**Schloss Grafenegg**

Marion's favourite classical composer was Vaughan Williams. She had liked him since she had been taken on a noisy school trip to St George's Hall to see the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic orchestra perform the Sea Symphony. Since she met Kristoph, of course, she had seen the premier of that work in Leeds in 1910 and at the Royal Albert Hall during the 2013 Proms. She was familiar enough with the piece by then to compare the premier with later, more polished performances, though not within earshot of anyone who might not understand the combination of time travel and musical appreciation.

But Vaughan Williams was not the only composer she had come to appreciate fully as Kristoph took her to times and places she never dreamed possible.

And this glorious weekend in twenty-first century Austria was certainly one of those times. She found herself humming a refrain from Gustav Mahler’s Eighth Symphony, which had captured her imagination during a glorious afternoon performance. Like Williams’ Sea Symphony it was a work for voices as well as instruments, sometimes called the Symphony of a Thousand, though few venues had ever managed to assemble a choir quite that large.

“You enjoyed the performance?” Kristoph asked her, fully knowing the answer.

“Absolutely,” she answered. “And this is such a wonderful place to hear music.”

She looked around at the magnificent edifice that towered over the formal garden where they walked. It was called Schloss Grafenegg and she wasn’t sure if it was baroque, gothic, neo-gothic or something else entirely. Her first thought was that it would make a very fiendish subject for a jigsaw puzzle with all of those stair gables reaching up into the pale blue sky. She could imagine having a hard time sorting out dozens of right angles of carved stonework.

Kristoph laughed softly and she realised he had been reading her thoughts.

“Somewhere in lower Austria there is bound to be a place where we can buy such a jigsaw. It will challenge you on a winter’s afternoon on the southern plains of Gallifrey.”

“You can buy me a CD of the Eighth symphony to play while I’m doing it. Then I shall be able to remember this afternoon fully.”

“I shall do that, too,” Kristoph promised. “But not yet. Time for tea.”

They had wandered through the sculpture garden to the small but exclusive hotel that the castle grounds were big enough to encompass. Something like the English idea of ‘tea’ was served in the open air. The beverage of choice was actually a Germanic style of coffee topped with thick cream, but apart from that it was a familiar meal. Marion enjoyed it just as much as she had enjoyed the refined ‘tea’ of the Negresco in Nice or on the Orient Express with its reputation for good service.

“I think I might take a lie down before this evening’s concert,” she admitted after a second luxurious coffee. “I’m glad there is a hotel here, instead of having to go back to the town of Grafenegg. So much easier. Of course, the most expensive way to enjoy the festival. But that’s the advantage of marrying a rich man.”

She smiled as she said that. It had taken her a long time to take the Lœngbǽrrow family wealth for granted. She still looked up hotel room prices on comparison websites and wondered if some of the more outrageously priced really gave value for money. Kristoph let her do so even though he might easily have bought many of the hotels wholesale, let alone a few days of luxury accommodation and some gourmet meals.

“Yes, you should get some rest,” he said. “Tonight’s concert is nearly four hours long, with intervals. That’s starting to compare with Gallifreyan opera.”

He paid the bill and tipped the waiter then walked with Marion to the neat, clean, modern hotel room. He sat with her until she drifted to sleep, then he quietly slipped away.

He went from the hotel towards the sculpture garden and wandered apparently idly amongst the exhibits, admiring some, amused or frankly baffled by others, as was so often the case when the word ‘contemporary’ was applied to art.

But sculpture wasn’t really his first concern. He had a rendezvous to make in the garden. Looking nonchalant while waiting for a contact was second nature to the Celestial Intervention Agency’s most notorious assassin. Nobody would have taken him for anything but a classical music lover enjoying a quiet walk in the park.

Kristoph didn’t recognise the man who stepped away from one of the more puzzling sculptures and slipped into step beside him. He didn’t expect to. He knew he was a fellow Time Lord. A moment’s extra concentration would have revealed a psychic identity he would probably have known, but he didn’t need to know anything more.

“Is she safe?” the younger Time Lord asked.

“She’s in her hotel room, and there is a psychic shield around it. Nothing can get close to her. Not even.…”

“Not even a Brakkian Wraith. That’s what they sent this time. You know the species?”

“By reputation. A mutable being, capable of taking on any outward appearance. Has one unfortunate characteristic. It can’t change its eyes. They always look like yellow balls with no discernible iris. They have to use contact lenses that never quite pass close scrutiny.”

“Exactly so.”

“I’d prefer not to get close enough to the creature to be able o study its eyes,” Kristoph added. “Any ideas?”

“I’ve got this.” The young Time Lord held up a device the size of a desktop calculator. A screen some two inches square displayed a surprisingly detailed map of Schloss Grafenegg and its environs.

“Calibrated to home in on the Wraith?”

“Yes.”

“Then we have an advantage over our enemy. That’s a refreshing change.”

The device gave out a high-pitched sound. They both looked at the screen.

“Its in the castle,” Kristoph observed. “Come on.”

They raced across the sculpture garden, towards the imposing edifice of Schloss Grafenegg. As they drew closer, they slowed. There were tourists and staff everywhere, and two men running so urgently would draw the sort of attention they didn’t need to attract. They entered the castle quietly, glancing at the device and then moving towards the Hall of Knights, one of the highlights of the castle tour. Kristoph had seen it with Marion before the Mahler performance. It was a large, high ceilinged room with rich red-brown panelling and a highly decorated ceiling. Paintings of knights from ages past looked down from the walls with the cold gaze of posterity.

They looked down on a group of tourists with their guide speaking German and English. Kristoph and his companion waited until they passed onto the next room. For a moment they thought they were alone, then they detected a movement in the huge nineteenth century fireplace. A figure unfolded itself from the hearth and stood up. Kristoph suppressed a gasp as he noticed that he was identical to his companion at his side.

“You should move away from him, sir,” the doppelganger said. “He’s the Wraith. He copied my form….”

“I hardly think so,” Kristoph answered. From within his coat he drew a small, squat black stick. It was a deceptively powerful weapon, a relic of his Celestial Intervention Agency days that he had taken to carrying with him since he and Marion had left Nice. It was for just such an encounter that he had taken that precaution.

“You’re wrong, sir,” the copy again insisted. “I am the one who came to protect your wife. THAT is the alien assassin.”

Kristoph didn’t hesitate. Hesitation wasn’t something a Celestial Intervention Agency assassin wasted time on. The split second before he acted was thoughtful decision making.

He turned and pointed the Time Lord weapon at the man by his side. He screamed briefly before disintegrating. Kristoph was slightly surprised to see two very small convex circles left on the floor. For reasons he couldn’t possibly explain, the non-organic contact lenses hadn’t been obliterated.

The other man approached slowly.

“You… saw the tell-tale sign with the eyes?” he asked.

“I did. But I was already suspicious when I mentioned that I’d put a psychic shield on the hotel room and he didn’t challenge me on the grounds that there is no such damn thing. I took a chance on leaving Marion in a plain ordinary hotel room with a card operated lock. I guessed I might be able to draw the enemy away from her.”

“Which you did… though not quite as either of us expected.”

“No, not quite. Do you want to tell me how the creature managed to copy your form and try its luck with me?”

“I intercepted it this afternoon while you were at the Mahler performance. We fought… and unfortunately, he got the better of me. Wraiths are strong, whatever form they take. I don’t know why he didn’t kill me. Perhaps it was outside his remit. He tied me up and stuffed me in the chimney. I just managed to get free when you came in. I had no choice but to make my presence known… and hope you would make the right choice.”

“Not a happy choice… all things considered,” Kristoph noted. As a new group of tourists came into the Hall of Knights he and his rather soot covered companion quietly left. As they stepped into the open air of the castle grounds Krisyoph had something else to say.

“Tell me one thing… I’ve been puzzled about this since you contacted me in Nice. Why is Marion safer here on Earth where any alien entity can wander around at will than on Gallifrey where the Transduction Barrier would keep them out?”

“Because the creatures that have been sent to find her are only hired guns... The Wraith, and the bounty hunter I tracked to the South of France… and whatever else they might try. The real danger is from one of our own – a Time Lord. One who has no qualms about breaking all of the protocols and going back in time from within Gallifrey’s borders in order to commit his terrible crime. You are both safer on Earth - especially if you keep on moving from place to place and to different times. Besides, SHE will just think you are both having a pleasant time. It is better that she doesn’t know anything about this.”

“I agree with that last sentiment,” Kristoph admitted. “Still…. I’m worried.”

“Don’t be. I’m not going to let this stand. I’ll deal with whatever comes at you.”

“You’d better practice your unarmed combat before we meet again,” Kristoph replied just a little avidly. “Protecting her and looking out for you getting into trouble is too much of a full-time job.”

The young Time Lord with everything to lose if Marion was killed accepted that criticism with a humility not usually characteristic of his race. With a few more words, the two men parted. Kristoph walked back to the hotel. After assuring himself that Marion was safe he went to the traditional Teutonic tavern that was another feature of the castle grounds. Over a single malt he thought about the possible danger that still lay ahead. He still wasn’t entirely certain that he shouldn’t take Marion straight back to Gallifrey and surround her with the best protection his former colleagues in the Celestial Intervention Agency could provide.

But if the true enemy was a fellow Time Lord, one capable of breaking unbreakable protocols, then it might not be enough. And besides, he didn’t want Marion to know that there was such a serious threat.

She definitely didn’t need to know that it was an enemy of their own future son who was threatening their life. She mustn’t know that.

And he had to keep believing that, despite today’s mishap, his future son was smart enough and skilled enough to stay one step ahead of his enemy’s scheme.

Marion’s life, and far more than that, depended on it.