**Pictures from the Album**

Winter on the southern plain of Gallifrey was well set in by the beginning of the second month of the year. Outside the white drawing room snow covered the rose garden, turning the bushes into fantastic shapes from a fairy tale.

Marion turned from the window to the warmth of the room. Her mother in law was sitting on the sofa with a large, leather bound photograph album on her lap and a cup of tea on the little table by her side.

“I know it's not a Gallifreyan thing,” Marion admitted. “But I have kept pictures in albums ever since Kristoph and I have been together. It was the first time I felt I belonged in a family, or that I had a real home to keep such things in. I have pictures of almost everywhere we went together – except when we were in places like sixteenth century Lancashire for Christmas or visiting the Bronte Sisters in their parsonage.”

Aineytta was puzzled.

“I mean in times when the camera had not been invented.”

“Yes, that would be quite wrong. One of the cardinal Laws of Time prohibits the introduction of advanced technology into non-advanced societies. But it looks as if you enjoyed many more suitable places.”

“Yes,” Marion admitted. “That's a very special place for us....” She smiled deeply as she looked at a double page spread of photographs from Nice in the south of France. “One of the very first places we went to as a couple. I was just beginning to feel confident that I could wear a swimsuit on a beach or walk about in public with a little sundress over the costume. Kristoph made me feel that I could.”

“Nice looks a very nice place,” Aineytta said. Marion smiled at the obvious joke that she had made herself many times.

“It doesn’t work in French. Nice est joli doesn’t scan the same. But it is tres joli. That picture is on the Promenade des Anglaise. They called it that because it was always popular with English tourists. It always felt so welcoming to us as visitors, a part of France that was a part of every other country around it.”

Marion knew that Aineytta didn’t really understand that. Gallifrey and just about every other planet she knew had one race, one language, one government. Earth’s multiple cultures were perplexing to her as much as it perplexed Marion that so many other worlds were so homogenous.

“Anyway, Nice has always been one of my favourite places to visit,” Marion added before Aineytta turned the page.

“That was a planet called Exia,” Marion said. “One of the first planets I visited with Kristoph. Even before I’d been here, to Gallifrey.”

“What in Creation are you both wearing?” Aineytta asked, barely suppressing her laughter.

“Exia is ninety per cent tropical wetlands,” Marion explained. “Like… well, Gallifrey has nothing like it. Too dry, even in the temperate zones. The closest equivalent on Earth is the Florida Everglades, I suppose, though I’ve never been there. The Exian cities are all built on huge stilts and covered in climate controlled envirodomes, but the people all spend as much time as they possibly can in the wilderness places, in those houses made of reeds, high up in the trees, all connected together by rope bridges. Kristoph and I spent a whole month there. It was wonderful. The clothes… are made of a sort of fibre that comes from the tree bark. And… yes… they are decorated with fruits.”

“A proud Time Lord dressed in fruit. The very idea would cause scandal in some quarters.”

“Gold Usher would be appalled,” Marion admitted. “But despite the improper dress Kristoph was true to his Time Lord honour at all times.”

“Well, of course he was,” Aineytta agreed. “He’s a fine man. Oh, but I can’t keep looking at that picture. It’s too absurd.”

She laughed out loud. Marion laughed, too. In the midst of the laughter Caolin brought a fresh pot of tea and a tray of cakes. Aineytta turned the page quickly. She was no snob, far from it. But she did feel quite strongly that the butler should not see a photograph of his employer, the Lord of the Demesne, wearing little more than a skirt of grass decorated by a belt made of colourful fruits.

“Oh, that is a beautiful picture,” Aineytta enthused as she looked at a page sized landscape in eye-catching colours.

“Okyto,” Marion said. “On the planet Seppasi V. I was surprised because it looked a lot like Kyoto in Japan… on Earth. Particularly since Okyto is an anagram of Kyoto. And of Tokyo, which is also in Japan. But, Kristoph pointed out that it only works if all three words are spelt in Arabic characters. Japanese and Seppasin are both spelt with completely different alphabets.”

Aineytta didn’t know where to begin to comment about that. She recalled her son once telling her about an Earth language that some Prydonian seniors had devised for the natives as a ‘prank’. She couldn’t remember which language, but it wasn’t Japanese or Arabic.

Marion’s planet was a complicated place.

She looked again at the image of a dozen or more small red lacquered wooden buildings rising up a steep hill, the paths between them nearly lost amongst a forest of small trees. When the photograph was taken the whole scene was covered in a layer of snow adding to the beauty.

“There are no seasons as we know them on Seppassi. This was just after dawn one morning. Only a few minutes later the sun had melted the snow and the trees were covered in pink blossoms. That’s the picture on the next page. By midday the fruits have ripened, and as you see, in the evening the trees are covered in cones full of seeds. The last image is after nightfall when the pilgrims travel up the paths with candles inside glass lanterns while the windows of the little temples are lit with coloured lights to show them the way.”

“How remarkable. This happens every day?”

“Every day. Different pilgrims, of course. But the same monks caring for the temples. Kristoph and I walked with them. We brought food offerings for the monks and went all the way up to the highest temple. The Elder monks there blessed us both and wished us well for our future together.”

“Of course, we have no religion here on Gallifrey. But Kristoph was taught to respect the customs of other worlds as part of his diplomatic training.”

“Oh, always. After Okyto Kristoph took me to Kyoto, the place in Japan, on Earth… the place that’s an anagram of Okyto… and Tokyo. There is a beautiful temple complex there. Kiyomizu-dera, the Temple of Pure Water, for a waterfall that goes through it. I loved it there. It was beautiful, peaceful, very spiritual. I didn’t take photographs because we visited it in the early nineteenth century, before the invention of the camera. It was spring. There was so much plum blossom it looked like dawn in Okyto. Absolutely lovely.”

“How nice to have such memories to reflect upon. So many wonderful places you have visited.” Aineytta turned the pages of the album slowly and looked at each picture while Marion told the stories behind each image. They told of inspiring and exciting visits to remarkable planets with amazing things happening. Ainyetta looked at the colourful pictures of the Carnaval in Rio di Janeiro and the ‘Festive’ on the planet Sileria that matched Rio for its glorious sense of sight and sound. She came to the conclusion that Gold Usher and several other elderly and conservative-minded Time Lords would be troubled by the amount of skin - brown, white or pale purple coloured - displayed by the ladies in both parades.

“The ‘thong’ as an item of clothing may be the reason we have remained aloof from other cultures for so long,” Aineytta suggested. “I cannot imagine it becoming popular here.”

“Good,” Marion answered her. “I may have become accustomed to wearing bikinis in warm climes, but I do draw the line somewhere. And so does Kristoph, you may be assured, regardless of the custom in the Exian wetlands.”

“Not that sensuality is completely taboo on Gallifrey,” Aineytta added. “In the privacy of the Lodge, Mooney and I indulged in ‘free’ swimming in our youth.” Marion’s expression confirmed that she and Kristoph had done likewise in their secluded weekend getaway. “Still, I doubt ‘Carnaval’ is a custom we would ever adopt in the Capitol.”

“No, some things are best left where they are,” Marion fully agreed. “The chief reason for loving Rio is that we made some nice friends, there. Marisole and Rodrigo, especially. Their wedding was delightful. Not a thong in sight.”

“Yes, I see. A wedding on the beach in moonlight. Another custom unlikely to come to Gallifrey. Though in that instance, I think it is a pity. It looks quite charming… and rather romantic. Though ‘romantic’ is not a word often used on this planet. Not by the men, at least. They do their best, of course. But it doesn’t come easy to them.”

Marion smiled. Her own Time Lord was very romantic, but she knew many of them were dour, phlegmatic men.

“Goodness,” Aineytta exclaimed as she turned the page and looked at a quite incredible photograph. It was another beach, but there was no wedding going on this time. The beach was deserted except for Marion walking along, dressed in a warm, fur lined winter coat. “Is that wave behind you actually frozen?”

“Not completely. It is salt water. But it did turn to thick slush in a few seconds when the temperature dropped. It was suspended that way for several minutes. It really was one of the most amazing things I had ever seen. I never would have thought it possible, but there it was, just as if time had slowed right down.”

“That is a remarkable planet, indeed.”

Marion laughed softly.

“Very remarkable, indeed. That’s a place called Nantucket, in North America… on Earth.”

Ainyetta was surprised by that.

“So was I when I saw it. But apparently it happens sometimes in winter. That’s something I have learnt since knowing Kristoph and being able to travel in time and space. Not only are there amazing planets to see, with different skies, dozens of moons, more than one sun…. Not only are there such things out there, but I come from one of the MOST amazing planets of all, with so many different natural environments, incredible, breath-taking natural phenomena, people so adaptable and ingenious that they live almost everywhere, from desert to ice shelves. And there are still lots of wonderful things on my own planet that I haven’t seen yet. I feel so proud of my world no matter how many other places I visit.”

“Quite right, too,” Aineytta agreed. “I must say, I think I would like to see a wave freeze before it breaks on a beach, myself. What did you say this place was called?”

“Nantucket. It’s a small island on the coast of Massachusetts. But… do you mean you’d like to visit Earth?”

“I have seen your Liverpool,” Aineytta reminded her. “But I think I would very much like to experience some of the more remarkable parts of Earth. Shall we put the idea to Kristoph, later?”

“I think we will,” Marion agreed.