

All Is Calm, All Is Bright

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All Is Calm, All Is Bright

by [silverfoxstole](#)

Summary

The Doctor takes Lee and Grace somewhere rather special.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

“Doctor, what’s going on?”

“You’ll see, you’ll see.” The Time Lord appeared from the direction of the library carrying what appeared to Grace to be an armful of winter clothing: heavy coats, scarves, gloves, knitted hats, a selection of which he passed to her and Lee. “Here; you’ll need these.”

“Where are we: the Arctic?” Lee asked, looking less than impressed with the red and white striped bobble hat and mittens he was apparently expected to wear.

“No, far colder than that. Don’t worry; I’ve made sure that everything’s fully insulated so you won’t get hypothermia or frostbite.” The Doctor watched them both expectantly. “Well, go on, put them on. We don’t have all day.”

“I thought this was a time machine?” Grace grumbled good-naturedly as she did as she was told and shrugged into the padded coat he’d brought her. Amazingly it really did feel much warmer than it looked, far too warm for the comfortable temperature of the console room; if they didn’t get outside quick she was going to roast, especially once she’d wound a scarf twice round her neck and pulled on an ear-flapped hat that looked as though it might have come from a tribe of Mongolian goat-herders. “What’s the hurry?”

“I finally coaxed the TARDIS into landing on a planet I’ve wanted to visit for centuries; somehow we’ve always managed to miss it before.” To Grace’s surprise he was actually bundling up himself; usually he claimed to be impervious to the elements, as though Time Lords were Teflon-coated or something, so to see him decked out in a caped oilskin overcoat that looked a couple of sizes too big, pulling on a pair of woolly gloves, was slightly disconcerting. He found a felt hat in one of the pockets and stuck it on his head at a rakish angle.

“I thought you didn’t feel the cold?”

“I don’t usually, but it’ll be a bit parky out there even for me. Aren’t you coming, Lee?” the Doctor enquired with a raised eyebrow and Grace turned round to find that Lee was still eyeing the clothes he’d been given with disgust. She supposed a navy blue duffle coat with horn toggles wasn’t really cool enough for him.

“Aw, Doctor.” There was the hint of a whine in Lee’s voice. “Do I really have to wear this?”

“Considering that the average temperature in San Francisco in winter is 50 degrees Fahrenheit and it’ll be well below minus that outside, I think it’s a good idea, don’t you?”

“I’m going to look a complete jerk.”

Grace did her best not to roll her eyes. “Well,” she said, “We won’t say a word, will we, Doctor?”

“Oh, absolutely not. And besides, there won’t be anyone else to even see you,” the Doctor added.

Lee looked suspicious. “No one? You mean it’s a planet with no people?”

“I mean it’s a planet with no life whatsoever, not even the teeniest, tiniest organism.” Evidently spotting the hint of interest in their companion’s eyes, the Doctor smiled. “Curious?”

“Maybe,” Lee hedged, but that was obviously enough.

“Excellent.” The Doctor pulled the lever that opened the doors and the next moment an extremely cold draught was whirling around the console room. It was thankfully tempered almost straight away by the TARDIS’s own automatic climate-control systems but Grace quickly zipped up her coat, biting her lip to stop the smile that was trying to creep onto her face at the sight of Lee hurrying to pull on his. From somewhere beneath his own layers the Doctor produced his pocket watch and flicked open the lid. “We’d better hurry; we haven’t much time if we don’t want to miss it.”

“Miss what?” Grace chased him as he strolled across the room. “You haven’t even told us what we’re here to see!”

He glanced over his shoulder and grinned. “Call it a surprise.”

“Oh my God.”

It was a frozen waste, or at least how she imagined one would look. Ahead of them was an expanse of bluish white, a desolate plain stretching out for miles, sparkling in the brilliant glare of the winter sun. At first it seemed as though a desert might have done the impossible, sand somehow turned to snow, but as she bent down for a closer look Grace could just make out gentle waves, as if they were standing on what had once been a great ocean. She shielded her eyes with a hand, staring into the distance: somewhere, far, far away, was a horizon. It all reminded her of something, but she couldn’t think exactly what.

“Awesome,” Lee breathed, the word fogging in the air before him.

“Quite,” the Doctor agreed, amused. Even his breath was visible, though it didn’t make as much of a cloud as that of the humans in the party. He pulled the TARDIS door closed behind them and set off, surefooted, across the ice. “Come on.”

It took Grace a moment to realise he was headed in the opposite direction. She forced herself to move faster to catch him up, just about resisting the urge to stick her arms out like a tightrope walker when her boots skidded on the ground. Behind her she heard Lee curse as he slipped; she glanced round to see him struggling to get up from the undignified position in which he’d landed, flat on his back. Wobbling her way back towards him since the Doctor was apparently oblivious to his predicament, she managed to steady herself, planting her feet

apart and putting as much weight as possible onto her heels as she bent over, offering Lee a hand. Gratefully he took it, and Grace almost went down with him as he scrabbled around, his trainers having some difficulty finding purchase on the ice.

“Thanks,” he gasped when they were both upright again and out of breath from the exertion, surrounded by clouds of white steam. “If I’d known we’d be doing this I would have found a pair of skates. Or skis.”

“Yeah, same here. I guess Time Lords don’t actually believe in planning ahead,” Grace said, shooting a glare towards their alien companion, who had stopped and was regarding them with a baffled expression.

“What on earth are you two doing?” the Doctor called as they shuffled their way forwards, Lee clinging onto Grace and Grace trying desperately not to overbalance from the added weight.

“Watching *The Magic Flute*; what does it look like?” she asked sweetly as they reached him, sliding about like a pair of drunks on an ice rink. He looked at them as though they were both mad before comprehension dawned and he dug around in the pocket of his greatcoat. Like Mary Poppins producing a standard lamp he pulled, first from one and then the other, pair of Nordic walking poles which he presented to them both with a little flourish.

“Better?”

“Much.” Grace planted the tips of the poles into the ice and immediately felt steadier. “I suppose you want me to ask how you did that, huh?”

He chuckled. “Maybe later. Where do you think we are?”

She pulled a face. “I was never much good at astronomy, and it’s probably a planet a million miles away from our solar system.”

“A very cold planet that’s a long way from the sun?” Lee ventured.

“You’re partially right,” the Doctor said. “But there’s no sun here, not any more.”

Lee frowned. “Then shouldn’t we be standing in the dark?”

“That is a very good point, Lee, and yes, we should.”

“So how come we’re not?”

In reply the Time Lord just gave him one of those infuriatingly enigmatic smiles he was so good at.

“It looks like a Christmas cake,” Grace remarked, finally realising what it was that the softly undulating expanse of white resembled: her aunt had grown up in England and always made a fruit cake for Christmas, using a palette knife to make waves in the wet icing. It was pristine, what footprints they’d left already frozen over, and quite, quite beautiful.

“Interesting you should say that, Grace. Why don’t you take a look behind you?” the Doctor suggested, his smile now definitely bordering on mischievous.

“Ooh, you really like making us work for our surprises, don’t you?” she griped, but turned anyway, expecting to see more of the perfect flat landscape, the ice stretching out as far as the eye could see with nothing to disturb it. Instead her mouth fell open in shock. “Oh, my *God*.”

“Incredible, isn’t it?” the Doctor said. “One of the most impressive feats of engineering ever attempted in this part of the universe, and sadly also one of the most short-lived.”

“It’s a candle,” Grace exclaimed. “A gigantic candle!”

And so it was, or at least it seemed to be: a huge white column reaching up from somewhere deep below the ice. It must have been miles away but even so it was some considerable distance across, the height of thousands of Empire State buildings put one on top of another. At the top was a flame, just about visible from this distance, big and powerful enough to illuminate what felt to Grace like the entire surface of the planet.

“Wow.” Beside her Lee stared upwards, awestruck. “What the hell is it?”

“It’s called the Light of the Universe, though that’s a bit of a misnomer as nothing could create that much illumination without burning out before it was even a fraction of the way there. During the First Dalek War the sun in this part of the cosmos was sent supernova by an attack from one of Skaro’s battle fleets,” the Doctor explained, all breathless enthusiasm. “All life in this star system was dying; some managed to escape but whole races became extinct with no way to survive so far from any other source of heat and light.”

“So what happened?” Grace asked, unable to take her eyes from the flame.

“Centuries later an exploratory ship from one of the Earth colonies discovered this system, and finding it rich in mineral deposits decided it would be ideal for expansion. Well, if they could sort the light and heat problem, naturally.”

“You mean someone came up with the idea of a humongous lighthouse?” said Lee, his tone more than a little sceptical.

“Exactly!” Just from the sound of his voice Grace could tell the Doctor was almost dancing with excitement. “But it’s so much more than a just lighthouse; that thing is also capable of generating enough energy to power a billion star cruisers, which is a fair bit of warmth. It’s a work of complete genius, all dreamed up by one of the technicians on that very exploratory vessel. He was quite the visionary; he wanted to bring life back to this desolate corner of the cosmos.”

“Then why’re we standing here freezing our butts off if it can produce that much heat?”

“Ah.”

Grace finally tore her gaze away and glanced round to see the Doctor wearing a rather rueful expression. “It didn’t work, did it?”

“Oh, no, no, no, quite the opposite: it worked too well. When they turn on the generators by remote drone in about twenty minutes’ time the heat created will be so intense that it will melt the core of the planet.” He sighed. “It seems that no one stopped to consider the effect it would have on a world that had spent centuries in the dark, gradually freezing until its very composition was little more than ice.”

“Not such geniuses after all, then, were they?”

“It seems not.” The Doctor looked up at the light, one hand stopping his hat from sliding off. “It’s a shame, really; all that effort, all that enthusiasm for creation, and in a short time there will be nothing left.”

There was a slightly uncomfortable silence as they all regarded the brief results of mankind’s endeavours.

“Well,” Grace said eventually, “At least it existed, if only for a few hours.”

“Indeed. You know, from space it looks rather like a Christingle,” the Doctor remarked. “At least I’ve always thought so. Appropriate, I suppose, if you’re going to call something the Light of the Universe.”

“Except that here it’s always winter and never Christmas.”

He smiled. “Oh, it’s always Christmas somewhere; the message of peace and goodwill spread far beyond your solar system, carried by some of the first explorers.”

“Let me guess: there’s a Christmas planet,” she teased, knowing as she spoke that she would be right. And she was.

“There are three, actually, though the parties are better on the first two, especially Yuletixx I.” He glanced at them both, brows raised. “I have an idea: shall we drop in?”

Grace groaned. “Doctor, we just *had* Christmas, remember?”

“I didn’t. And how did you spend that Christmas?” he enquired. “Don’t forget that I saw your tree; it looked rather forlorn to me.”

“I spent it playing poker in a back room and mostly losing,” said Lee. “No tree, no presents. If there’s a party on offer, take me to it!”

“Good man. After all we’ve been through lately I think we’ve earned some fun. Well, Grace? What do you think?”

Grace remembered a hectic day at work on Christmas Eve, wanting when she finally left nothing more than a soak in the bath and a glass of wine only to find that Brian’s parents had turned up on the doorstep without a word to anyone, insisting they couldn’t drive home at so late an hour. There were no sheets on the spare bed and they claimed not to have eaten all day. Christmas dinner had been a strained affair and she was only too glad to return to her patients, though Brian spent the next few days carping in her ear and down the phone, throwing a fit when he discovered she was on call over New Year after he’d gone to all the

trouble of booking last minute tickets to *Madame Butterfly* as a surprise without checking her schedule. Really, she should have seen the signs a mile off but she'd been too frazzled to even think about it; to have taken the sofa when he walked out he must have been planning it for some time. It was one Christmas she'd really rather forget.

"OK," she said. "But there had better be full-fat, artery-clogging eggnog."

The Doctor laughed, and offered one arm to her, the other to Lee. "Only the best," he assured her. "They have wonderful mulled wine, too; I keep meaning to ask for the recipe but I have a feeling it's a closely-guarded secret. Oh! And you should see the fairy lights; they're spectacular, and created by real fairies. Well, they're not *strictly* fairies per se, actually a subspecies of the native fireflies but that's what the locals call them and they seem quite happy with it. I must take you to see the grotto as well; it's really quite amazing..."

Grace was happy to listen to him expound upon the wonders of this Christmas planet as they made their way arm in arm back to the TARDIS, somehow managing not to slip once. She supposed it must have been the Doctor's influence and was grateful for it. As they entered the ship he was telling Lee about a party he'd once attended where it turned out it was a grievous social mistake to arrive without a Christmas sweater, the lack of which had resulted in both he and his then companion being summarily ejected; he'd apparently stockpiled a few since then and suggested they make sure they were suitably attired before they arrived. Glad to shed her heavy coat, fingers and toes prickling with pins and needles as warmth returned to extremities she hadn't even realised were so cold, Grace listened with a smile.

Just as the Doctor hit the switch that would send them barrelling back into the vortex she glanced up at the projection on the holographic ceiling. In those few seconds before the image was replaced with the familiar swirling green and blue she could see that the unnamed planet on which they had been standing only minutes before did indeed look just like a Christingle, the huge torch that was visible even from space resembling the candle traditionally stuck into an orange.

"Such a shame," she murmured. "All that work, for nothing."

The Doctor glanced at her and smiled gently. "Not for nothing; they went on to create bigger and better things, things that actually worked and made a difference. Everyone makes a mistake once in a while, and after all, it's the thought that counts, isn't it?"

"Yeah," she agreed after a moment's consideration. "Yeah, I guess it is."

"I wish *my* mistakes were that good," Lee remarked. "Even if it didn't last long, it looked phenomenal."

"It did, it did," the Doctor agreed. He whirled from the console, his overcoat fanning around him like the skirts of a Dervish, and clapped his hands together. "Now, I must find those crackers, and I'm sure I've got some party poppers somewhere about the place. We need to get ourselves in the festive mood..."

Grace and Lee leaned companionably on the console as they watched him burrow about in the drawers of his haphazard filing system, muttering to himself as he went. All sorts of odds

and ends that he didn't want went flying over his shoulder to land on the rug, or bounced into the darkened corners of the room, probably never to be seen again. Within a few minutes he had a set of fairy lights draped around his neck and a pair of reindeer antlers poking out from his curls.

"Well, it might be a bit unusual, but this is already probably the best Christmas I've had in years," Lee said. "D'you think we should help him?"

The Doctor was halfway up a library ladder, coming perilously close to falling off as he leaned over to reach a drawer that was just a little too far away. "No, he seems quite happy. Mind you," Grace added with a frown as the ladder wobbled, the Doctor clinging onto the nearest filing cabinet, "I'm not sure how long that will hold..."

She had her answer a moment later when the fixtures holding the ladder onto the wall came away; it toppled backwards in a surprisingly graceful arc, depositing the Time Lord and whatever he'd managed to dig out from that drawer onto the floor. Suddenly anxious they both raced across the room, only to find that he'd landed in a pile of cushions and was brandishing a box of Christmas crackers with a triumphant grin.

"What am I going to do with you?" she asked as they pulled him out.

"Well..." With a shrug he held up the sprig of mistletoe he'd obviously also found, raising his eyebrows.

Grace smiled, shaking her head, and gave him a quick peck on the cheek. "You are incorrigible."

His grin widened. "Always."

"Hey," Lee complained, "Don't I get a kiss?"

"Of course." The Doctor turned, holding out the mistletoe with a determined look in his eye. Worried, Lee backed away and Grace burst out laughing.

"Merry Christmas, Doctor," she said, and, thinking of the Light of the Universe and its hopeful creators, added, "and Merry Christmas everyone, wherever and whenever you are."

End Notes

Yeah, it's twee and my ability to create pseudo-science is pretty much non-existent but never mind. Merry Christmas!

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