

Snowfall

By Gavin Collinson

Part One: Frozen

Something was wrong.

David Kershaw looked down the station platform and was left open-mouthed by what he saw.

Not just a little bit wrong, but a big fat what on earth is going on? wrong.

Christmas Eve and it should have been heaving with kids and commuters, rushing home with last minute gifts but the platform was empty and as he turned to take in the rest of the station, he could see the whole place was deserted. He glanced at his watch. 20:02. Weird. He'd been awake at Woking, ten minutes ago, must have dozed off and the next stop should have been Waterloo. The end of the line. So when he woke up and noticed the train had rolled to a halt he'd clambered onto the platform. It wasn't until the last carriage whooshed past him that he realised this wasn't a London terminal. Too small. Too quaint. Too wooden. So where was he and... something else struck him. Oh, no! The snow...

The snow was inches deep across the platform, an even, untouched carpet indicating that not only was the station deserted now, but no-one had been here for hours. Maybe days. Except... He squinted to a spot at the end of the platform. He could make out one small space where the snow had hardly fallen. A conspicuous square patch about three foot wide that only had a light coating of white flakes. Something had been there until very recently, but there were no tracks leading to or from the square and so how had -

- No time to consider that little mystery. David hit the speed dial for his wife and as he waited for an answer, he smiled at the falling snow. A warm smile as he recalled a childhood moment. Sledging down the street during one of those weeks when bad weather had closed school. He'd spent hours playing outside on the sleigh with his brother and on Boxing Day, when Mum asked, 'What was your favourite present?', they'd answered in unison, 'The snow!' and their dad had grumbled, 'We shouldn't have bothered forking out for the Atari, then...'

No answer. He looked at his phone. No signal. No bar. Not even one of those half bars that means you should wave your phone around and hope for the best. Nothing.

Okay. Don't panic. Another train would be along soon and he'd be in Waterloo within the hour. The icy wind lashed around him and whistled through the platform benches. And then he saw it. On the opposite platform, a large old-fashioned sign that read 'Refreshment Room' and beyond it, the room itself, or rather a frosted glass window through which he could see the silhouettes of two figures. He suddenly felt hope. They'd know where he was and when the next train was due. David Kershaw turned up the collar of his coat and headed towards the light.

The refreshment room's solitary customer, Big Jack, sat at a corner table, his hands cupping a mug of hot tea. His train to London Paddington had stopped, he'd alighted and then found that the announcements had been wrong. Too late. He was stuck in what looked like a country railway station, although the girl behind the tea bar had told him the next train into the city would be along any minute. That had been half an hour and two mugs of tea ago.

He glanced at the girl. She looked to be in her early twenties, pretty with long red hair. She wore a white blouse and a peaked porter's cap, tilted at a rakish angle. This clearly belonged to the young man who leant easily across the bar, chatting to her. He wore an old-fashioned porter's uniform. Black suit, cream shirt, top button undone and tie at half mast. He had short dark hair, kind eyes and when the girl teased him, he occasionally replied with a dry come-back but usually he just shook his head and smiled like he'd heard it all before and loved her anyway.

Jack took a sip of his tea and almost choked on it when he saw who walked into the room: David Kershaw.

The new-comer smiled at the girl in the hat. 'Hi! Do you know when the next train to London is?'

'Any minute now.' She spoke with a soft Scottish accent.

David nodded. 'Great. Do I have time for a cup of rosy?'

'Always time for a cuppa!' She studied the huge silver samovar on the counter and gingerly poured him a mug of tea. 'Here you go! On the house.'

'Thanks! That's very kind of...'. His voice trailed off as he noticed Jack. A pause. He picked up his tea, walked over to the big man's table and took a chair. They glared at each other. David said, 'How long's it been?'

'Not long enough.'

'Ten years?'

'Like I said, not long enough.' Big Jack took a mouthful of tea. It burnt his tongue but he tried not to let on. 'What are you doing here?'

'Just passing through.'

Silence for a couple of minutes. 'Just passing through?' said Jack. 'An abandoned station. Middle of nowhere. You. Me. Something's going on.'

'Your imagination was always on the wild side,' David countered. 'Although...'

'Although?'

'This place does look deserted. The snow's undisturbed out there except for a square about the size of...'. He grinned, despite himself. 'Well, you wouldn't understand but about yay big,' he added, stretching his arms.

'I wouldn't understand? Didn't take you long to start, did it? What wouldn't I understand?'

'Believe me, you would not get the reference! Hardly anyone on this planet would! But I was going to say, about the size of the TARDIS.'

Jack's mug paused mid-way to his lips. 'Did you say TARDIS?'

David managed to make Yes stretch to two syllables.

'As in the Doctor?'

'As in the Doctor. How on earth did... have you met the Doctor?'

Big Jack gave a big laugh. 'Have I met the Doctor? You think this is weird?' he gestured to their surroundings. 'Listen to this!'

TO BE CONTINUED...