**Passengers on the Ro-Imo Express – Part Two**

Marion groaned sickly and tried to lift her head, but the carriage, even though it had tipped onto its side, was still moving - the screeching of the metal was even more desperate than before.

Then Kristoph was back with her. He pressed both women down, protecting their heads with his arms.

“The carriage is still moving under its own momentum,” he said. “Keep still until it stops.”

“We crashed?” Marion asked. “Oh... Those children... The four little girls.”

“You two, first,” Kristoph answered. “Keep your heads down and your limbs loose in case of impact.”

There was no impact. There was nothing for the train to impact against. The terrible noise and the jarring movement stopped at last as the forces of gravity and friction acted against the momentum. Kristoph stood up on what was the inner partition wall, telling the women to stay where they were for a moment longer.

Above him was an emergency door, one of two in this carriage. He reached and pressed the release lever and pushed the door open. Then he lifted Marion up so that she could climb out onto the side of the toppled train. He lifted Agafya after her, then clambered away towards the galley where he could hear cries for help.

Marion and Agafya climbed down onto solid ground by themselves, ripping their dresses, ruining silk stockings and grazing elbows, but not caring very much about those things. They looked around to see the front of the train, the locomotive, the first class baggage car, the galley, the lounge car and first class sleeper twisted onto their sides. In the other direction the second class carriages jack-knifed across the tracks at a right angle. Beyond those, the main baggage car and third class carriages looked as if they had jumped the tracks in the opposite direction again and were leaning at a very precarious angle

Another emergency door was pushed open and one of the little girls was lifted up. Though both of them had aches and pains from falling, Marion and Agafya hurried to help. All four children were lifted clear. Then there was an argument and an angry shout from inside the lounge car. The next to emerge was the businessman, Mr. Matthi, with the case attached to his wrist. He was quickly followed by the Governess, and the resumed argument suggested that the businessman had pushed the Governess out of the way in order to escape. She was letting him know what she thought of such ungallant behaviour.

“Well, that was cowardly,” Marion told him. “But right now, it hardly matters. What about everyone else?”

The other diamond merchant and two stewards climbed out through the same emergency door. The stewards ran along the side of the train and pulled open a second door that had jammed from the inside. The Duchess of Exemi and her maid, both looking dusty and shaken but otherwise unhurt, emerged from that exit followed by the Duke and another steward. Again, the lady’s fashionable clothes were ruined, but she didn’t care about that as much as her husband’s painfully broken arm which made his escape difficult without the help of the stewards. He, too, was cross with Matthi, who, it seemed, would have gone through that door if it hadn’t been jammed. He had pushed the duchess and her maid aside in order to get out ahead of them.

Though technologically advanced, Ro-Imi had old-fashioned convictions about the treatment of women and that made three of them he had insulted in that way. His cowardice and his lack of chivalry left Mr Matthi very lonely as others among the crash survivors helped each other.

“I’m all right, Karri,” the injured Duke assured his wife, though his face was pale beneath the dust and he was near to fainting. Aristocratic pride was all that kept him upright.

“Please, sit down, Ferris,” his wife begged him. “You need to rest.”

“Here, let me help, your Lordship,” said one of the stewards who had sensibly grabbed a first aid kit as he exited the carriage. Once the Duke had been persuaded to sit down on the grassy bank beside the stricken line he set about fixing a splint on the broken arm.

Then Marion cried out in consternation. The galley staff were emerging from the train, but one of them was being carefully lifted out by Kristoph and one of his kitchen colleagues.

The head chef was badly injured. A pan of scalding water had tipped over him as the carriage toppled sideways. His face, chest and arms were a terrible sight to see.

“Lay him down gently,” Kristoph said. “Let me look at him. Is everyone else out of these front carriages?”

“The driver is dead,” said a steward who had walked down the length of the overturned section. He turned to look at the second class passengers evacuating in a relatively organised way. Their carriages hadn’t turned over and injuries were minor. It looked as if they might have been lucky. Further on the third class passengers were also being evacuated safely though the tilt of those carriages made it a little more difficult. The stewards on each section were doing what they were trained to do. All was under control.

“No!” Agafya cried out suddenly. “My husband... He's....”

Kristoph groaned in despair. They had ALL forgotten Lord Charrl, the noisy drunk who had gone to his sleeping compartment with a bottle of whiskey shortly before the drama unfolded.

“I’ll go,” said one of the stewards. Mr Erro, the diamond expert, went with him. Kristoph turned his attention to the scalded man.

The sonic screwdriver had its tissue repair mode, of course, but it was only intended for minor problems. These scalds were deep. He could soothe the swelling and alleviate the pain, but the man would need to get to a hospital very quickly.

“Somebody will come looking for us, won't they?” the Duchess of Exemi asked. “These trains are tracked by satellite. They will know we’re here.... Wherever here is.”

“Just past Epicuris Gorge,” the head steward said. “We’re lucky. The train slowed to go across the bridge. If we'd derailed at full speed none of us would have survived.”

That was a chilling thought, but before anyone had time to dwell upon it there was a shout from the sleeping car. Three men, one very unsteady and covered in blood, were climbing back out through the emergency door.

“Calvi!” Agafya cried. She took two running steps before remembering the sad state of their marriage. She stopped and waited until he reached her, stumbling along blindly, blood from a head injury obscuring his view.

“Aggie... You’re all right....” he said, then fainted at her feet.

Kristoph looked at them, then back at the badly scalded chef.

“Marion,” he said. “Take over here. The sonic is all that’s keeping him from excruciating agony. Keep passing it over the affected flesh. It can’t mend so much deep tissue damage, but it will soothe the inflammation and perhaps ease the pain.”

Marion did as he said. The horribly inflamed flesh was dreadful to look at up close, but she wouldn’t be squeamish. Kristoph trusted her to be sensible about the very important job.

Meanwhile he took an ordinary first aid kit and tended to Calvi Charrl while his wife clung to his hand. The wound just above the hairline would need some stitches, and there was a mild concussion. He had a broken wrist, too. But for a man thrown from his bed by a train wreck he wasn’t too badly injured.

He came around as Kristoph was tending to his wrist. He looked at him, curiously.

“I don’t feel much pain,” he said.

“That would be the liquor you consumed, earlier,” Kristoph told him. “When it wears off, you’ll feel differently.”

“But he will be all right?” Agafya asked.

“He will be when he's had the concussion treated and the wound sutured in a good, clean hospital, not on a dusty railroad,” Kristoph answered. “But, yes, he'll be fine. “

Apparently, they both would be fine, Kristoph thought. If this incident had any silver lining it was that this couple had both realised what really mattered. Agafya clung to her husband’s hand tightly. A few short words of reconciliation healed the wounds a first aid kit couldn’t.

Marion looked at the two as she tended to her patient. She was glad to see them reconciled, too.

Then she looked up. Everyone other than Agafya and Calvi, who were oblivious to anything else, did the same. A shout identified a hovercopter coming towards the scene of the accident.

“One hovercopter won’t be enough,” Marion thought out loud. Apart from the head chef and the casualties from first class, there were people from the more crowded second and third Class carriages who would need airlifting out before the rest were taken onto some sort of replacement train or however they would evacuate them all.

They needed a lot more hovercopters.

This one hovered over the stricken first class carriage before landing close by. Marion noticed that it wasn’t any kind of emergency transport. It bore the livery of one of the royal lineages of the planet and was more like an airborne stretch limousine.

Two men dressed as personal bodyguards climbed out of the side door and ran to the Governess, who looked at them crossly.

“No!” she said, pointing to the four little girls who were shocked but otherwise unhurt, sitting quietly on the grass verge while all the drama went on around them. “No. His Lordship cannot do this. Get those three men and the ladies tending them into the hovercopter, first. If there is room, the young duchesses and I will come after them.”

There was a brief debate, which the governess won. The men helped Calvi Charrl and the Duke of Exemi aboard the hovercopter along with their wives before coming for Marion and the injured chef.

“Should I go?” she asked Kristoph. “There are other people who were hurt...”

“You go, sweetheart. Take care of that poor man until a medical team can take charge of him. I will find you, later.”

Marion climbed aboard the hovercopter. Some of the executive seats had been laid flat to make a comfortable place for the chef. Marion sat beside him. There was room, still, for the four little girls to sit next to Agafya and Calvi, but not for their governess.

“They’ll be all right with us,” the Duchess of Exemi assured her. “The Duke and I are godparents to Alici and Shari.”

The Governess was worried. Letting the girls out of her sight was against all her principles. But hovercopters had weight limits and she had to concede that the young duchesses would be all right in the company of three titled women and two dukes, as well as the Grand Duke’s own two men in the cockpit.

The decision was made. The door was closed firmly. Quickly the hovercopter took off.

Kristoph watched it go before turning to see who else might need medical help. As he did so there was a sudden cry of distress. He ran to where the stewards had found a man lying unconscious. His coat had been removed but he was clearly the hovercopter pilot!

He looked up into the clear sky anxiously. The hovercopter was already out of sight.

“Marion!”