**Q’Ariiy**

“This,” announced The Doctor with a flourish. “Is the planet Q’Ariiy, pronounced ‘quarry’. Yes, it looks weird. There are some very odd filters in the atmosphere. From space its actually quite boring, like a half-sucked gobstopper, but as you can see….”

Team TARDIS were staring around at what looked like an explosion in the Haribo factory. The sky was brightly multicoloured. So was the lake that reflected the sky. The grass was predictably green, but with enough shades of it to beat the old Irish folk song and frustrate a Dulux colour chart. Flowers scattered among the grass glittered like the candies from Candy Crush and the trees were like the candy floss trees from the Lorax.

“This is a real place?” Graham asked. “We haven’t accidentally taken something the Beatles experimented with in the sixties?”

“It’s really like this,” The Doctor assured him. “I’ve been here before, in the time of the old Queen Ipthia. That was two hundred years ago, though. I think her daughter may rule by now.”

“What’s that coming towards us?” Ryan asked. At first, even The Doctor could only see a boxy looking object drawing closer across the strange terrain. When they began to see detail all of them thought it looked like Fred Flinstone’s car. They tilted their heads to see if there were feet working it underneath.

The curious vehicle was being driven by a driver who looked like one half of Tweedledum and Tweedledee. His round face beamed with a wide smile as he stopped his curious vehicle beside the TARDIS Team.

“Good day, travellers,” he said in a surprisingly deep voice. “You’re here for the festivities, of course? I am here to convey you to the castle in comfort.”

The vehicle was fitted with silk cushions, which was an improvement on the Flintstone vehicle, and when it set off again it wasn’t driven by foot power.

“What IS driving it?” Ryan asked. “There’s no engine noise, and its dead smooth.”

“I’m not sure,” The Doctor answered. “Possibly some form of anti-gravity?”

“Magic,” Yas said. “I think this whole place runs on magic.”

“There’s no such thing as magic,” Ryan told her. “There isn’t, is there, Doctor?”

“Clarke’s Law,” The Doctor answered.

“Ryan was puzzled, but Graham smiled with excitement.

“I heard about that on telly. Hang on… it’s something like … any sufficiently advanced science is indistinguishable from magic?”

“Or the other way around,” The Doctor added. “I’m really not sure. But don’t worry. We’re going to the ‘festivities’. That’s got to be good.”

Everyone looked at each other, wondering if ‘festivities’ could be interpreted as anything sinister. Ryan recalled the village party in Pendle that celebrated the ducking of a suspected witch. Yas remembered that her grandmother’s first wedding had not been all fun. Graham thought of a Christmas he went through before he had the all-clear from the cancer clinic.

The Doctor smiled reassuringly at them, but they weren’t completely convinced.

“This place….” Graham said. “It’s just unreal. Like fairyland. And did anyone ever hear a story about mortals going into fairyland that turned out good for them? It’s all aging a hundred years in the real world and that sort of thing.”

“I know it looks a bit surreal,” The Doctor said. “But this IS a real planet, in the same universe as Earth and Gallifrey. My people visited it and wrote a report in the TARDIS database. The worst they could say about it was that it was frivolous.”

“Frivolous?” The word made them laugh. Ryan and Yas were reminded of their deputy headmistress who used words like that about anything non-educational - school discos, Easter eggs, Christmas trees. Miss Gerard would certainly agree with The Doctor’s people about this planet.

“Yeah, but doc,” Graham said. “When did we ever land on a planet that wasn’t dangerous in some unexpected way? We can’t help being a BIT suspicious.”

“Well, maybe this will be the exception,” The Doctor said optimistically.

“Hey… wow!” Yas exclaimed despite her reservations. “Look at that. Is that where we’re going?”

THAT was a castle out of everyone’s childhood dreams. It outdid the Disney one by at least a dozen more tall, slender towers, every one of them with a cobalt blue roof against the sherbet rainbow sky. It was perched at the top of a steep hill that fell away as a sheer cliff on one side.

“Neuschwanstein,” Graham said. “Castle in Bavaria…. I saw a documentary about it. Built for a mad king who loved opera and theatrics. The Nazis hid loads of art in it during the war. Disney got their castle from it.”

“Ludwig wasn’t mad, just misunderstood,” The Doctor said. “I should take you all to meet him sometime. He would certainly love this place, though.”

She turned to their driver.

“Who is the monarch of Q’Ariiy at this time? So that we may greet her appropriately.”

“Queen Schilde,” answered Tweedledum. “She who rides with the wind.”

The Doctor turned back in tine to see the two men sharing rather childish smirks about ‘wind’. Yas was already giving both of them ‘grow up’ glares.

“So… it’s a royal castle, then?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

“One where nobody is expecting trouble,” Ryan commented. “All those windows, and the towers are in no way defensive. I watch documentaries, too. Castle building through the ages is interesting. Nobody, including Just a Bit Misunderstood Ludwig built castles like that until they were sure they wouldn’t be attacked.”

The Doctor nodded. Ryan was perfectly right about that. This was a castle for showing off royal privilege, not for defending a territory.

It all boded well, so far. They watched in anticipation as the Flintstone car swept under an archway into a huge courtyard festooned with multicoloured flags. A red carpet was rolled up to where they alighted, and they followed it up a sweeping set of steps and into a grand ballroom lit by huge crystal chandeliers.

They stared around the room, taking in the incredible collection of guests of every shape, size, number of limbs, eyes, heads.

“It’s like Never Ending Story,” Yas said. “The castle where all the different people go to petition the princess. Or Alice in Wonderland… maybe both.”

“I was thinking the arrivals lounge at Men in Black Central,” Ryan suggested.

“The Star Wars Cantina,” Graham added, not to be outdone. “And I think that bloke over there is related to Zaphod Beeblebrox.”

“There was a two-headed bloke in Men in Black,” Ryan pointed out.

“Yes, but Zaphod looks more intelligent,” Graham countered.

A herald who fitted Yas’s fairy tale idea rather than the Sci fi one approached and told them they needed to be presented to the Queen and her consort. He brought them to the far end of the long room where a tall, slender woman sat on a gilded throne on a raised dais. She was silver haired and her complexion powdery white. Her lips and eyelids were silver and so were her long, manicured fingernails. She wore a thin silver crown with an emerald set in it over her forehead. Anyone not thinking of one of the elves from Lord of the Rings was missing some cultural capital.

Her consort stood beside the throne, though there was an elaborately carved chair with silk cushions set for him. He was a good seven feet tall and his skin really was as black as ebony, a term even Ryan thought was either fanciful or a touch racist but seemed completely appropriate here. Together he and the queen were like the opposite numbers in a game of chess.

“Your Majesty,” said the herald. “I humbly present The Doctor, Ambassador from the Time Lords of Gallifrey, and the Lady Yasmin of Earth, with their companions, the lords Graham and Ryan of Sheffield.”

The Doctor took Yasmin’s hand and guided her to the top step to curtsy in the manner they had practiced to meet Mary, Queen of Scots. Graham and Ryan bowed from the lower step. This was the custom in the court of Queen Schilde of Q’Ariiy – women first, men second.

“You are welcome Ambassador Doctor, Lady Yasmin,” said the queen in a voice like quicksilver. “Please enjoy the feast and the dancing. Tomorrow we will ride.”

“I look forward to that,” The Doctor said. After a few more pleasantries they bowed and curtseyed as appropriate and stepped back as the next invited guests came forward.

“Is this what they call a matriarchal society?” Graham asked. “I couldn’t help noticing that the Queen talked to you and Yas and ignored me and Ryan. And there’s Sonny Jim beside her with not much to say,”

“Yes,” The Doctor answered. “And there’s no point in complaining about it. There are plenty of royal courts where it’s otherwise, after all. Draconia.... They don’t even let women speak. It’s going to be very awkward if I visit there. I'm meant to be an honorary nobleman of the court. Anyway... Off you go. Eat, drink, mingle.”

The eating and drinking had worried Yas since the feature part of the catering was a whole ox on a spit and unlikely to be Halal, but she found assorted cheeses and lots of exciting kinds of bread and huge seafood platters that didn’t cause any difficulties as well as tables groaning under heaps of sweet delicacies.

And mingling with amazing people was fun. She didn’t even mind when a man who looked like he was made of cement, probably in an industrial scale mixer, mentioned that he didn’t know humans were 'two-tone'. Looking around at people with red, blue, green and puce coloured faces, one lot actually resembling unripe conkers, she knew the remark wasn’t in any way racist or even spiciest. It was just a comment about diversity.

Graham was happily chatting with a pair of tall, slender men who seemed to be descended from trees. Yasmin thought about Dryads, tree spirits who would die if their tree was felled. Was that in Narnia or Tolkien? She couldn’t remember, certainly something she read at school. Later, The Doctor told her that they were representatives from the planet Cheam, and, yes, they did have a tree half of themselves that could die when they did or vice versa.

Ryan had talked with a couple of indigenous men, the tall, slender, ebony figures like the queen's consort. These were aristocrats of the world, but not so powerful as their wives. Ryan felt a sympathy for Prince Philip he had never had before and wondered if 'men's lib' would ever come to this planet.

What all of them talked about, as they discovered later when they drank a nightcap in their guest suite in one of the fairytale towers, was the 'great race' that began tomorrow afternoon. It was a horse race over thirty miles of territory, returning to a finish line at the castle. It was open to all female visitors to compete. The Doctor was entered in the one-woman chariot category.

“It’s my first time competing,” she said. “I didn’t qualify before. My last visit I was accompanied by a lady Time Lord who came second in the category so I have something to beat.”

If the phrase 'lady Time Lord' struck anyone else as odd they were too polite to say so.

“I was talking to a couple of gendermorphs,” Yas added, smiling at the very idea of using the term so casually. It meant a member of several races who could switch gender at will, which meant that the two ambassadors she had talked to were equally safe on the aforementioned Draconia or any of several matriarchal worlds, many even less tolerant of men than this one.

“They’re in the chariot class, too,” Yas continued. “The two-woman chariot.”

“Isn’t that cheating if they’re not really women?” Ryan asked.

“You’ve not read the South Yorkshire Police detain and arrest procedures for transgender suspects,” Yas told him. “’Really a woman’ is complicated enough even for humans.”

“it doesn’t work like that for gendermorphs anyway,” The Doctor said. “Their DNA changes with the gender. I came across a burglar once who got away with it because HE did the burgling at night and SHE was questioned by police in the morning. Though most gendermorphs are more honest than that.”

The three humans looked at each other, all wondering if they dared ask The Doctor about her DNA and deciding against it.

“Well, I heard that sunrises are special on this planet,” Yas said diplomatically. “I’m for an early night and even earlier morning.”

The Doctor agreed. When they were gone Ryan and Graham looked at each other again with one thing on their mind.

“A planet where women are the bosses...” Graham said. “I’m all for women's equality. Grace would come back and haunt me if I didn’t. But women in charge.... I can remember what it was like under Thatcher. It's just not natural.”

Ryan agreed, but he was sure of one thing.

“We don’t say things like that around those two.... ever.”

Yas was up before dawn and drank a milky, fruity drink left by her bedside before heading out into the palace grounds. The Doctor was already up and joined her as they stood and watched the sun come up, making the multi-coloured sky look like a neon disco ceiling with swirls of impossible colours.

“There ARE still only three primary colours in nature, even here?” Yas asked. “Red, blue, yellow, making up all the other shades?”

“That is a universal constant,” The Doctor agreed.

“The universe is brilliant,” Yas conceded happily. And well might she be happy. Nothing was trying to kill them and this planet was full of amazing surprises.

“I’m going to the stables to pick out a horse for my chariot,” The Doctor said when the sun had risen enough to leave the sky the ordinary abstract mural of daytime. “Want to come with me?”

Yas liked the idea. The police HQ in Sheffield included the stables and parade ground for the mounted division. She had given sugar lumps and kind words to the beautifully groomed animals from time to time.

But nothing prepared her for the royal stables. It was a palace for horses in a white marble baroque style. Individual stalls ran the length of at least two football pitches and a battalion of grooms were attending to their needs.

Yas wasn’t sure, but she felt they were all far bigger even than the police horses. She didn’t know enough to talk about ‘hands’ and all that, but these were giants with rippling muscles beneath glossy coats.

“Beautiful,” she whispered as The Doctor reached up to stroke the nose of a chestnut coloured stallion. The horse leaned down and nuzzled her hair.

“Q’Arriy horses choose their rider,” The Doctor explained. “This chap is called Valeed and he has definitely chosen me. Or he likes the taste of my collar.” She signalled to a groom who placed The Doctor’s race number on the stall.

Yas walked on past each inquisitive and bright-eyed creature. She wasn’t one of those girls that featured in pre-teen girls’ comics who couldn’t live without horses, but she was experiencing some true animal love just now.

Then she stood very still. Her mouth opened in astonishment. She looked into a pair of big brown eyes. This horse….

…. Wasn’t a horse.

“If this isn’t fairyland, why am I being nuzzled by a unicorn?” she asked.

“Oh,” The Doctor whispered with something like awe. “It’s Trident. He was the old Queen’s mount. I didn’t expect to see him.”

“He’s a UNICORN,” Yas repeated. “Look at the horn….”

If she had ever thought about unicorns they were small, white and friends with My Little Pony and other such childhood dreams. This magnificent beast, glossy black with a single white star on his forehead, just below the foot and a half of twisted, tapering horn, was something else entirely.

As she glanced at the horses either side of him, she realised that, far from being a fantasy, he was possibly the most REAL creature she had ever touched. She would have had a hard time explaining what she meant to anyone else, but she knew it in her heart.

“The horse chooses its mistress,” said a groom who stepped beside her. “What is your race number, Madame?”

“Me?” Yas was astonished. “But I….”

She had never ridden in her life. It wasn’t something she fretted about missing out on, but the opportunities had never come up in the world of Sheffield council flats she grew up in.

Yet the more she looked at the beautiful creature and the more it looked back at her….

She opened the stall and the unicorn stepped forward. She put her hands on his shoulders.

“Where is his… his tack.”

From somewhere the proper word for the saddle and bridle and other straps and buckles associated with riding came into her head. At once a quartet of grooms, like a motor racing pit crew began assembling the ‘tack’, including, Yas noted, a side saddle for a lady.

Riding side saddle had to be harder than ordinary riding, surely?

But Yas felt no fear, no hesitation, as she put her foot in the stirrup and pushed herself up. She put her legs in the right position and lightly held the reins. Trident the unicorn walked sedately the length of the stable and into the paddock where other riders were exercising. There he broke into a trot, then a canter. He turned towards the practice jumps and Yas felt instinctively how to relax some muscles and tense others as the unicorn jumped. She felt a thrill as they hung in the air together for a split second before landing safely.

By the fence, Graham and Ryan watched with mouths open in sheer astonishment.

“Yas never mentioned she could ride,” Graham commented, ignoring, for the moment, WHAT she was riding.

“She can’t… she doesn’t. Where the heck would she do that at our comprehensive? And she could hardly keep a horse in a council flat. Besides….”

There was something Ryan wanted to say, but he wasn’t sure how to phrase it.

“You know… what they say about unicorns…. About them being tamed by women… ladies… girls… with the right qualifications.”

Graham nodded, hardly daring to say anything.

“Does this mean Yas is qualified? I mean… I never… never really thought about her that way… I mean….”

“Modern girls… you just don’t ask.”

“And I’m not going to,” Ryan firmly decided. “But… wow. She looks good.”

“She’s not the only one.” Graham looked around as a new horsewoman entered the paddock, this time riding a gilded chariot. Neither Graham nor Ryan had been educated ‘classically’, but somewhere, sometime, both had seen images of Freyja, the Norse goddess riding her chariot. If Freyja wore mauve culottes and a striped jumper with braces and wore Doc Marten boots on her feet, then the vision before them would have been perfect.

The Doctor looked as if she had been born to drive a one-woman chariot just as Yas looked born to ride side saddle on a unicorn.

“There must be something in the air of this place,” Graham decided. It was the only explanation for any of this.

The race was due to start after lunch. The Doctor and Yas, as competitors, were allotted places at the queen’s table. Graham and Ryan, as mere men, were at the far as and of the great hall. The food was the same, so they had no real complaints, but the segregation rankled just a little with all the men around them.

“I wouldn’t mind,” said the man with two heads whose wife was at the top table eating with one mouth and talking with the other. “But I’M the Ambassador.”

“They can’t imagine a man in such a role,” answered a tall man with blue skin and fire engine red hair. “One day there will be such a revolution on this planet.”

“It may come sooner than they think,” said a man whose skin was red and hair blue in contrast to the other. “You know the queen has five sons and no daughter. That’s them over there at the table even lower than ours…. Four of them, anyway. I’m not sure where the eldest is.”

Ryan glanced at the ebony coloured men wearing solemn black and silver in contrast to the motley of colour around them.

“None of them can inherit the throne?” he asked.

“No man may rule Q’Ariiy. The Queen will sooner choose another woman from outside her family line than allow a king to follow her.”

“I knew there had to be a downside to this place,” Graham said. “But at least its somebody else’s problem. Just remind me never to disparage Charles and Camilla ever again.”

The men were not invited to the grandstand to see the start of the race, either. Graham and Ryan found themselves watching from a roped off terrace alongside the same four of the five sons of the Queen and the male Ambassadors of other worlds. Despite that, they were excited about the race. They watched as the riders lined up and the chariots behind them. They easily spotted Yas mounted on the black stallion unicorn. Wearing a riding skirt and jacket of deep red satin and velvet, she looked proud and confident, even though she had ridden for the first time only a few hours ago.

“There’s the Doc.” Graham pointed to the gold trimmed chariot where a real vision was mounted. The haphazard charity shop clobber was replaced by something that really did look inspired by Wagnerian opera, from the winged helmet to the flowing cloak with a golden breastplate and leather skirt that completed the ensemble.

“Wow!” Ryan commented. Then his attention was caught by a huge globe that might have been glass or might easily have been soap. It floated above the starting line, and after shimmering with all the colours of several rainbows for a second or two the image of Queen Schilde appeared in High Definition to make a Sony executive weep. Her voice filled the air as she called the competitors to order and raised her hand clutching a silk handkerchief. When her hand fell, the race began.

The bubble stayed in the air as first mounted riders then the charioteers faced away. As they quickly disappeared from view it became a camera giving a birds eye view of the race. Ryan and Graham debated whether drone technology was known here, and decided that a world with racing unicorns might just as easily have actual birds following the race and somehow transmitting the image.

In any case, what mattered was that Yas on her unicorn was in the lead after the first half mile. Several strong contenders kept a cracking pace, including a grey mare ridden by a woman with golden wings folded across her back to reduce air resistance who came close to catching up and another black horse on which a tall, richly dressed woman was mounted. Ryan noticed her because she was a female yet with skin the ebony of the males of Q’Ariiy. He assumed that she was from another world where gender and colour were more arbitrary.

The Doctor was holding her own, too. She stood with one foot forward on the front edge of the chariot, her hands firmly holding the reins and guiding the chestnut stallion with ease. The two-woman chariot of the gendermorph couple was keeping pace. Graham half expected blades on the wheels to cut down the opposition, but there was nothing so unsportsmanlike.

“Your lady is superb,” said one of the queen’s sons as the unicorn found an extra spurt and left his closest rival behind.

“She’s not… our lady,” Ryan answered. “She’s our friend.”

“She is magnificent,” said another. “Is she betrothéd?”

Ryan had never heard anyone outside of school Shakespeare pronounce the ‘é’, but that didn’t mean he was impressed.

“She is not, but hands off, bruv,” he answered as fiercely and proprietarily as somebody who was definitely not betrothed or even betrothéd could muster.

“That goes for the Doc, too,” Graham added as he saw her swing her chariot on one wheel around one of the race markers some five miles out and skilfully bring it back down again.

There were casualties in such a wild race. The gendermorphs narrowly avoided crashing into a pair of single chariots that had run into each other on a tight turn. The two riders were shaken but unhurt, and perhaps more importantly, the horses were fine once they were released from the tangled traces, but that was two less competitors for the chariot competition.

Then the lady with the golden wings slid head first from her horse as she tried to make a jump over a rushing purple-watered brook that was a quicker way than the bridge Yas and the ebony rider had both taken. She landed in the brook and emerged covered in bright orange weed and looking extremely sorry for her lost dignity. The chestnut horse waited for her to remount, but the possibility of winning the race was gone.

By the halfway point another six riders and eight chariots had met with misfortunes. All of these happened way behind Yas and her closest rival, though. They stretched their lead to at least a half mile as they turned towards the setting sun and the way back to the castle. The Doctor was still amongst the leaders of the chariot racers, but it was the two mounted horsewoman who were the centre of attention.

“It’s ridiculous,” Graham murmured. “How can she really be that good after learning to ride this morning?”

“Magic,’ Ryan had decided. “There’s no other explanation. Never mid Clarke’s Law or anything else. She’s riding a unicorn and everything we ever heard about them in fantasy worlds is true. It’s giving her the ability to stay up there on its back and win this race.”

“Not yet,” Graham said. “The other lady is doing well. It could end up as a photo finish.”

Indeed, for a mile, at least, Yas and the ebony lady were nearly neck and neck. For a furlong or two, only the unicorn’s horn was ahead of the smooth face of the other stallion. Ryan and Graham debated whether a horse race could be won by a ‘horn’.

“A nose, maybe,” they decided. But a horn would surely be cheating.

Finally, there was no need to follow the race on the bubble. The two front runners were in plain sight. The excitement grew among the spectators as they reached the home straight, none shouting louder than Ryan and Graham. For a heart stopping moment they really thought that the ebony lady had pushed ahead, then Yas swung one leg over the side saddle to ride in the ordinary way and leaned forward almost flat against the unicorn’s neck. Whether she cut some wind resistance or the creature managed an extra spurt, they pulled ahead together and crossed the finish line the clear winners.

Graham and Ryan did a slightly embarrassing dance of joy with each other then pushed through the crowds to the winner’s enclosure where Yas and the ebony lady had dismounted and were congratulating each other while patting their noble steeds gratefully. The grooms might have prevented two males from entering the enclosure, but Graham and Ryan were a force to be reckoned with and they backed away.

“Yas!” Ryan hugged her fondly, lifting her off her feet with excitement. “That was fantastic.”

“It felt fantastic,” he answered. “Trident did all the work, of course. I just had to hang on.”

“Magic,” Ryan said again. Then a new cry of excitement made them look around. The Doctor had just won the one-woman chariot class. “Not sure about that, though. I think she won by stubbornness.”

Whatever reason, The Doctor came to join them with a massive grin on her face. She warmly congratulated Yas before the two of them as well as the runners up went to be presented to the Queen in the throne room.

And that was when the chariot wheels came a little unstuck. Queen Schilde presented trophies to the champions and then stood to make an important announcement in front of the whole assembly.

“I have decided,” she said. “Lady Yasmin of Earth shall be my heir.”

“What?” Amidst the susurration of whispers and murmurs around the court, Yas managed just one word of exclamation. “No… no… I can’t. I have to go back to Sheffield….”

She thought of Sheffield, her parents, the council flat they lived in, her sister she more often bickered with. For a split second she wondered why she would give up being the future queen of a fantasy world for all of that.

But, yes. Sheffield was where she belonged. When she finally stopped travelling with The Doctor, she expected to go back there, to go back to being a police officer, a job she loved even at its most irritating. She expected to go back to being human and ‘normal’ for a given measure of ‘normal’.

She couldn’t be a nominated princess. She just couldn’t.

“No!” cried the ebony lady in a strangely husky voice that gave everyone food for thought. “No, mother!”

“Mother?” The question mark was almost audible as the word passed around the throne room. Ryan glanced around and saw the four sons who had watched the race with them in the men’s paddock. They stood next to the ebony ‘lady’ and at once something clicked into place.

“Yes, mother. I am your eldest son,” said the lady, pulling off a long-hatred wig. “And I all but beat this woman. I almost certainly would have done if she had not been mounted upon my grandmother’s great unicorn. Nobody could have raced against Trident. So you have to concede that I am as good as a woman. I beat all the rest, after all.”

“He certainly did,” The Doctor said in quiet but insistent tones. “Your Majesty…..”

“It cannot be!” the Queen snapped angrily. “Take this imposter and put him in chains.”

“No, mother, I think not,” said her second son, placing a hand upon his elder brother’s satin covered arm. “Mother, the time has come for you and all of Q’Ariiy to accept that sons are as important as daughters. My brother is your true heir. If you do not proclaim him so, there will be terrible consequences for you. We do not stand before you alone. The men of Q’Ariiy have been ignored for long enough. They will support us in deposing you if you do not agree to our terms.”

There was a long silent moment. The Court of Queen Schilde held its collective breath. Then the proud head bowed in acquiescence.

“Very well, I shall name my eldest child as heir, regardless of gender…..” she paused and frowned in concentration. “What IS your name?”

“You called my Adler,” said the prince in satin. “But if you please, I should prefer to be called Alice, and I shall choose my own gowns.”

“Ohhhhh!” It was Graham who found a voice in response. “THAT sort of queen.”

The Doctor elbowed him into silence, but he wasn’t far wrong. It seemed to be a new concept for Q’Ariiy, but the Queen didn’t seem altogether displeased with the idea that one of her princes might be a princess after all.

Later, when a banquet was held to celebrate both the result of the great race and the proclamation of the Queen’s heir, ‘Princess Alice’ wore a gown that was stunning even on a planet with a multicoloured sky and indigenous unicorns. There were obviously going to have to be new ways of thinking about everything from the royal succession to the kind of issues about which South Yorkshire Police had procedural documentation. Life on Q’Ariiy was going to change in a lot of exciting and hopefully positive ways.

But the Doctor and her companions weren’t going to get involved. The two gendermorph ambassadors had quickly offered their services, planning to draw up a new constitution granting equal legal status to all citizens. The Doctor was confident they would be enough.

The only difficulty was getting Yas to say goodbye to Trident. She went to the stables especially to do so, and when she was done she was just a little tearful.

But as they took their places in the Flintstone car for a lift back to the TARDIS she smiled brightly and waved to the second eldest prince.

“He made me an offer,” she admitted. “To be a princess by marriage… to him. He offered me a palace of my own, and a stable full of unicorns.”

“Did you think about it?” Ryan asked her.

“The unicorns were a really good offer,” Yas admitted. “But… on the whole… really… I think I SHOULD go home to Sheffield. It IS the right decision. There may be days… Friday night chucking out time with some Drunk and Disorderly throwing up on my shoes… when I might regret the decision… but… no…. I think I had to turn him down.”