**Matin Sur le Train Bleu**

Marion rose early from her lower bunk in the sleeping compartment, leaving Kristoph asleep in the top. He had been up late in the smoking lounge playing cards with some of the other gentlemen travelling to the Riviera. Most of the gentlemen, as ever, were important people in some way or other. There was at least one Duke, a famous photographer, and a famous English writer with his gentleman companion. In the dining car, the wives of the aristocrats, an American film actress and a Parisian courtesan of some reputation had been among the ladies who chatted amiably before bedtime.

Marion had retired to their compartment before midnight. She had enjoyed the company of the ladies, but there was nothing to see in the dark outside the speeding train. She had planned this early wake up in order to enjoy the sunrise and the unparalleled views.

 She dressed for the morning in a calf length cream linen dress and silk stockings with matching court shoes. She slipped quietly out into the corridor and made her way to the dining car. All the while the Méditerrannée Express, popularly known as Le Train Bleu because of the colour of its luxurious rolling stock made its way through the French countryside.

It wasn’t quite dawn, yet, and the sky was several shades from star-speckled black through navy blue to a pale turquoise on the distant horizon. Marion watched that undulating horizon as a waiter brought her a pot of coffee for one and a breakfast menu.

She sipped her coffee while her food order was prepared and because there still wasn’t much to see outside she let her thoughts wander for a while.

It was late September and because it was not always a given in her life she reminded herself that the year was nineteen-thirty-three.

Nineteen-thirty-three wasn’t a year that stood out historically. Later in the decade European politics would start to resemble a train running out of control, a simile she quickly abandoned as tempting fate.

The point was that this was still a quiet time when it was possible not to worry about what the Germans were doing, still less the Italians or the Spanish. The people who travelled on Le Train Bleu had dodged the economic downfall of the Wall Street Crash and though it might have been naïve delusion, they could still feel as if the world was bright and hopeful and the political storm clouds looming over Europe might still blow over.

She turned to look out of the window again. The pale horizon was wider, now, and she could make out distant hills that the sun would have to rise over before there was full daylight. The dawn was delayed another half hour by those hills. Green fields and quietly huddled farms were still in shadow across the land that spread out between hills and railway line. Occasionally there was a yellow pinprick of light inside a farmhouse. The hardworking farmers were starting to wake, their morning tasks waiting to be done, but as yet all was still and at peace apart from this train rushing through the landscape. Here and there she saw a small village with its church spire in silhouette against the slowly lightening sky. Once, where a road ran along the side of the tracks they passed a slow-moving farm cart laden with hay. It was just a fleeting glimpse, though. The train sped past and quickly left it behind.

The waiter brought Marion’s breakfast of poached eggs, small French mushrooms and buttered toast. She ate slowly, enjoying the taste of the food and the ever-changing view from the train.

How strange, she reflected in the otherwise empty dining car where she could be alone with her own thoughts. She could travel by TARDIS anywhere in time and space, but she was taking such pleasure from a simple train journey that she had risen early to fully enjoy it.

It was, of course, the very ordinariness of it that made it a pleasure. She had spent all those weeks on Prorurutua, surrounded by so much gold and unnecessary luxury that she was starting to be sick of the sight of it. She had returned to Gallifrey with questions and confusion and hadn’t even felt properly settled in her home while the questions and confusion remained. When Kristoph asked her if she would like a little holiday on Earth, she jumped at the idea. The only question was where and when. But she had the answer to that right away, too. Above all other temptations there was the soft weather of the Mediterranean in September, the ripe citrus fruits, the warm breezes, the way the sunlit glinted off the azure sea….

And before all that, travelling by Le Train Bleu from Calais where they left the TARDIS in the freight yard by the ferry terminus, reaching Paris before evening dinner, then down through France during the night to awake as the train sped through the mid-France region of Auvergne. An hour before she had risen from her bunk the train had stopped in Lyon. In her dreams she had been vaguely aware of the stillness of the train, of the sudden shunt when an extra pullman car was added, the slamming of doors behind two people who came aboard at the last minute, then the whistle and the jerking start that soon became a smooth forward motion. By the time she woke fully the train had already left Lyon far behind it.

Lyon was another place she loved, but she usually visited it in her own modern timeline. She adored the Fête des Lumiéres in December with the magnificent light shows throughout the city centre. It was one of the exceptions to her love for France in quieter, less technological times.

But the sharp cold of December wasn’t to be thought of, yet. She looked at a map etched in gold on cream that was fixed between two windows of the dining car. It showed the route of Le Train Bleu with its thirteen stops including the Gare du Nord and Gare de Lyon back in Paris then Dijon and Châlons which she hadn’t even known about in the dead of night and the barely recollected Lyon. In another hour and a half, when the earliest of the passengers would be finishing their breakfast the next stop was Marseille. After that famous city there were three smaller Riviera towns - Saint-Raphaël, Juan-les-Pins and Antibes. Marion knew these as summer homes of some of her favourite impressionist painters who loved to bask in the Mediterranean sunlight and recreate it in paint on canvas.

Then Cannes, not yet famous for its film festival at this time. Marion had fond memories of visiting there in three different decades in order to thoroughly research a media studies elective for her final year at university. They would be there a little before midday with a hot, bright sun beaming down from near its zenith.

Then it would be around half past three, the time when the mostly English passengers on Le Train Bleu were ordering smoked salmon and cucumber sandwiches and pots of Earl Grey when it reached Nice. That was her undoubted favourite Riviera city with its Promenade des Anglaise named for the wealthy English visitors that had made it a popular resort as far back as the late nineteenth century. It was always tempting to alight from the train there and enjoy a walk along the Promenade and a glass of wine under a sunshade outside one of the popular bars. For those who resisted those temptations, the railway line passed the Promenade, the bars and restaurants looking over the long, white beach and the marina full of pleasure yachts by the time the tea time sandwiches were done with.

After Nice, the route of Le Train Bleu passed briefly from France to another sovereign country entirely, the Principality of Monaco and its glamorous city of Monte Carlo. Marion had visited there early in her relationship with Kristoph. The TARDIS wardrobe had yielded a dress, hat and shoes that Audrey Hepburn would have died for and they had gone to see the 1952 Monte Carlo Rally. Two British drivers, Sydney Allard and Stirling Moss, had been first and second placed and Kristoph had made sure he and Marion were near the finish line to see their triumph. It had been noisy and crowded, two things that frightened her then, before she had gained the confidence in herself, but Marion remembered it all fondly all the same.

When they slipped back into France again it would only be a half hour before Menton, the last French stop before passing into Italy and Ventimiglia, a town whose name sounded as if the Roman legions had only recently left it.

But that was thinking too far ahead, yet. Menton was far off and if she had wanted to get there in a hurry they could have got there by TARDIS. This journey was a special part of the holiday by itself. That was something that had surprised her the first time she travelled by a luxury train. Before then trains had been another version of her worst nightmare – crowded, noisy means of getting to a destination. But the Blue Train, the Orient Express and three different high speed anti-grav trains across the great plains of other planets had taught her to enjoy the journey as much as the destination.

Despite the absolute luxury of the Orient Express in more than one time of its history, and the wonder of those offworld journeys, it was le Train Bleu that was her favourite because it visited so many of her favourite places. It was why she was up so early to appreciate every moment of it.

A glimmer of gold topped the Italian Alps towards which the train was now heading in a roughly easterly line. Soon the whole of the Côte d'Azur would be bathed in dazzling morning light. Marion watched for the magic to happen, anticipating the beginning of this day more happily than any day for a very long time.

But getting up early wasn’t something she often did, and perhaps she had over-estimated her stamina. She missed that golden daybreak and found herself being gently shaken awake by Kristoph. Behind him a waiter set down a coffee pot for two people and another brought a fresh round of toast. Kristoph slid into the seat opposite her and poured for them both.

“I haven’t seen you look this happy for too long,” he remarked. “Is it the Riviera or the train?”

“Both, I think,” Marion answered. “Just now, the train.”

“Well, in that case, I wish we had trains on Gallifrey,” Kristoph mused. “I wish it could always this easy to make you happy.”