**Caribbean Interlude**

Marion looked up at the roof over her head. It was tiles or slate like a house roof, but there were no walls, only wrought iron pillars supporting it all around the four sides. For such a structure it was a remarkable length and width. She was suitably impressed by the architecture of the Saint-Antoine market in Pointe-à-Pitre on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe.

“Of course, I HAVE seen a bigger market canopy,” she remarked to Kristoph with a smile.

“On the planet of Xian Xian with its great oriental market spaces?” Kristoph asked.

“No, Preston, the same place with the library containing a copy of the Ghiberti doors. The ‘covered market’ built in the Victorian era is huge.”

“That is a very overlooked city,” Kristoph remarked. “I gather this one was built in the open style due to hurricanes regularly causing havoc. Not a problem suffered by industrial towns in Lancashire, I trust?”

“I expect it was rain that coloured decisions in Preston,” Marion conceded. “Apart from when the pot pourri and incense stick fashion was at its height, I don’t suppose it smelt like this, either. This is lovely.”

The abundance of colourful and fragrant produce found much favour with Marion. She had already bought all sorts of exotic spices. Kristoph, who was carrying the packages, was wondering what she even planned to do with all of them. Now she was busy buying strange fruits and vegetables. Kristoph knew about plantain, a type of banana. He thought he understood okra as a green vegetable used in curries and gumbo. But he really didn’t see how the misshapen thing called a prickly pear qualified as a foodstuff and had visions of confusion in the kitchen of his Gallifreyan home.

“Clemency knows lots of absolutely mouth-watering recipes,” Marion said of the lady Kristoph had engaged to cook for them during their self-catering stay in the Caribbean. “And I intend to get the recipes and find substitutes from Gallifreyan horticulture when we go home.”

“As long as you’re happy,” Kristoph assured her. He was surprised and pleased that after their sojourn on Earth that she spoke of Gallifrey as ‘home’. She even sounded as if she was yearning to be back on the southern plains under their yellow sky after weeks of travel to wonderful parts of her birth planet.

“Oh….” Marion stopped suddenly and looked anxiously at one of the many ‘street food’ stalls selling aromatic concoctions cooked in the open air over gas stoves. “Sauce la Chien…..” She didn’t need the TARDIS translation circuits to work out such a simple bit of French. “Oh… no. I thought it was only parts of China and Korea where they had such horrible eating habits.”

Kristoph looked at the sign and then spoke to the smallholder who replied very quickly in the Caribbean-French dialect of a former colony island.

“Ah, I see,” he answered and ordered two small containers of a greenish sauce and a packet of deep fried pieces. They went beyond the market canopy to where there was less noise and bustle and a fountain cooled the air.

“Dog sauce is named after the type of knife used to cut the vegetables,” Kristoph explained as they sat to eat. “It is a strictly vegetable recipe including pimento and lime. These are akra, bites of cod in seasoned batter for dipping in the sauce. Finger food in public places is not something we have a tradition of on Gallifrey, but it is quite acceptable, here.”

Marion would have preferred more lime and less pimento, but she enjoyed the impromptu snack before deciding, with some hints from Kristoph, that she had enough spices and they might take a taxi back to their holiday house.

It was a beautiful place, just at the high-water mark of a private bay. The wooden veranda faced west for the most glorious sunsets. Inside there was a bedroom, kitchen and a bathroom. There was no need for a dining room or living room. That was what the veranda was for. It was warm until at least midnight every night and they were content to listen to the tide washing the white sand as unidentified birds called to each other in the trees beyond the beach. No more entertainment was needed than that. There was no need to ‘dress’ for dinner. Even shoes were extraneous when they left the veranda to walk in the cool surf before bed.

Marion and Kristoph watched the sunset with rum-based cocktails while Clemency turned the fruits of the day’s shopping into wonderful food.

“I think we have a visitor,” Kristoph remarked, standing and looking out over the tropical beach where, with the sun already over the horizon and the sky deep brown, the sand was a swathe of shadow. Marion couldn’t see anything until the stranger drew close to their soft veranda lights.

“Oh, it’s you,” she said, greeting her tea companion from the Negresco and their saviour in St. Petersburg.

“Might I join you for dinner?” he asked.

“Most certainly you can,” Kristoph answered. “I shall tell Clemency to set out an extra plate. I am sure she made enough food for eight.”

“I’ll make you a drink,” Marion said as their guest sat on a cushioned wicker chair. She prepared a concoction of rum and fruit juices and brought it to him. “You’re quite recovered from what happened the last time?”

“I am…. Of course, it has been nearly three months on Gallifrey. Only a week or two for you, I think?”

“Yes. We stopped a few days in Barcelona during the Carnaval and then Kristoph suggested a last few restful weeks here before we return to Gallifrey.”

“Why not. After all, Kristoph is retired from politics, now. You have every right to enjoy yourselves.”

“I’m looking forward to getting back to the southern plain, all the same,” Marion admitted, confirming Kristoph’s sense that she was ready to go home. “I would like to show Aineytta and Lily all our souvenirs of this trip.”

She thought she noticed a slightly grieved expression on her guest’s face when she spoke of her two oldest friends, but it was only fleeting. He smiled warmly and talked about Guadeloupe, which he seemed to have explored as much as they had.

“We were at the spice market, today,” Marion said. “Have you seen it?”

“The one at Pointe-Pitre. Yes, I have. Remarkable how it resembles the covered market in Preston.”

Marion laughed with delight at that. Kristoph asked how he knew Preston.

“Not a destination for many of our kind,” he noted.

“I follow Preston North End,” the young Time Lord answered. “The football team,” he added because Kristoph looked a little puzzled.

“Don’t look at me,” Marion said. “Where I come from, you’re either a red or a blue.”

“That’s an unusual hobby for a Time Lord,” Kristoph pointed out.

“Perhaps so, but I have followed the team since they were champions of the first league, through victories and defeats, war years and one year when a pandemic cut the sports season short, and much more.”

“Loyalty.” Kristoph nodded in understanding. “That IS a Time Lord trait. Though I’m not sure everyone of our fellows would agree with such an expression of it. Gold Usher would be astonished.”

“Gold Usher is astonished by many things,” Marion pointed out. “I think a Time Lord football supporter is perfectly acceptable.”

To Kristoph it meant one thing that Marion hadn’t realised. Their young friend had an affinity with Earth that was nearly unique amongst a people who were mostly content to observe the universe from the confines of their own planet. It was not surprising, perhaps, given his background, but it marked him out as different from his fellow Time Lords in a significant way.

Kristoph didn’t question him further, but such lightweight topics as football and Caribbean cuisine carried them through dinner, which was three courses of exotic delight using all of the fresh vegetables and fruit Marion had bought, including the prickly pear sliced and smothered in honey as part of a piquant dessert.

Afterwards, Marion had a more serious word for the two men, one that saved them both from an awkwardness that might otherwise have arisen.

“You have some sort of Time Lord business to discuss, haven’t you?” she said, her years as a diplomat’s wife serving her well in recognising such moments as this. “I’ll take a walk by the sea for a bit and leave you to it.”

“Thank you, my dear,” Kristoph told her. “Take your shawl. There is a slight breeze out by the water’s edge.”

Marion put a soft cashmere shawl around her shoulders and walked away beyond the lights. Both men watched her go before turning to look at each other. Even then, it took a few moments before any words were exchanged.

“Is it all over?” Kristoph asked.

“It is. The one responsible is in the custody of the Celestial Intervention Agency. He will be punished severely for his treasonable actions, for breaking time protocols, the hiring of offworld assassins. The threat to your wife… to Lady Marion… is over.”

“Do I need to know how you captured the individual?”

“Only that no dishonour was necessary to bring it about. The arrest was clean, the guilt undeniable.”

“And it would be even less use to ask who this individual is who bore my wife such ill will?”

“Not right now. One day… in the future… we may speak as men do. But it would be no good for you to know at this time. It could even be dangerous to the future… all our futures… for you to know what has not yet happened in your own time.”

“Of course, it would. I shall not ask any more. I should say, however, that you have my thanks for all you have done… at risk of your own life.”

“I could do no more. For her sake. I… almost regret that it is over. Being near to her on these occasions… despite the danger…. That was a boon for me. I… am going to miss the opportunities I have had to be close… even if she didn’t know who I was.”

“She must never know,” Kristoph insisted. “Still less the reasons why you were around us. It disturbs me to know that you have enemies that would go to such lengths. Even in my own work… I never had a foe who took the matter so personally as to attack my family.”

“The enmity was not of my doing. I give you my word. There are bitter feelings that run deep in the hearts of Time Lords as much as any other men. That is all I can tell you.”

The young Time Lord stood.

“I should go.”

“No. Not yet. She would not want you to just disappear. You should at least say goodbye to her.”

“I... would like to, of course. But I thought... I thought you might not want me to stay any longer than necessary.”

“Taking your proper and courteous leave of a lady is necessary. Come. Let us join her on the sands.”

Marion wasn’t far away. They caught up with her on the edge of the still warm sea and walked without talking for a while. Marion noticed that the young Time Lord had caught her hand in his. She didn’t mind, and Kristoph either hadn’t noticed or didn’t mind, either.

“I… probably won’t see you again,” he said after a little while. “My task is done. I am recalled to other work. When you return to Gallifrey I won’t be able to see you.”

“I… suppose there are reasons for that?” Marion said. “Complicated Time Lord reasons that it would do me no good to know about?”

“That… pretty much sums it up. I wish it could be otherwise, but we all have our duties.”

“We do, indeed,” Kristoph said. “A Time Lord who remembers that cannot go far wrong.”

“Even one who supports Preston North End,” Marion added, teasingly.

“I should go,” he said after walking along in silence again for several minutes. I have no reason to be here now, except self-indulgence and procrastination. I… I want to say that it has been an honour to know you at this time, both of you. My Lord… My Lady Marion. Goodbye… and… May Rassilon bless you both.”

Marion was surprised but not displeased when he kissed her cheek. Moments after that unexpected intimacy he had stepped away into the deepening shadows. After only a few seconds he was gone and Marion knew that she wouldn’t see him again.

“I think he must have spent a lot of time at English football matches,” she said.

“Yes, so it seems,” Kristoph answered guardedly.

“It’s all right,” Marion told him. “I know. I guessed the first time… at the Negresco. He held my hand, and it felt as if he had done that a thousand times before. Except… of course… He hasn’t yet. But that’s why I worry about him. He’s so emotional… not like a Time Lord at all. Not the usual ones, anyway.

“Yes,” Kristoph agreed. “I can only hope he knows how to keep such emotions in check amongst those who might see it as a weakness to exploit. But he has courage and resourcefulness. Those will serve him in places where Gallifreyan stoicism would not do so well.”

Kristoph reached out for his wife’s hand. They walked back to the beach house to sit quietly on the veranda, listening to bird song send waves washing the sand, with nothing on their minds but a cup of very unCaribbean cocoa before bed and a coach tour of some of Guadeloupe’s prettiest churches and chapels tomorrow. Soon they would be going home. All holidays end, after all. But they still had a few more days under the blue skies of the Caribbean.