**Paris in the Rain**

“Oh, rabbits, it’s raining,” Tegan declared, looking glumly at the view outside the TARDIS, distorted by rivulets of water flowing down in front of the camera lens.

“You know, I always wondered,” Turlough remarked. “Where is the exterior camera that produces these images?”

“In the lantern on top of the TARDIS,” The Doctor answered. “That’s why there are all round views. Anyway… who’s for Paris in 1910?”

“Paris?” Tegan echoed, her face brightening with excitement. “1910. Oh… you mean… Oh, this I have to see. But not without a good Edwardian raincoat.”

The Doctor smiled indulgently as his two travelling companions headed to the room called The Wardrobe, its extensive collection of clothes for every occasion earning it the capital letters. He, meanwhile, busied himself at the communications panel. With the console room to himself he reached for the volume switch and a strange chirruping noise grew louder and more insistent.

“Yes, I hear you. I’m coming,” he said as if in answer to the incoherent call.

He turned the sound down again and made himself busy until his companions returned suitably wrapped up in thick woollen coats and felt hats. Turlough brought a long, wide collared ‘ulster’ for The Doctor. He put it on along with his usual cricket hat, then took that off and replaced it with a more suitable ‘derby’ style that was likely to withstand the rain a little longer.

They stepped out of the TARDIS onto one of the many bridges across the Seine. Tegan gave an excited cry and ran to the balustrade where a dozen or so Parisians in good raincoats were peering down towards a swollen and swiftly rushing tide of water.

“Yes!” she exclaimed as Turlough came to see what everyone was looking at. She pointed to the head and shoulders of a grey statue that was otherwise submerged in the flood. “This is the Pont de l'Alma, named for the battle of Alma in the Crimean war. That’s a statue of a Zouave soldier from the battle. Parisians know that when the soldier’s feet are covered the footpaths beside the river need to be closed. When the water reaches his thighs the bridge is too low for navigation….”

“He’s almost going under,” Turlough pointed out. “If he were real he’d be nearly drowning.”

“Yes. This is 1910, the worst flood ever to hit Paris. I’ve seen pictures of it, but being here is super… damp, grey… but super. It’s the sort of thing I wish The Doctor could do more often, instead of creepy monsters.”

The Doctor had not joined the crowd watching the statue treading water. Instead he turned and headed back over the bridge to the Quai D’Orsay. There, the water was only about twelve inches deep and both motor and horse drawn vehicles were getting through it, but pedestrians walked on makeshift wooden pavements that had been laid down with a surprising level of expertise. The Doctor walked confidently on the uneven and rain washed surface. Tegan and Turlough when they left the bridge and followed supported each other as they tried to catch up.

Tegan had visited Paris before several times. It had often been a stopover city in her travels as an air stewardess. She recognised many of the landmarks through the rain. The obvious one was easy to make out even though the Eiffel Tower’s high viewing gallery was indistinct in the grey mist. They were going in the wrong direction to see if her legs were under water, but judging by the state of the trees along the quai they almost certainly were.

The bridges across the Seine were all important markers of the state of things. The Pont des Invalides, leading across the river to the complex of military museums and institutions of the same name, was only just above water. The wide, ornate Pont Alexandre III with its sculpture topped pillars was in an even worse state. In the best of circumstances it was one of the lowest bridges over the river. Now there was barely any space between it and the swollen water.

The Ponte de la Concorde – nothing to do with Tegan’s favourite aeroplane – was also close to being swamped. They watched a man row a flat bottomed boat under it against the tide. He was working very hard to make any progress and for a few worrying minutes it was possible to speculate about him ever coming out again. There was a mutual sigh of relief from onlookers when he re-appeared.

Opposite that bridge, of course, was the Paris Bourbon, which at this stage in the turbulent political history of France was the seat of the National Assembly, the lower legislative chamber of the French government. There were lights on within the building. The Assembly was obviously in full session during the crisis known in French as La Crue des Eaux Paris.

“I bet I can guess what the Assembly Members are talking about,” Tegan joked.

“Tax rebates for boat owners?” Turlough suggested. They both laughed. Parisians nearby looked at them and perhaps wondered what the English speaking visitors were talking about, but laughter was not out of place. The population of a city that had seen revolution and counter-revolution, despotic empire and democratic Republic all within living memory was dealing with general good humour with the assault of mere weather upon them. The sight of a pair of swans swimming down the middle of the road was amusing to everyone.

“Where are we going?” Tegan asked as The Doctor turned off the Quai D’Orsay walkway onto one that brought them onto the Boulevard Saint Germain. After the openness of the riverside the apartment buildings of some four or five floors high on either side felt like a narrower, darker defile. The good spirits of Parisians was in evidence here, too, however. Many of them were sitting on their balconies drinking coffee or even wine and waving to passers-by.

“I’m all for a bit of tourism,” Tegan added. “But it seems like The Doctor has some kind of destination in mind the way he’s forging ahead.”

“I was wondering about that, too,” Turlough replied. “I thought we landed here by accident as usual, but it does look like he has a mission.”

“One he hasn’t shared with us.”

“Should we ask him?”

“If it’s something private….”

“The Doctor doesn’t have ‘private’ things, and not in France, anyway.”

But it certainly did seem as if he had an agenda of some sort. He kept a steady pace along the wooden walkways that ran down the Boulevard and into the Rue de Lille where he made another deliberate choice of direction. His companions made an effort to keep up, occasionally distracted by the sight of carriages pulled by horses ploughing through the water. The horses didn’t seem to mind being fetlock deep and the wheels created interesting bow-waves in the standing water.

“We should have got a carriage,” Tegan mused. “This is going to wreck my shoes. I don’t think anyone has really considered where all this water is coming up from.”

“Didn’t the river burst its banks?” Turlough queried.

“No, it didn’t. The river is higher than usual, but the banks are holding. Most of the way through Paris there are strong defences against that kind of thing. The water has come up through the sewer system and it can’t go anywhere because of soil saturation.”

“Sewers?” Turlough looked aghast. “That means everyone is walking through….”

“Pretty much, yes. I always wanted to SEE the flood, but I’m not thrilled about stepping in it.”

“Once the water goes down the mess will take ages to clean up.”

“Yeah, and I’m not going to be around for that bit.”

“I suppose the fact that it is still winter and cold stops it becoming really nasty,” Turlough suggested. “There’s no smell to worry about, and no flies or rats.”

“I wonder what they’re doing about fresh water, though? People know about water-borne contamination, bacteria, that sort of thing by now. It must be a bit of a concern.”

“They must be boiling the water like mad. It doesn’t seem to be affecting the pubs and cafés unduly. I’ve seen at least three of those in full swing. Food must be getting through, as well. It looks like Paris is keeping its spirits up in the crisis.”

“Good for her. Vive la Paris,” Tegan rejoiced. “And Vive le Docteur. We seem to be getting somewhere.”

The Doctor turned again onto the Rue de la Légion d'Honneur where the namesake, the grand Palais de la Légion d'Honneur, a building resurrected after the Communards of the 1870s burnt down the original building, stood in its classical glory. Standing opposite it was the entrance to a modern ‘palace’ of transport, the Gare D’Orsay. Tegan recalled seeing it in her time – the early nineteen eighties - as closed down and a little shabby. There was talk of it becoming a museum. Perhaps she might ask The Doctor to take her a few years ahead of her time to see if that happened.

But in 1910 it was very definitely a railway station. On ordinary days it was probably very busy. Today there was a sign to say that it was closed due to the ‘crue’. The Doctor looked at the closed entrance critically as his companions caught up with him.

“Were you planning to take a train, Doctor?” Turlough asked.

“No,” he answered. “I…. There is something… somebody… I have to meet, here. But….”

He looked around at the waterlogged area. There was a café on the corner of Rue de Lille. On better days it was almost certainly one of those pavement cafés Paris was so famous for, but even without a flood it was only February. The outdoor tables and chairs would be stashed away.

“Look, why don’t the two of you get coffee and croissants or something? I’ll be half an hour or so.”

“What’s going on, Doctor?” Tegan asked. “Why don’t you want us with you?”

“I promise I’ll explain,” he replied. “Very soon. But I should do this by myself.”

“I must say, I could murder a coffee,” Turlough said complacently. “And a chance to be dry for a while. Come on, Tegan. Let’s leave him to his secrets.”

Tegan wasn’t happy, but Turlough took her by the arm and steered her towards the café. She looked back once and saw The Doctor unlocking the shutter that locked off the closed-up station entrance. Breaking and entering didn’t seem his usual style, and only added to the mystery.

“What CAN he be up to?” Tegan wondered again as they stepped out of the grey drizzle into a pleasantly warm café and found a cosy alcove away from the chilly looking windows. The waitress approached and Turlough ordered coffee and croissants.

“I don’t suppose….” Turlough pondered aloud. “Could it be something illegal? Something other than lock picking, that is.”

“No!” Tegan protested. “No. Never. This is The Doctor we’re talking about. Never.”

She was adamant about that. With every ounce of her soul she believed in The Doctor and would not countenance the idea of him simply breaking the law.

“I agree with you,” Turlough assured her soothingly. “I was just…. I don’t know… just trying to think of a reason why he left us out of whatever it is.”

“It’s really not like him, that’s for sure.”

The warm croissants and coffee spiced with a little exotic cinnamon was a nice treat and warmed them up after their trek in the rain, but the puzzle about The Doctor spoilt the interlude a little.

They had just ordered a second round of coffee when he finally turned up. Both of his companions were surprised to see him accompanied by what looked like four small children wearing hooded coats made of a patchwork of different colours, patterns and fabric textures. He was carrying one of them while the other three clung to his coat. He looked around for Tegan and Turlough and crossed the floor to join them. The waitress who had just brought two coffees glanced at the new arrivals and nodded.

“Four goûter,” she said.

“And coffee for me, thank you,” The Doctor agreed. He arranged the four small people on the seats next to Turlough and Tegan and pulled up a chair at the end of the table for himself. Despite the café being quite busy, they formed a private little enclave where they could talk freely.

“Who are they?” Tegan asked. The Doctor paused while the waitress brought his coffee and the four meals called goûter. This was the meal that French children would eat around three o’clock in the afternoon. It invariably involved chocolate. In this case there was steaming hot chocolate to drink and warm pastry with half-melted chunks of chocolate inside.

“That looks lovely,” Tegan said on enviably. “It makes me wish I was a child again.”

“They’re not technically children,” The Doctor said about his new little friends who kept their heads far back inside their hoods as they consumed the goûter with gusto. “These are Le Genou.”

“The Knees?” Tegan queried. She had caught sight of their faces as they ate. At first they had been pinched and pale, but as they consumed their goûter their complexions turned a light chocolate brown. She wondered what would happen if they ate broccoli or strawberry jam. Would their face colour reflect their food?

“It comes from the idea that they are ‘knee-high’ to an ordinary human,” The Doctor explained. “Not that they see humans very often. That’s why I had to go alone. I had to get their confidence without a crowd around.

“Aliens?” Turlough asked, aware that it was something of a pot calling the kettle in his case.

“Thousands of generations ago, yes. But by now they’re as native to this world as Tegan is to Australia. They live quiet, unobtrusive lives. In rural places they frequent cave systems. In cities like Paris they make their homes in forgotten cellars, old railway tunnels, the dryer parts of the sewer systems.”

“But all those places are underwater right now,” Tegan pointed out.

“Exactly. That’s why the Elders of the Paris tribe contacted me.”

“Contacted you? How?”

“They’re telepathic. That’s why they don’t talk. They don’t need to. The very oldest and wisest can project their thoughts for enormous distances. They connected with the TARDIS’s communications field, and obviously I answered their call.”

“So are you taking them away from Earth, then?”

“Not at all, just away from the floods. Most of them escaped in time, but there are pockets around the city cut off from their friends and family. I promised to help reunite them with the rest of the tribe in their new home. These four are the first.”

“Poor things.” Although The Doctor had said they weren’t children they looked vulnerable and helpless. Their eyes were wide and appealing, like puppies.

“Why do they have to hide from humans?” Tegan asked. “Surely MOST people would want to be kind to them?”

“Because they look sweet?” Turlough suggested. “This world is full of animal shelters looking after unwanted puppies. For that matter there are plenty of orphanages filled with appealing looking children.”

“There are also laboratories where unspeakable experiments are done on the most appealing of animals. Then there are sweat shops where small, nimble hands could be unscrupulously worked. Le Genou want to be safe in their family groups... and free.”

“I understand,” Tegan sighed. “Humans can’t be trusted. “

“i’m afraid not,” The Doctor said in almost apologetic tones. “That’s why we have to get these four and the rest to Montmartre without being found out.”

“Why Montmartre?” Turlough asked.

“Oh, that I DO get,” Tegan replies immediately. “It’s the highest part of Paris. What I DON’T get is why we don’t whiz around in the TARDIS and get it done in a jiffy?”

“The TARDIS is having trouble recognising Paris,” The Doctor replied. “The old girl has a fixed idea about where the city is from previous visits, but the water level rising has confused her. We landed all right, but trying to reach fixed positions around the city would be too much.”

Tegan refrained from making any rude remarks about the TARDIS. The city must look strange even to its residents just now, and for a machine mind, mistaking the waterlogged soil as sea level was probably an easy mistake.

“Oh, well, it wouldn’t be an adventure if it was easy,” Turlough said brightly. “Besides, it IS getting dark, now. We should be able to move around without causing too much comment.”

“Will they be ok, though?” Tegan wondered. “I mean, the water IS knee high in some places.”

“We’ll manage,” Turlough decided quite firmly.

“Yes, we will,” The Doctor concurred. He finished his coffee and waved to the waitress to pay for their food and drink. He was surprised when an older woman approached the table, cutting her off.

“Grand-mere,” the waitress protested. “You don’t work here, now. You are retired.”

“Come, mes amis,” the grandmother said to the party of seven. “Let me show you something.”

The Doctor paid the protesting younger women and they followed the older one through the back of the café to a room where all the outdoor chairs and tables for summer were kept along with anything else with no immediate use. The grand-mère pulled a large, sturdy pram from out of a corner and offered it to The Doctor.

“Yes, perfect,” he agreed. “They can sit in there easily. Thank you, so much.”

The grand-mère nodded with satisfaction and said something so quickly that, even with help from the TARDIS translation circuits that allowed them all to understand French without effort, Tegan and Turlough missed all but a few words.

“What was that about?” Turlough asked as they set off into the Parisian dusk with the four Genou huddled in the pram. “I thought I heard her mention them by name at least once.”

“She did,” The Doctor answered. “As a little girl, the old lady used to live in the countryside, near some caves. She occasionally spotted our little friends out and about, but nobody believed her. They thought she had a charming imagination and all those patronising things adults think about children. Like most adults she forgot about what she believed in as a child, but seeing them in the café brought it all back. The best she could do to help was this old pram, but she was happy to do her bit.”

“So, some humans DO know about Le Genou?” Tegan queried.

“Children, mostly,” The Doctor admitted. “And authors. There are stories from all over the world about little people… usually known by other names… gnomes, pixies, that sort of thing.”

“Leprechauns?”

“No, leprechauns are another species entirely,” The Doctor explained. “More of a nuisance than anything else.”

“Wombles?” Tegan suggested. “Wombles of Wimbledon Common. I know, I’m too old for it, but I loved that programme.”

“Yes,” The Doctor agreed. “Almost certainly Wombles are British relatives of Le Genou who have become a part of popular culture.”

“Nice,” Tegan concluded.

What wasn’t so nice was trudging through the rapidly darkening streets of Paris pushing a heavily laden pram. In several places, they had to descend from the wooden walkways and splash through the flood water because the platform was too narrow or too uneven.

And they weren’t even going directly to Monmartre.

“Gare Saint Lazare,” The Doctor explained. “Another home for Le Genou, and another waterlogged place.”

Even worse, there was a huge ‘lake’ where an open plaza ought to have been. The water was many feet deep. There was no wading through it, and no getting the pram across. The Doctor summoned one of several men rowing flat bottomed boats around the streets. He paid the man to take him across to the station while Tegan and Turlough waited in a slightly dryer spot. Presently he returned with three more of Le Genou.

“I can fit one more in the pram,” Tegan decided. “You two will have to take the others on piggyback.”

“They need something to eat,” The Doctor said as they arranged matters that way. The three new arrivals looked even paler in comparison to their chocolate coloured cousins.

It was getting late, now, but there were still a few shops open. A patisserie happily supplied a bag of half price cakes that would only have gone stale. To Tegan’s utter delight two of Le Genou turned pink from eating jam-filled choux pastries and the other deep yellow from custard tarts.

“Are there more of them?” she asked as the trudge resumed through the wet streets.

“There are, but we really can’t cope with any more like this,” The Doctor answered. “Let’s get this lot to safety first.”

It was a dreary journey. Tegan gave up being interested in landmarks as they made their way through the residential neighbourhood. She didn’t even bother looking at the street names. She found herself envying people inside pubs and clubs where music and laughter spilled out or inside the second, third and fourth floor apartments where warm light was diffused through closed curtains. She felt a longing for the comforts of a cosy, DRY drawing room well above the flood levels.

But that was just selfishness, she told herself. Le Genou were washed out of their homes and completely dependent on the kindness of a very few people who could be trusted with the knowledge of their very existence. She couldn’t give in to misery about being cold and wet while they were in much greater need.

At least as they got a little closer to Montmartre the flood wasn’t so deep. They could abandon the walkways and step through water that only came to their ankles. It was cold and miserable, though, and Turlough fell twice, tripping on loose flagstones and debris. He suffered some nasty bruises because he the Genou he was carrying on his back rather than saving himself.

Between one thing and another, a journey that three fit, young people could have made in less than half an hour in ordinary circumstances took three times as long.

But at last they reached the base of the steep hill called Montmartre – the Mount of Mars in the original Latin. Tegan looked at the steps up the Rue Foyatier. She recalled being here as a tourist in the nineteen-eighties, when a tourist information panel proudly mentioned two hundred and twenty two steps.

“No way we’re dragging the pram up there,” she said. “I’m pretty sure I couldn’t drag myself up those, even if I wasn’t cold, wet and tired.”

“I feel the same,” Turlough added.

“Nobody has to climb anything,” The Doctor assured them. He waved towards a curious sight in the dark. It looked like a small cabin with yellow-lit windows was sliding down the hill.

“The Montmartre Funicular!” Tegan laughed with joy. “Of course. It was built about nineteen hundred. It’s nearly new at this time.”

The funicular reached its base station as the mis-matched party reached it. They had to leave the pram. There was no room in the cabin for it, but nobody minded. There were plenty of seats on the funicular. They were made of wooden slats and wouldn’t be comfortable for a long trip, but this ride only took a few minutes and after the miserable walk of the past few hours it was luxury just to be sitting down. Le Genou sat three to a seat, chubby legs dangling, heads turned upwards to peer out of the windows. They looked excited and hopeful as the cabin started moving upwards, powered, ironically, by water.

“They know their friends are near,” The Doctor said when Tegan remarked about that. “They can feel them.”

“Where?” Turlough asked.

“The Basilica, of course,” Tegan guessed. The white travertine stone of the ecclesiastical monument at the top of the hill was a ghost in the darkness that came into focus as they got closer to it. “I’m not sure that it’s finished, yet, but there’s a roof, at least.”

The roof in fact, included a magnificent dome that capped the whole city on brighter days and a pair of Romano-byzantine towers that contrasted with the Gothic style of other church buildings in the city.

The exterior was more or less complete though there was some scaffolding on the west side. Most importantly there were lights shining through the open vestibule door, welcoming pilgrims or refugees in equal measure. A trickle of people who hadn’t been able to afford the funicular were making their way inside with bundles of clothes and blankets.

Inside, the basilica was functioning both as an emergency hostel and as a functioning church. Tegan thought it hadn’t actually been consecrated, yet. She was sure she had read about the Great War delaying the ceremony. All the same, the tabernacle over the High Altar contained the Sacrament. A priest was giving communion to anyone who asked for it while bread and cheese and hot drinks were being distributed to those who needed them.

“The inside still has lots of work to be done, yet,” Tegan noted. “There will be a great big mosaic in the apse, later. Really beautiful. But I suppose, right now, people really need a warm, dry place more than a decorated one.”

Le Genou looked as if they weren’t quite sure of that. Perhaps the high-ceilinged basilica was a bit too big for them, or perhaps it was the presence of so many of the humans they usually avoided. They shrank into their hoods and huddled together.

“Genou!” A voice called in a loud whisper appropriate to the place of worship. A priest hurried towards the new arrivals. He grasped The Doctor’s hand warmly and invited him and his party to follow him.

“Another who believed in the little fellows as a child,” The Doctor explained as the priest unlocked a side door and ushered them inside. He showed them down a narrow flight of steps into the undercroft beneath the nave of the basilica.

“Oh!” Tegan cried in delight. “There must be a hundred of them.”

The undercroft was filled with Genou sitting quietly on blankets in small family groups. They had food and more blankets to sleep on and as far as it was possible to tell with silent telepaths they were content. This was at least as good as their homes in the basements and sewers.

The seven who had arrived with The Doctor and his companions found their families very quickly. They rubbed faces together in a form of affectionate greeting. Tegan noted that it was soon difficult to recognise them in the crowd.

“They said thank you very sincerely,” The Doctor assured her. “Come on, let’s leave them be. We’ll get a cuppa back upstairs.”

The priest sat with them as they drank hot, strong coffee. He talked about how he had opened the Undercroft for Le Genou even before the humans started to arrive looking for sanctuary.

“There are more,” The Doctor said. “At Gare de Lyon and the Louvre among other places.”

“You can find them?” the priest asked. “You know where they are?”

“I do,” The Doctor answered. “But I need a little bit of a rest before heading back down the hill. Even I have limits.”

“I have a motor car,” the priest said. “It is parked at the base station of the funicular. I used it earlier today to fetch food for Le Genou. If you know where to find them we can go and pick them up. Even if the car can’t get the whole way it will save some time.”

“No more trudging?” Tegan asked.

“None at all,” The Doctor answered. “In fact, you and Turlough can get some food and rest. More room for the little fellows in the car, that way.”

That made sense. Tegan was aware of how wet her feet and ankles were, and the hem of her dress and coat. She could hear Turlough’s feet squelching in his shoes.

Even so, it felt a bit of an anti-climax to be left behind while The Doctor went off with the priest, and she said so.

“We did our bit,” Turlough reminded her. “Like the old lady who gave us the pram and the priest making sure they had somewhere to bunk down when they got here. We’ve helped. We can feel satisfied with that. I know I do. I’m glad we got those seven to their families. If you were ever dumped at a boarding school you’d know how important family is.”

“We’re a family, sort of,” Tegan pointed out. “You, me and The Doctor. A funny kind of family, but we are - for the time being. Until we move on - which I suppose we will do eventually.”

“Which makes The Doctor the one who needs rescuing after we leave,” Turlough surmised.

“Yes, it does,” Tegan agreed. She turned and looked towards the altar under the yet unadorned apse. She had never felt especially religious, but for once she felt the need for a prayer – for Le Genou and for wandering Time Lords, for exiles and air hostesses and anyone else far from the comfort of home, friends or family.