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Prologue

It was a choice made by someone else.

'Fit in,' that was what they said. 'It's vital that you try to fit in.'

But she didn't want to fit in. She wanted to be herself.

'Any second now,' said the Doctor with the sandshoes, 'you're going to stop that countdown. Both of you. Together.'

The urgent red numbers on the clock stood at 00:51. Slightly less than a minute.

'And then,' said the slightly younger-looking Doctor with the waistcoat, 'you're going to negotiate the most perfect peace treaty of all time.'

'Safeguards all round,' interrupted the Doctor with the sandshoes. 'Completely fair on both sides.'

The other Doctor, the third one in the room – the old one with the beard who had never really thought of himself as 'the Doctor' until now – watched them: a

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smile beginning to break across the sad lines of his face, like longed-for rainwater through a dried-up riverbed.

‘And the key to perfect negotiation—’ said Waistcoat—

‘Is not knowing what side you’re on!’ said Sandshoes.

With that, Sandshoes and Waistcoat kicked their long legs against the table, slid back their chairs, and, with a theatrical flourish, got to their feet. Two Doctors, at the height of their power. Doing what they did best: improvising.

‘So for the next two hours—’ said Sandshoes—

‘Until we decide to let you out—’ said Waistcoat—

‘No one in this room will be able to remember if they’re human—’

‘—or Zygon.’

The Doctors brandished their sonic screwdrivers and jumped onto the table, one of them rather undermining the intensity of the moment by shouting out the old action hero standby, ‘Oops-a-daisy!’

They aimed their screwdrivers at a small device, looking something like a smoke detector, concealed quietly in the ceiling of the room. It clearly wasn’t a smoke detector, however, as it failed to detect itself as it glowed brighter and brighter, and emitted a gigantic belch of mind-altering gas.

The old Doctor – the wrinkled, battered version with the voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken in the tumult of the battlefield – took out his sonic screwdriver too and joined in with the boys. All

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of a sudden, he felt more optimistic than he had been in centuries: ready once more to be a joiner-in. Let the device have it, whatever it was.

For a moment, everything in the room was dazzling light. The gas filled the air. Everyone inhaled. And everyone who was not the Doctor fell asleep. And everyone who was not the Doctor lost their memory of who they were.*

Moments later, the people woke up.

The urgent red countdown clock stood at 00.08.

00.07 – 00.06 –

‘Cancel the detonation!’ cried two panicked voices, in perfect unison.

The clock stopped. 00.05.

The two panicked voices belonged to two women called Kate Lethbridge-Stewart (although known professionally as plain Kate Stewart). Besides the Kates and the Doctors (who had just shouted out ‘Peace in Our Time!’), there were three other people in the room: one was a woman in her twenties called Clara Oswald, who travelled with the Waistcoat Doctor when she felt like it. The other two were a young scientist called Osgood and another young scientist called Osgood. One of the Kates Stewart was an alien duplicate as was

* See DOCTOR WHO – THE DAY OF THE DOCTOR

one of the Osgoods. A living facsimile, perfect in every respect: a Zygon.

The room was called the Black Archive. It was a repository for the most secret and dangerous alien technology that had been collected over the years: a place for things which should not be on Earth but which somehow were. Even its own staff were not allowed to know what it held. They had their memories wiped after every shift: something that the people who worked in the Black Archive always meant to raise with Human Resources but never remembered to do. Above the room was the Tower of London, and beneath the room was a nuclear bomb.

Over the next two hours, Kate Stewart and Kate Stewart – ignorant, as the Doctors suggested, of which side they were on – negotiated the so-called ‘perfect peace treaty’. The Zygons – a race of creatures who could borrow the forms of other creatures, whose home planet had been destroyed in the war in which the older Doctor had lost his name, amongst other things – were in the middle of mounting an invasion. The invasion was to stop but the Zygons were to be allowed to remain on Earth. They were to take human form and stay that way. Kate Stewart and Osgood were to support and assist them in their new life. In exchange for this, the Zygons were to call off their attempt to take over planet Earth and generally do their best to fit in. As the Doctors instructed, Kate and Kate and Osgood

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and Osgood built in safeguards, fairness. They tried to imagine the ways in which this scenario could play out and how the ceasefire could be maintained. It was the very best that they could do in the scant few hours that they were given.

And after the papers were all signed and hands were shaken, the humans and the Zygons regained their knowledge of which was which and who was who. The Doctors moved on to other business elsewhere; the picking up of the pieces started, and the peace began in earnest. For the Doctors, centuries passed. On Earth, it was more like a couple of years.

But nothing is ever perfect.

There is never an easy solution to a difficult problem.

Soon enough, those same people would find themselves back in that same room. Trying to solve the very same problem.

Only this time they would know exactly who was who.

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Chapter 1

Operation Double

Osgood set up a camera to record their message. They wore a tank-top with question marks on it under a white lab coat. They were in the basement of a safe-house in South West London, operated by UNIT: the Unified Intelligence Taskforce.

Osgood had been UNIT's scientific adviser for some time. It ran in the family: their father had done pretty much the same job in the seventies or eighties too. He had always seemed to have an exciting time; he had retired at fifty with a bionic eye and a decent pension; Osgood had always wanted to be like their father, so they had put in their application and been approved. Osgood worked alongside Kate Stewart, the Chief Scientific Officer, whose father had also worked for UNIT back in the day. If UNIT had been remotely public-facing, or in the least bit accountable, there would surely have been eyebrows raised about the level of nepotism that seemed to be permissible there. But it seemed to work, more or less. Nobody asked too many questions.

Another thing about which UNIT managed to keep successfully quiet was the existence of their *former* scientific adviser: the mysterious traveller in time and space known as the Doctor. Osgood had met him once at a UNIT picnic when they were still a child. At that time, he had been dressed like a refugee from one of the sixties TV shows that used to be repeated at teatimes on BBC Two: all velvet jackets and frills. He did a little magic show for the little Osgood that kept them enchanted. He had introduced them to gorgonzola cheese. That version of the Doctor disappeared some time later, to be replaced by another with a long scarf and curly hair, who was even more intriguing. Osgood had kept tabs on him over the years and had become quite a fan.

Another Osgood came into the room and sat beside the Osgood who was already there. This Osgood wore a multi-coloured scarf similar to one that the curly-haired Doctor used to sport.

‘Do you want to start?’ said Osgood.

‘No, you can,’ said Osgood.

Osgood was just getting to know themselves. They thought that the best way to ensure that things went well between them was to be excessively polite and apologise to one another as much as possible. One was a human and the other was a Zygon. To begin with, they had some idea of who was who and which was

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which, but the more the two Osgoods lived together, the more the line became blurred; the more they forgot themselves.

After the shakedown in the Black Archive, the Zygon doubles of Kate Stewart and various others around the world had vacated their stolen forms and become different. But the Osgoods had stayed the same. The Doctors felt this was important to maintain the ceasefire: there should be a living symbol of the peace: someone who could be an honest broker, with no agenda, able to move between the various sides and factions, with a knowledge of what it was like to be a human, and what it was like to be a Zygon.

To begin with, Osgood had found it rather intrusive: perpetually having a doppelganger mooching around, reminding themselves of all their blemishes; confronting themselves all the time with the way that they looked and breathed and hunched their shoulders. But, to be honest, Osgood had always been rather lacking in the friends department, feeling something of an outsider. And there turned out to be something about their other self that they rather liked. They shared a small two-bedroom flat in Stockwell, just off the South Lambeth Road. Both Osgoods were paid a decent salary for doing the same job and they only had to do half the work that they used to. In their spare time, they had taken up badminton.

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‘Shall we do it together?’

They turned to the camera.

‘Hello,’ they said.

‘Operation Double – The Zygon Peace Treaty,’ they said in unison, adjusting their glasses.

‘I am Osgood,’ said the one with the tank-top.

‘I am also Osgood,’ said the one with the scarf. ‘Remember that. It’ll be important later.’

‘Operation Double is a covert operation,’ said the first, getting down to business. ‘Outside of normal UNIT strictures. To resettle and rehouse an alien race, in secrecy, on planet Earth.’

‘With UNIT’s help,’ continued the second, clearing their throat, ‘twenty million Zygons have been allowed to take human form, have been dispersed around the world, and are now living amongst us. They’re living peacefully, usefully. But they’re doing this without the knowledge of any of Earth’s authorities.’

Both Osgoods coloured up a little: ‘In most countries,’ said the first, ‘what we’ve done would be considered treason. At the very least, it’s an alien invasion . . . So. Sorry for that. But it was probably better than the alternative.’

‘We’re making this recording in case something goes wrong,’ said the second. ‘In case UNIT is infiltrated. In case something occurs to unmask the Zygons.’

‘Or in case one or both of us dies.’

There was something rather ominous about this