was given the gift of Time Travel, yet squanders it on petty cons and pointless heists. If it weren’t for me you’d still be wasting your time fencing stolen historical artefacts to greedy Linears. I’ve given you and your organisation a chance to do something grand; to harness real power.”

There was silence. Vinnie pressed his ear closer to the door but he couldn’t hear anything. *What’s happening?* He thought. He considered going in again but he didn’t want to interrupt Mr. Crawlfield unduly again. Just as Vinnie’s concerns were reaching fever-pitch, the silence was finally broken again and if Mr. Crawlfield had seemed rattled before, then he sounded down-right terrified now.

“Right, sorry Mr. Harbinger. I-I just let my temper get the better of me, it won’t happen again.”

This scared Vinnie a little because for Crawlfield to sound so terrified, then the man in the hat and coat, this Mr. Harbinger, must have been awfully powerful and terribly dangerous.

Mr. Harbinger spoke again, this time with the calm voice he had previously used. “As it happens Mr. Crawlfield, I do agree with your suggestion of bringing a professional on board. But make no mistake that this will still be very much my operation. Understood?”

“Understood,” said Crawlfield, still rather nervously.

“I’ll make the arrangements and make contact with you when the time is right. Meanwhile, I need you to start preparing your men for the final phase. This little...hiccup will not affect our schedule.”

Vinnie heard a soft vibrating sound, the kind that usually accompanied a Flux. Suddenly he had to stand at attention as though everything were normal, as the wooden doors opened inwards.

“Sir!” he half shouted, “is everything alright?”

Crawlfield was on his own and Vinnie couldn’t see the stranger anywhere inside the room.

“Everything’s fine Vinnie,” Crawlfield responded. “Put a call out to all of the men, and I mean *all* of them. All leave is cancelled, got it? We’ve got some planning to do, some serious plannin’ you here?”

“Something big, sir?”

“Vinnie, you have no idea.” Vinnie watched as Crawlfield waddled down the hall towards his private bar.

*Well,* Vinnie thought solemnly, *I’d better tell ma’ that I won’t home for Christmas. She’s going to kill me.*

**CHAPTER ELEVEN: TWO TIME-TRAVELLERS WALKED INTO A BAR**

Jessica looked down the smoky alleyway and just stared at the building that Edward was pointing to. It looked like a grimy old nightclub that hadn’t been painted or cleaned in at least fifty years, and that was from this time, 1928. The only thing that stood out from the grey exterior was a worn-out neon sign that flickered in and out of life. Well at least half of the letters did.

“Welcome to The Chrono-Logic,” exclaimed Edward, “the biggest hotspot for the average Archaic who’s looking for a good night out, hoping to bump into a celebrity from the pages of history, or just interested in hearing the latest temporal gossip.”

“And that’s us, right?”

“You bet! The owner, Archie is an old friend of mine. If anyone’s heard anything about why the Black Glove want the Eternity Stone then it’ll be him.”

“Well no disrespect to your friend, but I think that it’s seen better days.” Jessica felt an icy breeze suddenly cut through her dress and cardigan, making her teeth chatter. “But as long as it’s warm in there I don’t care,” she said as she hugged herself tightly.

“Appearances can be deceiving,” said Edward. “Why don’t we take a look at it from Timespace?”

“OK,” said Jessica, “But I can’t imagine it looking much better in shades of blue.”

She closed her eyes and focused on moving through the cracks between seconds; squeezing her corporeal form out of the physical universe and into the temporal one. She felt her body surge and then vibrate at a great velocity as she felt soft energy flowed around her body. She opened her eyes and gasped.

“OK, not so shabby after all.”

The rundown little building had been transformed into a glorious and luminescent palace of light; blues, pinks and greens that even managed to shine through the azure haze that covered it. Searchlights cut through the sky and there were all manner of people lining up the stairs that led to the doors, all dressed in beautiful tuxedos and cocktail dresses. Jessica looked down at her simple attire and suddenly felt horribly underdressed.

Out of nowhere there was a sudden streak of flesh coloured smoke that whooshed by and coalesced outside the club, taking on the form of a blonde woman. Two more streaks, one dark and the other light whooshed in from the left, also turning into people.

“Is that what it looks like when we’re in Timespace?”

“To an outside observer,” said Edward, “yes. Timespace is kind of tricky when it comes to perspective and relativity and whatnot.”

He held out one vibrating arm and said, “Shall we?”

Jessica smiled and looped her arm through his, relieved that they didn’t just pass through one another and they began walking up to the club.

They walked straight past the people in the line and went straight for the door. Jessica was beginning to wonder just how many lines they could cut in one day, though the people in this line didn’t seem to be very upset, rather many of them were whispering excitedly to one another or pointing in amazement.

“Edward, I think people are gawking at us.”

“Really? They must be mistaking us for a couple of celebrities.”

The bouncer at the door held up a large, resonating hand and said, “Sorry folks, end of the line.” But then he did a double take and lowered his sunglasses then glanced at his clipboard and said, rather apologetically, “Oh Mr. Graves I’m sorry, I didn’t realise...Come in, please, you and your lady friend.” He lowered the red rope that blocked the door and stepped to the side.

“Thank you my good man, you’re too kind.”

They passed through the grand doors and entered a beautiful and ornately decorated entrance hall.

“So I guess that *he* mistook us for celebrities as well?” Jessica said.

Edward shrugged, “What can I say? Word of my exploits gets around and, as I said, the owner is a friend.”

It was only now that Jessica realised that she was no longer resonating and that the hall was not awash with the familiar blue light of Timespace.

“Aren’t we in Timespace anymore?” she asked as she examined her arm.

“No we’re not. We’re now inside the building in regular space. Though we can only enter the building from Timespace, if you were to try and enter the building *from* regular space then it would appear abandoned and decrepit.”

Jessica shook her head, “Sounds confusing.”

“Isn’t everything?”

At the end of the hall there was a set of large double doors with brass handles and a man, dressed as if he had stepped right out of King Louis’ court, stood elegantly to the side.

“Ah, Mr. Graves,” he said with an accent that Jessica couldn’t quite place, “how splendid to see you again. Business or pleasure?”

“Business I’m afraid Sidney.”

“It always is with you,” he tutted, “you need to learn to unwind from time to time.” He looked at Jessica and said, “And who is this lovely lady?”

“Jessica Lazarus, pleased to meet you,” she said before Edward had a chance.

“The pleasure is all mine, you may call me Sidney,” he said before gently kissing her hand. “I shall announce you presently,” he said before gripping both door handles.

“Actually,” said Edward as he placed a hand gently on Sidney’s arm, “I’d rather if you didn’t. I’ve never been one for fanfare. Besides, I’d like to see the look on Archie’s face when I surprise him.”

Sidney nodded politely, “But of course.”

“Thanks,” whispered Jessica to Edward, relieved that she wouldn’t have to face the embarrassment of countless strangers staring at her, out of place and drastically underdressed.

The doors opened and a wave of orchestral music flooded over her body, sending chills down her spine. She wasn’t sure what it was exactly, but it was beautiful.

The space beyond the doors was just as breathtaking as the music and was certainly not what Jessica had expected when Edward had called the *Chrono-Logic* a nightclub.

She was bathed in a golden light as she examined the cavernous room before her, which was more like a ballroom than a club. The room was divided into two main sections; an outer circle of tables and a spacious dance floor in the middle. There was also a large band stand for what looked like a small Chamber Orchestra being conducted by a funny looking man with fluffy white hair. The whole affair was illuminated by gigantic chandeliers which hung from the ceiling, like golden fireworks suspended in mid-air. Jessica was reminded of the movie *Titanic*.

The whole room was filled with people in fine dinnerware either engaged in friendly conversation, dancing and spinning around the dance floor or eating food which seemed to vary from Lobster to Hamburgers. Waiters and waitresses criss-crossed and zigzagged their way through the crowded room in an expert pattern as they carried fine silver trays of food and drink. There was even a large bar at the back of the room, scattered with a few individuals at various stages of intoxication.

“Ah Mr. Graves!” said Sidney, as though he had just remembered something, “I’m terribly sorry, but I forgot to tell you that Mr. Wright is in the Schrödinger room this evening.”

“Of course, the bar, where else?” said Edward.

Surprisingly, Sidney actually pulled the doors closed, which confused Jessica greatly.

“Aren’t we going in?” she asked.

“Oh we are,” said Edward, “just not that room.”

Jessica cocked her head but Edward just told her to wait for a moment. Sidney gripped the door handles again and closed his eyes, sending faint swirls of blue energy down his arms and into the door.

He pulled the doors open and Jessica’s ears were assaulted by a horrible, screeching, pounding sound. She had to press her hands hard against her ears to protect them as best they could. With one eye open she could see that the majestic ballroom and dining area had been replaced by pulsating strobe lights and dozens of young people jumping around and dancing in a most provocative manner. The orchestra had been replaced by a DJ covered in glow sticks and the music he was playing was definitely not classical.

The doors swiftly closed with a loud thud and the horrendous sound of the ‘music’ was silenced.

“My sincerest apologies!” said Sidney who was rubbing his ear and making strange expressions with his face. “A slight miscalculation on my part.”

“What just happened?” asked Jessica a little too loudly.

“Just a simple Temporal Overlay,” said Edward. “Archie built this place so that Archaics of all ages, from all times could have a place to mix and socialise. So in addition to the main version of the Chrono-Logic, which we saw before, he also set up a few alternate versions in different points in time. Sidney here, as well as the other doormen, can switch between them through the use of Temporal Energy.”

“Yes and I apologise, but I do make the occasional mistake.” Sidney gripped the door handles and once again blue energy flowed down his arms and into the door. This time though, when he opened the doors, Jessica didn’t need to cover her ears. This time the room was a quiet little lounge with a large bar that occupied the entire back wall and some soft jazz being played by a live band. Cocktail waitresses wearing big smiles and not a whole lot else strutted around rhythmically, carrying carefully balanced trays of drinks to patrons, most of whom were cigar-chomping men.

“Voila!” said Sidney. “I have redeemed myself; shall I announce you this time?”

Edward waved his hand in a dismissive gesture and then bid him thanks as he stepped through the doorway. Jessica felt an odd sensation as she followed Edward through; like a pulse passed through her entire body, causing her to have a mini-convulsion, knocking the wind from her lungs.

“Are you OK?” asked Edward, placing a hand on her shoulder. “Passing through a Timespace shortcut like that can hit you hard, but it’ll pass in a moment.”

He was right, Jessica was already feeling better; the wave of energy had completely passed through her. The only problem now was that the excessive amount of cigar smoke in the room was burning her lungs and making her eyes water. It smelt like somebody had shoved burning matches up her nostrils and left them there for a few days.

“Passive smoking isn’t much of a concern around here, is it?” she choked out.

“Yes, it’s quite vulgar isn’t it? Unfortunately though there isn’t a whole lot that we can do about it, so might I suggest holding your breath for as long as possible?”

Jessica gave Edward a look that said, ‘are you serious?’ He just smiled and gave a soft shrug.

They made their way through the cushy chairs and little tables, overhearing various dirty jokes and other profanities, until they eventually reached the bar at the back of the room. Edward walked towards one of the stools and a man in a red suit, nursing a glass of Scotch.

Before Edward could even touch him on the shoulder he spoke, with an accent that Jessica thought may have been from northern England. “Good god, look at the rabble they’re letting into this respectable establishment these days. I shall have to speak to the owner; the bouncer will lose his job for this, for sure.”

“Respectable establishment?” Edward scoffed, “I should hope not. I find that the respectable ones are usually rather dull.”

The man turned around and opened his arms, “Edward Graves my dear fellow, it’s been far too long!” Surprisingly, Edward actually received his hug without any fuss, even adding a few pats on the back for good measure.

Edward then touched Jessica gently on the arm and said, “Jessica I’d like you to meet Mr. Archibald Wright. Archie I’d like you to meet my new partner in training, Jessica Lazarus.”

Archie turned his attention to Jessica and shook his head. “Oh now this is a disgrace.”

Jessica winced. “Pardon?” she stammered, shocked.

“How did such a charming young lady end up in the company of this vagabond?”

Jessica smiled; her self-esteem no longer under threat.

“It’s a dire shame my dear,” continued Archie. “May I?” He grabbed Jessica’s hand and placed a soft kiss upon it.

Jessica blushed, “Ah, gee, thanks.” She thought that after all of the chivalrous attention which she’d received from men over the last few days, that she’d be used to it by now. But evidently it was still proving to be a shock to her Twenty-First Century self.

“Watch it Archie,” said Edward, “she’s still learning the ropes and I don’t want you to give her a...poor impression of Archaics. Understood?”

Archie just shrugged, “My dear Edward I have only the best intentions for your young companion. Why, if she’s your partner then she’s practically family.”

“Family in training,” corrected Edward.

Archie admonished Edward with a hand gesture and then said to Jessica, “If you ever need anything and the old windy-wallets over there isn’t around, don’t hesitate to ask me for help.”

“Thanks,” said Jessica, genuinely appreciative, “that means a lot.”

Edward made a sound like he was clearing his throat and then took his hat off and sat it on the bar. “Now unfortunately this isn’t a social call,” he said as he took a seat at the bar and gestured for Jessica to do the same.

“It never is old boy, it never is. But come, let’s discuss this in more comfortable surrounds.” With a snap of his fingers Archie summoned the bartender, “A round of drinks, delivered to my office, if you could be so kind. Scotch on the rocks for me, Edward the usual I take it?”Edward nodded an affirmative. “And for you my dear?”

Jessica wasn’t much of a drinker and even if she were she wouldn’t think it a good idea to drink on the job; keep a clear head and all that. “Just an Orange Juice for me thanks.”

Archie motioned for the bartender to get the drinks, before leading Edward and Jessica into a back room, which turned out to be a rather lavish office, even more luxurious than Dr. Churchill’s.

Archie walked past his large, Mahogany desk and instead sat in a high-backed armchair, offering Edward and Jessica seats opposite him.

A moment later there was a soft knock on the open door and in came a smiling Chinese waitress with brunette hair carrying a silver tray of drinks. Jessica felt a little indignant about how she was dressed. As with all the waitresses she wore a black strapless leotard that resembled a one piece swimsuit, stockings, high-heels, a white collar and cuffs and a red bow-tie. It was the typical kind of clothing that men made women wear for their own amusement; giving them something to ogle while they chomped their cigars and threw back their drinks. Unfortunately everyone is a product of their time, even Archaics.

“Ah thank you Lucy darling,” said Archie.

“You’re most welcome Mr. Wright,” she said in fluent English while she set out the drinks, bending lower than was strictly necessary. To his credit, Edward didn’t seem to notice and simply thanked her politely, before retrieving a curly straw from his coat pocket. “And an Orange Juice for the young lady,” she said finally, smiling cheerily at Jessica. She gave an uncomfortable smile in return and took a sip from her juice.

It was only once the waitress had wiggled her way out of the room and closed the door behind her that Jessica noticed what Edward was drinking. “Is that custard?” she asked in disbelief.

“Why yes it is,” said Edward rather excitedly. “And it’s delicious!” He rubbed his hands together and then put his curly straw into the glass of thick, yellow dessert.

“You drink custard through a curly straw,” she asked, still in disbelief.

“Only when I’m in public,” he assured her. “Ah home I generally just take it right from the glass. But it can get a bit messy sometimes, so better safe than sorry, eh?”

Jessica looked at Archie who just shrugged and gave a silent laugh. “That’s our Edward,” he said. “He’s been drinking custard for as long as I’ve known him,” he said.

“And how long is that exactly?” She was still looking at Edward out of the corner of her eye, watching the creamy yellow mass travelling up his straw and doing a triple loop the loop before entering his mouth. It was a little disconcerting.

“Oh since the Earth was a molten mass,” said Edward, dabbing at his mouth with a handkerchief.

“It certainly feels like it,” said Archie. “We met at the Academy; the Temporal Council’s Archaic Academy. We both came from the Nineteenth Century, though I was from the decade after Edward, but we stuck together. We built up a bit of a gang with some other Victorians.”

Edward chuckled, “We were hardly a gang. More like a glorified study group.”

“A study group that once left one of the Titanic’s life boat’s in the Commandant’s office? Complete with ice?”

“Yes well...” said Edward. “There may have been a few good natured practical jokes here or there.”

Archie laughed so hard that he nearly spilt his scotch. Nearly. “My dear Jessica, you absolutely have to ask him about the time when...” he laughed and slapped his knee, “the time when...he...he...thought it’d be a good idea to teach a Zulu Warrior how to...” he could barely get the words out, “poor Jenkins was in hospital for a week!” He completely fell apart now and Jessica was surprised that he was able to stay in his seat.

“To be fair, I did send him flowers every day,” said Edward, also laughing a little. He looked at Jessica, “You really don’t want to know.”

They waited for a few minutes as Archie calmed down, wiping tears from his eyes and regaining his composure. “Oh forgive me old friend and my new friend. You see this lark and I had some truly wonderful times together and as I get older it feels as though I have to fight to hold on to those memories.” He straightened up and took a sip of his drink. “Now, how may I help you my friends?”

Edward placed his glass on the table before making himself comfortable in the chair and pressing his finger tips together gently in his lap. “What have you heard about The Black Glove lately; Hayden Crawlfield’s lot. Jessica and I have had a few run-ins with them lately and they’re behaving in a way which doesn’t quite fit their bill.”

“How so?” asked Archie, intrigued.

“Well for starters,” said Edward, “they attacked Jessica here, who was a Linear at the time, in her home to retrieve a stolen necklace which she’d received unknowingly from a thief for hire.”

“The Eternity Stone?” asked Archie. Edward nodded. “You poor girl,” he said to Jessica, “that must have been horrible.”

“It wasn’t one of my better nights, let’s put it that way.”

“Furthermore,” continued Edward, “When we attempted to return the Stone to the Archfield Museum, we found them waiting, with one of them posing as the Curator. They took the real curator as a hostage. Fortunately I was able to swap out the real Stone for a decoy, but I’d wager that they’ll be coming after the real deal soon enough.” Edward picked up his glass and took a long sip of his custard. “Now I don’t know about you Arch, but it seems like they’re going to an awful lot of trouble for one gem.”

Archied nodded silently, nursing his Scotch. ‘You’re not wrong there,” he said and then downed the last of his drink. “As it happens, I have heard rumblings; more like whispers really, about some strange goings-on within The Black Glove. A lot of the lower members frequent my establishment, I maintain neutrality here as you know Edward. So as long as everybody plays nice, I let them in.” He spoke directly to Jessica for those last two sentences.

“What kind of whispers exactly?” asked Edward, with his curly straw sticking from his mouth.

“There’s been talk of a leadership change. The Black Glove is under new management, as it were.”

Edward looked astonished, “Somebody took out Crawlfield?”

“Not quite,” said Archie. “From what I hear Crawlfield is still the official leader as far as the men are concerned, but he’s more of a figurehead now. The real person pulling the strings is some mysterious newcomer; someone whom even Crawlfield ‘The Beserker’ is scared of.” Archie scoffed, “Now that’s a worrying thought.”

“Yes, it is,” said Edward. Jessica noted that he had a particular look in his eye when he was processing information. She could almost see his mind ticking away; calculating; sorting through what he was learning and categorising it, filing it away and formulating or adjusting theories to suit.

“So this new leader,” ventured Jessica, “he’s the one who wants the Eternity Stone so desperately?”

“That would be my best guess,” said Archie. He attempted to sip his Scotch but then remembered that his glass now contained only ice. He looked at it disappointedly and shook it a little, before resigning himself to his fate and placing it on the table.

“But hiring a cat-burglar to steal it once is one thing,” said Edward, “but why did they try to steal it a second time, using their own men, when we tried to return it to the museum? It seems like a lot of risk and planning for a single piece of jewellery. Do you know anything about this new player at all?”

“Sorry old chap, not an ounce of information. As far as I know, nobody knows anything at all and you know how steadily information flows through my establishment. If I haven’t heard anything than this fellow must be more than secretive; he must be a ghost.”

“Hmm,” said Edward. “I hate trying to arrest ghosts; it’s a nightmare trying to get the handcuffs to stay on.”

Jessica thought that she’d take a stab at her own line of inquiry; she was, after all, a detective in training. “So what makes the Eternity Stone so special anyway? I mean it was on display in a museum and it sure is different to any gem that I’ve ever seen, not that that’s a particularly broad sample, so what makes it so different? Edward you said something about it being time-sensitive and absorbing Chronon Radiation. Maybe whatever makes the Stone unique has something to do with why they’re so hell-bent on getting their hands on it.”

Edward gave Jessica a broad smile and said, “Atta girl.”

Jessica gave her own smile in return, though she did her best not to let her cheeks knock her eyeballs out. After all, she didn’t want to seem too desperate for approval.

“As a matter of fact the Eternity Stone is unique,” said Edward. “It was found in India in 2322 during an excavation project. It completely threw the world’s greatest Geologists and Minerologists for a loop; they’d never seen anything like it. It’s twice as hard as Diamond with a unique lattice unlike anything ever observed and whatever element or elements it’s made of aren’t found on the Periodic Table and seem to bond in a way unlike anything else in the universe. It also has unique properties when it comes to radiation, especially Time Radiation.”

“Chronons,” said Jessica understandingly.

Edward nodded. “The trouble is that nobody could ever really figure out what to do with it or how to properly understand it. So it was donated to the Archield Institute in 2391 and it’s remained there since. Until now of course. Naturally the Temporal Council keeps a close eye on it, that’s why they ensured that it was sent to a museum founded by an Archaic.”

Jessica found it utterly bizarre having a history lesson about the future, but incredibly fun at the same time. She wanted to ask about the museum being founded by an Archaic, but felt that it wasn’t really important right now and filed it away with the four thousand other questions she planned to ask later.

“So could they use the Stone and it’s time-sensitiveness in any way? I don’t know, can it be used as a weapon or something?”

Edward shook his head. “No, the Council made sure of that, they ran their own tests independently of the Linear scientists. It’s not dangerous in any way, it just glows in the presence of Chronons, i.e. Time Travellers, that’s all.”

Archie cleared his throat and said, “Well...” He deliberately let his words hang as he and Edward shared a look. Amazingly Edward managed to convey the impression of rolling his eyes without so much as tilting his head. It was extraordinary.

“Well, it could have something to do with the legend,” said Archie.

“Ah! Here we go,” said Edward.

“What? It makes sense doesn’t it? It provides the motivation that you’ve been looking for.”

“No, not motivation, fabrication. Folklore; fairytale; myth; that’s all the legend is,” he said, waving his curly straw like a sword. “Hayden Crawlfield would not go to so much trouble and risk over a superstition. No matter how scary his new boss is.”

“Hey guys, mind filling me in?” Jessica had to wave her hands a bit to get their attention.

“It’s nothing much really,” said Edward. “It’s just a story about origin of the stone.”

“Story or not,” said Archie, “there are people who believe in these things, you must admit that old boy. People have gone to war for a lot less. After all, what are ideals if not stories that we tell ourselves?”

Edward tilted his head forward a little. “I suppose. But I’m still not convinced.”

Jessica really felt out of the loop and desperately wanted to be brought up to speed. “Guys? The legend, please?”

Edward finished the last of his custard, abandoning his straw and downing it in one swift gulp. “Delicious,” he said with honest content. “Archie, you seem to be the expert on the legend, why don’t you regale Jessica?”

“My pleasure,” said Archie. He leaned forward and faced Jessica. “Are you comfortable? Good. Here is The legend of the Eternity Stone, or so it is told...”

“...Millions of years ago, at the dawn of time, a beast was born from the darkness. This beast was unlike any other, for it did not eat maidens, nor children, nor men, nor animal or plant of any kind. The only thing that could whet this beast’s appetite was time itself.”

“Wait,” interjected Jessica, “a monster that *eats* time? Is that possible?” Jessica found it hard to gauge what was realistic and what wasn’t anymore, so she just had to ask.

“Well,” started Archie.

“Not really,” finished Edward.

“Nothing is impossible,” retorted Archie. “Isn’t that what you always say old boy?”

“True,” said Edward. “But by that logic, impossibility is in fact impossible, making your previous statement invalid. Never trust my logic, it tends to be all gobbity libbity.”

Archie’s face went slack. “You can be downright infuriating at times, you know that right?”

“You’d be surprised how often I hear that,” said Edward with a look of surprise.

Jessica cleared her throat loudly. “Can we continue please?”

“Yes,” agreed Edward, “but perhaps the abridged version, eh Arch?”

Archie sighed. “You really know how to spoil my fun old boy. Very well. The gist of the story is this: The beast was on the verge of destroying the whole of time and space; all of history erased by its hunger. To fight it, time sent forth a hero to slay the time-eating beast. But being a noble man, he did not slay the beast, because after all, it wasn’t the beast’s fault that it had to eat time in order to survive. Anyway, he imprisoned the beast in a box at the very beginning of time, where it would be cursed to spend all of eternity removed from time; alive yet separate from all else. As a reward for this deed, time promised to protect the hero for the rest of his life. Oh and I forgot to mention that the beast had a third eye that shone like a jewel. The hero took this third eye as a reminder of the dangers of lust and hunger. Remember that, it’ll be important later.”

“Unfortunately for our hero,” he continued, “the beast was quite cunning and had a plan for revenge and freedom. Using its former third eye the beast was able to seal the knight in a box as well. Inside this box the knight would live as normal, except time would not be able to touch him; he was cursed to be immortal, watching his loved ones fall around him.” Archie sighed and shook his head, sadness glinting in his eyes. “Can you imagine such a thing? People always seem to think that death is the ultimate price to pay. But sometimes, sometimes life can be a far greater punishment.”

Archie’s face turned two shades sadder than it had been before and he swallowed hard. He looked at Edward and he returned the gaze, but before long Edward broke away and turned his attentions back to his glass. It spoke volumes about the two men and Jessica was beginning to feel suspicions building inside her mind.

The thought of immortality had always sounded so amazing to Jessica. But now the mere thought of watching her friends and family die of old age while she remained young, sent a shiver down her spine. She remembered when she and Edward had synchronised; when she had seen his Timeline. He was immortal but he had not explained to her how he had come to be that way. Could the legend be more than a legend? She looked at Edward, sitting there and playing with his curly straw. He sensed her eyes upon him and looked up at her and for a moment, just a moment, they’re eyes were locked and she saw an endless pool of pain and tragedy; of loss and suffering; of age too great to bear and guilt to heavy to share.

Then he looked away to just above her eyes and he smiled that big grin of his and he made a stupid joke. But just for a second he had let his mask slip and now when she looked at him, she could see that pain as clear as day, no matter how hard he tried to hide it.

The silence in the room was becoming deafening so Jessica had to end it. “So how does the stone fit into the story?”

“Good question,” chirped Edward.

“Ah, well the legend goes on to say that the knight eventually realised that the beast was the cause of his misfortune. Upon coming to this conclusion he buried the beast’s third eye deep within the earth, hoping to rid himself of its influence and leave the beast to its isolation.”

Jessica thought about this for moment before voicing her theory. “So the third eye of the beast...that’s the Eternity Stone?”

“Well,” mused Archie, “according to the legend.”

“But even if that *were* true,” said Jessica, “or at least they believed it to be true, what use could they have for the magic eye of some time-eating monster locked away at the dawn of time?”

“Well I can’t say anything with certainty, but I have heard a couple of rumours; crazy stories really, that this new leader wants to use the Stone to free the beast from its prison and bring it under his control. How he intends to do that, I haven’t a clue.” He paused for a moment as if choosing his next words wisely. “Now I don’t blame you for being sceptical Edward, we both know that there aren’t any beasts at the dawn of time. You more than most.” There was one of those shared looks again. “But we both know that there is something or *someone* locked away back there.”

Edward didn’t break away this time, he just faced Archie, his expression not giving anything away. Jessica got the impression that they were having an entire conversation between themselves, communicated solely through a gaze. In the end it was Archie that broke away. Edward stood up and began to pace around the chairs in wide circles. “That’s ridiculous, I can count the people who know about him on one hand and I trust them all, even if some of them want me dead. But let’s say that is their goal, even if they are trying to free him, how do they plan to do it and why?”

Archie nodded in agreement but then a thought flashed across his face. “Do you think that a Genetic Imprint Isolator would help?”

Edward stopped in his tracks and did a double take. “What?”

Archie walked over to a large filing cabinet and began rummaging through one of the metallic drawers. He pulled out a file and said, “Aha!” He placed a transparent A4 sheet on the table in front of Jessica, which brought Edward over, hunching over to look at it.

Jessica didn’t understand what was going on so she leant forward to get a closer look. She watched Edward wave his fingers over the sheet, causing a scroll of text and images to fill it. His eyes darted from left to right while he flicked his free index finger to scroll down at a frightening pace. He looked increasingly concerned as he read. Finally he came to the end.

“Now that is worrying,” he muttered before handing the sheet back to Archie.

“Edward what is it?” Jessica tried to look at the sheet but Archie had already taken it back.

“It was a report,” replied Edward.

“A report on what?”

“A government report detailing the creation and subsequent theft of a Genetic Imprint Isolator, developed by the Indonesian Government in the 44th Century.”

Sometimes Jessica honestly thought that Edward didn’t remember that she was still new to all of this and thus needed some extra information from time to time. “Let’s just pretend for a minute that I’m still new to all of this; do you mind telling me what a Genetic Imprint Isolator is?”

Archie answered her immediately. “Well it’s a rather brilliant device which allows one to track an individual, no matter where they are in Time, by locking on to their genetic imprint. All you have to do is place a sample of DNA into the machine and you can find the person it belongs to anywhere in time and space. Obviously you need to have a sample of their DNA to begin with but it’s still a pretty handy little gadget.”

“I see,” said Jessica. “It sounds like it’d be handy in your line of work Edward.”

Edward smiled and gave a nod. “Well that was the idea behind its creation. It was thought that these devices could be used to track down temporal criminals. But,” Edward said with a sigh, “as usual, it didn’t take long for the technology to fall into the wrong hands and be used for other purposes.”

“What kind of other purposes?”

“Well it was soon discovered by certain nefarious individuals that they could use the device to not only locate people in time, but that they could also remove those people; erase them from existence altogether.”

The thought of someone being able to erase her very existence from afar made her feel a bit sick inside.

“Needless to say,” continued Archie, “the Temporal Council outlawed the manufacture and use of G.I.Is almost immediately. They placed agents inside the Linear governments and organisations who were developing them and tied up all of their work with a decent length of red tape, topped with a bow of bureaucracy.”

“Well it sounds like those guys didn’t get the memo,” said Jessica, indicating the file in Archie’s hand. “So is it safe to assume that our friends with the black gloved hands are responsible for relieving the Indonesians of their top secret whatsy-callit?”

“I’d put money on it,” said Edward. “If I were a gambling man of course. Which I’m not. Well that’s not strictly true; I take a gamble every time I step out my door of course. Then of course there was that one time with Sir Francis Drake; most rousing game of Lawn Bowls I ever played. I’m sorry where was I? That’s right, work; The Black Glove and the G.I.I!”

Edward began stroking his chin, looking much like a man who was deep in his own thoughts. “But even if they do have a G.I.I it won’t do them any good. For one thing they don’t have the Stone and for another they don’t have a Complete Temporal Observation Stand-Point.”

“Okay,” said Jessica, beginning to lose her patience for all of this jargon that she didn’t understand, “can someone *please* give me a glossary or a vocabulary list, or ‘An Idiot’s Guide to Time Travel’ or *something*?”

“Oh right, sorry. When one has a brain such as mine it can be difficult to remember that others need time to catch up.

“Oh Edward, I doubt that anyone has a brain like yours.” She was pretty sure that Edward took this as a compliment. It wasn’t.

“A Complete Temporal Observation Stand-Point, or CTOSP,” continued Edward, “is like a sort of peephole in the universe. It’s an anomaly, a rupture in time and space through which the entirety of the Spacetime and all of Timespace can be seen.”

“It really is quite a beautiful sight,” said Archie. “If the sheer intensity doesn’t kill you or drive you mad, that is.”

“So you guys have seen one of these Complete Temporal...thingies?”

“Oh yes, seen one, felt one, smelt one,” said Edward, “which leads me to a concern that’s been lurking at the back of mind for the duration of this conversation Archie. There’s only one Complete Temporal Observation Stand-Point that I know of, in the whole universe.”

Archie nodded, his jaw set tight. “The Furnace.”

“Exactly. Before you ask high inquisitor; miss ‘you never tell me what anything means,’” said Edward mere milliseconds after Jessica opened her mouth, “The Furnace is what we call the CTOSP that’s operated by the Temporal Council and it’s one of the most heavily guarded whosiewhatsits in all of time and space.”

Archie shook his head. “There’s no way that the Black Glove would try to attack the Council. To do something so brazen would mean they’d either have to be incredibly sure of themselves or incredibly stupid. That’s a straight out act of war.”

Edward stroked his chin as he paced. “A little bit of column A, a little bit of column B, I’d say. He made an unsure gesture with his other hand. “But no matter how cuckoo their new leader is, he’s not going to make a move on the Council until they’ve got all of the other, less Wrath of God earning, pieces together. So that means that they’re going to come after the Stone again, lucky me,” he said that last part with enthusiasm so great that Jessica wasn’t sure whether he was faking it or actually being sincere.

“Do you still have the Stone?” asked Archie. ‘Don’t tell me where it is, a simple yes or no will suffice.”

“I’m keeping it close at hand,” he said, tapping his cane against his leg. “It’s always by my side, don’t you worry.”

Archie groaned. “Well now I know that it’s in your cane don’t I?”

“Not necessarily,” said Edward.

“You couldn’t help it, could you?” Archie sighed, “There goes my plausible deniability.”

“That’s OK if anybody asks, you don’t have to deny that it’s plausible, just don’t confirm that it’s truthful.”

There was a little bit more general chit-chat but after ten minutes or so, Edward thought that it was time to get moving.

Archie escorted them out of his office and back to the magic doorway, as Jessica liked to think of it.

“Thank you old friend,” said Edward, “I know what I have to do now.”

“Don’t mention it old boy,” said Archie with a dismissive gesture. “Now don’t you be a stranger! I’d like to see you dropping around to my place for a social call some time. You too Jessica.”

“You know me Arch, busy schedule and all.” His smile softened and he clasped his friend firmly, moving in for a man hug. “I’m sure I’ll be able to find time soon. You’ll never let me hear the end of it otherwise.”

With a final nod Edward walked through the giant gold and wooden doors, a swirl of blue light swathing around him, before the doors slammed shut again.

“It’s been a pleasure meeting you,” said Jessica before heading to the door to do likewise.

“Just one more thing,” said Archie, taking Jessica by surprise.

“Oh? Sure, what’s up?”

Archie gave her a smile that was somehow different to anything she’d seen him use with Edward. This wasn’t an attempt at charm, but rather a genuine look of concern.

“Just keep an eye on the old boy, will you? He may seem like he’s this great, all-knowing saviour of the universe sometimes, which is how he likes people to think of him. But underneath he has a lot of emotional damage and a lot of vulnerability. He tries to hide them away, but they’re there and I worry about him sometimes. I worry about him a lot actually. This case in particular could prove troubling for him.”

Jessica was feeling concerned herself now. Concerned but curious. “Why do you say that?”

Archie looked as though he was about to say something, but just then the doors opened again and there was that same swirling of blue energy. Edward’s voice echoed out to them from the hall outside. “Archie do stop boring my partner and let her come and bask in my greatness!”

Jessica laughed, but became disheartened when she realised that Archie had given up on whatever it was he was going to say.

“Just be there for him ok?” He finally said. “I’m sure he’ll tell you everything when the time comes, but until then just be there for him; be more than his partner or his student, be his friend. I can assure you that he needs you more than you may realise; it’s not often that he actually lets people into his life.”

Jessica felt as though a great weight of responsibility had just been placed on to her shoulders, but at the same time she felt that her bond with Edward had strengthened. With a smile and a nod of her head she bade Archie farewell one final time before heading out to catch up with Edward. She felt that pulse of energy again, but she was prepared for it this time and let it pass through her harmlessly.

Edward was waiting with his back to the door, his hands resting gently on his cane and Sidney was still in his place, smiling at her as she came through. They bade farewell to Sidney and exited the club. Edward pulled his hat on as they entered Timespace again and walked down the stairs, past the long line of guests waiting to enter. Shortly after that they were back in Edward’s library. He suggested a leisurely afternoon stroll to unwind and work out their next step.

“So,” he said as he took her arm in his, “what did you think of Archie and his little club?”

“He seems like a good guy; quite the charmer isn’t he?”

Edward faced her with a smile on his face. “Yes he is. What’s more, he’s saved my life more times than I can count. Of course, I’ve reciprocated a few times myself. The point is that Archie is one of my oldest and dearest friends and there’s nobody whom I trust more than he.” For a moment he seemed to be lost inside his own thoughts, gazing out at something that only he could see. Then, just as quickly, he was back in the present. “Now Jessica my dear, I think that you’ve earned yourself a bit of a rest before the next stage of our investigation.”

Jessica didn’t want to complain, but it had been one hell of a day. Had it been a day? Yes she was pretty sure that it had. Who would have thought that you could fit so much into a single day; nearly one thousand years actually.

“Some R and R would be nice,” she said.

“Good, it’s settled then. Take the rest of the day off and we’ll resume tomorrow. What time shall I come by?”

Jessica had to concentrate very hard to get dates and times sorted in her head. “Um, nine?” she ventured. “In the morning. I take it that tomorrow we’re going to Indonesia?”

“Smart girl, I want to investigate crime scene, you never know what you can learn from a fresh crime scene.”

Jessica felt the chilling spring breeze slice through her clothes. “As long as it’s warm then I’ll be thrilled!”

**CHAPTER TWELVE: TIME SCENE INVESTIGATION**

Oh it was warm alright!

“Why does it have to be so hot?”

“You know, I’ve just realised something about you Jessica, well I noticed thousands of things about you actually, but I like to be succinct. Well as succinct as possible. Which is hard sometimes. Most of the time. Anyway, the point is that out of my many, many observations, I’ve just realised something specific to the current situation.”

“Oh yeah and what’s that?”

“You’re very inconsistent.”

“Excuse me? Inconsistent?”

Edward nodded, “On your first trip into the future you were filled with awe and wonderment. Now that I’ve taken you on a second trip, some fourteen hundred years or so further forward, you’re just complaining about the heat. Furthermore, you thought London was too cold and wanted to go somewhere warm and now that we are somewhere warm, you’re complaining about the heat. Inconsistent.”

Jessica felt like punching him only she was too sweaty and sticky to move. The very thought of lifting her arm and feeling the squelching sweat that had collected under there made her feel nauseous.

They had walked for three blocks now through the bustling streets of Jakarta. The day was Wednesday, the 29th of January, 4397. The temperature: too bloody hot for Jessica’s liking.

“How you can stand it?”

“Your complaing? Quite simple; I tend to just ignore other people and only focus on what I’m saying. It does wonders for me.”

“No,” she said in as aggravated a tone as she could muster. “I mean the heat. How can you walk around in plus forty degree heat, in a frock coat?”

Edward shrugged nonchalantly. “I must have a high tolerance for discomfort. That’s probably why I don’t tend to notice when I’ve created a socially awkward situation. It can be a little perturbing at times.”

Edward had warned her about the heat and she had dressed accordingly in a flowing floral summer dress and a large floppy hat, with a pair of large sunglasses. Edward had chided her when she voiced her hatred of heat; he told her that she was Australian and should be used to it. She had thought that a fair point. However, she had countered by pointing out that she was a pale redhead whose Irish ancestors had gifted her with skin that not only made paper look like tar in comparison, but changed to match the colour of her hair whenever exposed to direct sun light for more than five minutes.

The streets were a mass of people with great crowds writhing through the city which was a blend of traditional culture and the latest, or what Jessica assumed to be the latest, in technology and architecture.

“So how exactly are we going to get in?” she asked when they came to a large complex surrounded by a chain link fence. Words hung in the air which read: Pan-Asian Experimental Technology Centre- Restricted Access.

“I was just going to rely on my charm.”

“We’re in big trouble.”

They walked closer to the security gate and Jessica felt a prickle dance across her skin. “Whoa,” she said. She could feel the hairs standing on her arms and the back of her neck.

“You felt that, did you?” asked Edward. “It seems as though my suspicions were correct. This whole complex has been Temporally sealed, obviously a deliberate attempt to hide it from the Temporal Council.”

“So that’s why we couldn’t Flux straight in?”

“Precisely. Whoever was behind the development of this Genetic Imprint Isolator knew about our world, what’s more they did so with the knowledge that what they were doing was illegal.”

“The plot thickens,” said Jessica.

They approached the guard station and a man wearing a light blue summer uniform and a beret, holding a large black gun.

“Halt,” he said with only the faintest of accents, “Entry is strictly prohibited to members of the public; authorised personnel only.” He eyed Edward suspiciously and arched an eyebrow in confusion.

“Well that’s splendid then because we’re not public at all, on the contrary, we consider ourselves to be quite private, don’t we Jessica?”

“Oh yes, very private.”

“See, didn’t I tell you?” Edward tried to shake his hand but he raised his gun to eye level and aimed it at Edward’s head. “Well jolly good sir, jolly good. I must say that you’re very diligent, isn’t he diligent Jessica?”

“Very diligent,” she parroted.

“Yes, very diligent, that’s what I thought. But you don’t need to worry, I see where the confusion lies; simple mistake, could happen to anyone, couldn’t it Jessica?”

“Oh definitely, anyone!”

“See, we’re in agreement then? All shall be forgotten, no need for us to mention this to anyone, wouldn’t want you to throw your career away over a silly mistake now would we Jessica?”

“That’s the last thing we want.”

“Exactly!”

The guard lowered his weapon just a little and his thick, black moustache twitched. “What are you talking about, me losing my career?”

“Oh,” said Edward with mild surprise, “I don’t think he knows does he Jessica?”

“I don’t think he does,” she said with the same tone.

“Know what?” he demanded, lowering the gun. “Who are you?”

“Who are we?” Edward laughed and jabbed a subtle elbow into Jessica’s side, suggesting that she do likewise, which she did. “My dear fellow, I am Chief Inspector Theodore Graves and this is my associate Deputy Inspector Jessica Bellows. We’re here about your little incident. You know, that little top secret, nonexistent machine that you *didn’t* lose last night.”

The guard stiffened and his eyes grew wide. “But how did you...? That information is strictly confidential!”

Edward leaned in towards the guard, smiling subtly. “Well they need *somebody* to find it for them, don’t they?”

“I suppose...”

“Who do you think they called?” asked Edward, placing his arm around the guard’s shoulders.

“We deal in high profile, low-key cases,” said Jessica. “Discretion is our speciality.”

“I don’t know,” stammered the guard, “I should check in with my superiors.” He went to tap the side of his head but Edward grabbed his wrist.

“I’m sure you’re aware that this is a very sensitive case,” said Edward, “strictly need to know. We can’t risk letting those who don’t need to know, know. You know?”

The guard looked confused but he lowered his arm and nodded, before stepping aside and letting them through.

“I can’t believe that actually worked,” whispered Jessica.

“It’s all a matter of confidence,” said Edward. “If you believe your lie then so will they. Though it is hard to believe something that you know to be a lie. Hmm maybe I should rethink that.”

Edward said good morning to every single person they passed on the way in, even going so far as to compliment haircuts or suggest going to lunch sometime. He told Jessica that by drawing attention to himself, he was actually detracting attention from himself. After all, when an oddly dressed stranger waves at you manically and asks how your kids are, you don’t stop to ask for his credentials, you just keep walking as briskly as possible.

The complex was surprisingly easy to navigate and it didn’t take long for them to find Laboratory Six, the location from which the G.I.I. had been stolen.

“Hello, hello ladies and gentlemen!” Edward beamed, as they passed through a chunky metal door which slid effortlessly and silently to the side. There were three people inside the lab, two women and a man, all wearing lab coats and safety hats. They all stared at Edward and Jessica with total confusion and disbelief. One woman even dropped her jaw.

“I know, I know,” said Edward as he took each person’s hand in turn, clasping them between his own and shaking them furiously. “You didn’t expect us here so soon, now did you? I can see it in your eyes, you see. But my partner and I, that’s my partner, we cleared our schedule for the day as soon as you called; not a moment to waste, I said to Jessica over there. Mrs. Johnson can look for her own Chihuahua, this is important work!”

The three people all looked at one another, clearly exchanging glances, expressions, shrugs and gestures. One of the women, probably in her early forties, with caramel skin and dark hair that hung down over her shoulders in deep ringlets, stepped forward with a stern expression on her face, clearly she was in charge.

“Excuse me, but would you please mind explaining who you two are and what you’ are doing in a strictly prohibited area?” she spoke with the same faint accent as the guard outside.

“Chief Inspector Theodore Graves and Deputy Inspector Jessica Bellows, here to find your missing Genetic Imprint Isolator that never existed in the first place. Do you happen to have any crumpets?”

The woman, Bethari according to her security tag, did not look convinced. She maintained her fierce stare and Jessica was worried that she was actually going to start burning a hole through Edward’s skull. However, he just kept his face locked in that broad, charming smile of his.

“I was not informed of any authorities being called,” she said sceptically with one eyebrow raised. “This investigation is supposed to be strictly internal; off the books.”

“Oh but that’s why they called us, we never do anything by the books.”

She continued to stare at him, clearly sizing him up. Then she turned to Jessica, fixing her with the same gaze which was somehow both fire and ice at the same time. It took less than twelve seconds for Jessica to have to look away. She remeinded her of her year eight English teacher. That wasn’t a good thing.

“Call Supervisor Alatas,” she said without taking her eyes from Edward and Jessica. “And put security on alert, we may have a breach.”

The man of the group, an older fellow with no hair but a thick, white beard, moved his finger towards the side of his head.”

“Wait,” said Edward, not out of desperation or fear, but just a simple word. “Bethari,” he said after glancing at her tag, “may I call you Beth? I take that as a no. Bethari you seem like a very career-oriented woman and I respect that; understand completely. So my guess is that you’re pretty outraged by the theft of your machine; put a lot of man hours, or woman hours, into it I imagine?”

She folded her arms. “If you’re going to make a point I would do it within the next fifteen seconds.”

“My point is,” said Edward, resting his hands gently on her shoulders, “that I’m sure that you want to do anything in your power to find the G.I.I; it’s like your baby. You and I know that an internal investigation isn’t going to go anywhere. What you built was illegal; your superiors would much prefer to just sweep this whole thing under the rug. I know that and I think you know that.”

For the first time since they had arrived she shifted her stance uncomfortably and diverted her eyes to the floor. It was only brief, but a chink in her armour nonetheless.

“So what do you say?” Edward continued. “You want it back and we don’t want the thieves to use it. How about we work together and you let us find your machine for you? I think that you know, deep inside, that we’re your best shot.”

She continued to stare at him but her face had softened, Jessica could tell that Edward had struck a chord. She hesitantly lowered her arms to her sides and slumped her shoulders slightly, opening up her body into a less defensive posture. She looked at the bearded man, who was still holding his finger by his head and she indicated for him not to place the call.

“Alright,” she said, “do what you have to do, but it will be under my strict observation, understood? If I suspect you of any tampering or foul-play of any kind, you’ll be out of that ridiculous outfit and in a Prison Moon jumpsuit so fast it’ll make you dizzy for a month.” She sot a look at Jessica, “That goes for you too.”

With all of the intense threats out of the way, Edward and Jessica stepped further into the laboratory.

“Can you feel that?” Edward asked. He held out his hand flat and noted that his hairs were standing on end. “There’s been a temporal disturbance here recently, I can feel it, can’t you Jessica? It’s that prickling, tingling sensation running from the back of your neck all the way down to the base of your spine. It seems like we’re on the right track.”

“So The Black Glove are behind this?” Jessica asked.

“Well, we can’t say that for certain, but we do know that an Archaic or Archaics were here recently and it’s probably a safe bet that they were Black Glove agents.”

“Excuse me,” said Bethari, “Do you mind?”

“Not usually,” said Edward.

Bethari scowled. “My patience is wearing very thin Mr. Graves, so if you wouldn’t mind hurrying your *investigation* along?”

It was only now that Jessica realised that she knew nothing about crime scene investigation, apart from what she’d learned from that T.V show, the name of which escaped her. However, not wanting to look like she had no idea what she was doing, especially in front the eagle-eyed Bethari and her colleagues, she decided to stick close to Edward and follow his lead. Of course, this is exactly what she would have done even without the presence of strangers.

“So what do we do first?” she asked Edward in a whisper.

“We look for clues of course,” said Edward happily.

“Right,” said Jessica. “Can you be more specific?”

Edward smiled and said, “First we establish where the crime took place, that’s the crime scene. I take it that this is where the G.I.I was housed,” he said to Bethari, indicating a smashed glass case with several stray wires and tubes hanging inside from the top and sides.

“Yes,” said Bethari. Jessica could hear the tapping sound of her high heeled boots as she approached them.

“Right,” said Edward, “what do you see Jessica?”

“Broken glass?” she offered. She really wished that she could have thought of something cooler and more impressive than that. “Wait, what’s that? A bit of leather?”

“Yes indeed,” said Edward as he pulled on a pair of disposable gloves and produced a pair of tweezers, picking up what seemed to be a torn piece of leather. “Rather like what might come from a black leather glove that’s been torn on a broken piece of glass. Very good.”

“So, the Black Glove did steal it.”

“Well, that’s how it seems. But you know what they say about assuming,” said Edward. “Now, do you notice anything odd about the broken glass?”

Jessica stared at the small broken shards of glass which were scattered around the inside of the case, studying every detail that she could see, seeking to make sense of what was in front of her and draw a conclusion from her observations.

“I’ve got nothing,” she said.

“Come now Jessica, it’s literally right in front of you. No? Ok.” He turned to Bethari, “I’d wager that you didn’t find any glass on the floor, did you?”

She cocked her head and arched her eyebrow. “No, all of the glass is inside the case.”

“Yes,” said Edward, stroking his chin, “that’s what I thought. Tell me, whose project was this? I mean if you follow the chain of command all the way to the top, who was it that pushed to get this thing off the ground?”

Bethari’s mouth opened in display of disbelief and resistance. “Excuse me, but what makes you think that I’m just going to give you information like that? I hardly think that it’s relevant.”

“Not relevant? Not relevant? My dear Bethari, *everything* is relevant! From the tiniest grain of salt on the bottom of someone’s shoe, to the largest governments, everything around us is *relevant*.”

Once again Edward’s gaze seemed to make her feel vulnerable for just a moment and so she told him what he wanted to know. “Isaiah Herald,” she said. “Memeber of the United Science Conglomerate. After the G.I.Is were all scrapped, he stated this project in secret; bankrolled it under the table.”

“Well then he’s our man,” said Edward matter of factly.

“Excuse me?” said Bethari.

“Yeah, what she said,” said Jessica.

“Oh come on,” said Edward, “am I really the only one who can see this?”

Everyone in the room just stared expectantly towards him.

“Oh dear, it’s terribly hard being brilliant,” he said. “Right! Jessica, the glass. If it were smashed while the G.I.I was still inside then where would the glass fall?”

“Um inside the case?” she ventured. She felt like she was in high school all other again. Although in high school she usually knew all of the answers. Except in P.E. but that doesn’t count.

“Come on Jess, think about it. Use that big brilliant, beautiful brain of yours!”

“The device!” she said suddenly. “Some of the glass would have fallen on top of the G.I.I”

“Not just some, most,” said Edward excitedly. “Come on girl, keep going, keep going.” He was becoming quite excited now and began making frantic, fluid movements with his hands.

Jessica thought for a moment and then smiled as a light bulb switched on in her head. “Then the glass should have fallen off as they removed it from the case, leaving some on the floor, possibly even leaving a trail of glass dust out the door. It would have also messed up the glass in the case as they hauled it out, but instead there’s a nice, even layer of on the bottom of the case.”

“Oh yes baby, that’s it, you are on fire!” Edward’s face was positively beaming and he was wringing his hands like he was using an invisible bar of soap. “Conclusion?”

“The thieves smashed the glass *after* they removed the G.I.I. which means that they already had access, because somebody had given them the security codes. The broken glass was just a ruse, to make it look like an outside job.”

“What about the Temporal disturbance; somebody Fluxed in here, which is odd because...”

“Because we couldn’t Flux in here,” continued Jessica, now nearly as excited as Edward. “We had to Flux in two blocks away because that was as close as we could get. So not only has somebody Temporally Shielded this place, but somebody, probably the same somebody, let the thief or thieves *through* the shielding!”

“Ok now bring it home superstar, who do you think could have organised this little snatch and cover up?” said Edward.

“This Isaiah Herald guy? He needed a G.I.I. so her organised for one to be made in secret, then had it stolen for himself?”

“Sounds like a plot to me,” said Edward, positively giddy with excitement. “There’s a good chance that Mr. Herald is the secret new leader of The Black Glove, or at least working for him. He needed a G.I.I. to use the Stone but they were all outlawed and destroyed so he just found a way to get one custom made. Brilliant!”

“No it’s not,” said Bethari, “this is absurd! I don’t even understand what you’re talking about anymore. Black Gloves? Stones? A scientist respected throughout the galaxy, turned thief?”

Edward calmed down instantly and put his hands on Bethari’s arms. “Believe what you want Bethari, but our work here is down. Time for us to crack this case wide open. Thank you for your help.” He moved towards the door before spinning on his heels and flourishing his cane. “Oh and try not to work on anymore illegal projects. I’m sure that you had noble intentions, what with the pursuit of science and whatnot, but you know what they say about the road to damnation being built on best intentions. Or something like that. Cheerio!”

With that Edward strode right out the door, calling for Jessica to follow him. Bethari looked as though she wanted to say something but had been rendered speechless. Jessica just smiled awkwardly and gave a little wave before following Edward out.

“So now that we almost certainly know that The Black Glove have a G.I.I. and that they’ll be after the real Eternity Stone, what now?” Jessica had only just fallen into step with Edward when she began hurriedly speaking.

“Simple,” said Edward, “we give them what they want.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that we’re going to arrange an exchange: The Stone for the Curator.”

Jessica stopped in her tracks but had to quickly resume as Edward kept walking. They exited through the main doors and Edward pulled his hat on then gave a friendly wave to the guard, who still looked a little confused.

“Hold on, you’re just going to give them what they want?”

“The Curator’s life is in danger,” said Edward simply.

“But you’re not really going to hand it over are you? You’re going to trick them again, right?”

“Well I doubt that they’ll fall for the same trick twice.”

“But you do have a plan?”

“Of course, I always have a plan. Except when I don’t. But even then I usually plan to make a plan, which really is a plan unto itself, so I stand by my earlier statement.”

They reached the alleyway where they had Fluxed in, just beyond the perimeter of the Temporal Shield.

“You really do worry me,” said Jessica. “Sometimes I don’t think you take this stuff seriously.”

“Oh Jessica,” said Edward softly. He looked at her with those deep blue eyes and that soft smile. He stooped down and touched her chin ever so delicately. “I never take anything seriously. And that’s why I’m so good at what I do. Now let’s get you home, you need to rest up and I’ve got some planning to do.”

Jessica couldn’t help but smile. He seemed to have that effect on her and she was beginning to hate it. Well she wanted to hate it, but he just made it so difficult.

She focused on Edward and then focused on Timespace and then they vibrated into a blue haze and the alleyway was empty.

**CHAPTER THIRTEEN: A MOTHER OF A PROBLEM**

Jessica was beginning to learn just how confusing and disorientating the life of a time traveller could really be. She was living two lives and she knew full well which one of them she was more invested in. While she was with Edward she scarcely spared a thought for her home, her job or her so called real life. It was difficult for her to adjust upon her return, to remember that she still had a whole other set of obligations and responsibilities to deal with. Living through a day or two while those around you had barely seen an hour pass could make it difficult to stay on top of things, especially when those days had been spent jumping through time periods and investigating criminals from the past and future.

Jessica returned home at 8:30am on Tuesday morning, half an hour after Edward had picked her up for their Indonesian trip. He had advised her against returning to the exact same point that she left from, unless she had to and if she could, to allow the amount of time that had passed for her, relatively, to pass in her own time. He said that this was to reduce Temporal Strain on herself and her Timeline.

She looked at her watch, which Edward had modified for her to keep track of her own time, as well as local time. Right on the money.

She shuffled towards her room and looked longingly at her bed. What she really wanted to do was to sleep and recover from all of the Fluxing she’d been doing, but she had to get to work. Two lives in one; two jobs in one; two days in one; still the same amount of sleep. That hardly seemed fair.

She put away her floppy sun hat and removed her summer dress, giving herself the once over in the mirror. *Still the same creamy white*, she thought, satisfied. It would have been difficult to explain if she’d managed to get a tan overnight. That’s something she’d have to continue to be mindful of in the future. Or the past, whatever the case may be.

She slipped into a Doctor Who shirt and a pair of leggings then did a quick stock take of the kitchen and made a brief shopping list for after work, before grabbing her handbag, slipping her shoes on and heading out the door.

She returned home at six, carrying two shopping bags with her. Before she could make it to the shower though, or even think about cooking dinner, there was a knock at the door. Wary with thoughts of Black Glove agents on her mind, she closed her eyes and tried to sense any disturbances in Timespace. Nothing. She sure hoped that she had done it correctly.

She opened the door and was met by a middle aged woman with full, deep crimson hair and a set of hazel eyes which were just beginning to be marked by crow’s feet. She was Jessica’s height but with a fuller, rounder build and wore a grey suit with a green blouse and a large silver necklace. Her left hand clutched the strap of a large handbag that hung over that shoulder.

“Oh hi Mum,” she said, surprised. “What are you doing here?”

Her Mum, Diane cocked her head to the side. “Aren’t you going to invite me in?”

“Oh right, sorry,” said Jessica, shaking her head. “Come on in. Excuse the shopping bags, I just got home. Do you want to stay for dinner? I didn’t shop for company but I could probably stretch it out.”

“No, no, that’s alright dear, I won’t keep you long.” She took a furtive look at Jessica’s burgundy couch.

“Take a seat Mum, you’re making the place look untidy.”

Diane smiled and took a seat on the edge of the couch. “I haven’t heard from you for a few days so I thought that I’d come and see if you were alright. How did that date go with that young man. What was his name?”

“Sean?” said Jessica, softly clenching a fist as the name escaped her lips. “Oh he wasn’t really what I expected.” *Understatement of the century right there!* “It was just a single date, no biggie.”

“So you aren’t planning on seeing him again?”

“Not if I can help it,” said Jessica in as casual a tone as she could manage.

Suddenly Jessica felt an odd sensation, like a pulse at the back of her head. She heard a voice echoing from somewhere. “Jessica,” it said. “Jessica can you hear me?”

She looked around the room and then turned to her mother. “Did you just hear that?”

“Hear what?” asked Diane.

Jessica shook her head and blinked. “Nothing, sorry, I thought I heard a noise, that’s all. Would you like a drink?”

“Oh a Coke would be lovely. It’s been a long day.” Diane had often claimed that her soft drink addiction was her only vice. Well, since she’d given up smoking anyway.

Jessica walked to the fridge and opened the door. Again she felt a pulsation in her head. “Jessica you need to make contact, focus on my voice.” The voice sounded clearer now, it was Edward. He was trying to contact her through Timespace. *Not now*, she thought.

“Is a can alright Mum? I don’t have any bottles.” She did her best to push Edward’s voice aside. She handed her mother the soft drink and took a seat next to her.

“Are you alright Jessica? You look a bit distracted.” Her brows furrowed into a look of worry.

“Just tired,” said Jessica. “It’s been a long few days.”

“Is that why you haven’t called me?” She asked the question in that particular way that only she could. Polite and conversational, but with an intricate weave of emotions, implications and intonations which automatically made Jessica avert her eyes to the carpet. It was the way she spoke to her students and the way she spoke to Jessica whenever she was displeased or disapproving of her. She got to hear that voice a lot.

She took a long sip of Coke and then turned ever so slightly further towards Jessica. “Well?”

“I’ve just been busy with work,” said Jessica.

“You’ve been working for nearly five years now and living alone for nearly nine months, yet you’ve found time to call me every day, work or no work, up until last weekend, after your date with this Sean boy. Forgive me for being concerned.”

“Mum I,” she felt another, stronger pulse and an accompanying flash of blue hit just behind her eyes.

“Jessica,” came Edward’s voice, “are you alright, can you hear me? If you can, I’m going to come over, there’s been a development in the case and you’re not responding which is worrying me.”

Jessica suddenly sprang to her feet. “Oh no, not now!”

“Jessica, what’s wrong, what are you doing?” asked her mum, who had also risen, elegantly to her feet.

Before Jessica could say anything she felt a familiar sensation, the feeling of a time distortion, the feeling that she had whenever Edward Fluxed near her. Then there was a knock on the door.

She looked at the door and then looked at her mother and just smiled.

“Well aren’t you going to answer it?” asked Dianne.

“Ah yep, sure,” said Jessica.

Cautiously, she walked to the door and looked through the peephole, straight into a large blue eyeball which moved back to reveal Edward’s full face. She opened the door a crack, leaving the chain lock in place.

“Oh thank goodness!” bellowed Edward, “I was beginning to worry, you weren’t answering my calls, I thought that The Black Glove might have come after you again.”

“Ah no, I’m fine,” said Jessica in barely more than a whisper.

“What’s wrong? Why are you whispering? It’s not that late is it? I make it to be just after 6pm,” he said as he checked his pocket watch. “Do you have elderly neighbours who are asleep? Is that it?”

“No, no, it’s just not a good time, can you come back...”

“Jessica,” called Diane, “who is it?”

Edward peered over her shoulder and said, “Oh I’m sorry, I didn’t realise that you have company.”

“It’s my mother.”

Edward’s face lit up. “Oh splendid, I love mothers, so cuddly and cross. I’d be one myself except I don’t meet the proper job requirements.”

Jessica became aware of someone standing behind her and then heard her mother say, “Oh hello,” she paused as she examined Edward’s odd appearance. It was the first time in her life that Jessica had ever heard her mother fall speechless. “Whatever you’re selling,” she finally said, “she doesn’t want any.”

“Oh don’t worry ma’am, I’m not a salesman; never sold anything in my life, well unless you count the time I traded Socrates a toga for a silver coin. But that wasn’t really a sale, it was work related, the coin was actually a rather advanced computer processor. Though I guess trading goods for currency such as a coin is the very definition of a sale, isn’t it? Hello, Edward Graves, pleased to make your acquaintance.” He removed his hat and gave a bow. “So are you going to let me in Jessica or are you going to leave me out here until the old lady across the hall calls the police. Hello,” he said, waving at someone out of view.

Jessica rubbed a hand over her face but let Edward in, hoping for the best.

“Mum, this is Edward. Edward, this is my mother, Diane.”

“The pleasure’s all mine,” said Edward. He removed his top hat and then made to kiss Diane’s hand but she withdrew it. “Ah yes, quite right. Hygiene and whatnot.”

Diane studied Edward with those fierce, scrutinising eyes that could burn through the lies of even the most resolute of her students.

“It’s nice to meet you Mr. Graves.” Her eyes moved slowly up Edward’s body, from the spats on his shoes all the way up to the wing collar on his shirt and the cravat around his neck. “Tell me, how exactly do you know my daughter?”

“She’s my partner,” said Edward.

Jessica gasped and jabbed an elbow into Edward’s side, causing him to groan.

“I mean partner in training!”

“Excuse me?” said Diane, shocked.

Another elbow and another groan.

“I mean, we work together!”

“At the shop,” said Jessica

“The what? Oh yes, right, the bookshop,” said Edward, catching on as he rubbed his aching ribs. “The bookshop where we work and where we sell books together. Right here in the good ol’ Twenty-First Century, no other time, just here, doing what normal, average, young Twenty-First Century Booksellers do. Selling books...drinking coffee...kissing...”

“What?” yelled Diane.

“Ouch! I mean, no, no kissing, just books. Books, books, books and more books.”

Diane didn’t look convinced. “Why are you dressed like that then?”

“Ma’am there is an incredibly simple explanation for my clothing.”

“Which is?”

“I’m incredibly weird. And just a little bit eccentric!”

Diane looked at Jessica, who just smiled and prayed for the world to end at that very moment.

“So why do want see my daughter now, outside of work, at this time of the evening?”

“Excellent question,” said Edward. “Jessica?”

“What? Um oh right, well, we were, um, oh I was just lending Edward a book.”

Diane crossed her arms and shifted her weight onto her right leg. “You both work in a bookshop but you have to lend him a book? I thought that you kids just downloaded everything these days. I’m sure that you can find an e-book somewhere.”

“What can I say,” said Edward, “I’m old fashioned.”

“Obviously,” said Jessica with a forced laugh which she hoped would be picked up by her mother. It wasn’t. This wasn’t going well, she’d never been a very good liar, especially with her mum.

Diane took a few steps closer to Edward and stood up on her toes so that she could peer into Edwards enchanting blue eyes. She seemed momentarily mesmerised by their hypnotic azure shine, but only for a brief second.

“How old are you Mr. Graves? Twenty-three ? Twenty-five?”

“Oh stop it, you’ll make me blush. You’re about four centuries off. Mind you, I am pushing the half millennium and you know what they say, it’s all downhill from there.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“He’s just joking Mum, he’s a bit of a kidder!”

“Mr. Graves,” said Diane sternly, “I’ll cut to the chase. Are you seeing my daughter or do you intend to see my daughter?”

“Well I’m not seeing her right now because I’m looking at you. But I suppose that I do intend to see her when I turn my head around.”

“Mr. Graves, I am fighting very hard to keep myself from slapping you in the face.”

“Ah, he has that effect on people,” said Jessica. “Anyway Mum, you don’t need to worry, we’re just friends and colleagues. Don’t you think that you should get going? It’s dark and getting late, I’d better get dinner started, not that Edward’s staying for dinner or anything. I’ll just get him his book and he’ll be off, won’t you Edward?”

“Oh yes ma’am, you don’t have to worry about me, fraternising with young girls is the last thing on my mind. You can count on me to be a perfect gentleman towards your daughter, besides we’ve got a man to catch, haven’t we Jess?”

“A man?” suddenly a light bulb turned on in Diane’s mind and she said, “oh,” as if everything had just fallen into place. “Oh I see, the clothes, the eccentric behaviour, I see, I’m sorry, I didn’t realise.” She suddenly looked relieved. “Well then I’ll leave you two to it.” She got up and headed to the door. “But I expect you to call me tomorrow Jessica, I suspect that I’ll want to talk to you a bit more about your new friend here.”

“Sure thing Mum,” said Jessica as she prayed for the awkwardness to just end already.

“Mr. Graves,” said Diane as a farewell.

“It’s been a pleasure Mrs. Lazarus.”

Jessica closed the door and slid the locks into place. Then she pressed her back to the door and slid to the ground with her face pressed into her hands. She made an unintelligible moan.

“Well that went well,” said Edward without a trace of irony, “your mother seems like a charming lady, I don’t know why you don’t like her.”

“I don’t not like her, she can just get under my skin sometimes.” She stared up at Edward. “And you had perfect timing didn’t you? How can a time traveller have such a terrible sense of timing? Do you have any idea how ironic that is? And not in a good way either!”

“We’re synchronised remember, I had no choice.”

“You could have waited a few hours or something when I didn’t respond.”

“I was worried about you. Is this one of those moody, angst-ridden teenage girl moments that you’re having right now?”

“What? No! I’m just...what did you come here for anyway?”

“Well I came to tell you that the exchange has been organised. You and I are to meet with Hayden Crawlfield and one of his men at a neutral location, at which time we will present them with the Eternity Stone in exchange for Dr. Churchill.”

Jessica stood up. “So we’re actually doing this? You do know that we’re going to be walking into a trap.”

Edward’s voice turned oddly serious. “Jess I know that my reasoning must seem off and you must be concerned. But this is one of those very rare moments when I have to ask you to just trust me, alright?” He smiled. “I promise that everything will be alright, you have my word. Just have faith Jess.”

She nodded, “Alright. If you’re sure.”

“Splendid,” he said softly.

Edward returned to her house the next morning at 10am, she didn’t have to work so it gave her a whole day free.

Jessica opened the door and she saw an undeterminable expression flash across Edward’s face.

“My, my, you’re looking very efficient this morning.”

Jessica looked down at her outfit and smiled. She was wearing a white collared shirt with the sleeves rolled up, a red knitted vest, a black and red tartan skirt, black stockings and a pair of red and white joggers.

“I took your advice about blending in,” she said.

“Good job,” said Edward. “Timeless and elegant, much like myself.”

Jessica left her usual handbag on the kitchen counter and instead opted for a medium sized brown leather satchel from her room.

“I’ve packed a few supplies and provisions, just in case of emergency,” she said.

“Quite the little Girl Guide aren’t you?”

“Well you never know. Speaking of which, where and when is this exchange taking place?”

“The time, Midnight on the First of June, 1928. The place, Excelsior Hill,” said Edward, as if that name carried meaning. “It’s a little place in the middle of the Scottish Highlands.”

“Should I have heard of it before?” asked Jessica.

“Yes. But you definitely haven’t. It was the sight of one of the bloodiest battles in the history of the Earth: The Battle of Excelsior Hill.”

“I don’t think that I’ve ever heard of it.”

“It was an Archaic battle, part of the Intra-Temporal War. It was also the site where the peace treaty, between The Temporal Council and the seven generals of Aeon, was signed. It’s become hallowed ground since then and it’s quite often been used as neutral territory for peace talks and whatnot.”

Jessica didn’t understand what Edward was talking about but before she could ask him any questions he smiled and said, “I’ll tell you all about it. But later, I promise. Right now, we’ve got work to do.”

“Just a sec,” she said before running into her room and grabbing a brown jacket from her wardrobe. “The Scottish Highlands, that sounds cold.” She pulled her sleeves down and pulled her jacket on.

She wasn’t sure what trouble they were getting themselves into, but she was certainly going to be as prepared as she possibly could. She looked up at Edward and he smiled that fabulous smile of his. But she could tell that he was keeping something from her and that worried her. Edward had asked her to have faith in him and to trust him, but when it came down to it, she still barely knew him and he barely knew her. She’d met him less than a week ago and although they had had such amazing adventures since then, it still wasn’t a very long time at all.

Was she a fool for following him into a trap with no idea of his plan, if he had one? Was he more of a fool for *expecting* her to follow? Perhaps she had too much faith in him, but even more worrying to her was the thought that perhaps that he had too much faith in her.

It seemed though that her faith, and his, were about to be put to the test.

**CHAPTER FOURTEEN: UNFAIR TRADE**

Jessica was in a state of shock as she emerged from Timespace, only to be blasted by a torrential downpour of icy water. She made a gasp that was very close to becoming a scream and it felt like a million needles were being simultaneously pressed into her skin.

“Edward!” she screamed over the pelting rain, doing her best to shield her head with her satchel, her clothes clinging uncomfortably to her body. She peered through the icy sheets of water, trying to scan the environment for Edward. Finally she found him, hunched over with his coat pulled tightly round his body and the brim of his top hat overflowing with water. It seemed that he was looking for her too.

Their eyes met in a matter of seconds and Edward leapt into action immediately. He splashed through the marshy ground towards Jessica, pulling his coat off as he went. In the blink of an eye he had wrapped his coat around her and pulled her in close to him.

“Back to Timespace!” he yelled.

Jessica didn’t need to be told twice. In less than fifteen seconds she was back in the translucent blue light. Remarkably she was no longer cold or wet. The only shivering that she was doing was the usual resonance that occurred in Timespace. Edward appeared next to her suddenly, holding two large umbrellas. One was black, the other was rainbow coloured.

“I have a feeling that we might need these,” he said. A smile that said, ‘I’m sorry for not checking the weather and consequently getting you soaked to the bone,’ spread across his face.

For the second time, they emerged from Timespace and onto the soft, wet grass of Excelsior Hill. This time thankfully, Jessica was protected by her black umbrella. Edward, unsurprisingly, had taken the rainbow one.

“Hey, I’m still dry,” she said as she examined her arms.

“Oh yes, of the many functions and effects of Timespace, clothes dryer/heater is one of its most amazing.”

Jessica was about to say something but she stopped when she saw a group of indistinct shapes moving through the rain, across the other side of the hill.

“Edward,” she pointed, “it looks like they’re here.” She was feeling a little nervous.

“Well of course they’re here, it wouldn’t be much of an exchange if only one party turned up now, would it?”

Edward took a step forward. “It’s customary for the two parties to meet midway.”

Jessica grabbed his arm, exposing her own to the freezing rain. She bit her lip to keep a gasp from escaping.

“Are you really sure about this Edward?”

He turned to her and smiled. “Keep faith Jessica.”

Reluctantly, she followed him as they trudged across the muddy, grassy hill. She almost slipped three times, but managed to regain her balance in each instance. She tried to look around but there wasn’t much to see. The clouds had completely eclipsed the midnight moon and the thick curtain of rain made it impossible to see more than a few metres in any direction, with any sense of clarity at least.

The whole place smelled damp and grassy and it reminded Jessica of her High School P.E. classes and being forced to play soccer in the ‘light’ rain. Running around a muddy field, slipping and being pushed over, getting covered in mud; mud up her shorts, in her socks and through her hair. Those were some of her worst memories and it didn’t bode well that they were being dredged up now.

She turned her attention back to the black-clad group in front of them. There were four of them, all wearing black raincoats and they had come to a stop. Edward stopped as well and Jessica did likewise. She tried to look for Dr. Churchill among the group, but they all had their hoods pulled low over their faces.

One of the group stepped forward until they were close enough for Jessica to see the face beneath the hood. Surprisingly, it was a woman. She had long blonde hair that bordered on white, which flowed gracefully around her face, which was tight, like all of her features were being pulled towards the centre. A pair of sleek goggles protected her eyes from the rain. She opened the front of her coat and pulled it back behind her shoulders like a cape. Beneath it she wore a sleeveless black leather cat suit with fur trim around the collar as well as a utility belt of sorts, covered with bags and pouches, the contents of which only she knew. Additionally, Jessica could see what appeared to be the hilt of a sword protruding from the belt.

“Well, well, well, Ivanna Baskov! Crawlfield spared no expense, I see.” Edward twirled his cane, slicing a path through the rain. “Though it is curious that he should hire an assassin to oversee a hostage exchange.”

The crashing of the rain continued, the only sound to hear. A flash of silent lightening flickered shadows across Ivanna’s features. She held up a hand and Jessica tensed. Suddenly one of the other raincoat-covered figures was hurled to the ground; Jessica recoiled in shock and held an arm up in defence as mud splashed over her. Edward remained still.

Without taking his eyes off of Ivanna, he crouched down to roll over the body. It was Dr. Churchill, bound, gagged and beaten. Jessica drew her hand to her mouth to stifle a gasp.

“He’s alive,” said Edward, “how civil of you.”

“We kept our end of the arrangement. Now, the Stone.” Ivanna spat her words out filled with bile and a smooth Eastern European accent sharpened them to a point.

Edward pulled his coat over Dr. Churchill to protect him from the rain and then he rose slowly, never once taking his steely gaze off of the woman in front of him. Jessica didn’t even think that she’d seen him blink.

He unscrewed the top off his cane and tipped out the Eternity Stone, letting it spill into his hand. Its blue light shone brightly, even through the rain, casting everyone in shades of blue.

He let the stone daggle from its chain and held it out in front of him. “Here, take it and leave. But be warned that whatever it is that you’re planning, I will stop you. That’s a promise.”

“Oh undoubtedly Mr. Graves,” said Ivanna. She took the Stone from Edward and held it to her face, the light reflecting off her goggles. “But that is why we have to take precautions.”

There was flash of steel and the sound of something sharp slicing through water and then there was a long, thin blade pointed at Edward’s throat, right on his Adam ’s apple.

“Ah, straight to the point I see.”

“I wouldn’t speak if I were you Mr. Graves. Any movement of your throat could be disastrous for you. It’d be a shame if you were to be killed by a bad joke.”

“Well, live by the bad joke, die by the bad joke. Seems fitting to me.”

Jessica thought she saw an opportunity. While Edward was distracting her, she could Flux into Timespace and grab him. She closed her eyes and began to concentrate on the flow of time all around her...

“Don’t even think about it,” said Ivanna, like she’d just caught a naughty child reaching for the cookie jar. “I can sense you reaching out through time. If you Flux I’ll kill him instantly.”

“Jessica, please listen to the lovely psychopath and don’t do anything that could get me, or yourself, killed.”

Reluctantly, Jessica stopped and let her shoulders slump. She felt useless.

“Speaking of killing me,” said Edward. “Why haven’t you done it already anyway?”

Ivanna remained silent and her lips actually tightened. Though Jessica couldn’t be sure whether it was to avoid speaking or because she was angry. Probably both.

The rain slowed to a steady drizzle, creating a pleasant and steady pitter-patter of raindrops falling and collecting in the large puddles and small ponds that had spread across the hillside. But above all else, the most deafening sound was that of the silence that now hung thick in the air between Edward and Ivanna.

Finally Edward broke the silence. “You don’t think you can, do you? You’re not sure whether you can kill me or not and you’re not game to try. Oh now that is flattering! The big, bad killer with the big, bad reputation is scared!” His voice fell low. “I guess that I’ve got somewhat of a reputation of my own, eh?”

Finally the leather-clad assassin broke her silence. “I may not know whether it is possible to kill you Mr. Graves, but it would be very, *very* easy for me to find out.”

She deliberately let the tension from that last sentence hang in the air for a moment.

“However, that being said, my employer does not want you dead; not yet anyway.” Edward was clearly intrigued by this. Jessica found it odd that he could manage to be anything other the petrified in his current situation.

“Ah so you need me for something then,” he said casually. He gently moved the blade away from his throat then straightened his cravat and smoothed out his waistcoat. “That means that you can’t really hurt me now, can you?”

“No.”

“Ha!”

“But fortunately for us, you brought your new pet along with you.”

“Oh.”

“Wait,” said Jessica as two men advanced towards her, “did she just call me a pet?”

“I believe she did, yes.”

“Who do you think you are lady?” she yelled, then punched one of the men hard across the jaw. He stumbled back a bit and then fell over, but in fairness, that wasn’t so much a result of the punch as it was a result of the mud and wet grass. “Ouch!” she yelled as she shook her hand. “I thought punching was supposed to hurt the punchee, not the puncher!”

“That’s showing ‘em Jess!” said Edward.

“You shut up,” said Jessica.

The other man helped his comrade up off of the ground and then they both just stood there in front of her with their arms up and their hands opened towards her.

“Don’t worry little girl,” said Ivanna, “we won’t hurt you, as long as your friend here comes along with us peacefully.”

“Oh that old chestnut,” said Edward. “Well I suppose that I’m going to have to cooperate now, aren’t I?”

Suddenly Jessica got a crazy and desperate idea that almost certainly wasn’t going to work. But hey, desperate times and all that.

“No you don’t Edward, because you’re forgetting about this!” She thrust her satchel outwards like it was the most important thing in the universe.

Edward cocked his head to the side. “I forgot about your bag? I know that it’s nice and all and I’m sure it’s quite useful, but forgive me Jess if I can’t quite see its relevance at this present point in time.”

“I’m talking about what’s *inside* the bag,” she said, making odd and altogether non-specific movements with her eyebrows and mouth, as if this would somehow convey greater meaning.

Edward inhaled slowly and then exhaled. “Again, I’m not quite sure where you’re going with this. What, are you going to offer them a sandwich or throw some eye liner at them?”

“I’m talking about the bomb you dolt and I don’t wear eye liner!”

“Sorry, my mistake.”

“Now,” said Jessica, “let us both leave, *with* the Stone or else I’ll blow us all sky high.”

“Where’d you get a bomb from anyway?” said Edward.

Jessica grunted in frustration. “Edward would it kill you just to shut up and play along?”

“Well there’s no need to get snappy.”

“Enough!” yelled Ivanna. “We are going now Mr. Graves and I suggest you, Miss Lazarus, don’t try anything foolish unless you want your hair to be dyed blood-red.”

Jessica lowered her bluff of a bomb and slung it back over her shoulder. Ivanna walked up to her and stared down into her eyes. Jessica did her best maintain her gaze, but she relented and ended up looking at her feet.

“Don’t feel bad little girl,” said Ivanna. “Even if you did have a weapon, you wouldn’t have used it. I’ve seen cold-blooded killers before and I’ve seen people who can kill out of necessity. You are neither.”

Jessica just looked at the ground as she strutted back over to Edward and slapped a pair of cuffs onto Edward’s wrists.

“That’s not a bad thing,” said Edward, “remember that.”

She looked at him and said, “I’m so sorry.”

He just smiled and tipped his head forward, letting the water poor out of the brim of his hat.

“You’ve nothing to apologise for Jess. Take care of him,” he indicated Dr. Churchill, still on the ground, covered in Edward’s coat, “take him to Archie. Remember, you’re not a killer, you’re something better. You’re a Temporal Detective.”

She felt a tear run down her cheek and ran up towards him, but the two men stepped towards her and Edward raised his shackled hands, telling her to stop. He shook his head, still smiling.

“But what do I do now, how do I help you?”

“Keep faith, Jess.”

Then Ivana grabbed him violently and said, “That’s enough.”

Without further warning, they all began to vibrate with blue light, until they al vanished into an intense blue flash. Jessica had to shield her eyes from the light and when she looked again they were all gone.

Slowly, she picked up his cane, which had fallen by the wayside amidst all the commotion. She held it firmly in her grasp and she swore. She swore that she would get Edward back. Then she just stood there and the only sound left was the gentle dripping of the rain. And the falling of her tears.

**CHAPTER FIFTEEN: SHOWING SOME RESTRAINT**

“So,” said Edward, “where are we exactly? Five star resort? Health Spa? Oh! Are we in Disneyland? Is this the magic castle? I’ve always wanted to go there! Wait, I think I know where we are. This isn’t Hogwarts is it?”

The two black-suited guards who were escorting him through the corridors of the luxurious manor just kept moving in silence. “Come on guys, you can tell me, I feel like we all share a common bond.” He tugged on the shackles that linked his wrists to those of his stoic escorts. “Get it?” Silence. “Wow, tough crowd,” he muttered to himself. “OK, well why don’t you at least tell me *who* we’re seeing?” Suddenly they stopped. “Oh time for a chat, eh?”

The shackles stretched taut as one guard held Edward’s arms while the other unlocked his shackle and launched a fist that landed right in Edwards’s abdomen, causing him to double over in pain.

“You think you’re some sort of smart guy, don’t ya?” said the guard, rubbing his knuckles.

“Well I don’t mean to brag but...” He was silenced by another punch to the gut. “Ok,” he groaned as he stood upright, “I suppose that question was rhetorical. My mistake.”

“The boss told us to bring you straight to him.” He exchanged a crooked smile with the other guard. “But I don’t think he’ll mind if we soften you up a bit first. Another fist hurtled for the same spot but this time Edward acted too quickly. He used the force of the guard behind him to his advantage, hurtling himself and the guard backwards to the floor. Before the other guard had a chance to take in what was happening, Edward launched both his feet into the guard’s stomach, doubling him over.

“You know, it took you guys long enough,” said Edward as he clambered to his feet. “I’ve been trying to get a reaction from you guys for nearly forty-five minutes!” The doubled over guard snarled and made a wild lunge. At the same time the guard on the floor made a move for Edward’s legs. Edward simply took a step to the left and let them meet in the middle. The knee of one man hit the jaw of the other and Edward hard painful sounding crack. The man on the ground crumpled backwards into an unconscious heap, while the other tumbled over him and hit his head on the wall, sliding to the ground next to his partner.

“I mean,” continued Edward, “forty-five minutes is a long time even for me to be irritating!” He set about searching their pockets, looking for a key to his shackles. He soon found what he was looking for: a single silver tube of metal with a groove carved into the upper third of its length. He set to work on the lock of his shackle until they clicked free and then clicked them onto one wrist of each of the guards, binding them together so that they were facing opposite directions. Rubbing his wrists, he set off silently down the corridor.

He was like a cat-burglar as he crept through the eerily lit halls of the mansion. Everything was either white marble or brown wood-panelling, with a purple velvet carpet running the length of all the halls. From the sounds of things, it was raining outside. *Great, more rain!* After Fluxing from Excelsior Hill, he’d found himself in a corn field, after which a hood had immediately been placed over his head. They had then all Fluxed to another location, with him being pulled along by the shackles on his wrists. He’d than been loaded into a vehicle, a van presumably, at which point Ms Baskov made her departure. After a twenty minute journey along rough country roads and then another ten minutes on bitumen, he’d been hauled out and marched into the lobby of a large house, at which point his hood had been removed and he met his two new, mostly silent friends. So far his plan was going perfectly.

For surely the hundredth time, Edward attempted to reach out through Timespace, either to contact Jessica, or sneak through the house or at the very least, to see how many people were in the house. And for the hundredth time, he failed. He made his way for the staircase, peeking cautiously around the corner; the coast was clear, not surprisingly seeing as he was scheduled to be, well, occupied at this present moment.

He made his way down the stairs, keeping his back flat to the wall and making sure that he avoided all of the squeaky steps that he’d counted on the way up. He watched out for number three and number seven. He stepped over twelve and twenty-three, then skipped thirty-five. He stopped as he reached the final step and produced a small mirror, no bigger than his palm, to scan the around the corners and into the Entrance Hall. All was clear.

He had set himself a near insurmountable task. The house was large, a mansion in fact and he had no knowledge of its layout, yet he was attempting to find...something. What that something was, he couldn’t be certain. The G.I.I would be nice, a clue to help him figure out who The Black Glove’s new leader was would be even better. Some indication of their plan would be great. Of course finding all of these things would be like an early Christmas. Unfortunately Christmas seldom did come early, even for Archaics.

To make his situation worse, he knew that he only had a limited amount of time before his guards were found and he was hunted down by men who had a much stronger understanding of the house. He couldn’t help but laugh at the irony of a time traveller being pressed for time.

He headed for the east wing because, well, it was as good a choice as any, right? He moved down a dark corridor that was illuminated only by the faint moonlight which broke through the clouds and cut through the windows. Water ran down the glass, casting odd shapes and patterns that danced along the hall and over Edward himself. He did his best to avoid stepping into the light and so stuck as close to the wall as possible.

He found it odd that he hadn’t seen or heard anybody since his escape. He reasoned that it was a big house and so he could be lucky enough to avoid running in to other people, especially if his escape wasn’t yet known. But he couldn’t help but feel that he was lying to himself.

Every door he tried was locked and he was about to give up hope for that corridor, but then he noticed the door at the very end of the hall, which had golden light streaming out from underneath it.

He cautiously put his ear to the cold wood, which felt like ice to his skin, causing the hairs on the back of his neck to stand on end. He strained to hear through the dense wood before hearing a soft click behind him. That part of him that had known that the other part was lying gave a big I told you so.

Very slowly, he turned around and held his hands up, open and facing away from him. He looked at two black-suited men with their guns held out, ready to fire. Then he looked down at the diminutive old man that stood between them.

“Oh hello, don’t mind me. I’ve just been giving myself a private tour, feel free to return to your business.”

Hayden Crawlfield took a puff on his cigarette, held in a black cigarette holder and then just held it aloft. He seemed not to notice or care about the ash that fell to the expensive looking velvet carpet beneath his feet.

“Oh Mr. Graves, we need to have a little chat.”

Edward sighed. “This is going to be one of those torture things, isn’t it?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Oh well,” he shrugged, “we’d better get on with it then, I’m a busy man you know.”

**CHAPTER SIXTEEN: FINDING EDWARD**

The quiet chill of an October night was broken by the sound of glass shattering as an Englishman in a burgundy three-piece suit flew through a window and out onto the footpath, the violent thumping of mid-Twenty-First Century dance music following him out. He looked indignant as he stood up and brushed the glass from his jacket.

“That was awfully rude!” yelled Archie Wright through the broken window.

“I take it that things didn’t go so well,” said Jessica, who was standing by a blue car. She looked ethereal in the midnight moon which cast a glow over her face and the brown leather jacket that she wore over her white business shirt and green vest.

“Negotiations have hit a bit of a snag,” said Archie. “But don’t worry, I think that he’ll come around once I make my new counter-offer.” He leapt back through the window, disappearing into the glow of strobe lights and the heavy thump of the music.

They were in Chicago and it was 1am on the twenty-fifth of October, 2044 and the man whom Archie was negotiating with was Jason Hollister, an ex-enforcer for the Black Glove. They’d gone to his nightclub, *The Paradox*, for a polite chat but it seemed that things weren’t going Archie’s way.

Jessica ducked as a chair hurtled over her head. “This is getting ridiculous,” she said to herself. She walked straight through the club doors without any resistance, it seemed that the Bouncers were inside, helping their boss.

The club was an insult to her senses, with its loud, jarring music and flashing, coloured lights and everything else that made Jessica hate nightclubs. She felt out of place in her jacket, vest, dress shirt and tartan skirt, as she saw all of the other girls jumping and bouncing around in dresses that left little room for pockets, nor imagination.

She forced her way through the writhing mass of sweaty twenty and thirty-somethings until she saw a crowd that had gathered at one edge of the dance floor. She knew instantly that she’d found Archie. She forced her way through the sea of silver jackets, hair gel, high heels and too much make-up, until she could see Archie rolling on the ground with Hollister on top of him. There were four other men laying on the ground, all unconscious and not likely to pose a threat any time soon.

She looked around for something of use and saw a blonde girl holding an empty Vodka bottle, transfixed on the fight. Perfect!

“Excuse me,” said Jessica, barely audible over the music, as she snatched the bottle from the girl’s hands.

Jessica was pretty sure that the girl yelled some obscenity or another, under the thumping beat of the music, but she didn’t particularly care. She strode over to the wrestling men and pelted Hollister on the back of the head with the bottle, letting his body go limp. The music finally cut off and there was only the sound of murmuring as the drunken party-goers tried to comprehend what was happening.

“I nearly had him,” said Archie as he rolled Hollister to the side and slapped a pair of cuffs on him.

“Sorry, I was getting bored. And he was running out of windows to throw you through.”

Archie hauled Holister to his feet in the alleyway outside that smelled of smoke and who knows what else. He tapped him gently on the cheek, saying “Jason,” in a soothing, sing-song manner, “time to wake up.” Then he slapped him right across the face, “Wake up!”

“Great bedside manner,” said Jessica, “you should be a parent.”

“Who says I’m not?”

Before Jessica could respond, Hollister stirred and opened his eyes.

“Ah good,” said Archie, leaving Hollister to stand on his own, “now as I tried to explain to you before Mr. Hollister, my friend and I need to have a little chat with you.”

“Oh no,” he said groggily, “I’m not telling you anything Wright, that life’s behind me now. I’m a legitimate businessman.” He saw Jessica and snorted, “Jessica Lazarus. So you’re here too eh? What a reunion.”

Jessica glanced at Archie, then back to Hollister. “How do you know my name?”

“What do you mean? You and that top hat wearing partner of yours have busted me half a dozen times...” suddenly a switch flicked in his mind, “Ah, this is your first time meeting me, eh? Interesting. Where is the esteemed Mr. Graves then? No offence buddy,” he said, looking back at Archie, “but Edward Graves, you ain’t.”

“That, my not so good man is why we need your help.”

Jessica tried to discretely stand on her toes in an attempt to make eye contact with him, but even with her finite height boost, she doubted that her intimidation factor increased very much. “Your old friends in the Black Glove have Edward and you’re going to help us get him back.”

“Really,” he scoffed, “and how do you figure that? I’m retired now; I run a nightclub, which by the way, needs some new windows thanks to you.”

“You threw me through the windows, not the other way around.”

“We’ve got reason to believe that Edward has been taken to Crawlfield’s mansion,” said Jessica, “which is time-sealed; it’s impossible for us to find it, let alone Flux into it. But you were part of Crawlfield’s inner circle for years, so surely you know how to get to his little bachelor pad.”

Hollister bowed his head and laughed. “Now that is rich!” What makes you think that I’m going to throw my life away to tell *you* the location of the Black Glove’s most secure base of operations?”

“Because,” said Archie, “you may be ‘retired’, but you certainly haven’t been pardoned by the Temporal Council. You’re still wanted for over a dozen, very serious, crimes. We could run you in right now if we wanted to. I have it on very good authority that the Dispersal Chamber is waiting for you.”

Hollister’s face twitched as he tried to conceal the intense terror which had just struck through his body. “You’re bluffing!”

Jessica had no idea what Archie was talking about, but whatever it was, it must have been bad. She could see beads of sweat beginning to form on his forehead, ready to race down towards his jaw line.

“Why would I bluff?” said Archie. “You’re a dangerous criminal and a despicable human being. We have you in our custody and all I have to do is activate those cuffs to put you in stasis for the Flux back to the watch. Your trial would be over in under an hour and in less than two you’d be in the Chamber, having your Timeline shredded out of existence. They say it’s quite painful, but at least you won’t remember it. You won’t remember anything actually.”

Jessica shuddered, so that’s what Dispersal meant.

“I wouldn’t even lose a wink of sleep,” said Archie.

“Alright,” he said finally, “I’ll talk, but you have to guarantee my protection!”

“OK, deal,” said Archie.

“I mean it!” He bellowed, “I’m putting my life on the line here; you have no idea what kind of man he is! He’s a monster; I need guarantees that I’m going to be protected from him.”

“Don’t worry,” said Archie, “I’m well aware of Hayden Crawlfield’s psychotic tendencies and can assure you that the Temporal Council will invest all of its power into your protection.”

“You idiot,” said Hollister, “it’s not Crawlfield that I’m worried about, it’s the other one, the one that Crawalfield’s working for now; the guy that even he’s afraid of!”

Jessica turned to Archie and said, “This mysterious new leader again.”

Archie nodded, “You have my word that we’ll protect you, now tell us how to find Crawlfield’s mansion.”

“No, that’s not how this works. You take me somewhere safe and then you’ll get your information.”

“Fine,” said Archie, “have it your way.” He put his arm around Jessica and spoke so that only she could hear. “I’ll take him in to The Watch and see what else we can get out of him. I’ll be in touch as soon as there are any new developments.”

“Or I could just go with you, which would make a lot more sense.”

Archie shook his head, sorry Jess but I think you’d better sit this one out. Taking you to The Watch could pose some uncomfortable questions for you and Edward, me too actually. They tend to frown upon Archaics not passing through their system.”

“Fine,” said Jessica reluctantly, “but what am I supposed to do in the meantime? Now that we’ve Synched, I could be waiting for days to hear from you.”

“Well you could probably go to your other job, you know, the one that actually pays you.”

“Taken care of, I had a lot of sick days and holidays saved up, it’s not a problem.”

“Well then I’m sure that you have some catching up to do in your personal life. You’ve been working non-stop over the past few days, when was the last time you spent more than an hour at home? I mean, the little sleep you’ve got has been spent on the couch in my office. Go home, Jess, get some proper sleep, recharge, stay on top of your personal life and then when I’ve found us a way in, you’ll be ready. Balance is key, remember that.”

Jessica folded her arms and shifted her weight onto one leg. “Does living a longer life turn everyone into a substitute parent?”

“Only the charming, handsome English ones.”

When she returned to her little home, it had been twelve hours since she last left, putting it at just after eight in the morning, and about three days since she’d left with Edward, both relatively and chronologically. She’d been taking Edwards advice about allowing the amount of relative time passed for her, to match the time between her departure and return, a practice which Archie also endorsed.

It wasn’t until she hung her jacket up on the hook and slipped her shoes off that she realised exactly how tired she was. She dropped her satchel on her bed and made straight for the shower, tossing clothes to the floor as she went. She realised that it was the first time that she’d ever let clothes lay on the floor, but she figured that she had a pretty decent excuse.

She hated to admit that Archie was right, but the minute her head hit the pillows that night, her mind went blank and she didn’t have another conscious thought until she was awoken at 7am by some obnoxious pop-song playing on the radio. She’d completely forgotten to switch off her alarm, which was probably a good thing, or else she may have slept for a whole day or two.

She spent the morning doing housework but the whole time her mind was elsewhere. She didn’t feel right, being at home while Edward was being tortured by Hayden Crawflield. She kept trying to reassure herself; to force herself into believing that she was doing everything she could for him, but self-deception can only go so far. ‘Keep faith,’ Edward had said, but faith, though hard to break, could be shaken.

Halfway through scrubbing the bathroom floor she noticed a drop of water hit the tiles. Then another rolled off of her rubber glove. Then she collapsed to the floor in a fit of sobs, drawing in sharp breaths as tears ran down her cheeks and pooled on the floor. She wanted to be strong, she wanted to be tough, but she wasn’t, she knew she wasn’t. For three days she had put on a brave face, but now all she wanted to do was cry in peace.

She had several missed calls from her mother and Jenny from the previous few days and though she didn’t feel like dealing with her mother, she actually felt the need to see a friendly face. So she called Jenny and they arranged to meet for lunch at Nicola’s, a nice little cafe on the main road of town.

But even as she sat with her closest friend she found herself twinging inside. She was in such turmoil and she wanted to let it all out, but she couldn’t. Could she? She wanted nothing more than to tell Jenny all about Edward and Archie and The Black Glove; to let it all out, but she just couldn’t bring herself to do it.

“Jess have you decided?”

Her mind was brought back to the present, back to the table she was sitting at outside of Nicola’s. It was a sunny day and she could hear the steady flow of traffic passing along the main road that ran next to them, leaving behind the faint but noxious aroma of exhaust fumes; sparrows were flitting and tweeting in the hedge that bordered the curb. Jenny was seated across from her wearing a flowery summer dress. She looked at Jessica with a worried gaze, longing to know where her friend’s thoughts were. Standing by their table was an impatient looking waiter, barely older than Jessica, tapping his pencil against his notepad with agitation.

“I’m sorry,” she said, barely able to contain her embarrassment. She began scanning through the menu, trying to find anything, anything at all to order. She settled on a simple burger and chips, the waiter took their menus and then left them alone.

“So Jess, talk to me. What’s wrong?”

“What do you mean?”

“Come on Jess, I’ve known you like, forever, I can read you like a book and I know that something’s wrong.” She paused for a moment and patted Jessica’s hand, “Feel like talking about it?”

Jessica felt the words building up in her mouth, ready to just spill out and tell Jenny everything.

“It’s nothing,” she said. “I’ve just been feeling a little down, that’s all. You know, since that date went so...”

“Cataclysmically disastrous?”

“I was going to say bad, but sure, I’ll take that.”

“Bah, don’t let one bad date get you down. Besides, I hear that you’ve got a new suitor, a real gentleman who wears a Top Hat and everything.”

“Oh let me guess, Mum?”

“I’m sorry but I can’t name my sources, for their own protection of course.”

Jessica laughed for the first time in days, there was always something refreshing about Jenny and she was beginning to appreciate that quality now more than ever before.

“Jenny,” she said, grasping her friend’s hand, “please don’t ever change, you weirdo!”

“Hey, don’t go trying to distract me with compliments, spill the beans; how long have you been sneaking around with Mr. Darcy?”

When Jessica returned home that afternoon, she nearly felt like her old self, so much so that as she walked up the stairs to her unit, she felt a pang of guilt again. She pushed the feeling back down as she fished out her keys, then was startled by a voice speaking from just outside of her peripheral vision.

“I see that you’ve done well putting Temporal Defences around your home, but you need to remember to be alert as well.” Archie was leaning in the corner, his hands tucked casually in his pockets. He’d changed into a white three-piece suit with a red shirt and black tie, looking charming as ever. “Use your Archaic senses, feel for disturbances in Timespace. And just as importantly, use your good old fashioned Linear senses, keep your wits about you.”

“Sorry,” said Jessica, not really feeling like a lecture, “I’ve got a lot on my mind.”

“Yes, well,” said Archie, “just be thankful that there aren’t any more unsavoury characters lurking around your hallway. Not today anyway.”

Jessica set back to unlocking the door and invited Archie in. “So what did you find out from Hollister?”

“Nothing much, he was shot.”

“What?”

“I left him in a holding cell while I organised his protection detail, when I returned, his guards were unconscious and he had two holes in his head and chest.”

“You mean that somebody on the Temporal Council killed him?”

“Not likely, but somebody on The Watch is definitely a traitor.”

“I thought they were the same thing?”

Archie shook his head. “The Watch is the base of operations for Council, which is only made up of twelve members. Besides them though, there are tens of thousands of Archaics living and/or working there; engineers, analysts, trainees and teachers at the Academy, as well as Time Enforcers, like Edward and I used to be.”

Time Enforcer? Edward had never mentioned that phrase before.

“So we can’t trust anyone and our only way of getting into Crawlfield’s mansion is dead.” She dropped down onto her couch and kicked her shoes off, putting her feet up on the coffee table, rubbing her face slowly. “This is hopeless, how are supposed to break into a fortress and mount a rescue with just the two of us?”

He took a seat beside her. “Well I never said that it was just the two of us. I’ve picked a few people whom I know I can trust to help us.”

“How many is a few?”

“Well,” said Archie hesitantly, “five.”

Jessica gave him a look that didn’t exactly betray a lot of confidence.

“But with us that’ll make seven,” he said happily.

“I’m sure that’ll even out the odds a lot more.”

“Small numbers are good Jessica, it gives us stealth and manoeuvrability.”

“Yeah and it means that they won’t have to waste as much ammo to kill us all.”

“I think that you’re attitude could have a negative effect on team morale. Just have faith Jess, I have a plan.”

Jessica smiled, “Have faith, that’s what Edward said before they...before they took him.”

“He always says things like that.” He stood up, “Come to the club tomorrow morning, about nine. I’ll introduce you to the team, lay down my plan and then Jessica we are getting Edward back.”

When she awoke the next morning, a little after 7:30, her heart was thumping in heavy, steady beats. It was as if a wave of anxiety had crashed over her during the night and left her drenched in fear and trepidation. It was a reasonable reaction, she supposed. After all, how often do you wake up knowing that your to-do list consists of items like ‘storm heavily guarded mansion’ and ‘rescue kidnapped Temporal Detective’?

After she had eaten breakfast and she showered, her nerves began to settle a bit more and she forced herself to focus on what was really important: getting Edward home. She had to be brave for him; strong for him, if not for herself. What fear she was feeling was miniscule compared to the pain and fear that Edward was feeling.

She changed into what she now dubbed her Archaic clothes; a white collared shirt, a green vest, a tartan skirt and stockings. She looked at her brown leather jacket thoughtfully and then pulled it on, just to be safe, then slipped into her red joggers and grabbed her brown leather satchel. The satchel was a much sturdier option than her regular handbag and could hold a lot more, so she had stocked it with various odds and ends which could come in handy.

She ensured that her home was secure, both physically and temporally and then stood in the middle of the room. She reached out with her senses and felt the flow of time all around her. Concentrating, she matched the resonance of her body with the flow of Time around her. She reached into it and pulled herself in, feeling asuction around her body as she was pulled inward. Everyrthing around her took on a blue light and began vibrating as she entered Timespace. She thought that she was actually getting pretty good at Fluxing, after all, she had had a lot of practice over the last week or so.

She focused on the *Chrono-Logic* and Archibald Wright and the world around her began to shift around and beneath her as she was hauled through an ever-changing landscape, until she reached the opulent structure that was the pinnacle of the Archaic social scene. The club’s strong defences buzzed with an intense, vibrant energy, preventing her from entering the building, so she came to a stop at the end of the line of people waiting to get in.

She left the line immediately and went straight to the door, something that was becoming a bit of a habit. But as the doorman let her in without any fuss, for once she didn’t care about the countless angry eyes boring a hole in the back of her head. Social niceties be damned, her friend’s life was on the line.

OK, so maybe she still felt a little bit guilty.

**CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE SOUND OF SILENCE**

Vinnie Albertelli did his best not to cringe as screams of agony wafted through the halls of the mansion. He knew that it was imperative to maintain his steely resolve, no matter what. Of course he’d heard such screams before; it was nothing new for Mr. Crawlfield to invite a friend around for a little chat; nor was it unusual for him to employ...methods of persuasion to get the conversation flowing. But usually these chats would be over relatively quickly, a few hours, maybe a day and night if the friend in question was made of stronger stuff. But these screams had been going for four days day, with only the occasional interruption. It was enough to make even a pro like Vinnie turn cold.

There were only ten minutes left of his shift and he was counting down every last one of them. There was nothing that would stop him from leaving this house as soon as humanly possible, not while that god-awful screaming was going on.

He snapped to attention as Mr. Crawlfield and Harbinger walked out through the large Oak doors.

“He has to break soon! Ain’t nobody that can last this long, what’s it been, three, four days? I mean, Jesus, what’s he made of? I’m startin’ to think that the stories are true...”

“Mr. Graves is not some sort of superman, nor a god. He, like every other Archaic is still, at his core, only human. He may have a strong resolve, but even the toughest of barriers can be broken down.”

“Yeah well, all I know is that we’ve killed him at least a dozen times and each time he comes back, just as determined and resilient as ever.”

They were standing right in front of Vinnie, looking out of the rain-streaked windows, scarcely noticing that they had company.

“It’d be a hell of a lot easier if he hadn’t locked his timeline,” said Crawlfield, “then we could just skip this arduous torture an’ get to the answers, but no, he had to make it hard on us and himself. Bleedin’ idiot!”

Harbinger leaned against the window sill, his low voice barely audible. “Edward Graves may be a lot of things, but I assure you that he is by no means an idiot; far from it. It takes an incredibly strong mind to maintain a time-lock under such pressure, especially on a timeline as extensive as his.”

“Sounds like you’re a fan,” spat Crawlfield as he started walking down the corridor.

The stranger shrugged, “I simply know when to pay my enemies their dues, it means that I never underestimate them.”

What remained of the conversation, Vinnie didn’t hear, as they continued down the hall and out of sight. It was only then that it occurred to him that the screaming had stopped again. He wasn’t sure why, but somehow he found the silence so much more unnerving, like it made him uneasy about things that were soon to come.

“Hey Vin, shifts up, all quiet?”

He looked up at Joey and offered a forced smile. “Yeah Joey, all quiet.”

**CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: WHEN GOOD PLANS COME TOGETHER**

“Ah, Jessica, come in my dear! Here, let me take your jacket, you won’t need it in here. Allow me to take your bag too. Some of the others have already arrived, but don’t worry; you’re not the last to show up.”

Jessica could barely get a word out as she was ushered in to the golden light of the *Chrono-Logic*. She tried to protest as Archie removed her satchel and coat, but her words were lost on him as he ordered a brunette woman to place them in the coat check room.

The club, which had yet to open for the night, was mostly empty, bar for one large, middle-aged man who seemed to have passed out at his table. The only other people visible were the bartenders and wait staff, preparing for the evening ahead, as well as the coat check girl who was now busy vacuuming.

Archie led her to the back room, a VIP lounge of some sort, but on the way he poured a glass of water over the unconscious man’s head and told him to go home, much to the large man’s annoyance.

“That’s Nigel,” said Archie, “old patron; old friend. Used to be an invaluable ally; an excellent History Enforcer over in the Twenty-Third Century chapter. Doesn’t do too much but drink and sleep these days.”

Jessica cast a glance back towards the drunkard, who was babbling on about one thing or another as a tall, slick-haired gentleman escorted him to the door. “These guys that are going to help us rescue Edward...are they as *experienced* as Nigel over there?”

“Don’t worry,” said Archie as he opened the doors to the lounge, “these chaps are a little more reliable and sober. Well most of them.”

As they stepped through the double doors a dark skinned, bearded man flung his arms out, scotch swishing precariously in its glass. “Archie, my habib, you’re back, you’re back and you brought a girl, a pretty girl indeed. I’ve been...” Jessica didn’t hear the rest of the sentence because his voice became muffled by the carpet.

She looked down at the unconscious dark-haired man in the grey suit and his now empty glass, then she looked at Archie. “Sober, huh?”

“I did say, ‘most of them,’” he said. “Jessica, meet Ahmed Hussein, thirty-four years old, Lebanese and native to the thirty-third century. He’s an expert at espionage and weapons of all kinds.” Armin made an odd snorting sound into the carpet. “Yes, well, moving on!” said Archie.

It was only now that Jessica became aware of the other people in the room; there were three to be a precise which was a lot less than she’d been expecting. A friendly looking blonde man in a battered canvas duster and a red neckerchief was seated on a barstool chewing on a toothpick. Over by the piano, a serious looking man and woman in their early-twenties, dressed in matching outfits were seated opposite each other in silence. If she wasn’t mistaken, she had a sword and he had a bow, each resting their weapons upon their laps. She’d never seen a real sword, or a real bow before. Neat!

It wasn’t exactly the kind of turnout that Jessica had been expecting, but Archie did say that smaller numbers would work in their favour. Besides, he said that she wasn’t the last to arrive.

The room itself was a classy wood grain affair with a pool table, potted ferns, s few leather couches, an upright piano and a private mini-bar with three stools. The walls were adorned with framed black and white photos and a glass cabinet at the back contained various trophies and awards.

“Ladies and Gentleman,” called Archie, “may I have your attention?”

The man at the bar gave a toothy grin, griping his toothpick between pearly white teeth, “you got it slick.”

The serious couple stood silently and moved towards the bar with her sword holstered to her hip and his bow hung on his back. They were wearing purple waistcoats and ties, white button up shirts and arm bands on opposite arms. She wore a grey skirt and stockings while he wore matching trousers. They both wore black leather boots.

“Aren’t we still waiting on someone?” asked the woman. She had a bit of an accent but Jessica couldn’t quite place it.

“Not to mention the fact that Armin isn’t exactly with us,” said the man with the same unfamiliar accent.

“Ah yes, quite,” said Archie. “Solomon would you mind waking Ahmed up so that we can begin.” The man with the toothpick, Solomon, slid from his barstool and hauled Ahmed Hussein to his feet and dragged him over to a leather sofa. “As for Miss Rain...”

“Miss Rain is present and accounted for,” said a low, grumbling voice from the doorway.

They all turned to see a young girl standing at the door with her arms folded. She was barely more than five foot two with green and black hair, wearing a black shirt and skirt, fishnet stockings and black boots with matching lipstick and nail polish.

“Melanie,” said Archie, “glad you could make it.”

Suddenly there was a loud gasping sound as Ahmed sprung to his feet, gagging. “Ah where am I? What...Oh, sorry.” He rubbed a hand through his scruffy hair and yawned, “What did I miss?”

“Sorry,” said Solomon, “I helped myself to some of these; found ‘em behind the bar.” He was holding up a bottle of pills marked *Detoxis*. “I figured it’d sober him up quick smart.”

“Yes well,” said Archie, “now that everyone is present and accounted for, I’d like to get the proceedings started.”

The green haired girl, Melanie, joined their little circle, pulling up a chair by the bar. Jessica smiled at her, but she just glowered back.

“OK,” said Archie, clearing his throat, “first thing’s first, though not necessarily in that order, everybody this is Jessica Lazarus, Edward’s new partner. Why don’t you introduce yourselves?” he asked.

The cowboy in the neckerchief was the first to stand up. “Solomon Cain at your service ma’am,” he said as he gave her a gentle handshake, “hailin’ from 19th century Wyoming, barefist fighter extraordinaire an’ a damn find handler of the six-shooter if you don’t mind me sayin’.”

“Ah...Ok,” said Jessica, “so...you’re a cowboy then?”

He laughed earnestly, “Why yes ma’am, I s’pose you could say that.”

Next she was introduced to Ahmed for the second time, though this time he was actually conscious.

“Ahmed Hussein, pleasure to meet you. Thirty-third century Chicago is where I call home, though as you can probably tell, my lineage reaches back to Lebanon.”

“So what are your skills then?”

“That depends, how old are you exactly?”

Archie smacked him over the back of his head, causing him to yelp. “Please excuse him, despite evidence to the contrary, Armin is actually a vital member of this team. He’s what you might call a super spy. Although he tends to get distracted by rather easily.”

Ahmed rubbed his head and took a swig of Scotch, “Just being friendly.”

“Next up are the twins,” said Archie.

The boy and girl in the matching clothes stood up and bowed.

“Justin Thyme, 22 years old” said the boy.

“Annie Moment also 22,” said the girl.

“We’re twins from the fifty-first century,” they said in unison.

“Born on the human colony of Lanceron Prime in the Argon Nexus,” said Annie.

“But raised in Japan, Earth,” continued Justin.

“We each dedicated our lives to studying a weapon of the ancient masters,” they said again in unison.

“I, the blade,” said Annie.

“And I, the bow,” said Justin.

“Nice to meet you,” said Jessica. “Excuse me for asking though, if you’re twins then how come you have different last names?”

They smiled at exactly the same time and in exactly the same way. It was kind of creepy.

“Our master gave us new names when we abandoned our old lives to train with him,” said Annie.

“Unfortunately, he was rather fond of puns,” said Justin. “But we have grown used to them.”

Jessica smiled and nodded, “Right.”

Last was the gothic looking girl who had just arrived, Melanie Rain. She just sat with her arms folded, scowling at Jessica.

Archie tried to prompt her, “Melanie?”

Reluctantly and without a whole lot of enthusiasm, she stood up and said, “Melanie Rain, twenty four years old, from the twenty second century; reporting for duty, sir.” She finished off with a mock salute and then sat back down again.

“Hi,” said Jessica, then she gave her an uneasy smile and then took a seat. She didn’t know why, but Melanie definitely didn’t seem to like her. She had been around girls all her life and she could see all of those subtle indicators of distaste, not that Melanie’s were particularly subtle. She got the impression that she was actually trying to shoot daggers from her eyes.

“OK, down to business then,” said Archie.

He pulled out a small metal orb from his pocket. He fiddled with its settings before tossing it into the air. Jessica cringed instinctively, expecting it to crash to the carpeted floor with a dull thud. However after reaching its crest and beginning to fall back down, it simply seemed to stop, as if gravity had simply become bored with it and let it go.

It began to spin, with beams of green light radiating from its centre. At first the lights seemed to be scanning the room, but gradually they pulled together and tightened, forming a three dimensional image. It was a large country estate, surrounded by a girded fence; it was Hayden Crawfield’s mansion; Edward’s prison.

“OK,” said Archie, “we know that Edward is being held here, inside Hayden Crawlfield’s country manor in the American mid-west, 1928.”

Melanie’s voice piqued up, “Well we’re all screwed then.”

“How about you listen to my brilliant plan before drawing conclusions? Thank you. Now as I was saying, we haven’t a hope of breaching the mansions temporal defences, which extend out over a twenty kilometre radius. That’s why we’re going to have to Flux outside of them and then move in.

We’ll go in at night, under the cover of darkness. Firstly the twins will approach from the west, with the dense tree foliage providing even more cover, then take up a position in the trees by the fence,” Archie illustrated this by pointing to spots on the holographic map. “Observe the patrols and their patterns; let us know via Timespace when you’re ready for us.”

The twins both smiled in perfect synchronicity and offered a gentle nod of approval.

“Then, Solomon and myself will create a distraction at the front gate,” Archie pointed to the gate on the map. “We’ll keep the two guards distracted, while the twins will jump the fence and take out the perimeter and door guards, quickly and silently as possible; no lethal force unless absolutely necessary. We’ll also need you to cut the power so that we can keep under the cover of darkness. Signal us when it’s done and we’ll overpower the guards on the gate and join you.”

“Melanie and Jessica will then follow us into the mansion, where we’ll all meet up in the entrance hall. Then we’ll spread out, find Edward, subdue his captors and get the hell out of there. Any questions?”

Jessica took a look around; the expressions in the room were varied and hard to distinguish.

“I can’t help but think that it all gets a bit vague at the end there,” said Justin.

“Do we even know how many rooms are in that house, or where Edward could be?” asked Annie.

“Our source has said that Crawlfield tends to keep prisoners in one of six rooms: Two in the west wing, two in the east and two in the central structure, all on different floors.”

“One question springs to mind for me,” said Ahmed, “what exactly will I be doing during all of this?” He sounded a little hurt, as if he’d been forgotten.

“Don’t worry Ahmed, I didn’t forget about you. You’ll go in with Jessica and Melanie, but then you’ll remain outside and guard the gate, understood?”

He smiled, causing his black beard to stretch out, as if it were trying to cover his entire face. “You will all be perfectly safe in these hands,” he realised that he had a drink in his hand and quickly put it down. “Don’t worry, I do my best work when I’ve been drinking.”

Jessica gave Archie a worried look, to which he just shrugged happily. “Any other questions?” He asked.

“I have a lot of questions,” mumbled Melanie, “but none that you’ll want to hear about.”

“OK, anyone else? Good.”

The twins needed time to get through the forest, so Archie gave them a head start. Meanwhile, everyone else started doing their own thing to fill in time. Solomon and Ahmed were engaged in conversation at the bar, and Melanie was lying on a couch at the back of the room, listening to music.

Jessica started meandering around the room, killing time. She took a closer look at one of the photos on the wall, a landscape group shot; she instantly recognised two of the faces.

There were five people in the shot, three men and two women. One of the men was crouching down in front and directly in the middle of the rest of the group and although he was clean shaven an a bit younger, it was definitely Archie. He was wearing a Flat Cap and waistcoat, with his shirtsleeves rolled up and his collar unbuttoned. He had that same cheeky smile that Jessica had come to know well over the last few days.

Behind him, to the left, stood two woman in casual Victorian era dresses. The one on the outside had her hair tied up, save for a few strands that hung down to her bare shoulders. The other had hair that dropped down about her face in thick ringlets, with an air of elegance and strength that was both subtle and commanding.

The other two men stood to Archie’s right and both wore light, Victorian style three piece suits. The one on the outside wore a necktie with a standing collar and a fedora, while the one on the inside, standing next to the elegant woman, wore a bow-tie and no hat. He had striking features and a commanding smile, with piercing eyes, presumably blue. There was no doubting the visage of Edward Graves.

The inscription at the bottom of the frame read: *The Second Hand- 12th July, 1863*.

“Who or what is The Second Hand?” she wondered aloud.

“Just a silly little group that Edward and I were a part of in school.” Jessica hadn’t even noticed Archie standing next to her, his hands tucked casually into his pockets. “Five of us, all from the same year in history, and all from England, going through the Academy at the same time. We stuck together and even after we graduated, we worked together as a unit in the Nineteenth Century History Enforcers.”

“So why did you call yourselves that?”

“A bully once tried to get a reaction from Edward, calling him a second hand urchin that nobody wanted. You see, Edward’s parents were killed when he was eight and he was taken in by an English nobleman who also happened to be on the Temporal Council.”

“Oh my god, I had no idea, that’s horrible.”

“Anyway, so this brat of a kid keeps taunting Edward, calling him second-hand over and over again. And it looked like Edward was going to break down, his fists were clenched, his mouth was trembling, he was only thirteen at the time. But then he just relaxed, smiled, unclenched his fists and he went straight up to the bully and said, ‘Why thank-you sir, the second hand is the most important hand on the clock. Its movements are small but they’re the most noticeable. Why, if it weren’t for it, then the minute and hour hands wouldn’t function. You could say that without second hands like me, then time wouldn’t exist.’”

“Wow, he had even had that trademark wit at thirteen?”

“That was the beginning of that trademark wit. From that point on he always seemed to be able to turn an attack to his advantage, verbal or physical.”

“So who are the other three in the photo?”

“Well that would be Margret Jones,” he pointed to the woman on the outside, with the tied up hair, “but we all called her Maggie or Maggie Grace - she hated her middle name.” Archie’s voice went shallow, “alas she’s no longer with us.” He pointed to the other woman, “That is Sara Buchannan, a deeply beautiful woman in every sense and truly one of the most wonderful people I’ve ever met.”

“She looks close to Edward.”

Archie smiled, “Let’s just say that less than six months after this photo was taken, she became Sara Graves.”

“You mean, that’s Edward’s wife? She’s beautiful and they look so happy together.”

“They were,” he said. Jessica could feel the weight in his voice, filled with sorrow and regret. “She was too young to die, we all were.”

Jessica took a moment of silence, out of respect for the late Mrs. Graves.

“So, what about the other man, the one next to Edward?”

Archie’s expression changed, it was harder to read now, like he himself were unsure to how feel.

“Alexander Tombs – he like to be called Xander. He was Edward’s brother, well sort of. Like Edward, he was orphaned and taken in by the same member of the Temporal Council.”

“Graves and Tombs,” said Jessica, “sounds like a fictional detective agency.” She frowned, she didn’t want to ask the question that was on her mind, but she did anyway. “So what happened to him?”

If Archie had seemed upset and unsure before, he was downright conflicted now. “It’s complicated,” he said, finally. “Anyway, I think that we should head out, the twins have had enough of a head start.”

Jessica wasn’t stupid; whatever happened to Xander was obviously a touchy subject, somehow more so than the deaths of Maggie and Sara.

“Alright, I guess that we’ve gone a long walk ahead of us.”

Archie fixed her with a sly smile. “Whoever said that we’re walking?”

Jessica had never been much of a car lover, but that didn’t stop her jaw from dropping as she gazed out on the collection of beautiful, pristine conditioned, automobiles before her.

“Not a bad collection, Hoss.”

“Thank you Solomon,” said Archie modestly.

“So we’re going to drive to Crawlfield’s place?” asked Jessica. “I didn’t think...”

“You didn’t think that you could drive through Timespace? Of course you can, it just takes a bit of concentration to keep the car in Flux. It shouldn’t be a problem with all of us though.”

Archie led them through the aisles of shining metal, most of them classic models, others, modern or even futuristic. They stopped at a beautiful old black model with white-wall tyres and one of those curvy boots. Jessica had to admit that it looked nice and very classy.

“1948, Jaguar Mark V,” said Archie admiringly as he ran a finger along the gleaming wheel arch. “They don’t make ‘em like this anymore. Well actually they don’t make ‘em like this *yet* either. In any case, this pristine example of British automotive excellence is Edward’s pride and joy.”

Jessica stopped admiring the tan upholstery through the window and looked back over her shoulder. “This is Edward’s car?”

“Oh yes,” sighed Archie, “I’ve tried to buy it off of him several times but alas, he won’t have any of it. As a consolation he does allow me to allow him to store it here, where it is lovingly maintained by my mechanic Rhys. If we have to rescue Edward Graves then this is the car that we have to do it in.”

Jessica walked around the vehicle, inspecting it further. She nearly laughed when she saw the number plate: EGTD 48- Edward Graves Temporal Detective, no doubt. Somehow it didn’t surprise her that Edward had vanity plates.

“I’m kind of surprised that Edward actually let’s you drive his car,” said Ahmed.

“‘Let’s’ might be a bit of an overstatement,” said Archie. “There are only two people who Edward trusts to drive his car: Edward Graves and himself. But he doesn’t really have a lot to say on the matter right now.”

Solomon yelled, “Shotgun!” and dove into the passenger seat, leaving Jessica, Ahmed and Melanie to cram into the back. Jessica sincerely hoped that it wouldn’t be a long trip; being crammed in a confined space with the ever effervescent Melanie didn’t exactly seem like her idea of fun.

“All passengers, please keep your feet on the mats at all times. God only knows what horrors Edward’s had to endure, if there’s so much as a speck of dirt in here when we rescue him, it may be enough to finish him off.”

Luckily for Jessica, she didn’t have to sit in the middle, the vertically challenged Melanie had that honour. Instead, she got to sit on the right side, behind the driver’s seat.

“OK everyone,” said Archie as he turned the ignition and the old beast purred to life with a satisfying grunt. “We’re going to need to work together and focus, understood?”

They all gave a collective affirmation.

“Good,” he put the car into gear, “let’s save Edward.”

**CHAPTER NINETEEN: LET’S SAVE EDWARD**

Fluxing in a car wasn’t that much more difficult than Fluxing with another person, but it did require a lot more co-ordination and focus.

Jessica kept her eyes screwed shut as she focused on entering Timespace and moving towards Edward, while also focusing on the car and its other occupants. She felt her body begin to move with the familiar vibrations of Timespace and with a great effort of will, she felt the car began to flicker with the same resonance.

She chanced a peek and saw the interior of the car bathed with a light blue glow, with wisps of energy swirling around, lightly touching her skin.

“We did it,” she said, looking out at the garage, now washed with blue light and vibrating, just as she herself was.

“Hold on tight,” said Archie, “this is the fun part.”

Before she could ask what he meant, he slammed his foot down and the car lurched forward with incredible speed. Jessica screamed instinctively as they hurtled towards a wall, only to pass through it with a puff of blue haze.

Melanie laughed at Jessica’s expense, but she paid her no heed. Instead, she looked out at the shifting temporal landscape, looking even more surreal than before, as they sped through. People and buildings came and went all around them, even inside them as they skidded round corners and ploughed through living rooms.

“So how come you still need to drive?” asked Jessica. “Shouldn’t we be drawn there automatically?”

“Can someone else take this one?” asked Archie, “I’m trying to concentrate.”

“It only works on Archaics,” said Ahmed, “or articles that are attached to us. By using a vehicle, we’ve negated that effect, so we’ve got to move through Timespace manually.”

Archie took a tight turn as a glamorous hotel lobby came into existence around them; millions of people, criss-crossing through the car and one another, only to disappear into the distance again.

“So how does he know where he’s going?”

“The pull is still there, drawing us to our destination, Archie just has to hold onto that and follow it.”

Jessica took another look out the window and realised that they were now zipping across the ocean, without so much as a splash from the tyres.

“OK,” said Archie, “we’re nearly there.”

They were on an actual road again and in the distance, Jessica could see a fierce fire of intense, deep blue energy that stood out amongst the dense trees that surrounded it.

Her body slowed down in its resonance and she could see the world around her settling down into a solid state, the blue light receding until they were completely present and fully formed.

They continued down the grey road, lined by beautiful trees on either side, for about ten minutes. They didn’t pass a single car or see another person, but then it was quite dark and they were out of the way.

Jessica felt the hairs on her neck and arms stand up and she convulsed as a wave of energy passed through her body.

“We just passed through the first line of defence,” said Solomon. “So far, so good.”

A few minutes later, Jessica could see lights peering through the distance, presumably from Crawlfield’s mansion. Archie pulled over and trivial as it may seem, Jessica was bothered by the fact that he didn’t use a blinker.

“Alright, Jess, Melanie and Ahmed, this is where you get out. Remember to keep in touch through Timespace if anything goes wrong.”

Ahmed opened his door and got out, holding it open for Jessica, while Melanie got out on the other side. It occurred to Jessica that, seeing as they were now in America, they were on the wrong side of the road. Oops!

Archie and Solomon wished them luck and then pulled back out onto the road.

It was dark but the road was lined with street lights, so they could see just enough.

Jessica began to shiver and it wasn’t just because of the cold.

“Are you alright?” Ahmed asked. “You seem a little anxious.”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine,” she lied. “It’s just, you know, becoming real. Pretty soon we’re going to be inside a heavily fortified mansion, filled with bad guys with guns. I’m still getting used to it, I guess.”

“Don’t worry, Archie won’t let anything bad happen to you.”

Melanie made a scoffing sound which Jessica was pretty sure that she was supposed to hear.

“Yes, Melanie?” she said.

“Nothing, I just hope that you’re not going to hold us back in there. The last thing that we need is for Archie or anybody else being distracted by some misplaced sense of chivalry, and protecting you when they should be focusing on the mission.”

Jessica leaned right in on Melanie, fully illustrating the height difference between the two. “Listen here, I don’t know why you hate me so much, but I can handle myself well enough without Archie’s protection, or your approval. So do us both a favour, get that chip off your shoulder and pull your head out of your - ”

“OK ladies, let’s settle down, we’ve got a job to do. Neither of you are doing Edward any favours, standing around bickering all night.”

Jessica straightened up without a word and she took great joy in the subtle signs of surprise on Melanie’s face. She averted Jessica’s gaze before folding her arms walked on up the road. Jessica smiled and hoped that her confidence boost would help against hulking men, three times Melanie’s size, carrying automatic weapons.

She fell in with Ahmed while Melanie maintained her distance. A light breeze rustled through the leaves, nothing to drastic, but cold enough for Jessica to zip up her jacket.

“What is her problem anyway?”

“It’s not you,” said Ahmed. “Well it is. But it isn’t your fault.”

Jessica cocked her head, but he kept looking straight ahead. “That’s insightful.”

“I’m sorry, it’s not my place to say. But don’t worry about it, she’ll get used to you.”

“Get used to me? You make me sound like a wart or something.”

Ahmed laughed. “Just be careful, she’s not as tough as she makes out. Beneath the cynical, gothic facade, she’s just as lost and scared as the rest of us.”

Jessica didn’t say anything after that, neither of them did. They just kept to their own thoughts, punctuated only by the crunching of gravel and the snapping of twigs beneath their feet.

“Will he be alright?” she said, without even being aware that she was going to say it. “I mean, realistically. None of this, ‘he’s strong, he’ll be fine’ stuff. Do you honestly believe that Edward will be alright when we find him?”

Ahmed didn’t answer immediately, in fact, Jessica didn’t think that he would at all.

“Let me tell you a story,” he said finally. “Many years ago, my partner and I were trying to catch a man who was trying to steal weapons from our time, so that he could sell them in World War One, it was one of my first cases as a History Enforcer.”

“Which side was he trying to sell them to?”

“Both, he wasn’t particularly picky. Anyway, during our investigation we ran into Edward, it was the first time I’d met him, but we all knew him by reputation. It turned out that he was working on a case that was running parallel to ours. We’d been trying to find this guy for ages, but got nothin’, not even a name. Then Ed shows up and tells us how this McLintock guy’s behind it all, but nobody believes him but me because Edward has a lot of enemies in the Council and McLintock had a lot of friends. Long story short, we both got ourselves caught by McLintock who shackled us up in this old mineshaft, ready to kill us.”

He began to laugh, like he was remembering a funny joke. “So, Edward starts carrying on about how stupid this guy’s plan is, about how the clues were so obvious that Ray Charles could see them. He said that he knew every detail of his plan. Now that made Mr. McLintock mad, he started yelling about how perfect his plan was an then started laying into Edward like a beast from hell! I thought he was mad for provoking him on like that.” Ahmed stopped to catch a breath. “You see, Edward egged him on because he knew that McLintock was the kind of man to snap when tormented.”

“But why did he do that?” asked Jessica.

“Two reasons. One: so that during the beating, he could use his teeth to grab the key to our shackles. Two: To get the guy to confess in blind fury and reveal his plan. It turned out that Edward had no idea what McLintock was actually planning to do until then. The point is that Edward can take care of himself and no matter what’s happened to him in that house, he’ll be alright in the end.”

Ahead of them, Melanie had stopped, allowing them to catch up. The mansion, stood tall before them and they moved over into the trees. It was dark and if all had gone well, the guards should have been taken care of, but you can never be too careful.

The gates were wide open and the Jag was parked just outside of them, but there was no sight or sound that told them anything of what was happening beyond the gates.

“OK girls,” said Ahmed, “this is it, now or never. Good luck.”

Jessica swallowed hard, hoping that it would be fear that she was swallowing. But it wasn’t. Still, she followed Melanie through the gates, sticking as close to the walls as possible.

The Temporal defences made it difficult to reach out through Timespace so they couldn’t rely on sensing others in the area, they had to keep watch the old fashioned way.

When they got to the double doors, one side was open, hopefully thanks to Archie, not as part of a trap. They pressed their backs to the closed side of the door and Melanie held up a finger before sliding cautiously to the edge and peeking round the corner. Jessica took a shot at sensing through Timespace, but to no avail. She thought it was worth a shot.

Melanie gave an all clear signal and they entered.

The small guard’s desk by the door was vacant, as was the entrance hall and the grand staircase before them. Jessica did her best to tread quietly on the marble floor, but every now and again her foot would come down just a little too hard and Melanie would shoot her an accusing glare.

Suddenly Jessica stumbled back and she had to stifle a gasp as a flash of blue hit her like a shock wave and a voice began to reverberate all around her.

“Jessica, Melanie, it’s Archie. We’re all in the mansion and most of the guards have been incapacitated, sorry but we decided that it was best to keep moving.” She realised that although it sounded like the voice was coming from all around her, it was actually inside her head. “You should receive this message once you make it into the house, the Temporal Defences aren’t as strong inside as out. Solomon and I have taken the West Wing and the twins are checking the central structure. You two can take the East Wing, split up to search more than one level if you’d like, but please be careful. Stay in touch and be safe.”

Jessica shook her head a little and saw that Melanie was doing the same. Suddenly she felt Melanie’s voice inside her head.

“Did you get that?” said Melanie’s echoing voice.

*Yes*, thought Jessica, but Melanie didn’t seem to hear her.

She shook her head and rolled her eyes, “Really, you don’t know how to communicate through Timespace? Just think of me as a beacon in time and focus on pushing your thoughts towards me. It should be easy since we’re right next to each other, even for you.”

Jessica closed her eyes and saw Melanie as a specific point in time and space, focusing on pushing her thoughts towards her. Then she thought something very rude and immature about Melanie and sent it out to her. Judging by the angry look on her face, it worked.

Melanie opted to search the ground floor, while Jessica searched the second so that they could then meet in the middle on the first floor.

They split up and Jessica began climbing the stairs, alone and in the dark. Even though she didn’t get along with Melanie, at least she’d been some company and offered some help. But now, it was all up to her to look after herself and to do her best to find Edward.

All she had to fight her fear was faith. Faith in her friends, faith in Edward, but most importantly, faith in herself. She just hoped that it would be enough.

**CHAPTER TWENTY: THE LIGHT IN THE DARK**

One of the earliest memories that Jessica had was one of her father, sitting her on his knee and telling her that there was no need to fear the dark. Every night when her mother would put her to bed she would not last more than twenty minutes before screaming and crying - desperate for her mother to rescue her from the monsters that lurked in the shadows of her room.

Her mother had never been particularly comforting to Jessica, not even at that young age. But her father had been different. She remembered him sitting her on his knee and telling her that monsters don’t live in the dark, they like to live in the light where they can be seen. She could remember him saying, “What’s the point in being a scary monster if nobody can see you?” She was still unsure so he then told her that, rather than thinking of the dark as being scary because she couldn’t see, she should think of it as peaceful. “Being in the dark means that our minds aren’t being bothered by what’s around us. It’s the only time that we can really be in peace,” he had told her.

That was probably the clearest memory she had of her father, if not the only one.

Now though, as she sneaked through the dark halls of Hayden Crawlfield’s mansion, she was finding it hard to feel at peace. The moonlight that cut through the windows offered very little comfort, instead just casting sinister shadows and contorting furniture into menacing forms.

But no matter how sure she was that the twins had taken care of the guards, or that everybody else in the house was asleep, Jessica couldn’t fight that basic, primal fear of the dark. Or more specifically, things that hide in the dark.

She had cleared the second floor and was now making her way through the first. Melanie had just finished the ground floor and she was expecting her to catch up to her any minute.

Room by room, she reached out through Timespace to detect the presence of anybody inside. If she could feel someone, she pushed as hard as she could through the Temporal Defences, to see if it was Edward. If not, she’d just keep moving. When she couldn’t sense a presence inside, she’d open the door and take a look, just to be safe. So far, nothing.

She heard a slight creaking sound, barely audible but definitely there. She froze. She was in a dark spot in between two windows, so she was pretty sure that she couldn’t be seen. She pressed her back to the wall and had to hold her breath when she nearly knocked a vase off of a small stand.

She closed her eyes and listened, trying to pick up another sound. Nothing. But she was certain of what she had heard. She reached out into Timespace with her senses and felt a presence. There was definitely somebody else there; just a few paces away from her and getting closer.

She held her breath and tried to focus of the presence as it drew closer and closer.

“Melanie!” she said through Timespace, “You nearly gave me a heart attack!”

She couldn’t see her through the darkness, but she definitely sense her standing in front of her. She could just imagine her black lips snickering.

“Find anything on the second floor?” she asked, her voice reverberating in Jessica’s head.

“Nothing,” she said, shaking her head. “You?”

“Am I dragging a beaten up Temporal Detective with me?” she asked. Jessica glared at her, which, she realised, was a bit of a futile gesture given the circumstances.

“Come on,” said Jessica, “let’s finish this floor.”

They continued working their way along the floor in silence and with each room that they left, their hope for finding Edward dwindled. Jessica hoped that the others were having more luck.

Soon, they came to the final door on the floor. It was at the end of the corridor, directly in front of them. Outside the clouds shifted and pale moonlight flooded through the high arched windows, casting ghostly shadows onto the walls and the pink carpet beneath their feet.

As they approached, Jessica began to hear voices coming from the other side of the door. She and Melanie shared a look, before Jessica projected her thoughts outwards towards her.

“We’d better call the others first,” she said.

Melanie nodded and then closed her eyes in an effort of concentration as she broadcast the message to Archie and the others through Timespace. A few minutes later, Archie and Solomon walked cautiously up the hallway, Solomon’s gun extended in a casual but sure manner.

Not a word was wasted between them as Solomon put a finger to his lips and then signalled for Jessica and Melanie to stand clear, while he approached the door, with Archie on his flank. The girls hid behind a small table that supported an ornate marble statue of a young girl, watching in silence. Jessica glanced back nervously down the way they’d come. Clouds had shifted which allowed more moonlight through the windows, exposing details which she hadn’t noticed before such as the beautiful watercolours that hung on the wall. The flood of light would expose anybody who tried to corral them in from that end, but it meant that they were also exposed.

She looked back at Solomon, who was peering through the keyhole of the door. He freed his second six-shooter from its holster and shared a subtle look with Archie. Then, with both guns in hand, he kicked the door and charged in.

Jessica held her breath, which didn’t really help her racing heart, or her shaking body. She looked at Melanie, whose face and knuckles looked a shade whiter than usual, though it was possible that it was a result of the moonlight.

She was frightened out of her wits, but she still tried to mentally prepare herself to fight if necessary. But then she realised that she didn’t really know how to fight, which could put her at a slight disadvantage. If she and Edward got out of this alive, she’d have to ask him to teach her some moves.

It turns out that she didn’t have to worry though; it was all over in practically no time at all, despite how long it felt to her.

There was a shout of surprise, followed by a dull cracking sound and then silence. A voice called out through Timespace, “Well are you coming in or what? You’re letting the heat out you know.”

That wasn’t Solomon’s voice, but she did recognise it for sure. With her heart pounding in her ears, she rushed to the doorway, before Melanie could warn her to be careful.

She ran into the room, practically knocking over Solomon and Archie, before coming to a sudden halt.

“Took you long enough,” said Edward.

Jessica gasped. His teeth were broken and his mouth was bloody. His clothes were torn and stained with blood and sweat. His arms were drawn above his head with gleaming shackles holding his wrists to the wall. His legs just hung limply, his feet hovering a centimetre or so above the ground.

“Well, you know,” she said with a quivering voice, “I’m a busy girl. I can’t just drop everything just because you want some attention.”

She couldn’t believe it, he actually smiled. How could he smile? She felt like bawling her eyes out or screaming our throwing up, or all of the above. But he was smiling? She remembered what Ahmed had told her.

She ran up to him and hugged him with far too much force, sobbing softly into his shirt..

“Ow. I’m happy to see you too. Ow. Ow. Ow!”

“I’m sorry,” she said, taking a step back and wiping her eyes as subtly as possible with Melanie watching.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said. “I wish the other guy had just been giving hugs, it would have made this a much nicer experience.”

“No,” she said. “I’m sorry for this. I’m sorry that I couldn’t save you - that I couldn’t get to you sooner, I...”

“No, none of that! Jessica Lazarus, don’t you dare. I’m here because I want to be here and I won’t have you taking blame, responsibility or credit for my brilliant plan understood?”

She was confused, but she couldn’t help but smile. “I’m glad to see that they didn’t break your ego.”

“There’s nary a force on Earth that could do that.” He looked at Archie and Solomon, who had been busy tying up the unconscious guard and he greeted them each simply yet sincerely. Then he noticed Melanie lingering in the doorway, her arms crossed close to her stomach, trying to keep a placid face, but not succeeding. “Hello Melanie,” he said softly and with affection.

“Edward. You look terrible, you know,” she said matter of factly.

“Always with the compliments.”

“We’re going to have to finish the reunions later,” said Archie. “We haven’t been able to find the twins, they could be captured. We may be running on borrowed time.”

Edward nodded and Solomon set about working on the shackles with a key they’d found on the guard’s person.

“Before you do that,” said Edward, “you should know that they broke both of my legs, I’ll only slow you down in this state.”

He shared a look with Solomon who then shared one with Archie, who grabbed Jessica’s shoulders gently and began pushing her towards the doors.

“What are you doing?” asked Jessica.

“I need you to wait outside for a moment, you too Melanie.”

“I’m a big girl,” said Melanie, “I know what you’re going to do.”

“Then you know that there’s no need for either of you to see it.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Jessica as she was ushered out the door. She turned around to face Archie as he half dragged Melanie out after her.

Melanie yanked her arm away and scowled at him, rubbing her wrist.

“I need you both to cover your ears,” said Archie, “I’ll tell you when to come back in.” Without leaving room for a rebuttal, he went back into the room and pulled the doors closed behind him.

“What was that about? What are they going to do?”

“Think about it genius,” said Melanie, “Edward’s injured, the best thing for him is for them to...”

There was a loud bang that sounded an awful lot like a gunshot. Jessica rushed through the doors, Melanie said something, but she didn’t know what.

She pushed past Archie, who tried to grab her and she saw Edward hanging limp and lifeless, like a puppet, blood dripping from his head. She couldn’t speak, she couldn’t think, she felt like she was going to throw up, but her body was frozen to the spot.

Then a sudden rush of blue energy swirled into the room and worked its way into Edward, through his mouth, nose and eyes. His body jerked upright, his mouth and eyes wide open and glowing with blue energy, which now also flowed over his body. Then the light dissipated and he went limp again. He stayed that way for a few seconds before gasping loudly and jerking upright again.

“Woah, woo, what a rush!”

Jessica half screamed, “You shot him!”

“Don’t hold it against ‘em Jess, I won’t. I was pretty beaten up and this was the fastest and most efficient way to reboot my system, as it were. Hell, it’s what the Black Glove goons have been doing for the last few days, at least this time my murderer had my best intentions at heart. Now how often can you say that?”

Jessica felt some of the colour returning to her cheeks, well as much as was possible for her, but she was still shaking. “I thought...” She scowled and then slapped Archie with a loud thwack, “You could tell me next time!”

“Well it was all a bit on the spot, wasn’t it?” said Archie, his voice sounding a bit different as her rubbed his jaw. “Why don’t you slap them, they’re the ones who did it?” he said, indicating Edward and Solomon.

With the shock, drama and resurrections out of the way, Solomon freed Edward from his restraints with a lock pick, helping him to the floor. An added benefit of having his body essentially renewed by Temporal Energy, was that the damage to his muscles, from having been suspended in that position over the previous few days had been mended. Apart a pair of slightly sore wrists, he was good to go. Well, almost good to go.

“Where are they?” he muttered as he searched underneath a desk. “I swear that if they’ve hurt them in any way!”

“Hurt, really?” said Jessica.

“We really need to get going,” said Archie.

“Not until I’ve found them, Aha! There you are, my lovelies.” He pulled his Top Hat out of a draw and popped it into shape, placing it on his head. Then he held up his frock coat, all crumpled and dishevelled. Jessica could not believe the look of anger on his face. “You shall be avenged,” he said in quiet rage, before pulling the coat on slowly and with caution. Then he looked in a small mirror that hung on the wall and tied his cravat, which had been hanging loosely around his neck. “Edward Graves does not parade around in public, dressed like a vagrant!” He gave himself a once over, “It’ll do, I suppose.”

They moved through the halls silently, just as they’d moved before. But Jessica felt different now, she had Edward. It wasn’t just that they’d been successful in their mission, she just felt safer with him there. Somehow, as ironic as it seemed, it was like nothing could go wrong while he was with her.

They made it to the entrance hall without incident, but they still hadn’t found or made contact with the twins.

“Something’s not right,” said Edward in a low voice, frowning. “We should have heard from the twins by now. And that’s not all; you said that they did a sweep of the building and the grounds, to take out the guards. But where are the guards? Did any of you find any, tied up in any of the rooms that you searched?”

Jessica and the others all shared looks with one another.

“That’s what I thought,” said Edward.

Suddenly, light streamed in through the windows and under the door. It was blinding and Jessica had to shield her eyes with her arm.

“I think we’d better take a look outside,” said Edward as he moved over to one of the windows. “Zounds,” he said flatly, with undetectable surprise. ‘I don’t mean to criticise, but I think that your rescue plan has gone awry.”

Archie was the next to look, but he said a single syllable word that was a lot stronger than Edward’s.

Jessica knew that she wasn’t going to like what she saw out the window, but nonetheless, she walked in between Edward and Archie and did her best to look through the window without looking directly into any of the three spotlights which were pointing at the house.

When her eyes finally adjusted and she was able to make out the scene outside, she nearly repeated Archie’s word. But she didn’t.

By now, Solomon and Melanie were behind her, also looking out the window, making oaths of equal strength to Archie’s.

“Language,” said Edward.

“How did this happen?” asked Jessica.

“They knew,” said Archie, “somehow, they must have known our plan. But how?”

Down by the front gate, the spotlights illuminated a group of ten or so men in pinstripe suits, all armed with guns. In front of them stood a small elderly man dressed in purple and blue - Hayden Crawlfield. Standing beside him was a tall man in a heavy coat with a wide brimmed hat pulled low over his eyes and a red scarf covering his jaw. Most shockingly though, was that amongst the men in suits, was Justin Thyme, battered, beaten and tied up with a gun pointed at either side of his head.

“Alright you lot,” bellowed Hayden Crawlfield, “come out now, nice and slowly, hands up, or Legolas here’s goin’ to be finding out, once and for all, whether there’s life after death.”

Jessica looked at Edward but his expression was hard to read. “What should we do?”

He didn’t move or speak.

“Edward?”

“The only thing we can do,” he said.

**CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: JOB SECURITY**

Vinnie Albertelli kept his gun trained firmly on his targets as they exited the house. There were five of them, all unarmed and two of which were girls. Not women, girls. Vinnie, by contrast had nine armed and fully trained men by his side, plus his boss, Hayden Crawlfield as well as Harbinger - the stranger in the hat and coat.

The last twenty minutes had been crazy. There had been forty armed men spread throughout the house and grounds and now there were only ten. The first indication of trouble that Vinnie had received, had come when he stuck his head inside the security office to say goodbye to Charlie on his way out. He found some girl with a sword in the process of tying him up and within five seconds of pulling his gun out, she had disarmed him with her blade and knocked him out with the hilt.

The next thing that he remembered was being awoken and dragged to his feet by Sal. Apparently that crazy sword chick had a partner; a whack job with a bow, firing arrows Robin Hood style. Between the two of them they’d taken out all bar a handful of guys so, they needed all the reinforcements they could muster. So much for the end of shift.

He and a few others went out to patrol the grounds and managed to get the guy as he was trying to jump the fence, but it took the combined effort of Vinnie, Joey, Sal and Bobby to hold him off. Even then it was only thanks to Harbinger that they subdued him. He showed up and used some kind of funky fighting that Vinnie had never seen before.

They couldn’t get the kid to talk, and boy did they try, but it wasn’t exactly Rocket Science, trying to figure out what was going on.

They had no idea how they’d gotten in, or how many others were still inside, but Crawlfield knew that he was low on men and the enemy had the element of surprise. Luckily for him then, that they’d managed to get hold of a bargaining chip.

He heard a gentle pitter-patter as rain began to his the brim of his hat.

“You’ve got a set of brass ones, I’ll give you that,” said Crawlfield. “But you must be stupid if you honestly believed that you could just waltz into my place, attack my men and get away with it?” He sounded furious.

“To be fair,” yelled Edward, “you invited me.”

Vinnie’s trigger finger was getting sweaty and the rain drops were getting heavier, if it kept up then he might lose his clear line of sight; they all might.

“Tell you what,” called Crawlfield, “Surrender and we’ll let your friend here go.”

“I wouldn’t call him a friend, more of an acquaintance. Not even that really. A colleague? No. Definitely someone I’ve met though. At least I think he looks a bit familiar.”

Vinnie had to admire the guts of this Graves guy, he’d heard that he’d even kept his wit the whole time he was being tortured.

“You have to the count of three,” called Crawlfield.

The rain grew to a steady downpour.

“One...”

Vinnie heard a clap of thunder.

“Two...”

No, that didn’t sound like thunder, did it?

“Thr-.”

A black Jaguar barged through the gates, sending men jumping out of the way, then sliding to a halt outside the front door.

Vinnie stared in shock; they all did.

Even Crawlfield was speechless for moment as he tried to comprehend what was happening. “What are you waiting or you friggin’ idiots?” he screamed after a moment, “shoot them!”

**CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: HIGH SPEED PURSUIT**

Jessica stared in shock as the Jag skidded to a stop in front of them, they all did. Ahmed leaned across from the driver’s seat to open the passenger door, “Well, what are you waiting for? Get in!”

“There’s no way that we’re all going to fit in there,” shouted Melanie.

The boot slowly opened up.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” scowled Melanie.

“There’s no time to argue,” said Archie. “You’re the smallest and it won’t be for long.”

Bullets began to fire from automatic weapons and that was all the convincing that Melanie needed. She dove into the boot and Archie slammed the lid down.

They all crouched down as low as possible except for Solomon, who peered over the roof of the car, returning fire. He was good and managed to disarm two of the men, as well as take out two of the spotlights.

Edward opened the back door and Jessica, still trying to process what had just happened, went to slide in, but Edward stopped her.

“I think that, given the circumstances, you should sit in the middle,” he said over the sound of ricocheting bullets. Jessica nodded and let Edward slide in over to the far side, the side with all of the bullets coming at it. She assumed that the Jag had bullet proof windows because none had actually broken through yet, they’d only left small cracks and chips.

Jessica sat in the middle and Archie came in after her, pulling the door closed. With a final series of shots, which took out the last spotlight, Solomon slid into the front passenger seat, slammed the door shut and immediately began sliding bullets into the chambers of his six-shooters.

Ahmed slammed the Jag into gear, a little too harshly and Edward cringed and growled, “Be careful with her!”

Ahmed didn’t seem to take notice as he spun the wheels, sending loose bits of gravel and dirt flying behind them as they fishtailed towards the gate. The darkness had caused confusion for the Black Glove, but now that they were moving, the shots had started again and some of them sounded like they were getting close. One or two stray shots even made contact, ricocheting with a sharp, metallic twang.

“What about Justin and Annie?” asked Jessica, in a panic.

“Don’t worry,” said Ahmed as he turned the headlights on, “if all’s going to plan then Annie should be freeing Justin right now. They’re going to meet us outside, further on up the road.” The headlights cut through the dark in time to reveal a startled gunman with red hair, diving out of the way just in the nick of time.

Rather than following the gravel path all the way towards the gate, Ahmed cut across the lawn, digging furrows into the manicured grass and causing Edward to panic even more.

“She’s not an off-road vehicle, be careful! Here, let me drive.” Jessica and Archie had to actually stop Edward from reaching into the front of the car.

Ahead of them, the dented and crooked gates shimmered under the headlights. Two Black Glove agents had evidently just closed them again and were now standing in front of it, rapidly reloading their guns.

The next few seconds seemed to go by at one hundredth normal speed. Solomon leaned out the window and fired two well aimed shots at the gunmen’s hands and disarmed them. That’s no mean feat in a moving vehicle, especially one moving that erratically. Next Ahmed put his foot down on the accelerator, nearly touching the floor. “Everybody, hold on!” he said.

The colour left Edward’s face, “Why me?” he said softly.

The two men, still in shock after being shot, obviously realised that their post was not worth dying for and both dove in opposite directions, still trying to nurse their bleeding hands.

Jessica made sure that her seatbelt was secured and hunched down, ready for impact. There was a loud, metallic crunching sound as the Jag burst through the gates and the car jolted a little with the impact. She had to brace herself so as not to hit her head on the seat in front of her.

“You know,” said Solomon casually, “you’d think if this guy was so big on security, he’d a got a better gate.”

Jessica laughed but Edward’s face just twitched, like he was fighting back a nervous tick.

They drove on in relative silence for a few minutes and Jessica prayed that they could make it to the edge of the Temporal shield, where Annie and Justin should be waiting, without any problems.

Either God was too busy to take her prayer or he was in a bit of an ironic mood, because just seconds later, she saw lights reflected in the rear view mirror.

“Zounds,” said Edward. “It seems that we’re being followed.”

“We’re nearly out of the shield,” said Archie, “if we can just keep some distance between us then we’ll be fine. We’ve had a huge head start.”

Suddenly there was a flash of blue light and a tree trunk appeared on the road ahead. Ahmed began frantically working his way down through the gears, but Edward yelled, “No, speed up!”

“What?” They all yelled in unison.

“Just do it!”

Ahmed made a split second decision, up shifted again and piled on the speed. The car began to resonate with a blue glow and then with a flash they were in the familiar light of Timespace, passing harmlessly through the log.

“What just happened?” asked Jessica.

“They shut down their shields so that they could stop us with a road block,” said Edward. “But I turned their opportunity against them.”

“But I thought that we all needed to focus together, to Flux with the car.”

“Let’s just say that I’m strong enough to pick up the slack,” he said with a strained voice, “not that I’m bragging or anything.”

“Uh-oh,” said Ahmed, “we’re not free yet.”

Jessica looked out the rear windscreen and saw two cars materialising behind them in a swirl of blue energy.

“They must have latched onto our Flux,” said Edward, “followed our path into Timespace.”

“We can’t let them follow us back to the Chrono-Logic,” said Archie.

“Don’t worry,” said Edward, “Ahmed will just need to use some creative driving.”

“You got it!” Ahmed jerked the wheel suddenly and made a sharp left turn, going off road and through the woods.

Jessica flinched as tree after tree came at them, only to phase through harmlessly. “I don’t think that I’m ever going to get used to that,” she said. She looked back and at first, thought that they were clear, but then she saw the distorted blue haze of two other sets of headlights, passing through the shimmering, blue forest.

“How are we supposed to lose them?” asked Ahmed, agitation biting at his words. “If we try to finish the Flux, they’ll just follow us through. “And we can’t just keep driving around in here forever.”

“Get us back to the road,” said Edward, “I want to try something.”

“Alright,” said Ahmed, as if he were only doing it for lack of a better idea.

Again, he manipulated the gears and made a sharp, one hundred and eighty degree turn, so that they were facing the pursuing cars. He put his foot down and yelled, “This might get a bit uncomfortable!”

The other cars continued on with consistent, maybe even increasing speed and so did they.

“What’s he doing?” yelled Jessica.

“Just hold on,” said Archie.

“Reckon this is gonna twinge a bit,” said Solomon.

Jessica screamed as they came into contact with one of the cars. But they didn’t crash, nor did they pass through as they did with everything else. Well they did, but it wasn’t the same. It was like they were being meshed together, the two cars and all of the occupants. They moved incredibly slowly, like it was a great effort for them to pass through each other. She could actually see the other car coming through into theirs, the driver with a look of shock and fear on his face morphed through their windscreen, steering wheel and all.

It was so bizarre, but so cool. Jessica could feel the force of it all pushing through her body, it wasn’t pain exactly, just a dull force, moving through her from front to back.

For a minute, both cars and all of their occupants were completely mashed together, somehow all existing in one place, it was really difficult to describe. It took at least a few minutes for the rear of the car to come through and then, as soon as the rear bumper was out and the other car was fully behind them, they were off again.

“Jessica felt an empty, sick sensation in the pit of her stomach. She looked at Edward with disbelieving eyes, “That. Was the weirdest. Thing. That has ever...happened to me!”

“It’s one thing to pass through something that exists in regular space,” said Edward, “but another to coexist with something that exists in Timespace.”

They emerged from the trees and skidded to a stop on the open road. Edward unbuckled and got out of the car, Jessica followed him, despite the protests of the others.

“Stay in the car Jessica,” said Edward as took of his hat and coat and placed them on the car seat.

“I want to see what you’re doing,” she said.

“Oh fine then, but stay by the car and keep quiet, this is going to be tricky.” He rolled up his shirtsleeves, pocketing his cufflinks, and held up his arms, facing his open palms towards the forest. He leant forward on one leg and locked himself in position, like a mime pushing an invisible object. Jessica could hear the Black Glove cars coming their way.

Edward’s arms began to vibrate at a higher resonance than everything else and he closed his eyes in concentration, gritting his teeth. Blue tendrils of light, which danced throughout Timespace, began to coalesce around Edward’s body and swirl over his arms like a mass of writhing snakes.

Now his whole body was vibrating at such a speed that he was barely visible and the Temporal Energy was like a maelstrom that engulfed his body.

The cars emerged from the woods and with a scream, Edward unleashed the Temporal Energy which shot out and swarmed all over the two cars, stopping them in their tracks and leaving them barely visible. What glimpses Jessica could see, showed the cars changing somehow. It was difficult to tell for certain, but it looked like the metal was changing, getting older and rustier.

Edward opened his eyes and snapped to attention, drawing his arms to his chest, fists clenched. The blue light expanded outwards and dissipated, sending a light shockwave through Jessica’s body and revealing the two cars. Well, what was left of them. And what was left of them wasn’t much. They were just a couple of rusted out frames with nearly disintegrated tyres and no windows.

The occupants of the cars were perfectly fine but were in a state of shock, sitting in what remained of the car interiors.

Edward doubled over for a moment, breathing heavily but he quickly regained his composure and stalked over to the heaps of rusted metal. The Black Glove agents scrambled to get out of the framework. They pulled out their guns, but like the car, they were nothing but rusted and deteriorated bits of metal.

“Unless you want me to age you into piles of dust that even the worms can’t eat, I suggest you leave. Now.” He sounded so angry, not in a shouty kind of way, but in a quiet, restrained kind of way. It scared Jessica. A lot!

It must have had the same effect on the four Black Glove goons, because they disappeared into a sudden flash of blue light, looks of terror still etched onto their faces.

Jessica was speechless and she was pretty sure that her jaw was hanging open as Edward walked past her, to the car and picked up his hat and coat. He slid into them and smiled at her like nothing had happened.

“Ladies first,” he said, motioning towards the car.

“What was that?” she spat out.

“What was what?”

“That! You know,” she moved her arms around in the air, making sounds that she supposed were somehow meant to convey energy and movement.

“Oh that. Just a little trick that I picked up. I manipulated the Temporal Energy of Timespace to age their cars and guns.”

“How come you’ve never done that before?” she half yelled, still in shock.

There was a thumping from the boot of the car.

“I think that Melanie’s getting a bit impatient,” said Edward. “I’ll explain later, but right now I think that we need to get going.”

Jessica got into the car and realised that the others were staring at her with the same looks of surprise that she had. No, they weren’t staring at her, they were staring at Edward.

“It wasn’t that big a deal,” said Edward from outside the car, looking in. “Now Ahmed, not that I don’t appreciate your chauffeuring ability, but I think I’ll drive from here.”

Even as the blue light of Timespace dissipated when they returned to Archie’s garage, they were all still sitting in silent shock.

Edward turned off the ignition and whispered something soothing, presumably to his car. When he realised that there were still four sets of expectant eyes on him, he said, “What do you want me to say?”

“I’d heard the rumours,” said Solomon, “but I had no idea...”

“What, that I can manipulate Timespace? Yes, I can.”

“I haven’t seen you do that since the War,” said Archie, a little less shocked than the others.

“There’s a reason for that,” said Edward as he got out of the car, clearly finished with the subject.

Jessica got out and so did the others, Edward opened the boot and Melanie stumbled out, swatting away Edward’s offered hand. Her hair was messy and she looked a little shaken up. More than that, she looked like she could shoot daggers from her eyes if she so desired. And Jessica was pretty sure that she did so desire.

“Next time,” she yelled, “somebody else is going in the trunk!”

It turned out that Annie and Justin had already returned to the club, having figured that something had gone wrong when the others didn’t show up. Justin was in the medical bay - yes a nightclub with a medical bay – but they were assured that it was only superficial damage.

While everyone else was still in with Justin, Edward asked Jessica if they could talk in private, so they left the others and found an empty room, stacked with chairs and boxes; presumably a storage room. She realised, as he closed the door, that it was the first time they’d been alone since this whole mess began.

“I want to thank you,” said Edward. The words didn’t seem to come to him very easily. Jessica guessed that he wasn’t really used to being the one who had to be rescued.

“It’s no big deal,” said Jessica, sheepishly.

“Oh but it is Jessica, you saved my life.”

She laughed a little, “You can’t die.”

“True, but that isn’t necessarily a good thing. You saved me from a certain hell, just as I knew you would.”

She looked at her shoes, “Well, it’s only right, seeing as...well, seeing as I let you get caught in the first place.”

“Now Jess, I don’t want you to think like that. I knew that we were walking into a trap, but I wanted to get caught.”

She shot her head up, “You what?”

“I wanted to find out more about this new Black Glove leader and his plans. I needed to know for certain whether Archie’s sources were correct, whether they really do intend to attack The Watch and if so, how?”

Suddenly a wave of emotions surged through her body, “You put me through all of that just to prove a hunch?”

“Jessic, I-”

“Do you have any idea what I’ve been going through over the last few days? What I went through just now? I’ve been scared Edward, more scared than I’ve ever been in my whole goddamn life!”

“Mind your language.”

“Don’t tell me to mind my bloody language! Do you know what it was like for me? I felt responsible, I felt like I should have done something to save you and now it turns out that it was all a part of some plan, a little scheme! What if something went wrong, you could have been-”

“Killed?” he finished, calmly. “I was, three times.”

Jessica narrowed her eyes, “Well you may not care much about what happens to yourself Mr. Immortal, but you should put a little more thought into how your grand plans affect other people.”

“I didn’t plan to be tortured Jessica, nor to be away for so long. I just wanted to get into the mansion, find any information that I could about this new leader – Harbinger - and his plans, get the Eternity Stone back and get out of there. Unfortunately, this Harbinger seems to know things. He has a knack for predicting what’s going to happen next and that’s not as common as you’d think in our world.”

Jessica felt herself calming slightly. “Well you should have had a backup plan.”

“I did. Her name is Jessica Lazarus.”

Jessica opened her mouth to speak but stopped. When she spoke, her voice was in a low register, but not particularly angry. “That’s a lot of pressure to put on me.”

“I had faith in you Jess. You wanted to be part of this world, remember? I warned you that it could be dangerous but you didn’t caer, because you could feel something deep inside you that meant you didn’t have to be afraid, something which I could sense too.”

He crouched down and out his hands on her shoulders, “We’re partners Jess, which means that I have faith that you’ll have my back. I hope that you feel the same.”

She tried to stay mad as she looked into his deep, blue eyes but she just couldn’t. He was right, she had chosen this life and she knew full well how dangerous it could be, but there was something deep inside her that didn’t care, no, something that actually *wanted* the danger.

“You’re still an idiot,” she said, half smiling.

“Ah. I don’t think that’ll ever change.”

“So, did it work, did you find out anything?”

“Not as much as I had hoped,” admitted Edward, “like I said, I didn’t plan on getting caught. I did find out a little bit about this new Black Glove leader. His name is Harbinger and Hayden Crawlfield doesn’t just trust him, I think he’s scared of him.”

“I’m guessing that’s a big deal.”

“When you’ve lived as long and violent a life as he has, you don’t scare easily. From what I hear, he seems to know a lot about the future.”

“I don’t want to sound underwhelmed, but that’s not exactly a big deal for us, is it?”

“It is actually. Knowledge of the future is incredibly tricky to deal with, not so much with the big stuff, like seeing technology from one thousand years in the future, but the closer and more personal the information, the harder it is to see. I couldn’t find out what job you’ll have in three years, without seeing it in person and that would make me a part of it. By telling you about it, I could change your course and create a paradox. Time is fluid; it’s motion and it’s incredibly hard to predict the movements of something that is fluid.”

“OK, I think I’ve got that. So if what they say about this guy is true, then he’s something special. I guess that’s why they call him Harbinger, huh?”

“Hmm,” mused Edward.

“So did you manage to find out anything else?”

“Well, they’re definitely planning to attack The Watch. They made that abundantly clear when they kept asking me about strategic weaknesses in between beatings and stabbings.”

The way Edward talked about his torture so casually made Jessica feel uncomfortable and she found herself biting her lip.

“What worries me though,” continued Edward, “is that they may already have a man on the inside.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because, they weren’t interested in how to get into The Watch from the outside, but how to let others in from the inside.”

“So they’ve got somebody in The Watch but they don’t know enough to let the rest of The Black Glove in. Does that narrow down the suspect pool?”

“Somewhat. It rules out the technicians and engineers, as well as the Temporal Council members themselves. We could probably eliminate the security detail, except for maybe some of the very low level new recruits. Most of the senior History Enforcers should know how to work the defences, so we can probably count them out too.”

“So who does that leave us with?”

“Well, trainees at the Academy, junior staff members, general maintenance staff.” He snapped his fingers and his face said that a thought had just struck him. “Prisoners!”

“What?”

“The Watch’s prison holds over five hundred criminals, plus an additional one or two dozen more hardened criminals in stasis. One of them could be a Black Glove plant for sure, arrested on purpose so as to gain access to The Watch! It’s the oldest trick in the book, well, one of the oldest. Definitely on the first page. OK maybe second page. Or third.”

“Edward,” said Jessica, “you just arrested a guy that was working for The Black Glove a little while ago, at the beginning of all this, remember?”

Realisation dawned over his face, “By Jove, you’re right Jess! Geoff Proton, A.K.A. your boyfriend, Sean.”

“He wasn’t my boyfriend,” she grumbled.

“Oh Jess, Jess, Jess, you’re good, you’re very good! Come on, we need to debrief the others and make plans.

“Aren’t you forgetting something for the girl who rescued you and just handed you a missing piece of the puzzle?” She held her arms out wide.

“Oh...alright,” he said, “but only because it’s a special occasion.”

She laughed and then she rolled her eyes and gave him a hug. And no matter how hard he protested, or how much he squirmed, she wasn’t going to let go. And eventually, his gangly limbs stopped fidgeting and he reluctantly folded his arms into a gentle embrace.

**CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: THE PLAN**

Edward debriefed the others on the situation, everything about the Eternity Stone, the Museum, the G.I.I. and Indonesia. He also told them about Harbinger and his plan to take The Watch.

They found it hard to believe that there could be a traitor in The Watch, but when Edward explained their prisoner theory and told them about Geoff Proton, they were much more convinced.

In the end, they were sceptical about the Beast – The Time-Eater as it was sometimes known – but they agreed that no matter how crazy the enemy’s plan, the danger they posed was still very real.

Edward asked them – Archie, Melanie, Solomon, Ahmed and Annie – to go to The Watch and boost security where possible, also to isolate Proton and interrogate him.

Meanwhile, Edward and Jessica were going to address the Temporal Council, to convince them of the impending threat.

They went their separate ways, except for Jessica and Edward, who both returned to his place.

“Ah, it’s good to be back,” said Edward. As they Fluxed just beyond his front door. Jessica heard a crunching beneath her feet as she came into existence on top of a small pile of mail. She lifted up her foot, and saw a crumpled envelope with flowing handwriting, now smudged by dirt from her shoe. She smiled guiltily and brushed off the dirt as best she could, revealing a return address for a Mr. Forrester. She handed it to Edward, who just tossed it back on the pile.

“I’ll go through the mail later,” he said. “Mainly small case requests, I wager.”

Edward disappeared down the hall, but Jessica stayed back a moment to collect the mail and sort it into a neat pile. There were twelve letters in all, two of which were marked urgent, including Mr. Forrester’s.

“Some of them are urgent, Edward!”

“Everything’s urgent to someone!”

She sighed and put the pile down on a small side table by the door, then hurried off to find him.

“Feel free to wash and change before we head out,” he yelled from upstairs.

She decided to take him up on the offer and so went to the bathroom and drew herself a bath. Now this was a nice, old fashioned bath too, made out of bronze. She thought that she could soak in the heavenly, warm water until her skin was wrinkled from more than just the water. But seeing as though they were pressed for time, she kept it to five minutes. Well, maybe six.

She disliked having to change back into the same underwear, but she didn’t have anything else and she certainly wasn’t going to wear some of Edward’s dead wife’s Victorian knickers. She made a mental note to leave some clothes and essentials at Edward’s for future use. Jeez, who would have thought that the first time she left a toothbrush at a guy’s house, it’d be in a Nineteenth Century English town house?

Edward was already ready by the time she made her way downstairs and from the smell of him, he’d also cleaned himself up, probably in his private ensuite.

He’d changed his clothes and was now wearing a velvet frock coat of deep burgundy, grey waistcoat and matching trousers. His cravat was a shade darker than his coat and matched the Handkerchief in his left breast pocket.

He looked up as he adjusted his cufflinks, “Refreshed and ready to go?”

“Yeah,” she said, deciding not to go into the underwear situation. “I’m not underdressed am I? I mean, I’ve never gone before a regular council before, let alone a temporal one.”

“You look fine,” he said. “Well, technically you are underdressed seeing as you’re not wearing ceremonial robes, but neither am I, so it doesn’t matter. We haven’t got time for pomp and circumstance, so they’ll just have to deal with it.

He turned to the door and grinned, “You saved it for me!” He picked up his cane from its place by the door and cradled it in both hands, like he was examining some rare and valuable work of art.

“Of course,” said Jessica, “I cleaned it up a bit too.”

He gave it a twirl, remarkably without actually hitting anything and then leaned on it, crossing his ankles like Yogi Bear. Then he picked up a Top Hat, the same colour as his coat, from the table next to him and placed it on his head. He spent a moment adjusting it in the mirror, smiled when he got it just right and said, “Complete again.”

They went to the library and stood in the centre of the room, the late afternoon sun streaming in through the windows.

“Right,” said Edward, “The Watch is just like The Chrono-Logic, it exists inside of Timespace, but it’s a tad more difficult to get to. Just hold my hand and don’t let go, alright? And remember to just focus on The Watch.” He held out his right hand and she took it with her left.

They both closed their eyes and Jessica focused on the movement of time all around her – she concentrated on the movement of one second to the next; the steady breaths that came out of her mouth and the beating of her heart. She focused on matching the frequency of time; the rhythm of everything around her and she felt herself Flux into synchronicity with it. She opened her eyes and saw the vibrant blue wash of Timespace. Edward still had his eyes closed, so she shut hers again and focused on The Watch, the headquarters of the Temporal Council. With a sudden rush, she was being hauled away, but not laterally, as she was used to, but vertically. She opened her eyes and gasped as she saw Edward’s house, the whole street, below her feet. And not just the usual hovering that she was accustomed to in Timespace, they were heading straight up! Well, diagonally actually, but still up.

She looked up at Edward, who looked back at her and just smiled and then she looked past him, at the clouds which were getting closer and closer. She looked back down and nearly screamed when she saw the land below her; it was like looking at a satellite image. She coughed as they passed through the wispy, blue vapours of clouds which were frozen in time, coming out the other side to see the blue swirls of the night sky and hundreds of twinkling stars, which twinkled a lot faster in Timespace.

“How high up are we going?” she yelled, her voice distorted.

Edward looked back at her with that cheeky grin again, “As high as we can go!”

He pointed at something with his cane and when Jessica realised what it was, she could actually feel her jaw drop.

Because there, above her, getting closer by the second, was a city. A massive, sparkling city of towers and spires, suspended in space above the planet Earth.

And they were heading straight for it.

**CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: THE WORLD INSIDE TIME**

“This might get a bit rough, but just stay calm!”

“What?” she yelled back, having barely heard Edward, distracted as she was by the shimmering blue-white palace, which shimmered like it was made of light.

She realised that they were getting awfully close to one of the spires, but before she could ask Edward whether this thing actually had a front door, she was blinded by a vibrant, white light.

It filled her vision and hurt her head, just behind her eyeballs, but then it vanished and there was nothing.

Blackness. Darkness. Nothingness.

That was all she could see. More than that, that was all she could feel, all she could think. It was as if the nothingness was all that there ever was, all that there ever had been or would be. The girl that had been Jessica Lazarus no longer had any sense of identity or emotion or feeling.

All that existed of her was a dull thought at the back of her mind; or rather the idea of a thought. A thought that perhaps there was something missing, although what that thing was, she had no idea.

The girl that had been Jessica Lazarus drifted on in the cold and the darkness for an eternity, yet she seemed indifferent to her fate.

This was all that there was and one could not want more than what was.

As the centuries turned into millennia, she drifted without thought or feeling or understanding or care.

Soon, strange new concepts began to bite at the back of her mind, which became ideas, which became thoughts. Where was she? Why couldn’t she feel anything? What was happening? Oh god, how long had she been here for?

Jessica Lazarus began to remember more and more.

She remembered her name for one thing. Then she remembered her mother.

On and on, the memories came to her - flooding through her mind like a tsunami. How could she have forgotten this?

Tears began to well in her eyes.

How could she have forgotten what made her, her?

She remembered when she was three and her mother told her that daddy wouldn’t be coming home anymore. She remembered her mother’s tears and her confusion.

Bright light filled her vision again and then she collapsed on a cold floor. Was it tiled? No, it was something else. Metal, that was it, how could she forget what metal was? Then again, how could she forget who *she* was?

She felt hands grabbing hold of her and rolling her over. Someone was saying something. Her name, they were saying her name. More and more noises came to her now and she became aware of a dull throbbing in the back of her head. She felt the air passing through her nostrils and she detected an unfamiliar yet pleasant scent.

Slowly she opened her eyes and saw Edward Graves and his fancy clothes, staring back at her.

“Hey,” she said slowly. “What’d I miss?”

He gave a relieved smile and helped her up. “Are you OK? The first tip to the Watch can be a little traumatic, but it’ll be easier next time, now that the security protocol has registered your Timeline. Do you remember what happened?”

Jessica had a vague notion of having spent a period of time in the dark and she could remember some...actually she couldn’t quite recall anymore.

“I,” she started, “I can’t really remember. It’s like waking up and trying to remember a dream, you know?”

Edward smiled, “Yes, I do.”

She looked around and took in her surroundings, something which didn’t take long.

“Are we in a glass tube?”

“That is probably the most accurate way of describing our current location, yes.”

She turned on the spot and confirmed that yes, they were indeed in a glass tube about as big as a revolving door, with a metal floor and ceiling. Through the glass she could see more tubes stretching out on either side of them and before them was an electronic door.

“This is a decontamination tube,” said Edward. “After the security protocols determined that we were allowed to be here, they transferred us to a point in the Watch’s timeline which corresponded to our present selves and then materialised us inside one of these for decontamination.”

“But how does...”

No sooner than the words had begun to tumble out of her mouth, five jets of foamy liquid began to spray down from the ceiling, as a red light flashed and an electronic voice declared that decontamination was in progress.

Jessica squealed as the foam seeped down her shirt and soaked through her coat and onto her skin. She could even feel it building up inside her socks and underwear. Well, at least they’d be clean now.

She opened an eye and saw Edward holding his coat open with his hat in his hand, humming like he was having a relaxing shower.

Just as she didn’t think she could feel any more violated, the jets stopped. For a few moments she stood there chattering with her hair clinging to her face, but before she could say anything two giant heaters in the floor and ceiling began to blow hot air all over her body. This didn’t feel as bad as the foam and she was actually able work with it, to dry her hair as it blew about her head like a red tornado. She did have to occasionally pin down her coat and satchel when they threatened to blow too high in the air, or her shirt when it threatened her modesty.

If she looked funny then she knew that Edward looked hilarious. His hair was practically vertical and his cravat was floating over his face like a weird mask. He wasn’t even bothering to try and hold his coat down as it reached towards the ceiling.

Gradually the wind died down and Jessica was left with the mother of all frizzy hair, as was Edward.

She cracked up laughing when she saw his eyes peeking from beneath his crop of fluffy brown hair, which was usually sleek and styled.

“You look like a shaggy sheep dog,” she cackled.

Edward frowned, “Well you look like Elmo after he stuck a knife in a toaster, but you don’t see me bringing *that* up, now do you?”

That made her stop laughing.

Not wanting to look like an electrocuted Muppet, she took her hairbrush from her satchel and tried to bring her hair back into a manageable state. Edward did likewise with a comb that he procured from his coat pocket.

“Never visit The Watch without a comb or brush,” he said, before putting his hat back in place. “Decon-hair is the number one cause of embarrassment for Archaics.”

The red light turned green and the tube opened up with a hiss and the release of some steam. Edward led her out of the decontamination room and into a silver, metal corridor with lines on the walls and strange lights on the ceilings.

“How do you think the others are doing?” asked Jessica.

“If there’s any measure of luck on our side, then The Watch should be in the process of entering siege mode.”

“How would we know if that were happening?”

“There’d be alarms going off for one thing.”

Jessica couldn’t hear anything other than the sounds of their footsteps echoing down the corridor.

“Exactly,” said Edward, even though she hadn’t said anything. They’ve been caught in soup of bureaucracy; it runs like treacle through this place.”

“Well if they haven’t convinced the Council to see you, what will you do?”

“I’ll go to the Grand Epoch’s chambers myself and drag him down to the control cluster.”

“They don’t like you do they?”

“Let’s just say that my relationship with the council is a love-hate one. By that I mean that they love to hate me.”

They passed through an intersection and it dawned on Jessica, just how quiet it was.

“Where is everybody?”

“It’s the middle of the night, local time. We’ll run into more people as we get closer to the control cluster; the night staff.”

They rounded a corner and then passed through a large, hexagonal set of sliding doors. What was on the other side warranted a “Wow!” from Jessica.

The cavernous room that they entered wasn’t so much a room as it was a gigantic command structure. It was like a military complex and a hi-tech laboratory all rolled into one, all sterile white and metal grey, little balconies jutting out over the central space like an atrium. Looking to the ceiling, she saw the night sky stretching out above her head, covered in swirls of blue light, like a Van Gough painting. The stars blinked at her through a layer of glass and she couldn’t help but feel wonderment in every fibre of her being. It looked truly magical.

All around the control cluster, people in white and grey uniforms were sitting at computer terminals or walking around with strange equipment in their hands. The biggest shock, by far, came when she saw a large, brown and green creature about the size of a gorilla with a wrinkly trunk walking around in the same uniform.

She grabbed Edward’s sleeve. “Edward,” she gasped, “is that...an alien?”

Edward followed her finger, “Don’t be silly, that’s Gerald and didn’t your mother ever tell you that it’s rude to point?”

“But...he’s...”

“He’s from Earth, born and raised in the Fifty-Ninth Century, but his ancestors came from a little planet called Novak which, sadly is no longer with us.”

“But...what, so are there alien Archaics too?”

“Well, we’re not really sure about that,” said Edward. “We’ve yet to encounter any other races with the Archaic gene. Gerald here inherited his from his mother, whom is human and an Archaic. As far as I know, he’s the only alien time traveller out there, but who knows, nothing’s impossible.”

“Yeah,” said Jessica, “I’m really beginning to see that.”

**CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: THE TEMPORAL COUNCIL**

The chambers of the Temporal Council were located on the uppermost level of The Watch, meaning that they had to ascend twenty levels from their starting point on level twelve. When they exited the elevator they entered a reception area with a young Asian woman in her twenties sitting behind a desk.

“Hello Mr. Graves,” she said, excitedly and without an accent.

“Hello Rosie,” he replied with a smile that would dazzle a middle-aged drill sergeant. “My, you do look lovely today, have you done something with your hair?”

“It’s a new style that I’m trying out,” she said enthusiastically.

“Well it is working marvellously; it really accentuates your features.”

Jessica thought that, if anything, it made her face look a little chubby, which really didn’t suit her slim figure.

“Oh Edward,” she said, “I’ll never get tired of your old world charm.” It was only now that her eyes shifted to Jessica, as if she had only just noticed her. “Oh, I don’t think I’ve met your, um...” She left the end of the sentence hanging, obviously fishing for a relationship status.

“I’m Edward’s partner, Jessica.” She extended her hand, but Rosie just looked at her with fire in her eyes.

“Partner?”

“Investigative partner,” corrected Edward. “More of a student really.”

“Hey!”

“I’ve taken Jessica under my wing to show her the ropes of time travel and detective work.”

Rosie gave Edward a disapproving look, “The Council aren’t going to be happy about that.”

“That’s good. It’d feel strange if they actually approved of me for once.”

She looked down her nose at him, but then broke and smiled, before shaking her head. “They’re in session now and they’re expecting you. I don’t know what’s going on, but they told me to ask you to wait until they summon you.”

“It’s OK, I’ll just go in now - it’ll save them the trouble of saying my name three times.” Edward made for the large wooden doorway that led to the council chambers, “Come along, Jess.”

Rosie suddenly slid between Edward and the door and stood spread-eagled. Jessica could now see that she was wearing a traditional looking pink dress with a flower design on it. She wondered at what point in China’s history she came from.

“I’m sorry Edward, but you’re going to have to wait until they’re ready for you.”

“Come on Rosie,” he said with the charm levels turned up to eleven, “You and I both know that they could be in there for hours before they call me in, probably just to spite me. This is important.”

Rosie’s face twitched with uncertainty and slumped a little, but then she pushed her chest out and reasserted her stance. “I’m sorry, Mr. Graves.”

“OK Rosie, listen to me,” said Jessica, “I know that you’re doing your job and that’s admirable, but we’re trying to do our job. We have very important information which needs to be shared with the council or else people could die.”

“People are going to die?” asked Rosie.

“Possibly,” said Jessica. “Some very bad people are going to attack the Watch, we need you to help us Rosie. Help us to save The Watch, the people working here and possibly all of time and space.”

Rosie considered this for a few moments before stepping aside. “OK, I’ll let them know that you’re coming in.”

“No need,” said Edward, “I prefer to make a grand entrance and it just doesn’t work if I’m announced.” He grabbed Rosie’s hand and placed gentle a kiss on it, “Thank you my dear.” He leaned in to Jessica and whispered, “Good job. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say that you’re a bit of a manipulator.”

“What makes you think you’d know if I was?” asked Jessica.

“Touché.”

With an almighty heave, Edward pushed open the giant wooden doors to the council chambers. Jessica found it strange that there were wooden doors in a place where everything seemed so shiny, sterile and futuristic. She thought that it seemed so, well archaic. In a weird way she guessed that actually made sense.

What was beyond the doors felt like a completely different world to what else she had seen of The Watch. A corridor lined with wood panelling and old fashioned torches in brackets led to a large open chamber. Inside the chamber was a large, round wooden table with thirteen chairs seated around it, twelve which were occupied by people in robes and one of which was empty. One of the occupied chairs was more elevated and ornately decorated than the others, and the robes of the man sitting in it were equally elaborate.

Clashing with the old fashioned aesthetic, were bright, elliptical, electric lights which were impressed into the ceiling, as well as a blue holographic display which sat suspended over the table.

Edward cleared his throats to make their presence known and then threw his arms out wide, nearly striking Jessica with his cane. “Good evening ladies and gentlemen, it’s good to be back here on...” he pretended to look at a note in his hand, “The Watch!.”

The hologram above the table immediately disappeared and the councillors began to chatter, as if trying to find out whom, if anybody had arranged this interruption.

“You were told to wait until you were summoned,” growled an old, grey haired man wearing a red robe with a grey three-piece suit underneath. “You can’t just barge in here while the council is in session Graves.”

“But Padameer, if I didn’t, then you lot would still be arguing and voting a ratifying while the whole place blew up around you. You’re like ‘The People’s Front of Judea from *The Life of Brian*. Never mind, you probably don’t get the reference.”

“And who is that girl?” yelled an olive skinned woman in rich, blue robes.

There was a clamour of agitation as the other councillors became aware of Jessica’s presence.

“This is my new partner in training,” said Edward. He turned to her and beckoned for her to come forward.

Nervously, she took a few tentative steps, then a few more, until she was by Edward’s side.

“Uh, hi,” she said with a little wave of her fingers.

“This is Jessica Lazarus,” said Edward.

“Has she been through the Academy?” asked a young man with pitch black hair and robes to match. He spoke in an Italian accent.

“No, nor shall she.”

Some of the other Councillors began to grumble angrily, but they were quietened by the man in the elaborate robes and chair, the man whom Jessica was willing to guess to be the Grand Epoch. He had a kind but wrinkled face, like a loving grandfather who never raised his voice and always had time to play with his grandchildren. His hair was covered in a skull cap, but thick, white sideburns ran down to his jaw line and big, bushy, white eyebrows sat above his eyes. His eyes were in a permanent squint and it was as if his eyebrow were so heavy, that they were in the process of collapsing over his eyes completely. His nose was his dominate feature though, taking up a good third of his face, with their own little tufts sprouting out, eager to join their friends in his sideburns.

The Grand Epoch banged a gavel to bring the Council to silence and then spoke with a deep, raspy voice. “Let us hear what Mr. Graves and his partner have to say. It is, after all, the purpose of this meeting and so, I dare say, it matters little how coarse his intrusion was.” He peered at Edward from underneath his voluminous brows, giving a glimpse of his dark blue eyes.

He made a gesture with his hand and suddenly the table sank into the floor, with an almost soundless motion. The chairs moved away, with their occupants still seated in them, then realigned, so that they were all in a row, facing the door. Finally, they all rose several meters, so that they had to look up at them, like a judge’s bench.

“Please approach the bench,” said The Grand Epoch.

Edward nodded silently and stepped forth, walking up a small set of stairs to a raised section of the floor. Jessica felt even more reserved than before, but she still followed Edward’s lead.

“Thank you Grand Epoch,” said Edward with a surprising amount of respect – something which Jessica hadn’t really heard from him before. “No doubt, my friend Archibald Wright has spoken to you, seeing as you’re all here. So that means that you already know what I have to say.”

“We know about your fairy stories and ridiculous theories,” snorted an overweight man in magenta robes.

The Grand Epoch tapped his gavel gently and the heavyset man was silent.

“I know that most of you don’t like me – heh, now that’s an understatement – and that’s OK, because I really don’t like the majority of you. But I have dedicated the last century of my life, saving the world and the Timestream from threats and you should know by now that I am never wrong. That’s my best trait, that and modesty.”

Edward left a pause as the councillors shuffled in their seats, murmuring and exchanging glances.

“Mark my words,” he continued, “The Watch is going to be attacked. Soon. Are you all going to sit there and debate about whom thoroughly dislikes me more, or are you actually going to do something about it?”

“What do you propose we do?” asked a blonde woman, who looked to be in her thirties and spoke with a thick Eastern European accent. “You have told us that we are going to be attacked, but that is very vague. I, for what it’s worth, believe you Mr. Graves, but you have to give us details.”

Edward nodded, “Fair enough. It is my belief that The Black Glove have placed a mole inside The Watch; somebody to shut down our defences from the inside.” He held out a palm in a pacifying gesture. “Now before you start getting indignant and whatnot, I’m not saying that it’s anybody on The Council, nor that it is anybody who works or lives on The Watch.”

“Then who?” growled the man whom Edward had called Padameer.

“A prisoner,” said Edward. “Specifically, a man named Geoff Proton.”

“The cat-burglar?” asked a middle aged Chinese woman in Emerald robes.

“Yes, he was responsible for stealing the Eternity Stone. Jessica and I apprehended him and I brought him here.”

Edward then proceeded to outline their investigation and how it had led them to that point. Some of them actually looked a little bit sympathetic when he mentioned the torture part, which Jessica thought was nice of them.

“Surely you don’t believe in this Beast?” said a man with skin the colour of dark chocolate which nearly blended in with his deep violet roves. He had flecks of grey in his hair and a strong baritone voice, which gave him a commanding presence. “After all, you yourself have been to the Alpha Point.”

“Yes and I wasn’t the only one, if you remember correctly. Xander is still there.”

“You think that they know about him?” asked a squat Korean man in golden robes.

“I think that it’s a possibility. It’s also a possibility that the guy who’s calling the shots for The Black Glove now, is nuts. Either way, we shouldn’t take any chances.”

“But haven’t you solved the problem?” asked the olive skinned woman. “You said that your colleagues are seeing to Mr. Proton; ensuring that he is detained.”

“If they have one plant, they could have another. Or a backup plan. The point remains that you are under threat and you need to take precautions.”

“Are you really willing to risk this place, or the lives of everybody here, yourselves included?” At first, Jessica wasn’t even aware that it was her who had just spoken. She didn’t let that show though and did her best to keep a facade of confidence.

“Do excuse us young lady,” said the Eastern European Councillor, “but I’m curious. What century are you from?”

“Well, the twenty-first, or at least that’s where I’m from now. But I was born in the 1990s.”

“I see,” she said. “How old are you, relatively speaking?”

“I’m eighteen. Ma’am,” she added as an afterthought.

“So, you are a child,” responded the Councillor. “You do not have the necessary experience to weigh in on these matters.”

“Excuse me? I may be a child, but I have a better understanding of reality than you do. A few weeks ago I was selling books and complaining about my mother. Now? Now I’m travelling to other countries and other times! I’ve been shot at and on the run; I’ve mounted a rescue mission into the stronghold of a crime lord’s criminal empire. Don’t you dare tell me that I don’t have the necessary experience to weigh in on this!”

The Council actually fell into stunned silence, like none of them had a clue what to say to that.

“So,” said Edward, “are you going to listen to a rogue and a child? Or are you going to wait for doomsday to befall us all? Because I can wait, I’ve brought some knitting with me.”

The council took a few minutes to deliberate before announcing a decision.

The Grand Epoch banged his gavel to and then cleared his throat. “Alright Mr. Graves, extra security forces will be deployed to guard the Furnace as well as the temporal pathways to The Watch. We’ll also increase the security detail for The Watch itself, raising the security level to blue alert. That’s as much as we can possibly...”

Suddenly the room shook and bits of debris fell from the ceiling. Edward grabbed Jessica and pushed her to the floor as a chunk of masonry smashed to pieces on the spot where she had just been standing. The councillors scrambled for cover beneath their bench but some fell and others were struck. Sparks flew from computer banks which had previously been unseen by Jessica.

The shaking settled and Jessica became aware of Edward’s weight on her back. “I think you can let me up now,” she said, muffled by the floor.

“Sorry,” he said as he helped her to her feet. She collected her satchel off the floor and dusted it off.

Almost immediately, guards entered the room with weapons raised, demanding to know if the councillors were alright.

Turning to Jessica, Edward looked gravely serious. “We’re too late,” he said, “It’s begun.”

**CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: THE BEST OFFENCE**

Edward bolted down the corridor with his cane clutched firmly in one hand and his coat splayed out like a giant set of wings. Jessica managed to match his speed and keep more or less in step with him.

People were running all over the place, sirens were echoing everywhere and every minute or so the whole place shook violently, making it incredibly hard for Jessica to keep her footing. They rounded a corner at full speed and Jessica cast a sideways glance at Edward, surprisingly, he was smiling. Even more surprising, so was she.

They practically skidded through a metal sliding door as the floor shook beneath them, sending Jessica tumbling right into a pair of strong arms.

“I knew that you’d fall for me, but I didn’t expect you to do it in such a literal way.”

Jessica looked up into the eyes of Sean Hendricks, or as he was better known, Geoff Proton. She pushed herself away from him and then in a single, smooth motion, she punched him right in the nose.

“Owwww!” she bellowed as she shook her hand, “That was totally worth it!”

Proton was wearing a simple grey shirt and pants – a prison uniform – and his hands were bound in front of him with ordinary handcuffs. He rubbed at his nose with his bound hands and examined the blood that was there. “I probably deserved that.”

The room shook again but this time Jessica steadied herself on a table, rather than a criminal, sorta ex-boyfriend. She also took notice of where they were for the first time. It looked like an interrogation room, with not much more than a table, some chairs and a water-cooler.

“You two got here just in time,” said Ahmed, who was standing to the left.

“Ahmed,” Jessica said happily.

“Good to see you again old boy,” said Edward. “Where are the others?”

“Archie’s working with external security, Justin and Annie are working on internal defence, Melanie’s trying to boost the shields and Solomon’s guarding her.”

“Good. Now please excuse me while I do some investigating.”

He grabbed Proton by his shirt and then slammed him into a wall, but he timed his attack with the next attack on The Watch, so that they were propelled at a faster rate, knocking the wind out of Proton as they hit the wall.

“What did you do?” snarled Edward. “Tell me!”

“It wasn’t me,” gasped Proton.

“He’s telling the truth,” said Ahmed, “he’s been in lock up, under surveillance ever since he arrived. We used a Time Trace on him and he definitely hasn’t been anywhere near any of the security systems.”

Edward narrowed his eyes at Proton, but then he let him go and picked up his cane, which he’d dropped when he grabbed him.

“I was certain that it was him,” said Edward. The floor shook again and they struggled to keep upright, especially Proton. “OK, wrong point of inquiry right now. Ahmed, any idea what’s actually going on out there?”

“Well, from what I’ve heard, the shields have been disabled and we’re being fired upon by Wash Ships. Melanie and Solomon are in the Security Hub, working on boosting the Intrinsic Field – she’s the best Systems Operator we’ve got, so if anybody can do it, it’s her.”

“What are Wash Ships?” asked Jessica.

“Small, one man vessels which can travel through Timespace,” said Edward.

“So they’re trying to blast their way in? That’ll never work, will it? I mean, this place has defences, doesn’t it?”

“Oh yeah, but they won’t help if they’re all turned off.” Suddenly Edward smacked himself in the face, “Stupid! Stupid! Stupid McStupid, son of Stupid!”

“What?”asked both Jessica and Ahmed at exactly the same time.

“The shields are down, don’t you see what that means? They can Flux in!”

“Then what’s with the full on assault?” said Jessica.

“It’s a distraction, we’ve got to get to the Furnace right now! Ahmed, keep an eye on him, don’t trust him.”

Jessica wished Ahmed luck and then went to leave but Proton called for her to wait.

“I don’t have time for you,” she snapped, as The Watch rocked once more.

“I just want you to know that I’m sorry,” he said. “I really did like you and I honestly just wanted to settle down; retire. I really hoped that you might have been somebody I could do that with.”

Jessica stared at him; she had so much more anger which she wanted let loose upon him. But then she heard Edward call for her and so, without giving Geoff Proton a second thought, she turned and left him.

She caught up with Edward and they ran back along the corridor they’d just come along.

“So how do we get to the Furnace?” She did her level best to not puff as she spoke.

“The Watch is a big place, more of a city than a space station. Fortunately for us, we’re in the Command Cluster, which means that we’re where all the important stuff is.”

She stopped in her tracks as she caught a glimpse of something strange. There was a man walking through the corridor, but there was something wrong with him. He flickered and fluctuated with blue light, like he was Fluxing, but he never completely vanished, he just kept limping along with one arm outstretched, like he was reaching for something. His face, or what she could see of it, was in pain.

“Jessica, stay away from him,” Edward snapped, grabbing her by the wrist and pulling her away.

“Hey!” yelled Jessica. “What’s wrong with him?”

“He’s a Paradoxical,” said Edward, “someone who’s Timeline has been corrupted by a paradox. Never let one touch you – if you do then your Timeline will become corrupted and you’ll become one yourself.”

Jessica threw a glance back in the direction of the Paradoxical. “Isn’t there something that we can do for him?”

“No,” said Edward, definitively. “And even if there was, we don’t have time.”

“Right,” said Jessica softly, casting one last backwards glance.

They came to a bank of tele-pads, like the ones at the museum, only in far greater number. People were ushering in and out them, disappearing and materialising all over the place.

“The Furnace is at the very heart of The Watch, which means we’re going to have to go down.” They climbed into the pad and less than a second later, they were there, with only the slightest blur of colour to mark the interim.

Edward ushered her out of the pad, the only one in the area where they’d arrived. It was a lot warmer down there and the whole place was bathed in a dull, red light, like some kind of engine room.

Jessica choked on acrid smoke as she followed Edward across a metal catwalk, doing her best not to look down into the cavernous space below. Her shoes made loud clanging noises as she trotted along, bringing to mind, the story of the Three Billy-Goats Gruff.

“How much further?” she asked, trying not to choke as she inhaled the noxious fumes that filled the air.

“We’re nearly there,” responded Edward without slowing down or looking over his shoulder.

Steam mixed in with the smoke, billowing up from what appeared to be some sort of molten metal contained below. The heat was getting more intense, the further they ventured. Jessica could see why it was called the Furnace. She had her sleeves pulled over her palms so that her hands wouldn’t burn on the metal railing and she was constantly wiping sweat from her brow. This combined with the thick, fog-like steam meant that her field of visibility was extremely diminished.

Finally, Edward stopped when they reached a metal hatch with a wheel on it. He leant his cane against the wall and began straining against the wheel, trying to make it budge. Slowly she heard a squeak as it gave way and gradually loosened up. It was obvious that people didn’t come down here very often.

“I can see why they call this place the furnace,” she said as she wiped a few sweaty strands of hair from her face.

“Oh this isn’t the Furnace,” said Edward, his face glistening with sweat.

“It’s not?” She said, surprised.

“No...”

The door swung inwards and they were bathed in a mesmerising, fluctuating blue light coming from within.

“Oh my god,” she said.

“This is the Furnace,” said Edward.

**CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: BATTLE-STATIONS**

“Makes me nervous just sittin’ here like this, feels like we’re sittin’ ducks, is what it feels like.” Solomon Cain had been in plenty of fights during his life but they usually involved him hitting or shooting something, not just standing around in front of a computer monitor. It was making him antsy and it was making him nervous.

“Yeah well there’s not a whole lot I can do about it, so why don’t you just do me a favour and shut up?” Melanie Rain on the other hand had never been a fighter, not really. When she was younger she thought that she was. She’d mistaken anger and insecurity for a will to fight, but she’d soon learned her mistake. Edward Graves had seen to that. What she was good at however, was raising a defence. She’d kept her defences raised for as long as she could remember, never trusting anyone; never letting anyone in; always believing that only she could truly understand herself.

Maybe that was why she had been such a good systems operator, working with shields and security protocols, it was like keeping things out was what she did best.

Her eyes darted between the external feed showing the Wash Ships and back to the diagnostics readout with startling speed, matched only by her fingers as they entered commands, moved displays adjusted settings.

Solomon thought that she looked like a conductor, dragging and dropping holographic displays all over the place. Not that he’d never seen a five foot conductor with black and green hair and a nose stud before.

Suddenly the translucent displays began to flash red, with the word ‘Warning’ appearing in big block letters. Melanie cursed loudly before rubbing her head in her hands.

“What’s wrong?” asked Solomon.

“Somehow they’ve uploaded a virus to our mainframe and it’s deleting our security protocols. The shields have already shut down and in a few minutes the Intrinsic Field and the Temporal Analysis System will be gone too. And if you thought that was enough good news, I’ve got more because once those protocols are gone then there’ll be nothing stopping them from Fluxing straight onto the Watch.”

Solomon looked dumbfounded. “I didn’t even think that was possible,” he said incredulously.

Melanie ran her fingers through her hair in frustration. “Whoever designed this virus is smart, very, very smart and they must have had some knowledge of The Watch’s operating systems and protocols.”

Suddenly a klaxon began to ring out all over the Watch; it was a shrill and deafening; a warning.

“My god!”

“What?” said Solomon as he drew his six-shooters.

“They’ve disabled the turrets and some of the ships are getting through.”

A new holographic screen materialised to her right, giving a readout of some sort. Melanie’s eyes grew wide as she read the information. “Half a dozen people just Fluxed in. Now another half a dozen.” She turned to Solomon, panic on her face. “We’re being boarded!”

**CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: THE FURNACE**

They stepped through into the room – well, it was more of a cavern than a room - and Jessica immediately felt more amazement and wonderment than she had ever felt. It was as if she were a child again, fully absorbing the beauty and wonder of the universe and all that existed in it.

The catwalk outside opened up into a wider walkway, more like a bridge that stretched out as far as the eye could see before disappearing into the horizon. And all around the bridge, above and below were streams of luminescent blue light twisting and writhing around the room like an endless ocean of cascading energy. Jessica felt a complete sense of serenity wash over her as she looked around her, her shadow dancing in the flickering blue light.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t?” said Edward as he looked skywards with an easy smile on his face.

“What is it?” she asked with wonder.

“I told you,” he said, “this is the Furnace; a Complete Temporal Observation Stand-Point. Right now, all around us every point in time and space that ever existed or ever will be, is mixing together and coalescing into one single, uniform mass. It’s a melting pot if you will, one in which all of time and space fuse together as one single moment and location. And isn’t it just breathtaking?” His voice was light and airy, full of awe.

“But how did this happen and what’s it for?”

“It was constructed by Temporal Council back when they first built The Watch as a way of monitoring the timestream. You see, from here it’s possible to see all of existence in its entirety. If you know how to look at it, of course.”

Jessica tried to imagine how anybody could see anything in all of this. It would be like trying to focus on an individual snow flake in the middle of a blizzard, which you’re watching through binoculars from a house several kilometres away.

“So how big is this place?” she asked.

“This is the main chamber, not really used for much apart for maintenance,” said Edward, “but there’s an observation and control platform directly above us, not that you can see it from here.”

“Do you think it’s possible that the Black Glove guys are already here?”

Edward twirled his cane in his hand before clasping it behind his back. “I don’t know, you’re a detective now, why don’t you tell me.”

She stopped focusing on the CTOSP itself took a look around, trying to search for clues. It was hard to see details in the shifting blue light, but she did her best to examine the floor and the space around her. A shadow shifted and she saw some specks of dirt in the vague form of a footprint.

She crouched down to examine it closer. “Dirt from a shoe,” she said. “But there’s no dirt here, it’s a space station. The dirt must have come from a somewhere else.” She walked back towards the doorway, examining the floor all the while. “There’s no dirt before that point, meaning that whoever left it there Fluxed directly to that point. They’re here already.”

“Excellent,” said Edward. “So Miss Lazarus, I just have one more question for you. Do you want to catch some bad guys?” He sang to the rythm of ‘Do You Want to Build a Snowman?’ from *Frozen*.

“Come on, let’s put these creeps away,” she continued in the same rhythm. They both laughed.

They made their way to the other end of the bridge, which ended with another metal hatchway, one which Edward assured her would lead to the observation deck. They then proceeded to climb a metal, spiralling staircase which led to another metal hatch.

“Okay,” said Edward in a hushed tone, “we’ve got the element of surprise so it’s important that we make the most of that.” He indicated to the wheel on the door. “They haven’t locked the door, so on the count of three I’m going to heave it open and then we’ll rush them and place them under arrest; shouldn’t be more than two or three of them. Are you ready?”

Jessica slid her satchel off and placed it softly on the ground, before doing the same to her coat. “Always,” she said with a smile.

Edward returned her smile and then leant against the door.

“One,” he said.

“Two,” she said, readying herself.

“Three,” said the smooth voice from behind them.

They both slowly turned to each other.

“Jessica,” whispered Edward, “did your voice just break?”

“No, did yours?” she asked.

“No,” said Edward.

“Then I think we have a problem,” whispered Jessica.

“I was just coming to the same conclusion. You may think that this sounds crazy, but I think that we may have just walked into a trap.”

They both turned slowly to face a tall, slender Black Glove agent with auburn hair, holding a gun.

“I think that I’ve found some evidence to support that theory,” said Jessica.

The Black Glove agent indicated the door behind them. “Don’t let me interrupt your plan folks. After all, you’re just in time for the show, and Mr. Harbinger wouldn’t want either of you to miss out. Especially you Mr. Graves, you’re going to play a vital part.”

Jessica exchanged a glance with Edward. She had a feeling that whatever his vital role was, it wouldn’t be good for him and it certainly wouldn’t be voluntary.

**CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: CASUALTIES OF WAR**

“The mainframe is just around that corner,” shouted Melanie as she thundered down a sterile white corridor. Behind her, Solomon continually checked over his shoulder with his six-shooters drawn and ready. He’d already had to wound two Black Glove agents since they left the control room and he was sure that there’d be more to come.

They rounded a corner and came to a set of doors, marked with a sign that read: Central Mainframe-Authorised Personnel Only. Melanie whipped out a security card and flashed it by a scanner. The doors automatically slid open with a reluctant hiss and they bounded through.

She froze in terror as soon as she entered the room. There was blood. Everywhere. On the walls, on the floors, on the computers and even on the ceiling in places. Every one of the fourteen technicians, five engineers and three security officers that were stationed there – the night crew – were laying on the floor or slumped over computer banks. All of them were motionless and all of them were dead.

Melanie’s knees began to bend inward and she lost the ability to support her own weight. Solomon caught her under the arms just in time and helped her on to a chair. Once he found one without a body slumped in it.

“Oh my God,” she gasped through chattering teeth. “Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God.” Her hands were trembling and she was sucking in air with shallow, jagged breaths. Tears began to well in the corners of her eyes. “God no, no, no.”

Solomon crouched down in front of her, blocking her view of the room and grasped her hands in his own. It was almost comical, seeing her delicate and slender appendages in his broad and calloused mits.

“Melanie, listen to me, look at me Melanie. We got a job to and a lotta people are countin’ on us, so you gotta keep your head on straight, OK? Just focus on what you gotta do, OK? And me, focus on me, can you do that?”

She could her him speaking, but the words weren’t really sinking in. She could only think of the bodies and the blood. She’d known those people, she’d worked with them and now they were gone. All so that some psycho could upload a virus, to get through their security and try to summon some fairy tale monster?

She looked into Solomon’s eyes, he was saying something but she wasn’t sure what.

“Melanie, can you do that? Mel?”

She clenched her fists, “They’ll pay for this, I’ll blast them back to hell!”

Solomon made her look away while he moved the bodies and did his best to lay them, respectfully on the floor at the back of the room. He took a moment to say a few words for them and then gave Melanie the all clear.

She practically pounced onto the central console, but then withdrew when she saw the blood smeared over the controls. She hesitated for a moment but then took a deep breath and brought up a holographic interface. She was doing it for her slain comrades as much as anyone else. Solomon took up a position by the door, his guns loaded and ready to fire.

“Can you get the defences back up?” asked Solomon.

Melanie squinted at the display, typing and opening windows; running scans and cancelling sub-routines. “Whoever uploaded this virus was good, very good.” She licked her lips, as she often did when she was concentrating. “But I’m better,” she said with an evil grin.

“I’m afraid not Miss Rain,” said an accented, feminine voice. “Back away from the console.”

She heard the click of Solomon’s revolvers and she turned to see him holding them at Ivana Baskov. Her hand was resting lazily on the hilt of her sword which was still in its scabbard.

“Lady I don’t like harmin’ women, but if you so much as twitch that trigger finger, I swear to god that I’ll fill you full of so much lead that they’ll be able to use your corpse as a pencil.”

“My,” said Ivana, “quite the poet, aren’t you?”

It took a few moments for Melanie to process what happened next. There was a glint of light reflecting off of steel followed by a gunshot and then a spray of blood.

As Solomon looked down at the stain that was spreading across his shirt, a look of shock began to register across his face.

“Solomon, No!” bellowed Melanie.

“Uh-uh, stay there Miss Rain,” said Ivana, sounding like a teacher talking to a student who had spoken out of turn.

Mealanie couldn’t comprehend how this could happen. Why? It made no sense, good people were dying and for what? She began trembling again, but she did her best to choke back her tears; she couldn’t let her enemy see her weakened. Instead she focused on her fury and rage and let it give her strength.

She gritted her teeth and spoke with short, grated words. “You monster, I’m going to kill you, I swear to God, I will!”

**CHAPTER THIRTY: REVELATIONS**

Jessica and Edward were marched into the observation room and were each forced into a chair. The Black Glove agent tied their arms and legs in turn, first Edward and then Jessica.

“I’d never been tied up before I met you,” whispered Jessica as she strained against her ropes, “but since I’ve met you, it’s happened twice. Twice! What does that tell you?”

“You used to lead a boring life?”

Jessica opened her mouth to say something, but then she closed it again. “Fair point.”

Harbinger stood with his back to them, hands clasped gently and gazing down at the Complete Temporal Observation Stand-Point below.

“Time is such a beautiful thing,” he said to nobody in particular, his voice muffled by his scarf. “We truly are in a blessed position, to see that truth more than most.” He turned around and slowly stepped towards Edward and Jessica. “Let’s get straight to the point, shall we?”

“I actually prefer to live life like a broken pencil,” said Edward. “Pointless.”

Harbinger scoffed, “You rely on humour and wit to give you control over difficult situations Mr. Graves. Admirable.” He slammed a gloved fist straight into Edwards jaw.

Jessica strained against her bonds and gritted her teeth as bone cracked against bone.

“Admirable, but very irritating.”

“That’s my biography right there,” said Edward seemingly unaffected by the assault. Fortunately he didn’t seem to have any broken teeth.

Jessica took a look around the room, it was fairly large but there were only two chairs, upon which they were sitting, which gave Jessica the impression that it was operated by a skeleton crew. Consoles and displays lined the walls and at the far end of the room, there was a balcony in place of a wall, which looked out over The Furnace. Blue tendrils of light danced and erupted upwards at the balcony, like the solar flares of a blue sun.

A familiar looking machine was wired up to one of the consoles; a patch up job of two barely compatible technologies. It was about the size of a briefcase and had a small tray for inserting samples, various tubes and modules criss-crossed their way around the machine in an intricate network of circuitry. Jessica immediately recognised it from the photo that Edward had shown her of the Genetic Imprint Isolator, stolen from the Indonesian government. Hayden Crawlfield and another Black Guard agent, the one who had apprehended them, were standing silently in the corner.

Harbinger turned his attention to Jessica. “What’s wrong Miss Lazarus, you look like you’ve got something on your mind. Would you like to say something?”

Jessica averted her gaze, but he gripped her by the chin turned her head, so that she was forced to stare into his deep blue eyes, which peered over his red scarf. She heard Edward yelling futile commands and warnings, but Harbinger just laughed.

The more that she looked into his dazzling, blue eyes, the more she thought that they seemed familiar. Then a light switched flicked on in her mind, “Doctor Churchill?”

Harbinger herked backwards in surprise, letting go of her.

“Jessica,” said Edward, “what did you say?”

“It’s Dr. Chruchill,” she repeated. “I recognise the eyes.”

Edward stared at Harbinger, who took a few more steps backwards. “Hmm...the heavy coat makes it difficult to determine build, so the difference is negligible. Height’s a match, as is hair and eye colour; complexion. Aargh, I am so stupid! How did I not see this before? First rule of investigation: never trust the victim!”

“Wait, so I’m right?”

“I think you are.”

“Wow. Not bad for a student, eh?”

Harbinger furrowed his brow and Jessica was pretty sure that he was growling. But then his expression softened and he reached up with his gloved hands and began unwinding his red scarf.

“No matter,” he said, just as his scarf came off completely, revealing the tanned and not altogether unattractive face of Dr. Chruchill, Curator of the Archfield Museum. “Even if you were both going to live for more than a few more minutes, my plan is near completion. Nothing can stop us now!”

Jessica rolled her eyes, “Over the top, much?”

“Like that Sylvester Stallone movie,” said Edward.

Harbinger fixed them with an intense stare, but then relaxed and smiled. He seemed to be constantly at war with two different personalities. “Childish jokes won’t save either of you.” Then, as if to punctuate the end of the conversation, he turned his back on them and strode over to the G.I.I. He rummaged around inside his coat pocket for a while before pulling something from its depths. Although it was clenched in his gloved fist, Jessica could make out a faint blue glow emanating from within.

He placed the Stone in the Genetic Imprint Isolator and Jessica could now see that its blue light was far greater than before, and was nearly as bright as the light from the Furnace below.

“Why are you doing this Churchill? Honestly, what could a well respected member of the academic community of your era, gain from trying to summon forth a mythical monster from the dawn of time? All of that time alone with those relics must have driven you loco.”

Harbinger cast an eye over his shoulder and responded in a low growl that was far removed from the charming tones he’d used before. “Churchill was just a shell; a facade to aid in my master’s plan. I am his harbinger - that is my true calling.”

Edward cocked his head, “When exactly did you first hear this calling?”

“My master has spoken to me since childhood; he has always been by me. He instructed me on my path – my studies, my career – and when the time became right, he instructed me on my true purpose – to ensnare Edward Graves and his meek, little accomplice.”

“Come back over here and I’ll show you how meek I can be!”

Harbinger laughed. “So the bookseller has had a small taste of adventure and now she fancies herself a warrior.”

“No, I fancy myself a detective.” The double meaning of that sentence suddenly became apparent and she shot a look at Edward, “Not like that!”

Thankfully Edward seemed more focused on Harbinger than any of Jessica’s slips of tongue. In fact he was more than just focused. He had expression that she hadn’t seen on his face before. His jaw was clenched, his brow was furrowed and his eyes were narrowed towards Harbinger with a look that wasn’t anger. It was fear. Edward Graves, the man who had died one hundred times over, who had willingly subjected himself to torture, was scared.

He spoke in a strangely desperate tone, “Listen to me Churchill...”

“I am Harbinger!”

“OK, fine, whatever. You have to listen to me Harbinger, somebody’s using you. That person that’s been inside your head all of your life, he’s not some magical beast, he’s a man; just an ordinary man.”

“I know perfectly well who I serve, Graves!” He practically screamed, with a ferocity that left Jessica wondering how she had ever been attracted to this man, who now looked less like a man and more like a monster that wore human skin.

“My master has shown himself to me, he has told me of his sins!” He paused and a malicious grin sliced its way across his face. “And of yours.”

Edward recoiled, visibly hurt and looking as if he’d been struck physically rather than verbally.

“Then you know that he cannot be trusted,” said Edward, “and that he is far too dangerous to be allowed back into the universe.”

“The same can be said of you,” he countered.

Edward had nothing to say to that, which excited Harbinger a great deal. He shrieked with laughter and returned to working with the G.I.I.

“He’s gone nuts,” whispered Jessica.

“He’s gone through life under the influence of a madman, whispering in his ear and shaping his life for him. He’s always been mad; it’s just that he’s finally letting it show.”

“So who is this guy that you’re talking about, the one who you think has been manipulating Churchill or Harbinger or whatever we’re supposed to call him now? Is he a real threat?”

Edward looked at his lap, a heavy burden clearly resting on his shoulders. “It’s a long story. But yes, he is the most dangerous man in all of existence. He sought the power of a god and he found it. I sealed him away at the dawn of time for the good of the universe.”

Jessica had seen a similar look before, when Archie had told her about the young boy with Edward in the group picture, Xander. She began to connect dots and the faint trace of a suspicion began to seep into her thoughts.

She was about to voice her suspicions when suddenly there was excited gasp from Harbinger. The G.I.I. whirred to life with a low humming sound and Harbinger pointed at Crawlfield’s Black Glove agent, who was standing by a console.

“Now!” yelled Harbinger.

The agent traced his fingers along a touch screen in a complicated pattern and then things really started to get interesting. Sparks erupted from the G.I.I. and a loud hum of power filled the air. The soft, blue tendrils of light from the Furnace grew dark, harsh and more turbulent – twisting and writhing like a knotted ball of snakes. They rose up into the air, so that they were even with the balcony, conjuring a rush of wind which blew Edward’s hat right off his head and sent Jessica’s hair flying all over the place.

“What’s going on?” she yelled over the gale.

“The Isolator has located the point in the timeline where a corresponding genetic trace can be found. Now it’s separated that point from the rest of the timeline so that it can be accessed directly. If anybody goes through there, they’ll be taken directly to the Alpha Point – the dawn of time!”

“Is that possible?”

“Yes,” bellowed Edward, “it’s been done before but it’s incredibly dangerous, any form of artificial time travel is. The Furnace is meant to be a window, not a door.”

Suddenly Harbinger yanked Edward from his chair and hauled him over to the balcony, holding his face out over the edge.

“Look at it Graves,” he screamed, “isn’t it beautiful?”

He let go of Edward and swung his arms out wide, his coat and scarf whipping around violently, his hat long since blown away. Meanwhile, Hayden Crawlfield and his man were doing their best to stop themselves from being knocked over.

It was only now that Jessica noticed that Edward was using some kind of small, serrated blade to saw through his ropes.

“How much longer is this going to take?” called Hayden Crawlfield, his voice barely able to hold on to its irritated tone as his frail body was buffeted by the time winds.

“The promised hour is nearly upon us,” laughed Harbinger. “My master must only follow the signal from the Eternity Stone and he shall be free!”

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that,” said Edward. He pulled his wrists apart until the ropes fell away and were caught by the wind and thrown right past Jessica’s head. His coat flapped around him like a cape as he swiftly untied the knot around his ankles, just in time to dodge a punch from Harbinger.

The Black Glove agent drew his gun and made a move on Edward. But he had to use his arm to shield his face from the wind, hindering his peripheral vision and giving Jessica the chance to dive from her chair and plough right into his side, sending them both to the floor, with the gun sliding off to the side.

For a terrifying few seconds, Jessica could see nothing but red as her hair was wrapped around her face by the wind and she sincerely regretted not tying it up that morning. She didn’t have to worry about for too long though, because as she tried frantically to get her feet back under her, she felt her scalp scream with pain, as she was yanked up by her hair and left to rest on her tip-toes.

She gritted her teeth and did her best not to scream as she looked into the dark brown eyes of the Black Glove agent. He had olive skin and vaguely Italian features, probably in his mid-thirties.

“You’re lucky I don’t hit girls,” he said.

Her eyes began to water, but she still managed to look out of the corner of her at Edward, who was engaged in a fight with Harbinger. Well, Harbinger was the one doing the fighting, with wild, sweeping blows and crazed lunges. Edward, on the other hand, was keeping fluid, dodging, ducking and weaving with ease, almost like he was playing with him. Unfortunately for Jessica, he was too caught up with his own fight to notice what was happening to her.

The Black Glove agent threw her to the ground, temporarily relieving the pain in her head, only to reignite it again when her skull collided with the ground. The world around her shook and went blurry for a few moments, as she saw the Black Glove agent looking down at her.

“I’m sorry,” he said. His voice was surprisingly sincere.

Her head cleared and she heard Crawlfield call out something, she couldn’t make out what exactly. The agent looked back over his shoulder and she saw a window of opportunity, which she wasn’t going to miss. She rolled backwards onto her shoulder blades, lifting her bound legs into the air and delivered a well placed kick to his groin. He shrieked and doubled over in pain while Jessica swung her legs around and swept him at the ankles, the force of the wind boosting her strength enough to send him to the floor with a grunt and a thud.

Jessica rolled over onto her knees, looking for something to cut her ropes with. There wasn’t much in the way of blades in the room, but then something caught her eye, a knife protruding from the Black Glove agent’s jacket pocket as he squirmed on the ground. She did her best to find an alternative, but it seemed that the knife was her best option. Hell, it was her only option.

Frantically, she shuffled across the cold, metal floor, nearly losing her balance more than once. She leaned over and tried to grab the hilt in her mouth, but the agent rolled over and swatted her aside with an arm that felt as broad and strong as a tree trunk.

Her body screamed in pain once more as she flipped backwards, crushing her knees under her own weight, before flopping sideways to the ground. She scrambled to get back upright, well the best that she could manage anyway. The agent had already risen on shaky legs and was standing over her again.

He opened his mouth to say something, but Jessica slammed her head straight into his stomach and then jerked upright as he doubled over, crunching her skull into his jaw. Her head spun for a moment but she fared far better than Captain McBonecrunch.

She shook her head clear and reached for the knife again, but her jaw was grabbed by a hand that was nearly as big as her head. Then, before she could register what was happening, a sledgehammer shaped like a fist, ploughed into her left cheek, sending her back to the floor with a smack.

Jessica’s eyes watered from pain, but she wasn’t in any danger of crying, fortunately. Surprisingly, the Black Glove agent had a horrified look on his face.

“I-I-I’m sorry,” he said, clearly rattled. “I’d never hit a woman, I swear! I don’t know what came over me!”

Then Jessica had an idea.

“You seem like a nice guy, what’s your name?” she asked, ignoring the burning pain in her jaw and cheek.

“Vinnie,” he said hesitantly.

“Alright Vinnie, that’s OK, I know you didn’t mean to hit me, you’re just doing your job, right?”

“Well, yeah, no, we’re not talking; I’m putting you back in that chair!”

He leaned down and pulled her up to her feet. His giant hands were deceptively gentle this time.

“Vinnie,” she said as softly as possible while still being audible over the wind, “let me go, and help us. You’re a decent guy, I can tell, so surely you know that this isn’t right?”

Vinnie clenched his jaw but didn’t speak. His grip on her arms remained gentle but firm.

Jessica looked over her shoulder at the fight, which was still raging on. Edward sidestepped and tripped harbinger over, but he recovered and landed an elbow right in the small of Edward’s back, causing him to arch in pain. He countered by swinging his cane, which he had obviously recovered at some point, right into Harbinger’s stomach.

“Please,” said Jessica. She looked into his eyes imploringly, trying her best to reach out and appeal to the morals of a man who would never hit a woman.

He looked away. Then his grip loosened. Then he let go of her together and moved behind her. She could feel tugging at her wrists, she tried to look over her shoulder, but she could only make out his suit with her peripheral vision.

She couldn’t hear anything over the wind, but she soon felt the ropes around her wrists loosen and fall free. She rubbed her poor wrists, which were red with ropes burns and it wasn’t long before she felt her ankles released.

“Thank-you!” she said, going to hug Vinnie.

He held her at arm’s length and said, “Get to work, before I change my mind.”

Crawlfield was bellowing something, barely audible but clearly furious. Jessica ignored him and ran straight for the G.I.I., snatching the Eternity Stone from it. The wind died down to a gentle breeze and the thunderous noise fell to barely a whisper.

“No!” bellowed Harbinger, before Edward pinned him to the floor.

Vinnie began drawing patterns on the touchscreen again, he looked up at Jessica and was about to say something, but his voice was covered by the sudden sound of a gunshot ringing throughout the room.

His expression turned confused and then, as blood began to spill out of his mouth, his eyes glinted with understanding and then acceptance, all within a brief second or two. His whole body wobbled a little, as a blood stain spread out across his chest, ruining his crisp, white shirt. Without grace or ceremony, he fell forward, slumping over the console.

Jessica shrieked and tried to run to Vinnie, but Hayden Crawlfield shouted a warning, the smoking gun still firmly grasped in his liver spot covered hand.

Both Edward and Harbinger looked stunned, but not enough for Edward to loosen his grip.

“Put the Stone back, young lady,” spat Crawlfield. “Very. Very. Slowly, please.”

Jessica’s lower body received conflicting messages. Her legs wouldn’t stop wobbling, but her feet felt like lead and were fixed firmly to the floor.

Crawlfield fired a shot into the air, which ricocheted, creating sparks and causing Jessica to flinch. Crawlfield remained still.

She took a several deep breaths and then slowly, she placed the Eternity Stone back into the G.I.I. The machine whirred back to life immediately and the blue portal of Temporal Energy was whipped back up into a frenzy; the winds of time rushing back into the room.

“Now Mr. Graves,” bellowed Crawlfield, “if you could be so kind as to release my business partner, so I don’t have to put a bloody great big hole in your little girlfriend, there.”

Edward looked down at Harbinger, then at Jessica, then at Crawlfield and finally back to Harbinger. He scrunched up his face, but released him, standing up and held his hands up.

“Now drop the cane!”

Reluctantly, Edward complied, letting his cane fall to the floor with a muffled clatter. It started to roll away under the force of the wind.

Harbinger jerked his head, indicating for Jessica to stand next to Edward. With her legs still trembling, she complied and stood next Edward with her hands up.

Harbinger rose to his feet and brushed himself off. “Did you really think that you could stop me, little girl? The work I do is divine!”

“More insane than divine,” said Edward.

Then, something happened. The winds accelerated and if they’d been strong before, they were downright gale force now. Jessica lost her footing and actually got blown away! Not just buffeted, but literally blown away. She would have been thrown clear across the room if Edward hadn’t caught her by the wrist, anchoring them both by gabbing onto the balcony’s railing. It was almost comical, the sight of them barely tethered and dangling, almost horizontally, in the temporal cyclone.

Harbinger had also managed to grab hold of the railing, but Crawlfield hadn’t been so lucky. His small, frail body was flung clear across the room, a gunshot echoing out as he went. Perhaps it was an accidental misfire. Perhaps it was a frightened old man’s attempt at fighting something which he had absolutely no control over. Either way, he still ended up as a crumpled, unmoving heap on the far side of the room, a trickle of blood running from his head, his body unmoving.

The vortex of Timspace had also changed, it was more violent now, like a whirlpool flipped on its side, with lightning striking around the edges and in the centre. Speaking of the centre, a dark shadow began to form there, barely noticeable at first, but slowly becoming more distinct.

Harbinger gazed into the eye of the storm with a mixture of manic excitement and awe. He barely seemed to notice the way in which his body was being assaulted, his legs flapping around behind him, as if they were merely a part of his coat.

“He is here, my master has come! Praise be to Xander!”

The shadow was clearly in the shape of a person now, possibly a man.

“Edward! What does this mean?”

He turned his head, his teeth clenched and his hair blowing towards her.

“All hell is about to break loose!”

**CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION**

Ivana Baskov smiled softly as she delicately ran a silken cloth along the length of her blade, gently wiping away Solomon Cain’s blood.

Melanie was shaking and felt like she was going to be sick. She wanted to just drop to her knees and cry; to sob and heave and bellow in anguish and in grief. But more than that, she wanted to live. Even more than that, she wanted to avenge Solomon and that meant, stopping Baskov and her employers.

She glanced over at the console she’d been working at, specifically at the artificial gravity controls. Shutting off the artificial gravity was easy, but she’d need to be quick. It would take twenty, maybe thirty seconds for her to do it and she had to actually get to the console first. Ivana didn’t seem to have a gun, apparently she favoured swords. That was positive, unless she was fast. If she were fast then she’d probably be able to cut her down before she made it to the console. She had a feeling that Ivana Baskov was probably fast.

She looked at Ivana, she was nearly done cleaning her weapon. As if she could sense that she was being watched, she glanced up at Melanie with her piercing eyes and said in that thick accent, “Don’t worry dear, I’ll be with you shortly.”

Knowing that she would be dead soon anyway, she took a chance and dove for the console. The seconds slowed down, stretching out into hours.

Ivana looked up from her sword.

Melanie accessed the gravity settings.

Ivana lunged forward.

Melanie requested an emergency gravity shutdown.

Ivana swung her sword outwards.

Melanie entered her security code and there was a large grinding sound, machinery coming to a halt.

Ivana closed the gap between them, just as her feet floated out from under her.

Melanie turned around just in time to dodge the blade that swung towards her back and then she felt herself rising from the floor, like an angel ascending to the heavens. She quickly grabbed onto the leather strap that was attached to the consol for just such an occasion. Her legs drifted towards the ceiling, as did her short crop of hair, but she held onto that strap with all of her strength.

Ivana had been taken by surprise and thus had taken too long to react. She swung her sword at Melanie, just narrowly missing her right shoe. She yelled something, which Melanie assumed was a Russian profanity.

“Sorry, I don’t speak Russian,” said Melanie.

“Let me down right now you little brat,” spat Ivana as she bounced around the ceiling trying to get control of herself.

“I don’t think so,” said Melanie as she did her level best to keep herself anchored. Keeping her legs down was hard enough, but stopping her shirt from drifting up too far was another challenge in itself.

She looked over at the door and pondered whether she’d be able reach it without drifting up within sword range. She looked up and had to stifle a scream. She couldn’t believe that she hadn’t noticed it before. The room was now full of floating corpses. Blood drifted from wounds and floated towards the ceiling in big globs. Her body went limp and she released her grip on the strap. Fortunately, she took hold of it again before she could float away.

She looked in terror upon Solomon’s body as it floated by. She wasn’t sure how, but there was something about his expression which pushed her. It was as if he were telling her to keep going. She broke away from his lifeless gaze and turned her attention to Ivana, who was beginning to get control of herself. She crouched upside down, on the ceiling and it looked as if she was going to attempt to spring down at Melanie.

Melanie took one last look at Solomon and then decided to take another risk. She reached down to the control panel and reactivated the artificial gravity.

Ivana kicked off of the ceiling with her sword stretched out before her, just as Melanie felt her stomach sink and her feet fell clumsily to the floor. Wasting no time, she dove for the door and turned around just in time to see Ivana crashing to the floor with a scream, her sword snapping in half and the pieces sliding in two different directions. Finally, as it rained blood and corpses, Solomon’s body fell directly on top of her and pinned her to the floor. Ivana Baskov was left battered, bruised and covered in her blood, as well as Solomon’s.

Melanie wiped away a tear and smiled at how even in death Solomon had managed to save her and get revenge. She hoped that it brought him some peace.

**CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: TURNING THE TIDES**

Jessica’s hand was covered with sweat and was beginning to slip. She didn’t know how much longer she’d be able to hold on to him. Or for that matter, how long he would be able to hold on to her.

The dark figure in the centre of the vortex was slowly emerging, still obscured by shadows, but now more three-dimensional.

“I’ve got an idea,” yelled Edward. “Trust me.”

Before Jessica could ask him to flesh out his idea for her, he let go of her hand and she felt herself hurtling towards the far wall, screaming all the way. With his outstretched hand, Edward made a few fluid gestures, shooting out a stream of Temporal Energy, which hit Jessica, causing her body to stop with a jolt, suspended in mid-air. The wind kept blowing around her, but there was some sort of invisible barrier that protected her from its effects. She tried to move her arms or legs, but couldn’t and in her peripheral vision, she could see that her clothes were frozen as if they were in mid-flight. It stuck her that she was frozen in time - that was the only explanation. But if that were true, shouldn’t that effect how she perceived everything around her? Yet, time around her seemed to be moving normally. Maybe it was the air around her that had been frozen, not her. She decided it was best not to dwell on it for the time being.

Edward let go of the railing and he too flew backwards, but only for a few seconds. He waved his arms around in sharp movements and he suddenly stopped midair, his coat still flapping about in the wind. Looking closely, Jessica could see faint streams of blue light weaving around Edward’s body.

He held both arms arm, palms splayed outwards, towards the whirling mass of Temporal Energy.

“What are you doing?” screamed Harbinger, still clinging to the railing.

“Throwing a spanner in the works,” said Edward. He closed his eyes and lowered his head.

The dark figure finally emerged; he looked about twenty-five and had long, dark hair that was tied up in a ponytail. He wore a dark red suit and his face was twisted in an expression of absolute fury. Jessica recognised him from the picture of the Second Hand – it was Xander.

Harbinger yelled exaltations and laughed maniacally - his mind finally snapped now that his mission was complete.

“Edward!” The man’s scream carried clear across the room, even over the sound of the wind. It froze Jessica’s blood and she could feel her face turning a few shades paler.

A flicker of shock dashed across Edward’s face, before he closed his eyes and bowed his head.

“Edward, look at me, you coward!”

Edward kept his head bowed and muttered, “I’m sorry.”

Then he twisted his hands and blue streams of light began to dance around the man’s body.

The man roared with rage and tried to take a few steps forward, but the Temporal Energy held him back. But even as the energy slowly encased his body, he strove forward, straining with every muscle. Soon, he was leaning out as far as he could go, looking straight at Edward with a ferocity which Jessica had never seen before.

Slowly, Edward looked at the man and they stared at each other for what seemed like the longest time. The man’s face softened to the point of sadness. It looked like he might cry.

“Please,” he said softly. “Brother.”

Edward closed his eyes again and said, “I’m sorry.”

With that, he pulled in his left arm and clenched his fist, while simultaneously pushing his right arm out further, hand still splayed.

There was a blood-curdling scream as the blue Temporal Energy pulled the man back into the writhing mass of light and with a flash of blinding light, the energy settled back into its passive state. The wind dropped off immediately and Edward fell to the floor, crumpling to his knees.

At the same time, Jessica’s little bubble of suspended time suddenly popped and she was hurled across the room by the delayed force of the wind, and then dropped to the ground with a crash. She just laid there and groaned for a while before sitting up and saying, “Ow.”

Harbinger let out a cry of anguish, “What have you done?”

He whipped out a gun from a holster inside his coat and he pointed it at Edward, who was still in some kind of shock.

Jessica strode forward and screamed Edward’s name, she shot her arm out in a futile gesture that turned out not to be so futile after all. A flash of blue light shot out of her hand and hit Harbinger, sending him backwards. He was taken off guard and lost his footing, sending him over the balcony and screaming into the Furnace below.

Jessica stopped in her tracks and looked at her hand in shock. It looked normal but it tingled in an odd way, all the way up her arm.

She ran to the balcony and looked over the railing. She couldn’t see anything other than the gentle waves of blue light below.

She retrieved Edward’s hat and cane from the back of the room, trying not to look at the bodies of Crawlfield and Vinnie. Silently, she offered Edward his things. He was still slumped over on his knees, she wasn’t even sure if he was aware of what had happened.

“Edward?”

Slowly, he looked up at her. His eyes were filled with so much pain and sorrow; it was hard for her to look at him. The anguish in his eyes seemed to physically age him. Gone was the facade of the fresh faced young man with all of time and space at his feet. Then, in that moment, Jessica could see all four hundred and fifty-three years of his life, weighing down on his shoulders and reflected in his eyes.

He offered a weak smile and he slowly rose to his feet and took his hat and cane from her.

“It’s over,” she said.

“Yes. All over,” he said quietly as he pulled his hat down firmly, pulling the brim down low over his forehead.

“I thought that gentlemen didn’t wear hats inside,” she said, trying to lighten the mood.

“Well, there are exceptions.”

Then she saw a single tear run down his cheek and it sparkled on his chin for moment, before dropping to the floor.

**CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: TIDYING UP**

Under Melanie’s leadership, the Systems Operators and Security Team soon had the security protocols up and running again. After that, dealing with the remaining Black Glove agents was fairly easy. With the Wash Ships taken out, Hayden Crawlfield dead and Harbinger missing, they didn’t put up much of a fight.

Slowly the chaos gave way to order, as prisoners were processed and damage was assessed and repaired.

Edward and Jessica assisted with the cleanup operation and oversaw the retrieval of Crawlfield’s body as well as the search for Harbinger. His body couldn’t be found, which led Edward to theorise that he had actually fallen into The Furnace. Nobody was certain what that meant, The Furnace was much more dangerous than regular Timespace; it was all of Timespace compressed into a single point. Some thought that he would have been killed by the temporal stress, others believed that he could have been torn apart and scattered throughout all of time. But then there was also the other possibility – that he had survived and wound up somewhere out there, in time and space. Edward didn’t think that was likely, but said that he didn’t want to dismiss the idea completely. He didn’t mention what Jessica did – the blast of Temporal Energy – and neither did she. She wasn’t sure what it meant exactly, but she didn’t feel like it was the right time to talk to Edward about it. He put on a brave face, but he’d been shaken to the core.

Three hours after the fight in the Furnace, the Council were ready for a debriefing. Edward said that he’d rather put his head through a sausage grinder and, truth be told, a few of the councillors would have preferred that too. But they made him go anyway.

Thankfully though, Edward convinced them to spare Jessica the ordeal, something which she was grateful for. She wandered through The Watch until she found a quiet little rest area that Edward had told her about. After everything that had gone on, she just really wanted to grab a hot cup of tea and unwind, maybe even have a nap.

She passed through the dull metal doors as they hissed open, with her Styrofoam cup of tea clasped in her hand. It was a spacious but simple room with leather couches and benches lining the walls and a table sitting in the middle. The far wall however was mostly occupied by a large window through which the Earth could be seen, suspended amongst the eerie stillness of space and washed with the blue light of Timespace. It looked so beautiful.

Sitting on a leather, backless bench, looking out at the planet below, was Melanie. She was hugging one leg against her body while the other one lay stretched out on the couch. She looked morose and pensive.

Jessica didn’t really know what to say, so she took Edward’s advice and started with, “Hello.”

“Hi,” replied Melanie without really looking up.

“Is this seat taken?” she asked.

“Go ahead,” said Melanie.

For nearly a minute the two girls sat there without a word, just looking out at the planet below.

“It’s beautiful down there isn’t it?” said Jessica. “I mean, we’re looking at a single moment of the Earth’s history, frozen forever. Just think of all of the people down there, locked in a perpetual state of joy or sorrow or birth or...”

“Death,” continued Melanie.

Jessica frowned and looked down at her steaming tea. “Edward and I heard about Solomon,” she said. “I’m not going to pretend that I knew him well, but he was a good guy and he didn’t deserve to die like that.”

“Does anybody?” scoffed Melanie.

Jessica hesitated, “Would you like to talk about it?”

Melanie scowled, “Oh sure and then maybe we can be besties and we can paint each other’s nails and talk about boys.”

Jessica had never been very good with these situations so instead of saying something that upset her further, she opted to take a sip of her tea. Unfortunately nerves turned that sip into more of a gulp and unfortunately the tea was still very, very hot and unfortunately her body reacted to that heat by spurting that tea all over Melanie.

“What the hell?” she screamed, springing to her feet.

“Sorry, hot, hot,” panted Jessica as she used her hands to fan her exposed tongue.

The scowl on Melanie’s face stretched into a smile and she began to laugh. Despite the tea in her hair and on her face, she laughed hysterically. Despite her stinging tongue, Jessica managed to join in the laughter, as best as she could anyway.

The two girls laughed and laughed until tears ran down their cheeks. Then Jessica realised that Melanie’s tears were flowing faster than her own and without any sign of transition, her faced morphed from laughter to weeping. She pressed her face into her shaking hands and howled with grief.

“Hey,” said Jessica, as she put an arm around her shoulder, “it’s alright, just let it out.”

She let go of Melanie for a moment to produce a hanky from her satchel and offered it to her. She took it with a trembling hand and wiped her eyes. Her tears eased a little.

“Great,” said Melanie, “there goes my tough girl reputation.”

“I don’t know,” said Jessica, “with that running eyeliner you still look pretty scary to me.”

Melanie smiled a tear-stained smile and handed the hanky back to Chrystal. “Thanks.”

“I should thank you for not blowing your nose on it,” said Jessica.

They both laughed again. Not as long or hard as before, but genuine, healing laughter nonetheless.

The laughter slowly died down and was replaced by the particular brand of awkward silence, that exists once laughter has faded away.

“You know, I could have been you,” said Melanie.

Jessica cocked her head. “What do you mean?”

“I could have been Edward’s partner.” She took a deep breath. “When I was about twelve my parents were murdered, they were both Archaics and Edward investigated.”

“My god, I’m so sorry,” said Jessica. She was surprised, not only by what she had just said, but by the fact that she had said it at all. It was like, in a single instant, her walls had come tumbling down and all of that repressed emotion had come flooding out, desperate to be received by somebody.

Melanie kept talking, as if she were worried that if she were to stop, she wouldn’t be able to start again.

“They were good, honest people, my parents. Both Archaics, but they weren’t really involved with The Watch or the Council, they just lived out a normal life, raising me, running their little shop.” She paused for a moment, her head bowed. “The guy who killed them was a psycho and a serial killer, but he wasn’t an Archaic, he was a Linear. So naturally, the Council didn’t want to get involved - they said that they couldn’t interfere with Linear affairs.”

The sadness in her voice was replaced by anger. “They even had the audacity to say that if my parents had worked for the Watch then they still would have still been alive.” Melanie scoffed, “They think that all Archaics should just live on this heap of junk for eternity and not bother with something trivial like a normal life. Mum and dad never liked that idea,” she said with a soft smile.

“So how did Edward get involved?” asked Jessica.

“The same way he usually does, he heard the gossip. Two Archaics murdered in their own home, an orphaned child, the Temporal Council refusing to intervene, how could he resist?”

“That sounds like him alright,” said Jessica.

“He caught the guy,” said Melanie, leaning back on her hands and looking up at the ceiling. “But since the Council refused to put him on trial, he had to be a little more creative.”

“What do you mean?”

“He just made sure that the Linear police were able to catch him. He may have messed with time a little bit, helped them find bits of evidence which would have otherwise gone unnoticed, that sort of thing.” She smiled and wiped away a stray tear. “Plus, I hear that he may have given the creep a...well, a talking to. I’m not really clear on the details, but he scared the guy, I mean really terrified him. And he made it clear that if he somehow escaped or weaselled his way out of prison, or hurt anybody ever again, then Edward would find him.”

“I was so in love with him after that,” she continued. “Not love, love, but you know? I was only eight and he was this superhero that came in and caught the bad guy who killed my parents. I was amazed by him, I looked up to him. He taught me to laugh again and was the first adult who seemed to genuinely understand me - the first person to really make me feel like everything would be alright.”

Jessica smiled, “He has that effect on people.”

“Yeah he does. Anyway, he kept checking up on me, organised to have me study at the Watch but also to live with a guardian in my own time so that I could receive a traditional education. He’d visit me from time to time and brought me presents, took me on trips, that sort of thing. But it was tough for me; I had a lot of anger, guilt and grief swirling around inside of my head and for a prepubescent girl, that’s a dangerous thing.”

“I started getting into fights, started running away and doing whatever I could to make other people feel at least a fraction of the pain which I felt. By the time I was fifteen I had been to three different high schools and the Temporal Council were going to throw me out of the Archaic Training Program. Edward tried to talk to me, tried to help me but I didn’t want help. I told him that if he wanted to help me then he could make me his partner and let me work with him. He seemed to honesty think about it and then he told me that if I could make it through high school and the training program without causing too much more trouble, then he’d consider it.”

“So did you?” asked Jessica.

“I managed to not get kicked out of anywhere again, if that’s what you mean. But I still had some trouble - a fight here and there, usually brought on by somebody else. But I was genuinely trying and my marks, both Linear and Archaic were pretty damn good. But on my graduation day for the Archaic program, Edward was there and I asked him whether I had proved myself. He told me that he was proud of me but that I just had too much anger inside of me and until I could master that, then he couldn’t take me on as a partner, it would be too dangerous for me. Pfft, it’s easy to judge when your parents weren’t murdered four days after your eighth birthday.”

A heavy silence hung between them for a long while, before Jessica felt the overwhelming need to break it.

“Melanie I,” she began before Melanie held up her hand to stop her.

“Don’t,” she said. “Don’t apologise or say, that you understand - I don’t want that. It’s true that I can’t bear the fact that he chose you and not me, and yes when we first met, I resented you for that. But I know that it’s not your fault. If he chose you, then there must be something special about you that he saw, probably something that you’re not even aware of. Just do me a favour, alright?”

“Anything,” said Jessica.

“Take care of him and take care of yourself too. I want you to prove to me and to him that he chose the right girl for the job.” She smiled a devious little smile. “Because if it turns out that he chose a little princess over a bad-ass like me, then I’m going to have to kick your ass you understand?”

Jessica gently placed a hand on her shoulder, leant in and with a smile she whispered, “I’d like to see you try Emo chick.”

They both laughed again and in that moment Jessica had the nagging feeling that, despite their differences, she had just made a new friend.

Jessica left the room and Melanie to go in search of Edward. It exactly didn’t take her long, since he was standing right outside in the corridor.

“What are you loitering around here for? Were you spying on me?”

“Do you really take me for the type to spy on young girls?” he asked, pretending to be offended. Then, more seriously, he said, “How is she?”

“About as well as you could hope,” said Jessica. “I can’t begin to imagine what she’s going through right now.”

“You’ve been through a lot too,” said Edward. “You’ve seen people killed right in front of you as well and even though they weren’t friends, you still have every right to upset by that. So if you feel like talking, my ears are at your service.”

“Thanks,” she said, “but I’m Ok. No, really, I am.”

They walked side by side down the corridor, though Jessica had no idea where they were going. She thought that Edward probably didn’t either.

“So, how did the debriefing go? You weren’t in there for very long.”

Edward shrugged. “There wasn’t much to say really. I told them I’d have my official report in by Monday. I didn’t actually specify which Monday, though. I’ll pick a nice one. Out of the hundreds of trillions of Mondays that exist, there must be at least one nice one out there,” he said thoughtfully.

“Maybe they’ll start taking you a little more seriously now.”

“Oh I wouldn’t want anybody to do that,” said Edward.

“I mean, maybe they’ll listen to you now. You were right about The Watch being attacked, so surely that’ll change their opinion of you.”

“And maybe it’ll start raining sugar plums and mince pies, but it probably won’t. The Council’s opinion of me has nothing to do with what I do or say, it’s all about what I am.”

“You mean, immortal?”

Edward cast a sidelong glance, down at her. “In part. They think that I’m an abomination; a monster; an unnatural event; a paradox; a dangerous anomaly. And that’s just the ones who like me!” He shook his head and smiled. “It’s OK, I don’t need them to like me, I just need them to stay out of my way and to let me have my freedom as a free agent; a private investigator. In return, I round up the bad guys whom they don’t want to waste their time with. It’s an uneasy relationship, but it works.”

They kept walking for a little longer, with Edward making casual chatter and stupid jokes. But he never once brought up what took place in the Furnace; the man who had called out to Edward with such animalistic fury. Jessica couldn’t stop thinking about him, or about the powers which she had seen Edward wield, nor how emotionally assaulted he had seemed by the whole experience.

Looking at him now, talking and laughing, she wouldn’t have guessed that just a few hours ago, he had been slumped on the floor with tears welling in his eyes. He was good at wearing a mask. She supposed that living for four hundred and fifty three years would have given him a lot of experience.

“Edward,” she said reluctantly, “can we talk about what happened down in the Furnace?”

He stopped in his tracks and then turned to her, resting his hands on his cane. His face was hard to read. Jessica was unsure whether it was an invitation to speak, or a polite refusal to talk about the subject.

“Yes, I suppose that I do owe you some explanations.” He sighed. “That man who came through the portal, his name is Alexander Tooms, better known as-”

“Xander,” finished Jessica. “Sorry, I saw a picture of him at Archie’s place, along with the rest of the Second Hand. Archie filled me in on some of the details.”

“Oh,” said Edward. “Oh, I see. How much detail did he give you exactly?”

“Not much, really. Just that you and Xander were like brothers, but something happened. He didn’t really elaborate.”

“Right,” said Edward.

They found another vacant rest area without too much trouble, it seemed that everyone was far too busy to rest. Edward made them both a cup of tea and then sat her down to tell her about Xander.

“I was orphaned at a young age,” he said, blowing on his steaming tea. “I was taken in by an English lord, who also happened to be an Archaic and a very well respected one at that.”

“So you weren’t born into privilege,” said Jessica.

“Not at all. My father owned a bookshop, coincidentally. We were well off, very much middle-class. But my adoptive father – boy, now he was loaded!” He took a sip of tea. “But I digress. A few years after he took me in, he took Xander in. We were the same age and he was also a budding Archaic who had just lost his parents.”

“So you became adoptive brothers.”

“Oh yes, but we were so much more than that. We were best friends and as close as two people could be. We were survivors of tragedy, both thrown into worlds that we scarcely understood and being taught to harness power that we could hardly believe.”

“So, what happened to him?”

Edward frowned. “Not everyone can survive tragedy and keep their soul at the same time. Some people become tainted, even if they aren’t aware of it. For years, Xander tried to fight the anger and pain inside of him; he tried to bury it. But all that did was make it grow and fester, until one day it exploded to the surface.”

He closed his eyes for a moment, thinking and remembering. “He wanted to change time, to stop his parents from dying. More than that, he wanted to be able to control time, to shape it as he saw fit. He thought that he could rewrite time and make the world a better place - that was his life-long ambition. Nobody really worried about it until he found a way to do it.”

“The Alpha Point,” guessed Jessica.

“Gold star,” said Edward. “He thought that if were able to reach the Alpha Point, he could tap into it and not only see all of time before him, but control it as well.”

“So you stopped him. You didn’t want to, but he didn’t leave you any choice, right? You tried to reason with him; convince him that nobody should wield that power, but he wouldn’t listen.”

Edward lowered his head and a shadow fell over his face. “I followed him through the Furnace and, just as we reached the Alpha Point, I slapped a pair of stasis cuffs on him. I was going to bring him back, but the Alpha Point, it was...there aren’t any words to describe it. I was mesmerised and horrified at the same time, it was beautiful and terrifying and the pain was just too much.” He exhaled silently. “To this day, I can’t remember how I returned. I just remember waking up on the floor of the Furnace control room with the blue light dancing over my face. And Xander was gone. I assumed that he was dead, but I always had my suspicions, a feeling that he was still alive and in eternal torment, because of me.”

“Why didn’t you go back and check?”

“I wanted to, but the Council forbade me and put measures in place to block off the Alpha and Omega Points, preventing something like this from happening again. It was around about then that they stopped trusting me.”

“That was when you became immortal?”

He nodded.

“And what about those other powers?”

“When I came back, strange things started happening to me. Time distortions, unnatural fluctuations in Timespace, that sort of thing. I quickly realised that I could actually control Timespace, and by extension, control time itself. I tried to keep it secret, but the Council found out and pretty soon they were cutting me up and running experiments on me. That’s how they discovered that I was immortal too.”

Jessica cringed at the thought. “That’s horrible!”

“I know, I was there. It wasn’t so bad though, well, OK, it was, but it gave me a new scale to measure all future pain and suffering on, so that was pretty cool. Naturally, I eventually decided that I didn’t like being treated as an undying lab experiment, so I escaped and spent the next few centuries travelling, training, learning and all the while seething with anger. But, I think that’s a story for another time.”

“Edward, I’m sorry, your life – it’s been...”

“Pretty amazing, right?” Suddenly, he was smiling and looking like his usual self. “Sure, I’ve had some rough spots – nobody should have to see what their internal organs look like – but, hey, it’s the bad times that make the good times matter. Don’t pity me Jessica, I’m far too amazing to be pitied.”

“Wow, you really have been humbled by your life experiences.”

“I’d like to think so.”

“Something I’m still not clear on. If you’ve got these super timey-wimey powers, why don’t you use them more? I can think of at least a half a dozen times since we’ve met, that they would have come in handy.”

“Because I stand by my beliefs, Jessica. I believe that time is an awesome force that needs to be treated with respect. I believe that nobody should have control over time and that includes myself. I’ll use my abilities when absolutely necessary, but never before that point. Every time I use that power I feel like a hypocrite and in the process, I dishonour Xander’s memory. Besides, it doesn’t take much for an ability to become a crutch and I would much prefer to rely on my intelligence, cunning and remarkable problem solving capabilities, than any sort of superpower. Time-travel none-withstanding, of course.”

Jessica felt so much closer to Edward than she had before. It spoke volumes that he felt comfortable with divulging so much to her and she was truly grateful for his trust and faith in her.

She looked down at her right hand, the tingling long since subsided. She knew that she had to tell him about what happened earlier.

“Edward,” she said, still looking at her hand, “back at the Furnace, when Harbinger fell over the railing...”

“You hit him with a blast of Temporal Energy,” said Edward.

“You saw it?”

“I’m a detective, I see everything, even if I’m a little bit out of sorts.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

Edward shrugged, “It’s been a busy day and besides, I knew that you’d talk to me about it when you were ready.”

“So what does this mean, how did it happen?”

Edward leaned back in his chair. “Well, I’d say that your exposure to the Alpha Point through the Furnace, triggered similar changes in you as it did in me.”

Jessica’s eyes grew wide with worry. “Do you think that means that I’m immortal too?”

“It’s hard to say,” he said, rubbing his chin. “You didn’t actually visit the Alpha Point, as I did, so you might not be affected in the same way. Only time will tell. In the meantime, I’ll just have to broaden your training to include your new abilities.”

Jessica looked down at her hands and thought about the feeling of power that she’d felt before. But she also thought of Edward and his cursed life and she hoped beyond hope that she wouldn’t have to share the same fate.

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They spent a lot of time at The Watch over the next week, sitting in on interrogations, taking part in hearings and enquiries and overseeing security debriefings. The Council seemed to hold Edward in a slightly higher regard now and even extended the same courtesy to Jessica.

Then, of course, there were the funerals. Thirty-seven people had died during the attack and Jessica and Edward attended every single funeral and memorial. For Jessica though, the only one that carried any real emotional weight was Solomon’s. She realised that she had hardly known him – she had met him once and they’d hardly even spoken. But maybe that was what cut the deepest wound – the sense that comes from being touched by a life, but having never fully known that life.

Melanie was at the funeral too. So were Ahmed, Archie and the twins. It felt like they all shared a bond now, like old army buddies. The night of the funeral, they went to the *Chrono-Logic*, along with some others from the Watch, and they raised their glasses to Solomon’s memory. Gradually, the mood lifted and sorrow gave way to joy as, for the first time since the attack, they were able to actually celebrate their victory. They talked and laughed and danced and sang – watching Edward sing *Barbie Girl* on the Karaoke machine was something she’d never forget.

Despite the danger that she’d faced over the preceding weeks, Jessica felt something that she’d never felt before. For the first time in her life, Jessica really felt like she was part of something. She belonged somewhere and she felt like she had a purpose in life.

And it made her feel happy.

**CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: THE END OF THE BEGINNING**

Two weeks after the Battle of the Watch – as it was being called – on a sunny Wednesday afternoon, Jessica was putting some new releases on the shelves of *Horizon Books*. She heard the bell above the door jingle and she stood up so that she could see over the bookshelves. A large woman in her forties walked in, accompanied by two little girls and a little boy in school uniforms.

She smiled at them and asked them if they needed assistance, which they politely declined and headed for the education section, except for the older looking girl, who stopped at the children’s section on the way and began excitedly flipping through the pages of a sparkling, pink princess book. Jessica adjusted her position so that she could keep an eye on them while she worked, they seemed like rambunctious kids and you could never be too careful. Besides, she knew that it was only a matter of time before the mother asked for help finding whatever particular book the teacher had assigned.

The little bell jingled again and she thought that there was going to be an after school rush, so decided to move behind the counter. When she stood up, however, she didn’t see another mother flanked by children, nor a group of high schoolers, trying to bring Slurpies into the store. Instead, she saw Edward.

“Hey!” she said, excitedly.

“Good afternoon, Jess,” he said. He was wearing a tan coat and waistcoat, with green, check patterned trousers and a red cravat. In one hand, he held his hat, in the other, his cane.

The woman at the back of the store was looking at him with an incredulous gaze, as if she were actually offended by how weird he looked. One of her boys began whispering very loudly about the weird man and she told him to keep his voice down, before they continued browsing the shelves.

“I haven’t heard from you in a few days,” she said, “I was beginning to worry.”

“Ah yes, sorry about that, been a bit busy. Time flies, you know. Well it doesn’t really, I mean, you should know that as well as I, it’s just an expression. But why do people say that, I mean, why don’t they say that time runs?” He paused mid sentence and tilted his head, thinking. “Where was I? Oh, right, busy! Yes, I’ve been very busy and, actually, that’s partly why I’m here.”

“We’ve got another case?”

“Yes, actually. But first, how are you holding up now that the drama at the Watch has died down?”

“Oh yeah, you know, I’m good,” she said. “I’ve actually done some travelling on my own.”

“Oh, really? When did you go to?”

She took a look around cautiously, to make sure that nobody was watching. Then, with a barely contained grin, she pulled out a copy of the complete works of William Shakespeare and opened the cover. On the title page, a nearly illegible text was scrawled in flowing, cursive script - four full lines, followed by two words beneath the main block of text.

“You got William Shakespeare’s autograph?” asked Edward, impressed. “On a collection of his works, published in 2010?”

“I know, right? He was little confused by it, but I think he’d had a few ales, so he didn’t over-think it too much.”

“Not bad penmanship for an inebriated fellow,” said Edward. “Though, Will always could hold his drink – that’s how I ended up owing him ten quid.”

“It was just amazing, watching him write,” she said. “I had to really fight the temptation to take a selfie with him.”

Edward examined the book and then handed it back to Jessica. “Do you realise that you now own what is arguably the most valuable book in the entire English-speaking world, and yet it is also completely worthless?”

She nodded. “Yes, yes, the irony is not lost on me.” She carefully put the book back in her bag. “So, what’s this new case?”

“Are you sure that you’re up for it? I mean, naturally you find an enigmatic and devilishly handsome gentleman, such as myself, irresistible, but things got pretty rough with that last case, so I’d understand if you needed some more time off, or if you changed your mind completely.”

“Yeah, it’s dangerous,” said Jessica, “but for the first time in my life, I feel like I can do something worthwhile. What’s the point in having these powers if I’m not going to use them for good?”

Edward smiled, “Oh Jess, I knew that I was right to take you on as my student.”

“Oh yeah, because it was entirely voluntary.”

“Oh course it was, from the moment we met, I knew that you were just the kind of girl I needed.”

“That’s not how I remember it.”

The woman at the back of the shop called out, rather brashly.

“She’ll be with you in a moment ma’am, we’re just arranging to go out for a romantic evening which will involve Jazz – no, young people don’t listen to Jazz anymore, do they? – Rock n’ Roll – no, Hip-Hop? Yes, lots of loud Hip-Hop and probably some kissing and various illicit activities.”

The woman’s jaw dropped and Jessica, trying to smile, assured her that she would be with her in a moment.

“Sometimes I don’t know whether you’re deliberately trying to embarrass me, or your just way too eccentric for your own good.”

Edward held his hands up, mimicking a set of scales. “A little bit of column A, a little bit of column B.”

“Well, I’ve got to get to work. I’ve got two jobs, but this is the only one that actually pays the bills. We can’t all be the idle rich.”

“Right-o,” he said, pulling his hat on and grabbing the door handle. “Give me a buzz when you’re off work. The Moon has been stolen and the President of Earth is keen for us to get it back, and trust me, you do not want to get on her bad side.”

Jessica said goodbye and turned to help her customer, who was now standing with her hands on her hips, her face scrunched up and waiting impatiently. Her children were jumping up and down all around her, like they were part of one of those Whack-a-Mole games.

Jessica stopped, looked over her shoulder, offered a quick apology to the woman and then ran out the door.

“Is it always going to be like this?” she called. Edward, who had just reached the corner, stopped and looked over his shoulder. “This crazy; this dangerous?”

“If you’re lucky,” he said.

“Am I insane for being excited by that, for actually enjoying the danger?”

“Probably,” said Edward. “But then again, all the best people are.”

Then, with a smile and a wink, he was gone in a blur of blue light, leaving Jessica standing there with a smile on her face. It didn’t subside, even as she turned to walk back into the shop to face the undoubtedly angry customer, for she finally felt, after nearly nineteen years, that her real life had finally begun. She didn’t know where it would take her or what trials she’d encounter on the way. She only knew one thing.

Only time would tell.

**THE END**