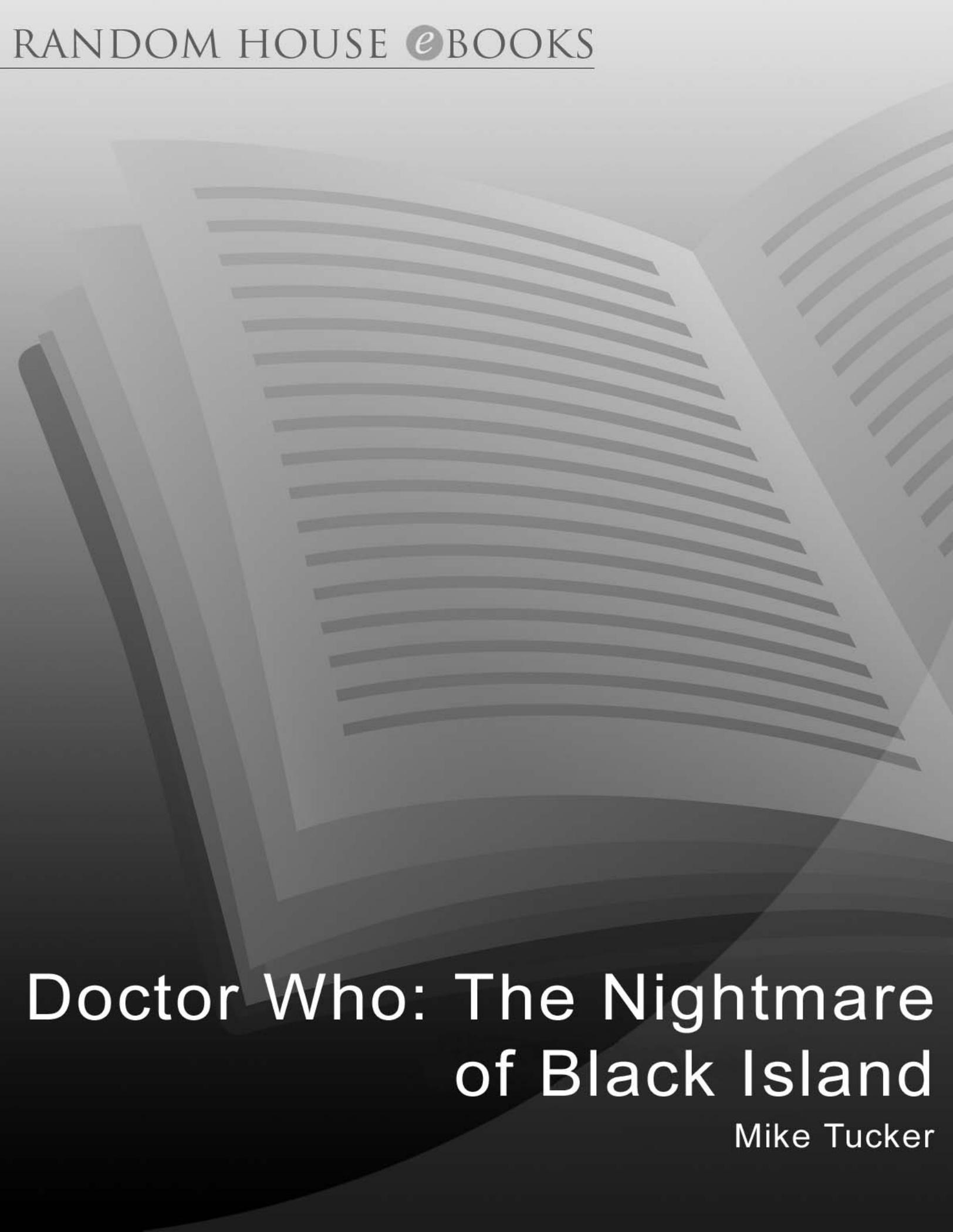


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Doctor Who: The Nightmare
of Black Island

Mike Tucker

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The
Nightmare
of
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BY MIKE TUCKER

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For Karen

The first clap of thunder echoed off the cliff face like cannon fire, sending gulls shrieking into the dark, brooding sky. Out across the waves a bright fork of lightning lit up the purple clouds on the horizon and, with another ominous rumble of thunder, the rain swept in from the sea.

Carl Jenkins looked up in despair and struggled with the hood of his jacket as a sharp gust of wind swirled the rain around him. He glowered angrily at the sky as the rain became a torrent, and cursed his luck.

The weather had been against him almost as soon as he set out on this holiday. When he left his flat in Bristol the sun had been shining and his spirits had been high. He should have known that his fortunes were going to change as soon as he saw the boiling clouds on the other side of the Severn Bridge. It was typical. Every trip he made into Wales was the same. Paying the toll was like putting coins into a launderette washing machine: no sooner had they clunked into the slot than the water started to pour.

The brochure advertising holidays in west Wales that had fallen out of his local newspaper had seemed ideal. The photographs of the bays and cliff tops looked idyllic, but it had been a paragraph about the fishing that had finally convinced Carl to pick up the phone and book.

His father had been a great fisherman. Old family holidays had always started with a regular routine of unpacking long canvas bags from the attic, checking rods and reels, sprucing up floats. The entire exercise fascinated Carl and there had always been that extra thrill of danger when his father untied the small pouch filled with gleaming hooks, pointing out sternly that they were not to be touched under any circumstances.

Not that he would have gone anywhere near them. The wicked barbs on the tips had terrified him and he had always curled his hands into fists so that there was no chance one of those metal spikes could get near his fingers.

Carl had spent a pleasant couple of hours pulling his father's rods and bags from the attic and checking that everything was in working order. It came as some surprise to find that the bag of hooks still sent a familiar chill down his spine, and he found himself smiling at how stupid childhood memories continued to have such a strong influence.

Ynys Du had seemed like an ideal spot. The village was small and pretty with a couple of decent pubs, the campsite was only a few minutes' walk from the centre and the brochure had pointed out several good spots for fishing along the coast. There was even a disused lighthouse on the island out in the bay - a ragged lump of black rock that explained the name of the village - and the photographs in the brochure had given the entire area a picture-postcard feel.

The truth was that now, under the dark and brooding sky that had loomed low overhead ever since his arrival, the village had a completely different feel. The long, tangled line of rocks along the coast that looked so pretty in the sunlight had taken on a harsh, jagged feel, the waves boiling angrily along their edge sending spray high into the air. On top of all that, the campsite was deserted, his little orange tent the only one. He hadn't even been able to get hold of the site owner.

Carl shivered inside his jacket. The rain was icy cold and the wind was starting to cut right through him. He glanced back along the coast at the village. As the rain soaked into the stone of the buildings, the entire village seemed to

darken and solidify, becoming cold and unfriendly. Another loud crack of thunder made him jump. It suddenly seemed like a very long walk back to the relative comfort of his tent, and he was aware of how treacherous the paths along the cliffs were becoming as they started to stream with water.

With a deep sigh, he started to reel in his line, wincing as lightning arced across the waves. The lighthouse that had been so picturesque in the brochure now stood out like a dark, ominous spire in the water, the black rocks at its base flecked with foam from the raging ocean.

A sudden flare of pale light made Carl glance up, puzzled. That hadn't been lightning. He brushed away the stray strands of hair that had matted themselves across his face and peered through the lashing rain at the looming shape of the island in the bay. Surely that flash had come from the lighthouse...

As he struggled to see through the rainwater stinging his face, another faint pulse of light lit up the clouds. It *had* come from the lighthouse! He could see a faint flicker of sickly green-grey light from the lamp room. He frowned. The lighthouse was meant to be deserted; it was a relic from the days when Ynys Du had been a busy mining community and ships had had to pick their way through the treacherous sandbanks that lay just off the coast. According to the guidebook, it hadn't been used since the 1970s.

He reached for one of the canvas bags at his side. His binoculars were tucked into a leather case in there, packed with the fishing gear in case there was an opportunity for bird-watching. Shaking the rain from his eyes, Carl groped around in the sodden bag. He gave a sudden cry as he felt a searing pain.

He whipped his hand back from the bag, tears of agony welling in his eyes, struggling not to let the rod clatter down

the rocks and into the swirling sea. Blood streamed down his hand, diluted by the lashing rain, and he could see the gleaming end of one of the fishhooks protruding through the tip of his thumb.

Stumbling to his feet, Carl tried to wedge the rod under his arm, turning his back to the wind and pulling at the hook. He felt sick and dizzy. All the nightmares about fishhooks that he had had as a kid suddenly threatened to overwhelm him. The hook was buried quite deep and there was no way he was going to be able to just pull it free without tearing out a good portion of his flesh with it.

His stomach heaved and for a moment he thought he might faint. He tried to slow his breathing. He was being stupid. It was just a fishhook, for God's sake. He was a grown man, not a frightened kid. He had a pair of pliers back in the car. All he had to do was snip off the barb and the rest of the hook would slide out easily. The cold was already numbing his hand, dulling the pain. He tried to wipe the blood from his palm, fumbling in his pocket for a handkerchief.

Then two things happened at once: a child's laughter, shockingly close, made him stumble back in alarm, and at the same time the rod jerked in his arms, bending sharply as something heavy hauled on the line. Carl struggled to keep his footing on the rain-slick grass as the tug on the rod became an insistent pressure, the reel spinning uncontrollably. The laughter came again and a tiny shape appeared out of the rain. A small child, a young boy no more than five years old, dressed in flannel pyjamas and clutching a bedraggled soft toy, stared at him through the downpour, seemingly unaware of the biting wind. The boy raised a pale hand, pointed at Carl and giggled, the wind swirling the sound eerily across the cliff tops.

Carl felt a sudden chill of fear as he realised that the child wasn't pointing at him but past him, at something in the water. The line continued to unwind wildly, the noise from the reel now a high-pitched scream. As Carl started to turn, the rod was wrenched violently from his grip, sending him sprawling.

With a guttural, bubbling roar, something vast and glistening emerged from the raging ocean. Carl stared in disbelief as the thing clawed its way up the rocks, waves breaking on its broad back. It was huge, well over two metres tall, its skin a mass of barnacle-covered heavy plates and iridescent scales, a patchwork of different bright colours altogether too gaudy for any creature Carl had ever seen. Its head was squat and crested, with spines emerging directly from its shoulders. The jaw worked spasmodically, as if struggling to draw breath, and its eyes glowed a deep fiery red. It hauled itself over the rocks with four powerfully muscled arms, claws gouging out great lumps as it came.

The red eyes fixed on him and the creature threw back its head and gave a bellowing roar. Bright tongues of flame burned in its throat, as if at its centre was a vast ball of fire. Steam hissed around it as the rain boiled on its skin. Carl started to scabble away, but the creature bounded forward, looming over him, shrieking in triumph.

As it raised one huge paw in the air, Carl realised with horror that its claws were barbed and metallic, like fishhooks. He closed his eyes as the huge arm swept down and was suddenly aware of a sharp pain, and then there was nothing but the sound of rain, and sea, and the laughter of a small child, slowly fading.

Way out in the depths of space, the police box shell of the TARDIS appeared in a blaze of blue light, tumbling end over end in the dark. It spun for a moment, as if getting its

bearings, and then, with a swirling kaleidoscope of shimmering colour flaring around it, vanished again into the time vortex.

Inside the Doctor sat cross-legged on the floor, poking and prodding at the tangle of tubes and pipes that wound their way through the coral-like growths and protuberances of the central control console. Above him the huge glass and crystal column of the time rotor rose and fell in steady progression, keeping time like the tick of a huge clock, or the beat of a heart.

The lights in the console room were dim and low, the huge curving walls in shadow, the indented roundels glowing softly with emerald light. Rose was curled up on the battered control room chair, the Doctor's long brown coat draped over her like a blanket. She was fast asleep, her breathing slow and measured, keeping pace with the rotor.

The Doctor peered round the console at her, smiling. It was rare to see her so quiet and still; she was usually such a bundle of tireless energy, always keen to head off to the next great adventure, to find somewhere new to explore.

The steady background hum from the console suddenly changed in pitch for a moment and there was a faint moan from Rose as she stirred on the chair. The Doctor frowned and clambered to his feet, peering at a flashing light on the console.

'Well, that's not right... Not right at all.'

He pulled a pair of thick-rimmed glasses from his jacket pocket and leaned forward, his nose almost brushing the controls. He tapped at a read-out.

'What are you flashing for? You're not meant to flash. If I'd wanted you to flash I'd have put you somewhere more obvious, more flashy'

There was another bleep from the other side of the console. The Doctor hurried around to where a new set of lights had blinked into life, twisting controls as he went. A cluster of symbols flickered on to one of the many screens that littered the surface and there was a low electronic burbling from somewhere deep in the machinery below him.

Rose twisted in her sleep again, her brow furrowing. The Doctor's gaze went from the console to Rose and back again, and he pulled off his glasses, chewing on one of the arms thoughtfully.

'Now what are you two talking about? All girls together, is it?'

Pushing his glasses back into his pocket, the Doctor leaned forward and started tapping at the controls.

Rose knew she was dreaming. She knew because she could see herself, as if she was another person, from just over her right shoulder. It was odd, looking at the back of your own head, seeing everything from someone else's perspective. A small part of her subconscious was aware of the fact that her hair was getting straggly and needed a cut, perhaps a bit of colour, but mostly she noticed that she was outdoors, in the rain and floating a couple of metres off the ground.

She looked around, taking in the vague, unreal surroundings of her dream. As dreams went, it wasn't particularly exotic. She was on the coast, almost certainly Britain. The scrubby grass and tangle of gorse bushes were unmistakably British. And yes, there were sheep grazing in the distant fields. As far as she was aware, sheep were peculiar to Earth; in her travels with the Doctor she hadn't yet come across any space sheep...

She giggled, aware that it was turning out to be a very odd and mundane dream, when she noticed the child looking at

her: a small child in pyjamas, clutching a soft toy, staring straight at her and smiling. For some reason that she couldn't explain, a shiver ran down Rose's spine.

The child started to laugh and the sky darkened, lightning cracking through the air.

Rose found herself moving now, swooping over the gorse, sailing out off the cliff and sweeping down over the water. Dark shapes loomed up from the darkness: cliffs, jagged rocks, a lighthouse, its paintwork faded and peeling, the glass in the lamp room cracked and broken.

Pale, sickly green light washed over her and she was aware of masked figures watching her, chattering in a strange incomprehensible language. The lighthouse sped past and a roar suddenly cut through the air, harsh and terrifying.

Rose's dream rapidly degenerated into nightmare as a vile four-armed creature hauled itself from the sea below her. Steam curled around it and the sea boiled as it lumbered up on to dry land, rain hissing on its armoured skin. Its claws reached out for something lying on the ground and Rose realised with horror that it was a young man, fishing equipment scattered around him, his arms raised in a futile attempt to ward the creature off as he scrabbled backwards over the wet grass.

Rose desperately wanted to look away, already knowing what was going to come next, but, as is the way with nightmares, she couldn't tear her eyes from the horror unfolding before her.

The creature let out another guttural bellow. Flames leapt from its throat and Rose felt a wave of hot, fetid air wash over her. A monstrous arm swung into the air and she gasped as she caught sight of wickedly barbed claws

glinting in the rain. As the arm came down, the young fisherman slumped backwards, his blood staining the rocks.

The creature turned and fixed Rose with blazing eyes. It roared again, reaching out for her. Rose tried to scream, but no sound would come from her throat. Above the roars of the creature she thought she could hear the sound of a child laughing. Then the huge taloned hands closed around her...

And she woke with a start, almost tumbling from the chair.

The Doctor looked up from a screen, concern in his eyes.

'Are you all right?'

Rose ran a hand through her hair, her eyes flicking around the shadows that pooled in the corners of the console room.

'Yeah, a dream, that's all. A nightmare.' She shivered, pulling the Doctor's coat around her shoulders.'

'Not surprising really, is it? Considering the stuff we end up seeing ...'

She rubbed sleep from her eyes and shuffled over to where the Doctor was prodding at the console. 'Don't you *ever* sleep?'

'Nah. Tried it once, didn't like it. I prefer it when it's quiet.'

Rose gave a snort. 'Yeah, right. Like it's *ever* quiet with you.' She nodded at the console. 'What are you doing?'

'It seems that you're not the only one who was having nightmares.' He cocked his head to one side and peered at her. 'Can you remember what your dream was about?'

'Things. Creatures...'

'Creatures?'

'Yeah, I was at the coast. Not a beach with sand, but lots of rocks... and a lighthouse. There was a storm. And a kid, a little boy who kept laughing. Then this thing came out of the sea, a big sea monster sort of thing, four arms, breathing fire. It killed a man, a fisherman, and it was starting to turn on me.

The Doctor's frown deepened. 'Well, isn't that strange.'

Rose was puzzled. 'Why? What's up with that? It was just a dream, wasn't it?'

The Doctor nodded at the screen in front of him. 'Seems like you and the TARDIS both had the same dream. We picked up some very odd readings while you were asleep. I've been tracing them back to their source.'

Rose crossed to his side, peering over his shoulder. 'Oh, my God!'

On the screen was a long stretch of rocky coast, harsh and windswept. Out in the waves was a jagged lump of black rock, the long, slender shape of a lighthouse stabbing towards the heavy clouds.

That's the place!' Rose stared in disbelief. 'That's where I was in my dream!'

The Doctor looked up at her with a mysterious twinkle in his eyes. 'And if the place is real, then the creature might be real as well. Shall we go and take a look?'

Before Rose had a chance to answer the Doctor darted round the console, spinning wheels and pumping energetically at some of the TARDIS's more jerry-rigged controls.

With a grind of ancient engines, the TARDIS started to turn, and Rose realised with a thrill of terror that quite

possibly she was about to confront the creature from her nightmare.

ONE

The moon gleamed fitfully through the long fingers of cloud that scudded across its face, sending sparkling highlights flickering over the foaming waves. The storm that had whipped the ocean into such a frenzy was far away now, the rumble of thunder just a distant boom over the hills, the lightning a faint glow occasionally illuminating the sky.

A new sound joined the rhythmic hiss of waves on shingle, a rasping, grinding noise, rising and falling in pitch, building in volume until, with a loud thump, the TARDIS appeared from nowhere on the cliff top, incongruous among the windswept gorse.

With a rattling of the latch, the door swung inwards and the Doctor stepped out into the cold night air, coat billowing in the wind. Rose emerged tentatively after him, looking around nervously.

The Doctor spread his arms wide and took a long, deep breath. 'Come on, Rose. Get a good lungful of that fresh sea air.'

Rose pulled her parka tight around her. 'You'll get a great lungful of fresh sea *water* if you're not careful. It's freezing out here!'

'It's a bit fresh, I'll admit.' He twirled, fixing her with a piercing gaze. 'Is this the place?'