**Lockdown in the TARDIS - I**

Marion was content. The TARDIS was only a few minutes away from the Transduction barrier. In a few minutes more they would be home at Mount Loeng House on the Southern Plain where summer was just beginning and the roses would be in magnificent bloom.

She was busy putting all of her photographs of the many Earth places they had visited into an electronic album, ready to show to Aineytta, who loved to see where her son and daughter-in-law had been. Lily, and many others of her friends liked to see the pictures, too. Many of them had never travelled offworld, and, though content with the splendour of Gallifrey, would be interested to see images of architectural wonders like El Duomo in Florence or the wonderful sunsets on Guadeloupe.

They had stopped off after the Caribbean for one short afternoon in the far less exotic Preston, because Marion wanted a picture of the covered market there, which she considered even more impressive than the one at Pointe-à-Pitre. She also had images from both inside and outside of the library in the same town, to prove that beautiful architecture wasn’t the preserve of great Italian cities, and that the Florentine guide books had snubbed the copy of the Ghiberti doors that were on display there, in grey-skied, industrial Lancashire.

“My dear,” Kristoph teased as he saw the results of her efforts displayed on the wide viewscreen. “You will start a revolution among the ladies of Gallifrey. They will all want their wives to take them on offworld holidays.”

“I’ve never understood why they don’t,” Marion answered. “Time Lords have the whole of time and space at their fingertips. Why DON’T they travel much more than they do?”

“That is a very good question,” Kristoph answered. “I know we did in times past. Many of my ancestors were well travelled. Then there was a long period of very insular thinking. We spurned ‘lesser’ societies and kept to our own world. We’re really only now starting to emerge from that way of thinking. We’re letting the students take TARDISes on research trips, making far more diplomatic ties than before. Maybe your friends will yet find a galactic equivalent to Ibiza and pack their summer clothes….”

“My friends will choose something more exciting than Ibiza,” Marion protested, but Kristoph was distracted from the light conversation. She became aware of a persistent noise coming from the communications console, then the screen with her holiday pictures on was swept away to be replaced by the foreboding logo of the Transduction Barrier Executive.

Kristoph made an irritated sound as he accepted the incoming transmission.

“What’s going on?” he demanded. “Why has my TARDIS been stopped outside the Barrier? It has diplomatic status.”

“My apologies, Ambassador,” the operative answered with due respect in his tone, something not always apparent in his dealings with the Gallifreyan Civil Service. “There is a situation….”

“A situation?” Kristoph echoed with barely concealed impatience.

“There is a plague on the outer planets. The mining colonies on Polafrey and Karn have significant numbers of hospitalised cases. It is believed that the plague has come from beyond the Kasterborus system. Infection may have been spread after a deep space freighter docked on Polafrey.”

“That is disturbing news,” Kristoph conceded. “But since I have not been anywhere near Polafrey or Karn….”

“The High Council has ordered a strict lockdown. No vessel is to be allowed to land on Gallifrey unless the crew and passengers have undergone fourteen days of isolation. This applies to diplomatic craft as well as others.”

“I… see,” Kristoph said. “What exactly are we meant to do for fourteen days?”

“Maintain orbit outside the Transduction Barrier,” the operative answered. “If fuel is low or food supplies are short, a drone flight can be arranged….”

“This is a TARDIS,” Kristoph answered. “Food and fuel are not a problem. I trust communications are not impaired? I would like to speak to a number of people. The Lord High President for one…. But I think, first and foremost, my mother.”

‘I will connect you, immediately,” the operative said.

Marion came to Kristoph’s side as the screen cleared once more. A half minute was all it took to connect to the videophone at the Dower House. Aineytta smiled warmly at them both.

“My dears, it is good to see you,” she said. “Though the circumstances might be better.”

“Is everyone all right at home?” Kristoph asked. “You and father….”

“We are quite well,” Aineytta assured her. “So are both your sisters, and young Orin is doing fine. We are a little worried about Remonte and his family. We have not heard from him since this ‘lockdown’ began. There is an issue with….” She looked around and her husband, the former Lord de Lœngbǽrrow, and Gallifrey’s greatest astronomer came to her side.

“The Venturan sun has been subject to extreme solar flares for some months,” he explained. “It has prevented communications of any kind. We simply don’t know what is happening there… if they have this plague that is afflicting our system. We are concerned… but there is nothing to be done.”

Kristoph received that news gravely. Marion was upset, too. She liked Remonte. She liked his wife, Rika. Their son, Remy, was an adorable child. The thoughts of them succumbing to an illness that had closed Gallifrey to the galaxy beyond was frightening.

“We can only hope,” Kristoph said. “But… what of our citizens on the outer planets? How bad is this plague?”

“We don’t know for certain,” his father answered. “The figures are not being released. We don’t know if there have been deaths… or if people have recovered from the illness.”

“That won’t do,” Kristoph decided. “The truth must be known, even if it is uncomfortable. What is Dúccesci thinking of, allowing censorship of facts? I will speak to him, later. It won’t do. But… for now… I think Marion wants to tell mama all about our trip to Earth. I shall leave them to chat.”

Marion felt as if sharing holiday pictures was a long way from her mind, now, but she smiled brightly and tried not to dwell on any difficulties as she did what she had been looking forward to doing, albeit remotely.

While she was doing that, Kristoph was talking to Malika Dúccesci, the Lord High President, and what he heard did not please him at all.

“This situation is quite intolerable,” he said when he came to sit beside Marion. “Even Malika doesn’t know the full situation on the two outlying planets. The governor in charge of both Polafrey and Karn will not release any figures… not how many people are ill, how many have died. He claims it is to prevent civil disorder, but such actions are likely to CAUSE disorder. Families on Gallifrey are pressing for news of their relatives and getting nothing from the government. It will not do at all.”

“Do you think people HAVE died?” Marion asked.

“I see no reason for this wall of silence otherwise. But it only makes things worse. Dúccesci is angry and frustrated, especially as HE is bearing the brunt of the blame.”

“When this matter is over, I shouldn’t like to be that governor,” Marion decided.

“I quite agree,” Kristoph said. “But I don’t want you fretting about any of it. We have a situation here, but we will make the best of it.”

“Fourteen days quarantine… in the TARDIS. What WILL we do?”

“Don’t worry about that,” Kristoph told her. I’ll think of something. Why don’t you carry on arranging your photographs and I’ll make some arrangements for our first evening under lockdown.”

Marion did so, though with all that had occurred in such a very short time, her heart wasn’t really in it. She was glad when Kristoph returned to the console room.

“Come along,” he said. “I’ve got a surprise for you.”

He took her by the hand through several corridors and two spiral staircases to a part of the TARDIS Marion had never been in before. There were, of course, many parts she had never been in. It had never really been necessary for her to go into the engine room. Even Kristoph rarely did. He sent the TARDIS to a repair bay from time to time for the temporal equivalent of an MOT, but he really didn’t need to go in there himself.

She didn’t use the swimming pool or library very often, either. They had the lodge house with its outdoor\indoor pool and her own private library at home, as well as those she had founded herself all over Gallifrey.

This part of the TARDIS was curious because the usually bare grey walls of the corridor were covered in artworks – presumably copies. She recognised many painted by Earth artists – The Rokeby Venus and the Arnolfini Wedding, both from the National Gallery in London, and a whole collection of Matisse and Picasso which she knew WERE the originals. Kristoph had ‘rescued’ them from the Rosenberg gallery in Paris before the Nazis got to ransack it. They were among the ‘missing’ art of that desperate era.

She laughed when he showed her a large door with a glowing bronze sheen. It was yet another copy of those Ghiberti doors from Florence. As she looked at it, the images shifted. First they were the biblical scenes the great Florentine Master had created, and then scenes from Gallifreyan sagas like the Pazzione or the deeds of Kristoph’s ancestor, Chrístõ Drăcœfirĕ, who had fought dragons. When she looked again, the biblical images were back.

“How wonderful,” she said. “How….”

“This…” Kristoph frowned as he tried to explain. “You know the Room of Requirement in Harry Potter?”

“That could be anything you wanted or needed….” Marion responded.

“Well, TARDISes have been equipped with such a room long before Miss Rowling thought of it. Possibly some random particle of stray inspiration gave her the idea, along with cars and tents that are bigger on the inside. I’ve never really needed this one before. I haven’t spent fourteen days in the TARDIS before. But….”

He pushed open the Ghiberti doors and drew Marion inside the room. She gasped in astonishment.

She didn’t know how big the room was meant to be in any kind of reality, but right now it was as big as a Caribbean beach at sunset, with the whole sea and the golden horizon in it. For the first time in years, she considered what ‘relative dimensions’ really meant in a TARDIS.

She turned from the sea view, attracted by a delicious smell. There was a little house just like the one they had stayed in on Guadeloupe. On the veranda was a charcoal grill where food was cooking. On closer inspection she saw a pair of plump fish and a selection of exotic vegetables and fruits. While she carefully turned the fish over, Kristoph brought out long, cool drinks with fruit floating in them and invited her to sit on a wickerwork swing seat for two.

“The TARDIS can do all this?” she marvelled.

“Everything but actual organic life. No animals, insects or birds, no people. The sounds of birds you can hear are artificial, for atmosphere.”

“I can live without the insects,” Marion admitted. “The mosquitos were a bit of a downside to the real Caribbean.”

They ate the food sitting on a blanket on the beach. Of course, it was all synthesised by the TARDIS. Nobody had really caught the fish. The taste was quite good enough. Only a real connoisseur could have detected the artificiality.

Marion didn’t care about that. She was back on a glorious beach with Kristoph and no danger of anyone encroaching on their privacy. When the meal was over and they lay on the blanket together, under artificial constellations, she knew they probably wouldn’t bother going to any bedroom tonight. The balmy warmth with just a breath of air to prevent it feeling stuffy, was perfect.

Marion woke the next morning to a Caribbean sunrise, which came up in the same place that the sunset had gone down the night before. It didn’t matter. She had the best of both worlds.

Kristoph took her by the hand with a smile and a wink. The Caribbean beach shimmered and dissolved. The next moment, they were standing in the rooftop café above the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. There was a smell of coffee – much better coffee than the Uffizi café actually served. At a table with a perfect view over the Piazza della Signoria, an English breakfast was waiting. Marion realised she was hungry and slid into the seat happily.

“This ISN’T exactly the right view,” Marion said when she was onto the toast and marmalade and her third cup of good coffee. “That’s the Loggia dei Lanzi over there. But we shouldn’t be able to see it. Its BELOW us on this balcony.”

Kristoph smiled.

“I thought that was one of the drawbacks of the view, so I rearranged things. Do you like it?”

“I like it a lot. After breakfast, can the TARDIS recreate the Vasari Corridor and the Boboli Gardens? I’d love to spend an unhurried morning in the sunshine, there, without so many noisy tourists.”

“Your wish is the TARDIS’s command, my dear,” Kristoph confirmed. “We can plan a few more scenes from our travels. I’m sure fourteen days will go by very easily with such delights as this to ease the waiting.”

Marion agreed, though remembering all that was happening beyond the confines of the TARDIS, Marion knew Kristoph was keeping back his worry not only for his family, but for Gallifrey as a whole. She shared that worry and hoped for a happy outcome at the end of the crisis