

MEMO

The Doctor brings Ace to a mysterious art gallery and finally puts her in the picture...  
*Doctor Who*, BBC1 7:30pm



**9.15pm A Very British Coup**

Harry Perkins invents a distinctive chicken coup, much to the chagrin of French farmers.

**10.05pm House of Cards**

Having problems stacking your cards? This hour-long self-help documentary will turn you into an expert builder of card houses before the show is over.

**7.30-8.20pm Doctor Who**

Starring **Edward Peel-Smith**  
 In *Pictures at an Exhibition*  
 An adventure by **JAMES BOW**

An alien art gallery proves to be the key to resolving Ace's childhood demons.

- Ace ..... SOPHIE ALDRED
- The Doctor ... EDWARD PEEL-SMITH
- Sad Man ..... GEOFFREY PALMER
- Audrey ..... COREY PULMAN
- Chad Boyle ..... SAM MEAD
- Manisha ..... KISHORI VARU
- Dorothy ..... JASMINE BREAKS

Stunt Arranger TIP TOPPED  
 Incidental Music LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
 Costume Designer RICHARD CROFT  
 Make-up Designer PALOMA PICASSO  
 Script Editor PATRICIA SMITH \*  
 Designer MARTIN F. PROCTOR \*  
 Producer NATHAN TURNER-JOHN  
 Director ALAN WEARING  
 \* - true credit  
 CEEFAX SUBTITLES

**8.25pm Eastenders**

*Too Many Drops to Drink*  
 A new episode by **BORIN MANN**

The annual ale-guzzling tournament at the Queen Vic pub combines with a plumbers' strike, with tragic results in Albert Square.

**LETTERS**

Greetings! Spotted your ad in issue 44 of **Enlightenment**. Generally, I try to avoid fanzines written by only one person because of the risk involved: if the writing is bad, it's bad all the way through. However, I was so interested from your ad that I decided to make an exception - the relationships and the story hints sound really good! Enclosed is \$15 US for a copy of **Trenchcoat**.

Chris Kocher  
 Dallas, PA (Order #1)

**11.10pm Gloomwatch**

Repeats:  
*Today the Mouse*  
 By **JERRY MAVIS**  
 An intelligent mouse leads an organized rodent revolt, while taking to wearing little red shorts.

**12.05am Who in Review**

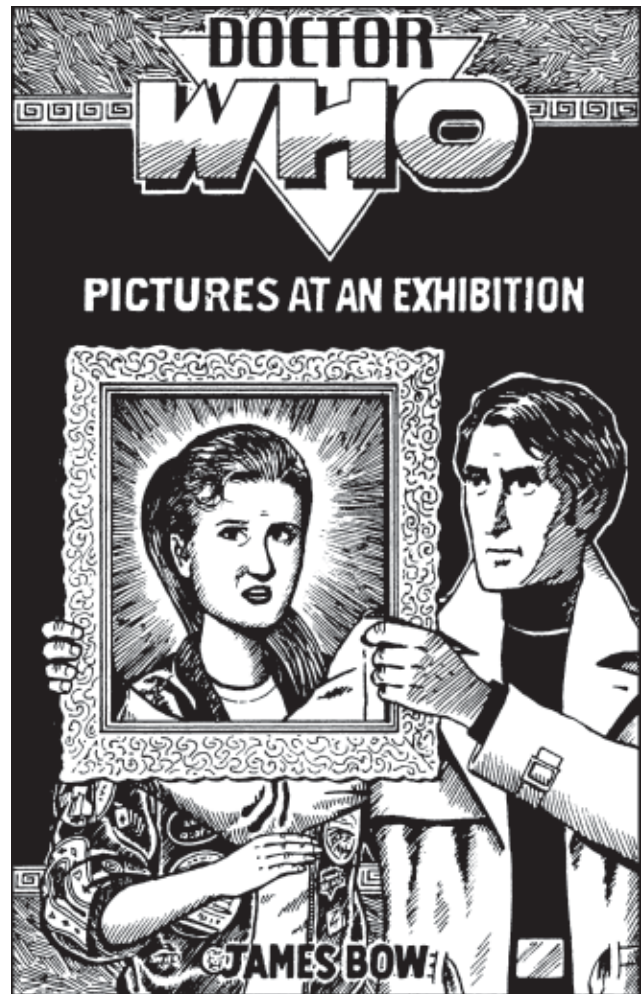
Replays: *The Miscue*  
 The TARDIS crew meets Vicki, and Bill Hartnell flubs his lines.

# SERIAL 7Z

After eight weeks on location, the cast and crew retired to the CBC Toronto studios to film **Pictures at an Exhibition**. This serial was to be the budget saver, featuring a small cast and no location work. However, the production crew took care that this short story would not suffer because of this.

Filmed third, **Pictures at an Exhibition** debuted second, as a single forty-five minute episode on September 13, 1992 where it got respectable ratings of 7.8 million viewers. This story was remarkable in that not one word of dialogue was spoken, and the main feature of the story was the musical score, performed by the London Symphony Orchestra.

*Pictures at an Exhibition* first appeared in September 1993 in *Myth Makers 2* and was included in the *Trenchcoat 1&2 Omnibus Reprint* in January 1995.



# PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

Written by James Bow

The building rose six stories above the brick sidewalk and asphalt street. Twenty marble steps led up to the three story neoclassical entrance. Three heavy oak doors stood evenly spaced between four Corinthian columns.

On the sidewalk before the edifice, a blue box materialized out of thin air. No one was around to see this strange sight. The mid afternoon sun shone brightly upon the TARDIS from over the cornice of the building.

The door to the TARDIS opened and a young woman stepped out, shouldering a battered black rucksack. She brushed light brown bangs from her forehead and stared irreverently at the tall building before her. Ace didn't like pomposity. The building looked like a museum, or a government house. She was glad she was wearing her old leather jacket with all its badges. That, her rucksack, and her worn black jeans would be perfect to make this place feel more human.

She looked to her left and right for people, but saw no one. Beyond the building, neatly trimmed lawns stretched to the horizon. Ace raised her eyebrows, and then stared cockily at the overdressed structure. No wonder no one was around. Well, if this place wasn't going to welcome people, particularly her, then she'd impose herself. She'd be a blot of imperfection on its perfect halls, at least until someone turfed her out.

The door to the blue box opened again and a tall man stepped out. Ace looked up at the Doctor as he locked his disguised time machine and straightened his grey trenchcoat. Even after a year with this man, she reflected, she still hadn't gotten used to his new appearance. She winced as she recalled the traumatic events of his death.

To see her mentor riddled with bullets until little remained was bad enough, but to watch him change before her eyes, taking on this form he had now, that was truly frightening. Worst of all, for six months after, he had been so sickly that she didn't know what would have happened to him had she not been there.

During that time, the mysterious, dark yet cheerful and erratic man she knew was gone. She'd hoped this persona would return as soon as he recovered from the post-regeneration trauma, and when this didn't happen, she was disappointed. The Doctor settled into a completely different persona for his eighth body.

As Ace stared up into the sombre, high cheekboned face of the tall man, she knew she couldn't help liking him. Since his recovery, he had tried his utmost to re-establish their close friendship. She trusted him, he was the Doctor after all, but in this character the mysterious and dark nature of his previous incarnation remained, while the cheerful exterior disappeared. It had been replaced by fragile, sombre melancholy. She missed his seemingly indestructible old body. Certainly, she couldn't call him 'professor' anymore.

The Doctor smiled at her; always, she noted, there was a sad twinge to his lips. He patted her shoulder reassuringly and trotted up the marble steps to the oak doors of the building.

Ace shrugged. This Doctor maintained one of the more annoying characteristics of his predecessor. He hadn't told her where they were or why they were here. Yet he expected her to go into this naff building without question. As with his predecessor, she knew there was no getting around him when he wanted something done. She shouldered her rucksack and trotted up the steps into the building.

She couldn't help but be impressed by the sight that greeted her as she entered the lobby. Grey-white marble walls stretched six stories to a ceiling of stained glass. The sun shone through this glass, colouring everything in brilliantly joyful hues. Across from her, corridors barely twelve feet high stretched into the building's depths. Works of art hung at eye level on the lobby walls, in the corridors, and on the balconies above her.

Ace was impressed, but disgusted. Art and art galleries weren't meant to go together. Art was something she enjoyed, but why did it have to be stored in places that intimidated you and compelled you to keep a reverent silence? It just wasn't fair.

She looked for the Doctor and found him at the entrance to one of the corridors. He was staring at her oddly but before she could call out, he ducked back and was lost in the darkness of the hallway.

Ace frowned. She strode across the lobby, her boot-heels loud on the polished floor, to where she'd last seen him. She peered along the corridor. Marble walls, lit by an endless series of gas lamps, stretched to the vanishing point and along these walls framed paintings alternated with satin draperies. The Doctor was nowhere

to be seen, though Ace could see no place where he could hide, nor a side corridor where he could run.

Why had the Doctor run away from her? One thing he hadn't lost from his previous incarnation was a tendency to sometimes do the strangest, most infuriating things. Was this some stupid game of hide and seek? If so, knowing the Doctor, he'd use some sneaky trick to make her lose. She could go back to the TARDIS instead, but that idea repelled her. It would have meant admitting defeat. In the twenty-three years of her life, she had never admitted defeat by anything.

She strode along the gas-lit corridor, passing masterpieces to right and left. At first she gave them only a passing glance, but after a few minutes she found herself lingering at each one.

Ace's favourite works of art weren't boring, stately portraits, but pieces depicting people or other things interacting. Picnics in the park charmed her, though she'd never admit it in public. Lovers kissing, though sappy, still offered more life than static poses. Depictions of oncoming storms or other threatening action thrilled her.

She found herself staring at a painting of a ship at sea. The sky was black and the waves were capped with white. Sheets of rain obscured the small vessel. More than a mile away, the lights from a distant harbour beckoned.

Ace looked on appreciatively. She glanced near the frame to see who had created the piece, but could find neither name nor title. She shrugged





and stared at the painting again. The blue-white ship leaned at a rakish angle, beset by whitecaps, but still it withstood the attacks. Its mast jutted triumphantly up from the deck. It looked ready and able to fend off the storm's best blows. Silly as it sounded, Ace couldn't help liking the boat, almost as if it were a person.

She blinked, and the wind blew spray into her face.

Ace clutched at the wheel as the ship topped the crest of a huge whitecap before plunging into the churning sea. Another wave, three meters from trough to crest, rose up in front of her. Desperately, following an instinct she didn't know she had, she steered the bow into the wave. Spray washed over her, but the ship crested without keeling over.

The wind howled like a demon, and the roar of the waves and thunder drowned out anything less than a scream. Ace peered into the gloom and spotted the distant lights of the harbour.

The wind was at her back, driving the vessel recklessly forward. A four-meter wave rose up before her. The dashing water almost knocked her overboard, but she clung to the wheel. The bow tipped up, crested the wave, and plunged forward into the dark trough. It was all Ace could do to keep the ship head-on into the next swell.

For five minutes, she forced the ship over whitecap after raging whitecap. Fortunately, someone else seemed to be handling the sail, though Ace couldn't see anyone behind her. She couldn't spare more than a quick glance away from the oncoming seas.

But after that first four-meter wave, the subsequent whitecaps weren't as large or as difficult to handle. Ace got used to piloting the vessel through the foam toward safety. She began to enjoy herself. This was exhilarating! It was her and the ship against the elements and she and the ship were winning. A two-meter whitecap shoved the vessel skyward, and Ace shrieked in delight. Then the winds faltered and she taunted them for giving up so soon. The dark clouds broke, the rains let up, and Ace chased them away with her laughter.

Minutes later, she was within a hundred meters of the harbour. Other craft poked their masts above the protective barrier. Ace smirked contemptuously at those who hid from the storm. They were like kids covering under a blanket.

Suddenly, inexplicably, a wave rose up in front of her, blocking her view of the harbour. Her jaw dropped, but she aimed the bow into the wash. She felt her ship lurch skyward and she lost her grip. The bows ploughed over the wave as she fell back.

Ace blinked and glanced around in confusion at the marble halls and satin curtains. The daydream had been so real. But it had been real! But how could she have gone from some art gallery to the middle of some ocean? She felt her face and clothes. They were dry.

It must have been her imagination, somehow spurred on by that painting. She glanced at the picture and stepped back in surprise. The sailing ship was no longer tossed at sea. It floated at the entrance to a harbour, among other ships. The sun shone brightly and the sea was calm.

She shuddered. She couldn't explain how this had happened. Instead, she turned away from the painting and strode hurriedly down the corridor. Find the Doctor and demand an explanation, she told herself.

But the pictures still caught her eye. Eventually, her pace slowed again, and she stared at each painting as she passed.

One painting made her stop and stare. It had hard edges so cold they made her shiver. A man, his eyes invisible behind grey sunglasses, stared back at the viewer. He sat on a cold white chair on a wooden deck, and the sky beyond was a cold cloudless blue. A revolver lay on the table in front of him. His lips were set in a thin sad frown.

The wind was calm, and the lake below the deck hardly made a sound as it lapped the sandy beach. The man stared through Ace toward the

distant horizon.

As she stared at the man, his head lowered and she could see his eyes over his grey sunglasses. They were glistening. His hand went up and wiped a tear away. She saw the envelope on the table, beside the revolver. It had been hand delivered, and addressed with elegant flowing script. It lay open and had obviously been read, but despite the man's grief, he had calmly refolded it and inserted it neatly back into the envelope. His fists whitened as they clenched to hold back the tears.

He reached for the revolver and began examining its metal details and its smooth finish. For a second, Ace stood frozen in horror. When she saw him turn the muzzle to his face and finger the trigger, she lunged forward, gripping him by the arm.

The man stared up at Ace, as if he'd seen her for the first time. Through his sunglasses, their eyes met. Ace stared at him, wordlessly pleading. She couldn't bear to see him do this. Whatever was the matter, no matter what the circumstances, it wasn't worth it to do this. It wasn't a solution; he had to find another way out. Above all, he couldn't bottle his emotions up any longer. He had to let go.

The man stared back at her for a second, and then the expression around his eyes shifted. He brought his other

hand up and carefully unloaded the revolver. The bullets fell into Ace's hands and she pocketed them. She breathed a sigh of relief.

The man placed the gun on the table, and shoved it out of reach. His stare returned to the distant horizon. Tears flowed like rivers down his cheeks.

Ace stared at the picture in astonishment. The painting had changed. The revolver was missing, and the cold, bottled-up man was crying freely. But when she felt her pockets for the bullets, she couldn't find any. This was crazy!

She glanced up and down the marble hallway. She must have been walking for a while. The lobby was a small bright square in the distance, and she could still see no ending to the corridor the other way. Still no sign of the Doctor.

She walked on briskly, trying to keep from seeing the paintings from even the corners of her eyes.

She sensed rather than saw the next painting. It was almost as if an invisible presence reached out to caress her subconscious. She tried to walk by, but her legs stopped as if they were possessed, and she was forced to look at the picture. The scene sent chills through her body.

It was a picture of a crib in a room decorated modestly for the baby's needs. A woman stood by the window, nursing the child, her back to the viewer. It was a scene filled with warmth, but the familiarity of it made Ace shiver for a reason she couldn't name.

When the woman turned around, Ace's blood froze. She easily recognized Audrey, her mother. The memory of the woman she hated so much blinded her momentarily, and the painting patiently froze until Ace could ignore it no longer. Then the scene resumed. It was obvious who the child was. The loving way Audrey cuddled and sang a lullaby to the gurgling tyke sickened the young woman.

How could she show so much love to me then and not when I could give it back, she wondered? Why did she change so much? But as she watched, Ace saw all the characteristics that made her mother in that woman in the picture. Yet the woman looked so compassionate. Had she changed? Of course, Ace told herself. She had to have. If her mother hadn't changed, then it had to have been... She dismissed that thought out of hand.

Audrey set the baby gently into the crib. It fell asleep within seconds. Ace was disgusted that she hadn't even wailed just a bit to annoy her mother.

Audrey smiled down on the child, and then straightened up. A tired



edge crept into her eyebrows, and Ace recognized it immediately. The woman left the room, turning out the lights behind her. Ace felt herself following her.

The two-bedroom apartment was as she remembered it, subdued and lonely, with no man about except for those times mom brought one home. They never stayed for long, however. Something always happened to chase them out the door. Ace didn't even know what her father looked like. Audrey had refused to tell her, and Ace hadn't succeeded in getting the information herself. That had been the final straw.

Audrey sat down before the coffee table, and the tired lines around her eyes deepened. Ace looked on dispassionately; then she noticed an open envelope on the table, its contents lying nearby. Before Ace could look at it, Audrey picked it up and read it, obviously for the umpteenth time. The weary look around her eyes sharpened.

Ace peered over her mother's shoulder to read the letter. Her jaw dropped and a sickening sensation filled her stomach. She had been wrong. Audrey hadn't chased the father out.

Audrey's jaw tightened, but she refused to cry. She neatly folded the letter and, carefully and methodically, tore it into small pieces, which she threw into the garbage. Ace stared in shock. In that moment, she'd seen a bit of herself in her mother. It had always been there, but she'd never seen it before.

She blinked once, and was in the gas-lit corridor. She blinked again, and the corridor was gone.

Ace frowned. She hadn't even had the chance to look away before another painting swallowed her. She couldn't even see what the new painting was about. Nervously, she surveyed her surroundings. The same chills went through her as when she'd seen her mother, only worse.

She was outside the fence to the hard of her school. Sure enough, she saw her younger self, moping in an alcove, aloof from the childhood cliques and the classroom friendship circles. Always the lone wolf.

But as Ace stared at the moping little girl, she had to wonder if she actually chose to be alone, or if circumstances forced her. Had she chosen not to fit in? A nearby group of children spotted the little girl and giggled. Their whispered remarks were those most children made, but deeply hurt those they were aimed at.

A larger group of boys loitered by the wall. Amongst them was Chad Boyle.

Ace had accepted the fact that the Chad Boyle she'd met again through the Timewyrm wasn't the real one but a twisted version. He was, essentially, a child barely the age of eight. This meant little to the younger Ace, however, whom Chad always found a way to torment.

Chad spied the lone girl moping in the alcove and a sneer lit up his face. As Ace stared from the street, her eyes flared.

It started slowly at first, the jokes with his friends (who were mostly smaller kids afraid to stand up to him), then the taunts, growing more and more direct as the girl just scowled. Finally, the younger Ace lashed out, yelling at first, then lunging forward and tripping herself up to the laughter of Boyle's group.

The girl stormed off, desperately biting back the tears, and failing, making her feel all the worse. Boyle and his bunch started to follow. They passed the gate, and Ace lunged forward, grabbing Chad by the shoulder, raising her arm to strike.

Chad stared up at her with wide, bright eyes. She suddenly realized he was much smaller than she remembered him. He was only a child. In his eyes, she saw the same vulnerability all children had and, yes, even the same innocence. The tragedy of the Timewyrm using him in her fight

against the Doctor struck Ace once again.

Chad Boyle was a child, so was Dorothy and all the kids in the playground. Looking back, were all the problems really so great, especially compared with the anxieties she contended with today?

Ace lowered her arm and turned away, leaving the school grounds. Chad stared after her, confused. Then he shrugged and looked for little Dot. She was nowhere to be seen, but he spotted another piece of fun in a nearby teacher's pet.

Ace stood at the fence around the schoolyard, waiting for the transition to begin again. This time, she meant to run straight through the corridor, not stopping to look at another creepy painting. She knew the Doctor's game, now. It was another attempt to get her to re-evaluate her life. Well, she was having no more of it. She'd hire a psychiatrist when she was good and ready!

Ace waited, but the transition back to the corridor never came. Instead, the air tingled; telling her some sort of change was to occur. She looked around in alarm. Ten meters to her left, she saw an opening in the air. Through it was what one would expect to see looking out from within a painting. The satin-draped marble corridor beckoned beyond the frame.

Desperately she ran towards it, as the world around her faded to black and took new shape. Then, as she was about to jump through, something on the other side blocked her path.

She blinked to find herself face to face with the Doctor. The frame was between them. She hesitated, and then reached out to haul herself from the picture. The Doctor pushed her hands back. Ace gaped, then pushed forward again, but the Doctor firmly pushed her back. It was like a ludicrous game of mirrors.

Ace stepped back, stomping her foot in frustration. She shot a wordless appeal to her old mentor, but he grimly shook his head. His hand reached through the frame and pointed over her shoulder. She saw no other choice but to look.

She stared out across a park. She recognized it as the one not far from her old home in Perivale. People, mostly adolescents, lingered on the rolling grassy hills between the sparse trees. To the west, a late summer sun set.



She saw herself again, thirteen years old, walking alone past the couples and the groups. Few adults mingled; it was late evening, when the neighbourhood park became the abode of derelicts and teens. Ace had, in her youth, spent a lot of time in the park to escape the pressures of home. So had many teens. How ironic, then, that the park they escaped to was the most boring place on Earth. An open space, where one sat, or played Frisbee, or got into mischief and worse things.

Ace remembered the day. She didn't want to look. Yet an unseen force within her mind bade her watch.

Dorothy Ace struck out across the park on her way home. There was nothing else to do, so she'd be early for once. A row of townhouses stretched across the street from the park. Dorothy's home was among them.

The girl stopped and ducked instinctively back behind a copse of trees as she spotted a group of older boys across the street. They

wore clothes that were a disgusting combination of grunge and militarism. They exuded tough-guy attitudes from every pore, ready to challenge everything and everyone that got in their way, or stayed out of their way.

They were running, some of them laughing in a manner Dorothy didn't like. The older Ace couldn't bear to watch. She wanted to shout a warning to her younger counterpart, but her throat was dry. Why couldn't the Doctor mind his own business for once?



There was a startling boom, and the people in the park jumped to their feet. Smoke issued from the front of one of the townhouses, and then flames began to appear. It took young Dorothy only a second to realize which address it was. She screamed and lunged forward. Others who stood watching in horror heard her coming, realized what she was about to do, and grabbed her. She yelled hysterically and struggled, but they held her back, shouting to reach her. The front of the house was now an inferno.

The fire trucks arrived, and began hosing the house. Other men entered through the windows and pulled people free. They laid them on stretchers on the other side of the street as the ambulances arrived. Young Dorothy recognized one of the burnt forms and broke free of those holding her safely at bay. She rushed up to Manisha.

Ace watched numb as her younger self broke down beside the dark girl, hysterically apologizing as if it was all her fault. Ace remembered how she had felt at the time. She almost blamed herself for the explosion. If only she'd been more insistent on taking her friend to the park! If she'd only realized what those bastards were up to and acted! She knew now these were silly concerns, but in the heat of the moment, they cut through her heart.

She also remembered the look of hatred Manisha shot at her. As though, by the colour of her skin, she was no better than those who'd firebombed her home. But as the older Ace watched, Manisha didn't react at all. The dark girl lay in a daze, staring ahead with eyes glazed in pain, not responding to the voices around her. She didn't even know what was going on. Then, the eyes softened as unconsciousness overtook her, her head lolled away from the younger Ace, and she fell unconscious.

Ace frowned. Had she blamed herself so much for this tragedy she made herself believe Manisha hated her for it? How else had memory altered the events of her life?

Dorothy stood staring as the paramedics lifted up the stretcher and pulled it into the ambulance. Someone asked her if she wanted to accompany her friend, but she didn't hear. She stood in a daze. Finally, they couldn't wait any longer and the ambulance drove off. Dorothy stared after it in stunned horror. The passers-by dispersed, but little Dorothy just stood on the sidewalk.

Ace watched her younger self boiling like a kettle. Finally the girl screamed, venting all her rage and frustration at the sky. This wasn't enough, and the girl charged across the street, not caring as traffic barely avoided her. Ace stared after herself, and decided to follow. Knowing this place, she'd be compelled to follow, anyway. She knew the route, and needed no prompting.

Dorothy ran through the streets, as though to outrun her troubles. She ducked along an abandoned right of way, ignoring the bushes that scratched her calves and ankles. She tripped once on a rotting piece of wood but was on her feet without breaking stride. Only ten years of exercise and growth allowed Ace to keep up.

Dorothy ran until her legs collapsed beneath her. She struggled up to run again, but her strength had gone. She sat on the abandoned land and sobbed uncontrollably. The clouds veiled the sun, and a light rain began to fall. The afternoon thunderstorm built up.

She stood up pitifully, her clothes torn, her ankles bleeding, and her eyes red. But she didn't want to go home now. She didn't want to go home ever. The thought of her mother was too much for this bad day. She pushed through the bushes, not caring where they would lead her. When a wall and a door barred her way, it was too much. She kicked it in frustration. The rickety door splintered open at once.

Ace wondered how she could have missed the old house until she was inside. The place had stood abandoned for as long as even their parents could remember, and it was always the subject of dares and childish pranks. Yet no one had ever ventured inside. They sent stones through the broken windows, but no one dared go any further.

Ace blinked once, and watched Dorothy sitting on the dusty stairs, taking in the musty air with deep breaths. The sobs ebbed. The still air caressed Dorothy's cheeks and soothed her soul. The girl looked around her. Outside, distant thunder rumbled, but the walls of the place caught the noise and muted it, giving it a soothing quality.

Ace hadn't remembered Gabriel Chase like this.

Dorothy caught movement out of the corner of her eye and she whirled around. A butterfly fluttered out of the shadows and landed by her feet. It had wide, delicate blue wings that bobbed gently as it rested. Dorothy was charmed.

Then the winged creature took flight again, and Dorothy got up and followed it. It led her through the shadowy hallways, past dust-laden rooms that hadn't been disturbed for a century. It flew into an old study. Dorothy walked up to the open door to be surprised by a second butterfly, which flew out, then flew back in.

These creatures were at peace with the world, with hardly a care. How she would have liked to have been like them. She felt the house teeming with life, forever unchanging, and untouched by the harsh realities of the world.

Ace frowned. Where was the evil edge she'd sensed in the house?

The blue butterfly fluttered out of the study door and hovered in the air before Dorothy. The girl raised a finger, and the flying insect landed on it. A smile lit up her lips, the first smile in a long while.

Dorothy sensed the feelings of this house. They offered her a place to stay. She could drop the troubles of the world outside; forget them entirely if she wished. She could live here, forever at peace, untouched by the rapidly changing realities. Dorothy remembered Manisha's stare of utter hatred, the grotesque laughter of the skinheads, her mother who was too busy trying to sort out her own problems to have time for her. She could leave them all behind.

Ace's heart pounded. Why had she burnt this place down? Even now she'd accept the house's offer if she could. No more Daleks, no more worrying about the Doctor's health or sanity, no more coming to terms with how small she was in comparison to the evils of the Universe. She could leave all that behind. Why not?

The house coaxed Dorothy, and Ace heard and remembered every word. It was as though a veil was pulling back from part of her mind. Why had she placed it there in the first place? Why had she forgotten all this?

Stay, the house urged. Let your troubles cease. Be free. Give up.

The last two words were a slap in the mouth to Dorothy Ace. Give up? After so much struggle against her mother, against Chad Boyle, against the ignorant fascist youths, against Daleks, Cybermen, Fenric and even the Doctor himself, how could she give up? It would mean declaring all the years of her life a wasted journey. It would mean admitting defeat. She couldn't contend with that. In the thirteen/twenty-three years of her life, she'd never admitted defeat. Not by anything. If she kept fighting, things would get better eventually.

It was as though the air became tainted with gall. The blue butterfly turned to dust in Dorothy's fingers. Gabriel Chase demanded she stay, not coaxing this time. It promised to swallow her whole and hold her in limbo. No more changes. No more dealing with reality. Dorothy recoiled as the invisible forces of the house reached out for her.

Ace wordlessly urged her younger self on. This was a sick, stagnant house, with the ghosts of its past forever frustrated in their bid to hold back flux both good and bad; admitting defeat at the hands of change, and retreating to its own little world. Dorothy Ace was not like that.

But as the invisible forces of the place rose up from beneath the house and all around, Dorothy stood overwhelmed. She ran back down the hallway, but the evil forces followed. She fell heavily as dry-rotted floor collapsed beneath her, but she scrambled up and kept running. She paused for breath at the stairwell and gripped the railing. The rotten wood came off in her hand. She glared around at the evil house in disgust.

An idea struck her. The world was full of hatred, but none so evil as the forces surrounding this house. Manisha would be avenged. She pulled a pack of matches from her pocket, and a vial of lighter fluid she'd shoplifted from the hardware store the morning before. She'd hoped to build a bomb, but it suited her fine on its own. She pulled open the cap and doused the bottom of the stairwell, leaving the half filled bottle discarded in the middle of the puddle. Then she pulled out a match, and struck it.



Ace watched in satisfaction as the stairwell caught fire. Dorothy jumped out the front door and ran as fast as her legs could take her. She'd done the right thing.

Ace felt the forces of the house speak to her. She'd destroyed them, but had she realized her mistake? She could have been at peace, free from all the demons of reality and the evils of the Universe. Had she realized she was wrong to reject the offer of freedom, and instead accept a life of constant risk and constant change?

Never, Ace thought. I'll never surrender. There's always a chance that I'll win. Good for you, Chad told her, because the human race

isn't so bad, and we all must be forgiven for our childish mistakes. Will you forgive me? Remember that there are people who love you, Audrey told her, and not everyone in this Universe hates, said Manisha. You'd fight better against the demons of reality if you made peace with the demons of your childhood. The past is the past, and each day is a new start.

The forces of Gabriel Chase closed in around her, but the forces surrounding Ace pushed them back and made her run through the hallway to the back of the house. At the door to the kitchen, a picture frame floated in mid-air. Beyond, the satin and marble gas-lit corridors beckoned. The hallway flared up behind her, and Ace ran. She dove through the centre of the frame, and was free.

It was as though a great weight had lifted from her shoulders. She'd still remember the bad things in her life, but they didn't tighten around her as they used to. They weren't as important. She was free. She bounded to her feet, light-headed. She saw the exit to the corridor a hundred meters away, and strode towards it.

The portrait of Chad Boyle smiled as she passed, as did that of Audrey, and Manisha. Ace stopped some distance from the lobby. At the end of the corridor the Doctor stood, a dark shape. A guilty smile touched his face. He gazed at her bittersweetly, silently asking forgiveness.

Ace ran down the rest of the corridor and embraced him. He staggered back, but held her. The light from the stained glass windows glittered around them. No hard feelings, Professor, Ace thought.

After a moment, she pulled back and stared up at his sombre face. She recognized a part of his expression, now. She saw the weight on his shoulders, and it made her weights look pitifully small by comparison. And he'd been carrying his for much, much longer than she had. She gripped his hand and pulled him back into the corridor, but he resisted. He smiled and shook his head. He pointed to his watch and led her through the lobby and out the front doors.

The late afternoon sun shone on Ace's back from over the cornice of the building. The Doctor strode up to the TARDIS and unlocked the door. Ace gave him a smile as she stepped inside. The Doctor smiled back, glanced at the gallery one last time, and then followed her. With a grating of engines, the blue box disappeared from the sidewalk.

**END**

