

Snowfall

By Mark B. Oliver

Cold Snap, Part One

Louie shivered as he, Millie and his Aunty Rachael trudged through the snow. The snow was so deep it was reaching the top of his wellies and his feet felt like blocks of ice despite the two pairs of socks he was wearing. Even though he was freezing, he was excited as they were on their way to see the pantomime in the local theatre.

'Are you okay, love?' said Aunty Rachael who was clutching both him and Millie tightly as the conditions worsened. Louie nodded as his teeth chattered from the cold.

'I still think we should have asked the Doctor,' Millie chipped in, seemingly unbothered by the heavy snow. 'I bet he would have loved to have come with us.'

'And how are you going to tell him we're going, Millie? We haven't seen him since Bonfire Night.'

'I'm going to call him, silly.' And with that Millie pulled her mobile 'phone from her pocket, the one she was only supposed to use in emergencies. But before her mum could reproach her, Millie had deftly dialed the number the Doctor had given them, despite her thick gloves. She pouted. 'Voicemail.'

'There we are,' declared Aunty Rachael as through the falling snow they could finally make out the warm inviting lights of the theatre.

'Doctor, it's Millie, you remember, Guy Fawkes dummies trying to scare us witless and that nasty alien? Anyway, Louie and me are off to see Peter Pan in town and thought you might like to join us. Sorry for the late notice...' They climbed the steps and pulled open the heavy wooden door. 'The panto starts at...'

'...7pm!' finished the Doctor, who was standing in the foyer beaming over at them.

'Doctor!' Millie and Louie cried out as they ran over and gave him the biggest hug they could muster.

He held out his hand. 'Hello, I'm the Doctor.'

'So I gathered,' replied Aunty Rachael with a smile, 'I'm Millie's mum, Rachael. My sister and these two have told me a tale or two about you.'

'All true, sadly,' grinned the Doctor.

'But how come you're here already, Doctor?' asked Louie. 'Millie was still leaving the message.'

'Oh well, you know how it is, there I was fighting off the alien hordes of the Gendhi on the planet Visperon when my 'phone rang, not exactly ideal timing as you can imagine. Months later I remembered the call, listened to Millie's message but it cut off before she said the time! So I've been here for a bit, not that long, a few hours maybe...' He beamed, seemingly oblivious to the bewildered look on Rachael's face.

'It's a bit quiet,' Louie noticed as he glanced around the deserted foyer.

'Isn't it? It's been like this since I arrived, I thought maybe I had missed it altogether. Amy is always saying that I have no sense of timing and that coming from a woman who ran off the night before her wedding!'

'There aren't even any staff around,' chimed in Millie.

The foyer was large with a high vaulted ceiling, a huge chandelier and a staircase going up the far wall, presumably to the Circle. The ticket booth was dark, as was the food and drink stand, but the room itself was bathed in warm lighting. Millie and Louie jumped as a door behind them slammed shut and the newcomers whirled around to see a slightly built man in his early thirties before them. He had a warm open face, brown short hair and was much shorter than the Doctor.

'Blimey, I didn't think anyone would make it in tonight. The weather is atrocious. I was just going to lock up,' he said smiling.

The Doctor had wandered over to the front doors and was looking outside. 'The snow and wind have really picked up,' said the Doctor over his shoulder, 'I don't think we're going anywhere for a while.'

'Well, it's just the five of us then,' said the man. 'I'm the only member of staff who made it in, not even any of the actors are here.'

Louie and Millie looked glum at the news, as the Doctor and his friends introduced themselves.

'I'm Jack, but all my friends call me Big Jack,' he declared. Millie stifled a laugh.

'Millie!' admonished her mother, but Big Jack just laughed, tussling Millie's curly hair.

'Oh, I don't mind, I'm used to it,' he replied. 'My mum used to call me Big Jack as I was the eldest. I didn't grow too big did I?' he said winking at Millie.

'How about a cuppa?' After enthusiastic nods, Jack fumbled with the large tea urn behind the counter and soon had it working.

'I don't suppose you have the key to that room over there do you?' asked the Doctor motioning to a door on the far side of the foyer under the stairs.

'Sorry mate, no, that's the cashier's office. Only the manager and Mrs. Wharburton have the key. Why?'

'Oh, I um, just left a box in there earlier. Silly of me really, not paying attention and the door shut behind me. I was just hoping to nip back in and get it.' As Big Jack turned his attention back to the tea, Louie sidled up to the Doctor.

'The TARDIS?' The Doctor nodded. 'Why don't you just use the sonic?'

'It's a deadlock, Louie,' the Doctor said dejectedly, 'the sonic can't open it, I'll have to find another way in.' With that, the Doctor dug deep in his pockets and was soon waving a gadget around in the air. 'It's getting colder,' he declared, his breath visible in the air.

'You're right,' replied Aunty Rachael. 'I'd thought it was my imagination.'

'The boiler may be on its last legs, but it's usually more than capable of keeping this old place toasty,' replied Jack as he handed out mugs of tea.

'But this weather is exceptional,' declared the Doctor, 'the temperature inside is dropping at an alarming rate - this goes way beyond freak weather.' The Doctor was wandering around the foyer taking further readings. 'What am I missing?' he mused to himself. 'An outside influence? But why is it just getting colder inside?' The Doctor's pacing was making Millie feel giddy. He stopped suddenly and took a gulp from his mug. 'Oh good tea, Jack, thanks,' he said as he quickly drained his cup.

With that the lights went out and Millie let out a small yelp.

'Sorry,' she apologized to no-one in particular.

The Doctor soon fished out a torch. He was immediately next to the front doors scraping away the ice that had formed on the inside of the windows. He peered outside.

'I can see lights through the snow, so it just seems to be us,' the Doctor informed them.

'We have an emergency generator in the basement, just in case power goes off during a performance,' Big Jack interjected. 'If I nip down and get that on, we should be OK.'

'Maybe we should leave,' suggested Aunty Rachael, 'if it's getting as cold as you say, Doctor.'

As the Doctor turned to answer, he noticed his friends were stood directly below the ornate chandelier that moments earlier had bathed the foyer in light. But now in the darkness, the Doctor could see the light from his torch reflecting off it. Ice. Lots of ice. The Doctor dove at the group, as the thin chain holding the heavy fixture suddenly broke from the increased weight. The Doctor just reached them in time, pushing them clear as the chandelier shattered on the ground.

'Is everyone alright?' They all nodded, shaken by the experience, as the Doctor helped them to their feet.

'We should definitely leave,' said Auntie Rachael, her arms around her two young charges.

'The doors are frozen shut and we have more immediate concerns,' added the Doctor as he touched Louie on the forehead. 'How do you feel?'

'Cold, and I have a fuzzy head,' replied Louie who was feeling weak suddenly.

'Did you get wet on your way here?'

'Just my feet, some snow came over the top of my wellies, my socks are wet.'

'We need to lay you down,' the Doctor said urgently.

'Over here, the manager's office has a couch,' said Big Jack. The Doctor handed his torch to Auntie Rachael and gently scooped Louie off his feet as Jack led them gingerly towards the room in the gloom.

Laying Louie on the sofa, the Doctor removed Louie's boots and Auntie Rachael took off his soaking wet socks. His feet were blue and his aunt started rubbing them, trying to improve the circulation; Louie had hypothermia.

'We need to raise his core temperature. Jack can you bring the tea urn in here?'

'Err, sure, Doctor.' He looked confused by the request but did as he was asked.

'Now Louie, do you understand, that you've got just a bit too cold and we are going to warm you up. You're going to be just fine. Millie, could you bring that small table a bit closer?' As Millie dragged the table over, Jack brought in the urn. The Doctor motioned for him to put it on the table. 'Stand back everyone!'

The Doctor aimed his sonic screwdriver at the urn. The sharp piecing hum echoed around the theatre and slowly at first, and then with increasing speed, the urn started to heat up, the dull silver metal, turning bright red. Soon it was radiating heat throughout the small room. 'There,' said the Doctor. 'That should keep this room nice and warm for a few hours.' He handed Louie the sonic. 'Do you remember how it works, Louie?'

Louie nodded.

'If it starts to cool down, just give it another quick burst.' The Doctor removed his jacket covering Louie with it.

'Jack, are there any blankets we could find for Louie?'

'Yes, upstairs Some of our older patrons like to have a blanket across their laps. I could show you.'

'No, I'll get them,' said the Doctor, 'we need you to switch on the emergency power.'

'Right,' replied Big Jack, who turned to leave. 'Hang on in there, kid,' he said with a smile.

As Big Jack left, Millie declared she was going with the Doctor. 'We need as many blankets as we can find, and you can't carry them all.' Millie's mum nodded her agreement as she turned her attention back to her nephew.

'Be quick, Doctor, and look after my baby girl.'

'Mum!' cried an embarrassed Millie, but the Doctor simply replied that he would and then they were gone.

'It's okay, Louie, 'I'm here with you.'

'Thanks, Aunty.' With the others gone, Aunty Rachael shivered, not from the cold but she because she was scared, she was scared for all of them.

Big Jack made his way backstage in the darkness. Thankfully he had worked here for years and knew the way like the back of his hand. It was strange though, eerie, for the theatre to be so dark, so quiet. It usually teemed with both life and laughter. As he found the door that led to the basement he failed to notice the smallest of movement in the shadows. Something was watching him. Jack closed the door behind him as he made his way down the metal staircase into the basement.

Millie held onto the Doctor's hand tightly, pressing on despite the cold and her fear. It was much colder on the upper level and the Doctor shone the torch around in search of the cupboard that contained the blankets. Icicles had formed on the ceiling and the carpet was covered in ice. Not needing to be told, Millie carefully followed the Doctor down the hallway.

Aunty Rachael thought she heard a noise, and she cocked her head to listen intently. Louie's eyes were closing, but Aunty Rachael turned her attention back to him.

'Come on love, you must keep awake. You hear me? Why don't you tell me about the first time you met the Doctor?' Rallying at the thought of their previous adventure, Louie began to recount the fateful day he had gotten a puncture on his way home from school. Aunty Rachael, though, was only half listening, 'What was that noise?' she thought to herself.

Big Jack weaved his way around the props that littered the basement until he found his way to the generator. It was rusty and didn't look as though it had been used in years, but he knew what he was doing and set about switching it on. He was quite oblivious to the fact that the basement door behind him was now wide open.

Millie and the Doctor stood before the cupboard, its doors frozen shut.

'I don't suppose you have another sonic?' asked Millie hopefully, but the words died on her lips as she saw the look on the Doctor's face. Looking around she saw a fire extinguisher a short way down the corridor. 'Could we use that somehow?'

'Brilliant!' exclaimed the Doctor loudly, as he gingerly picked up the frozen extinguisher. 'Oh, yes, that's rather cold,' he said as he quickly moved it from hand to hand to stop it sticking.

'At these temperatures, the metal handle should be quite brittle. One hefty thump should do it.' With that the Doctor hit the latch which shattered as if made of glass. The door swung open revealing a stack of dry blankets. Millie whooped with glee and grabbed as many as she could carry, and the Doctor did likewise.

'Let's get back downstairs to Louie and your mum.'

Louie was still telling his story, when suddenly his aunt motioned with her hand for him to be quiet.

'Did you hear that?' Both of them listened intently. There was a strange slithering sound outside.

'Doctor? Jack?' called out Aunty Rachael, but there was no reply. She leapt up, grabbed a chair and wedged it under the door handle. As she backed away the handle started to move.

Jack was finishing his safety check of the generator before switching it on. He shivered as he reached for the switch, when he suddenly felt something cold and wet on his back. Resisting the urge to panic, he tried to turn to see what was there but he couldn't move. Whatever had attached itself was draining his life energy. His legs began to buckle and he could feel everything going dark.

'Quickly, Doctor!' exclaimed Millie as they carried the blankets towards the staircase. In her haste, she slipped on the icy carpet. She reached out for the balustrade to break her fall, but the frozen metal shattered under her weight. Millie screamed as she toppled off the balcony.

TO BE CONTINUED