**Queen of Sheffield – Part I**

The TARDIS materialised on the pedestrianised plaza between Sheffield’s Edwardian Lyceum Theatre and the nineteen-seventies Crucible Theatre. The plaza was moderately busy with shoppers passing by and students passing time on the public benches. Even so, nobody noticed the sudden appearance of an old-fashioned police telephone box. The Doctor explained this as a ‘Somebody Else’s Problem Field’ and told Yasmin to Google it if she really wanted to know.

She didn’t.

“They’re holding a ‘Miss South Yorkshire’ contest at the Crucible?” Yas commented disdainfully as she looked at the banners advertising the event. “I thought we had more class than that in this city. Those things are so tacky and demeaning to women.”

The Doctor shrugged. They didn’t do that sort of thing on her world. But on the other hand, she had seen societies where people were forced into far more demeaning activities. At least these young South Yorkshire ladies had a choice.

Besides, there was something else to be concerned about. She saw it right away and understood why Graham and Ryan had sent a message asking her to visit.

“Yes, I see them, too,” Yas said, following The Doctor’s gaze as a group of thin young women in skimpy summer clothing, too skimpy for a rather overcast day, passed by. “Let’s find the guys and see what they know.”

‘The guys’ had arranged to meet at the Chinese Kitchen, a restaurant only a short walk down Norfolk street which allowed The Doctor and Yasmin to observe a few more ‘persons of interest’ on the way.

Graham and Ryan, step-grandad and step-grandson, had secured a window table and were enjoying bottled Tiger beer while they waited. The Doctor ordered rice wine and Yas a spring water along with the starter course from the four-person set menu. For a while they chatted as friends with Yas relating the adventure of the Banana Tree Ghost to be in keeping with their oriental surroundings.

When the main course had been served and the waitress out of earshot, Graham glanced out onto the street and nodded to The Doctor.

“What do you think that’s all about?” he asked.

“I don’t think,” The Doctor answered straight away. “I know. You have a nasty infestation of Elves.”

“Elves?” The other three echoed the word in astonishment.

“No,” The Doctor said. “Not like Will Ferrell or any of Santa’s little helpers. And not like the superior but definitely good guys of Tolkien. Nothing to do with anything by Enid Blyton, either.”

“You know, I didn’t think so,” Graham agreed. His eyes followed two people walking along the pavement. At first glance they just looked like a casually dressed couple, each blessed with more than usual physical beauty and attracting an inordinate amount of attention from the passing crowds.

But more than a casual glance stripped them of all benign appearances. What Graham, Ryan, Yasmin and The Doctor were looking at were vaguely humanoid with stick thin torsos, gangly arms and legs and peculiarly inverted triangle shaped heads that gave them an appearance of walking insects. Large eyes were set into the face under a narrow forehead, vestigial noses and thin, mirthless mouths.

“It’s called a glamour,” The Doctor said. “A kind of low-level psychic field that affects anyone near them so that they see attractive humans. We four can see through it because we’ve been exposed to the TARDIS’s own low-level but slightly superior psychic field. Nobody else out there knows that maybe one in fifty of the current population of Sheffield isn’t human.”

“Aliens?” Ryan asked.

“Yes and no,” The Doctor answered. “No, in that they’re not from another planet in this universe. Yes, in that they’re from a parallel universe with interstitial weak spots that sometimes, when the natural magnetic forces of the planet fluctuate, allow them to cross into this universe and cause trouble.”

“Parallel universe?” Graham queried.

“Inter… what?” Ryan asked.

“Like Narnia,” Yas suggested.

“No,” The Doctor contradicted. “Well, yes, sort of. Except Narnia doesn’t have elves.”

“Wherever they’re from, you talk like you’ve seen them before, Doctor,” Graham told her.

“Two regenerations back. I foiled a plot by a group of them who wanted to replace Katherine Middleton with an Elf lookalike just before the wedding.”

“Why?” Ryan said it. Graham and Yas both looked as if the question was on their lips.

“They’re like hive insects. Bees, if you like. Each tribe of them is led by a queen. But bees have a biological mechanism for making a queen – feeding a newborn royal jelly, that sort of thing. Elves have to create a queen – by marrying a prince, for example, one in line to be king.”

“Bit of a long game with Wills.” Graham remarked.

“They are patient,” The Doctor explained. “They would have used the years to cast their glamour over all the country, while gradually eroding any influence her husband has, so that, on Ascension, she could rule the country unopposed.”

“Are you sure that didn’t happen?” Ryan asked. “Everyone loves Katherine, even my mate Dalziel who says he’s a communist.”

“No, she’s real,” The Doctor assured them. “The British monarchy are safe for a couple of generations at least.”

“Then what are these lot after?” Graham asked, waving towards the window. “And why in Sheffield?”

“I’m not sure,” The Doctor answered. “One possibility… There is an interstitial weakness – one of those wardrobes into a place less charming than Narnia – at a place called Nine Ladies – a bronze age stone circle…”

“On Stanton Moor,” Graham said. “About twenty miles south of here. It’s an English Heritage site. I’ve driven school outings there. Do you mean to say it’s dangerous?”

“Not generally,” The Doctor assured him. “But if the elves did break through there, Sheffield is the nearest dense urban population. They would come here to hide in plain sight amongst the crowds.”

“That makes sense,” everyone conceded.

“But…” Graham asked. “If they’re here to make themselves a queen… how could they do that in Sheffield? We’re not even due any royal visits this year.”

That stumped The Doctor, a rarity to be appreciated. Then Yas gave an excited yelp and jumped in her seat.

“What about a BEAUTY QUEEN,” she asked. “Would that qualify as making a queen?”

“It… probably would,” The Doctor admitted. “You’re thinking of the Miss South Yorkshire Contest?”

“Yes. I mean… it sounds silly, but….”

“Not to the elves. The crowning of the winner, even if the crown is just gold foil… represents a binding contract. It would allow her the power to rule South Yorkshire.”

“Not just South Yorkshire,” Ryan said. “The winner goes onto Miss United Kingdom… and from there…”

“Miss World?”

“Sweet Mother of Chaos,” The Doctor swore.

“This is bigger than Wills and Kate,” Graham remarked.

“FAR bigger,” The Doctor agreed. “This is the start of a planetary coup d’état. Once crowned queen of the world, nobody on Earth would be able to disobey her commands. This would be a slave planet.”

“We’ve got to do something,” Yas declared. “We’re the only people who CAN. Nobody else can even see them.”

“What can we do?” Ryan asked.

“I have an idea,” The Doctor said. She looked steadily at Yas and smiled widely. Yas looked back at her, puzzled at first, then with a startled and disbelieving expression as she realised what The Doctor was planning.

“Nooooo!” she wailed.

It took a photoshopped picture and a retrospective application sent backwards in time two months by what The Doctor called ‘TARDISmail’ to put the plan in action. That done, Team TARDIS walked back down Norfolk Street to the Crucible’s stage entrance.

“This is Yasmin Khan, Miss South Yorkshire Police,” said The Doctor to the young man with the list of contestants and the firebook. “I’m her chaperone, this young man is her brother, who is chaperoning us both, and the other gentleman is her dad, keeping an eye on the lot of us. We were told our backstage passes could be picked up here.”

That was two more chaperones than was necessary, but The Doctor wasn’t giving anyone a chance to object.

“Yes, of course,” the young man said, consulting his list and looking in his desk for the requested documents. “Here are your passes, your orientation pack and plan of the backstage area. You need to register in the foyer and the Welcome Reception is this evening at six o’clock in the Crucible Corner Restaurant. It’s smart-casual for guests, but contestants should wear cocktail dresses with their tiara and sash.”

The words ‘what tiara and sash’ were on Yas’s lips, but The Doctor pre-empted her.

“Excellent,” she said, taking charge of the orientation pack. “Come on, Fam. We can while away the afternoon at a matinee of Noel Coward’s Private Lives at the Lyceum. I remember the premiere very well. King's Theatre, Edinburgh, August 18th, 1930. Coward directed and starred as Elyot, Adrianne Allen played Sibyl, Gertrude Lawrence was Amanda, and Laurence Olivier played Victor. His nose was really out of joint playing second lead to Coward, but he was having a lean time that summer.”

If anyone else heard The Doctor’s unlikely monologue they didn’t comment. The afternoon agenda was good enough, since the alternative was watching daytime tv on the TARDIS videoscreen. By the time Nigel Havers, Patricia Hodge and their co-stars had taken their curtain calls it was time to cross the plaza to where the TARDIS was still parked to change into ‘smart casual’ and cocktail dresses for the private party at the restaurant only a few metres away.

Yasmin still had a lot of reservations about this whole plan, but what woman didn’t enjoy ‘putting on a posh frock’ as they say in Yorkshire. The one she found in the TARDIS wardrobe was a shimmering blue satin with silver threads shot through, as if somebody had taken the colours of her police uniform and ‘glammed them up.’ The hem was comfortably just above the knee. Sheer nylons and strappy heels completed the outfit as far as she was concerned, but of course there was more.

The sash of pale blue ribbon with ‘Miss South Yorkshire Police’ printed on it came in the orientation pack along with the tiara. It wasn’t plastic like something out of a girl’s party bag, but a soft, low quality but shiny metal covered in rhinestones. It was pretty, but wearing it made her feel just a bit self-conscious.

The other contestants had obviously worn their tiaras and sashes more often. As they mingled, eating low carb finger food and drinking fizzy wine, they looked far more as if they did it every day.

Some of them, Yas noted, knowing her own outfit was modest enough in that respect, were far more daring about their neck and hemlines. Miss Sheffield Social Services and Miss South Yorkshire Young Farmers both wore mini dresses high up their thighs and Miss Sheffield City Council’s v-shaped neckline plunged almost to her navel.

The nicest dress, in Yas’s opinion, was a red and gold knee length one of the style that, after her time on Xian Xian, she knew was called cheongsam. The young woman’s sash declared her to be Miss Sheffield Business District. Yas recognised her as the head waitress at the Chinese Kitchen.

They met informally later in the evening when both had escaped the stuffy heat of the restaurant for the outdoor seating area opposite the Crucible’s brightly lit box office.

“We live in Yorkshire,” said Miss Sheffield Business District, whose real name was Lei Liu. “So it’s no surprise we’re the only non-white skinned contestants… not counting Miss South Yorkshire Veterinarians with that dreadful fake tan.” They both laughed conspiratorially about that fashion faux pas before Liu continued. “But the next time somebody asks if I’m a British citizen I might behave in a way that is not ‘tasteful, charming and ladylike’.”

“Tell me about it,” Yas agreed. “It’s been ‘surely YOU can’t be a policewoman’ every time. And I know half of them are implying in a ham-fisted way that I’m too pretty for the job and the other half that I’m too DARK for it. I’m sure one of them meant BOTH.”

“What have you said back to them?”

“I said it’s police officer, not policewoman. South Yorkshire Police are gender neutral.”

Yas and Liu laughed again then went quiet as another contestant came out onto the patio. They both watched as Miss South Yorkshire Heritage walked to an empty table and sat, crossing her legs and nearly but not quite revealing her underwear in a not very ladylike way to the half dozen men who had followed her out.

‘Nearly but not quite’ described her whole outfit. It was nearly but not quite a whole dress with abstract cut outs of the figure-hugging bodice that just missed revealing more than was decent, let alone the ‘tasteful’ that the contest rules had required.

‘Charming’ in those same rules had meant ‘friendly, pleasant, approachable’. The ‘charm’ Miss South Yorkshire Heritage was giving out in waves that were almost certainly attracting any men in her vicinity was the sort associated with wicked witches in fairy stories, a sinister, deceptive spell that wound around men like unbreakable tentacles.

Which was not surprising since, beneath a stunningly beautiful face with glittering green eyes, the whole framed by rich red hair, was the insectlike triangular head The Doctor had identified as an Elf.

She was the one, the prospective queen of the world. And now Yas fully understood how it would work. If she were handed any position of power, she would be able to influence every aspect of human life. Miss World got invited to the White House, to Buckingham Palace garden parties, to UNESCO conferences. She only had to turn the charm on in any of those places to change human thinking.

“I hope she doesn’t win,” Liu said. “She… I don’t know why… gives me a creepy feeling.”

Yas didn’t know, either. Perhaps Liu was particularly sensitive to such things. But she was right, if only by accident.

The door opened again. Yas saw Ryan head towards the growing crowd of male admirers around the Elf, then a flash of cream linen dress suit as The Doctor pulled him back and forced him into a seat facing Yas and Liu and with his back to the charming one.

“Don’t even think about it, sunshine,” The Doctor told him. “You’re here with our Yas or you can go to bed early.”

Liu looked puzzled but not displeased by The Doctor’s firm stance. Ryan obeyed, but almost unwillingly. His neck twisted all the time towards the Elf. Each time The Doctor kicked him under the table. He hardly seemed to notice the bruises.

“We need to do something about you,” The Doctor said later when Graham and Ryan were waiting for a taxi back to their estate. “You fell under her spell too easily. That could be dangerous as well as disloyal. You might be charmed into revealing our mission.”

“I would never….” Ryan protested. Then he groaned out loud. “I would. I wouldn’t be able to help it. I was ready to vote for her tonight. What can I do?”

“Cold shower,” Yas suggested, though not completely unkindly. “Why wasn’t Graham affected?”

“I never saw her,” he explained. “I got pinned most of the night by the Mayor’s wife, who had first mistaken WKD for soft drinks, and then mistaken me for the managing director of Yorkshire Television. She reckons Sheffield loses out to Leeds in local news and had a right old rant about it.”

“Sheffield gets the snooker every year,” The Doctor pointed out. “As for the important matter. I’ll work something out before tomorrow.”

In the morning Yas and her chaperone presented themselves at the Crucible for a technical runthrough in which all thirty contestants practiced walking out onto the extended apron stage, turning and walking back.

It was harder than it looked. Yas decided that she preferred crowd control duties when either of Sheffield’s football teams played at home.

After lunch, a luxury coach took everyone to Manor Lodge, the mostly ruined Elizabethan castle that once housed the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury and Mary, Queen of Scots under house arrest.

Yas and The Doctor met Graham and Ryan on a lawn where the latter two had once played life-sized chess with the Earl. The Doctor lost no time in presenting them both with small, discreet earpieces.

“Since she’s clearly targeting men more than women, this is a bit of TARDIS technology to boost your resistance. Ryan, now that you’re protected you DO have permission to get near Miss South Yorkshire Heritage and see if you can find out anything. I’ll be watching in case she overwhelms you and you need extracting,”

“Her name… or the one she’s using, is Una, by the way,” Ryan said. “I found out that much.”

“Interesting,” The Doctor mused. “It might actually be her real-real name. In Irish mythology the last High Queen of the Daoine Sidhe – the faery people – was Oonagh. But that’s just for the trivia section.”

This was the first appearance at which the contestants were being judged and scored by a panel. Even so, it was a surprisingly friendly situation in the row of trailers that passed for changing rooms. Hair and make-up tips were swapped and clothes admired amicably as they paraded and posed against the background of the Turret House or the rose garden in outfits representing ‘sports day’, ‘girl about town’ and other fashion magazine clichés. There were several group shots, but most of the photo opportunities were in singles or pairs. Yas and Liu were a little suspicious of how often they, the only two ‘ethnic’ faces, were paired up, but they kept their thoughts to themselves for the time being.

As the afternoon turned to early evening and the contestants dressed in period costume to reflect their Elizabethan location, it was noticed that there were three individuals who hadn’t, in fact, been especially friendly. Una the Elf preferred her all male entourage that grew larger by the hour. Miss South Yorkshire Veterinarians, aka Miss Fake Tan, had made no friends after throwing a hairbrush at her dresser and complaining that she hadn’t been photographed as often as Una, which might well have been true since most of the photographers were male, but since the dresser had no control over such things all the sympathy went to her.

The other contestant who wasn’t making friends was Miss Sheffield Steel, real name Paulette, a tall woman with a shy, uncertain smile who possibly just lacked self-confidence. Curiously, she seemed to be the only female who tried to be friendly with Una.

Yas had a suspicion about that, but decided it was none of her business, at least, not yet.

The next day was the longest, so far, for the contestants. It began in earnest after lunch with the first round of the ‘talent show’. In front of an invited audience of press and council representatives, it was the only chance for all thirty contestants to perform. By the final night a third of them would have been eliminated.

“We didn’t think of your ‘talent,” The Doctor said anxiously. “We ought to have prepared more thoroughly.”

“It’s ok. I’m sorted,” Yasmin assured her. She held up a small sports bag. “The TARDIS understood exactly what I needed.”

“The TARDIS is female. You all stick together,” Ryan commented.

“You get in with your girlfriend,” Yas teased him in return before heading to the dressing room.

“She is very definitely NOT my girlfriend,” he responded. “Even if she was a real human woman, she’s not my type.”

Everyone autonomously decided not to ask what his type was as they went to their tasks – Yas to change and await her turn on stage, Ryan to join Miss South Yorkshire Heritage’s close retinue, The Doctor to snoop around backstage with her eyes open for deceitful behaviour and Graham to a discreet seat at the back of the auditorium where he was observed talking quietly and earnestly to Paulette, AKA Miss Sheffield Steel before her call to the back stage area.

The ‘talents’ displayed by the contestants were surprisingly varied. Liu recognised her dual heritage by playing the English folksong ‘Strawberry Fair’ on a traditional Chinese pipa. Miss Sheffield Social Services skilfully sang the aria “Der Hölle Rache” from Mozart’s Magic Flute. Miss Sheffield Guild of Tailors and Seamstresses twerked through a medley of Beyonce songs to the amazement of the whole judging panel and the delight of the male section.

Yasmin appeared on stage wearing a blue-white leotard that glittered as if it was covered in ice crystals. Accompanied by the main theme from Stargate Atlantis, a tune she had loved as a teenager, before wormhole travel had become commonplace to her, she performed a graceful rhythmic gymnastics sequence with a long ribbon winding and waving around her body. Ryan, while appearing to be paying attention to Una, remembered that Yas had been good at gym when they were at school – one of many reasons he, with his dyspraxia adding to all the other problems of adolescence, felt that she was far out of his league.

“That was very good,” Miss Sheffield Steel congratulated her as she and Liu stood in the wings and watched Miss Plusnet perform an American style cheerleader routine with red and yellow pom-poms. “I wanted to do rhythmic gymnastics at school, but I wasn’t allowed.”

Paulette followed the Sheffield based internet provider’s representative dressed in what Yas and Liu both recognised as a ‘gi’, the loose shirt and trousers with a fabric belt worn for various oriental martial arts.

“She’s very good at that,” Liu remarked as Paullete began a series of very precise and stylised moves.

“Is it karate?” Yas asked. “Or some kind of Tai Chi?”

“Kata,” Liu explained. “A Japanese form of detailed choreographed movements practised and performed solo, unlike most other martial arts. My brother does it, though my grandfather gets cross because he still blames the Japanese for invading China in the thirties.”

“But it IS something women do, too?” Yas asked.

“Oh, yes. Most martial arts are performed by both sexes, you know. With very little difference in the moves, unlike western gymnastics where the disciplines are different.”

“Yes. Though it’s a shame Paulette didn’t get to do rhythmic gymnastics. She would have done it well, I think.”

“I wonder why they didn’t let her do it,” Yas added. “At my school they wanted any girl they could get to make up a team for county competitions.”

Liu and Yas looked at each other as they both had the same thought, but before they could say anything, Paulette finished her routine and slipped back to them.

The three headed to the green room together while Miss Sheffield Amateur Sports Associations proved herself as a talented violinist.

Miss South Yorkshire Heritage aka Una the Elf took to the stage after her. She sang unaccompanied in a language nobody recognised, but the whole theatre stopped what they were doing to listen to the most beautiful and compelling voice they had ever heard in their worthless lives.

All, that is, but the four TARDIS companions who knew better.

Ryan almost forgot to be unconditionally admiring of the Elf woman as he noted that her voice sounded like a chainsaw with broken teeth. It was all just part of the glamour.

And it was a glamour turned up several notches. Now women were as captivated as the men, filled with joy at being in her presence and with self-loathing at their own shortcomings in comparison to Una. Paulette was quite the most affected, actually bursting into tears of admiration and self-deprecation.

It was not permanent. The spell broke when Una finished singing. The puzzled glances all around proved that. But The Doctor knew well what was going on.

“That was literally a rehearsal for her,” she said later. “She was practicing drawing everyone into her net. It’s how she intends to win the contest, of course.”

“Cheating,” Ryan commented.

“It’s how they work. Trickery, deception, just plain cheating,” The Doctor confirmed. “But I’m good at those things, too. She will not be getting it all her own way.”

The evening saw the first public event and the first elimination round. It was evening gowns and interviews. First, the contestants paraded onto the catwalk together, silk and satin shining under the spotlights. Then they returned to a comfortable green room. There was a musical interlude by last year’s Britain’s Got Talent runner up before eight of the contestants were called back onto the stage.

“Oh, this is a horrible way of doing it,” Liu said as they watched on a big screen. “Bringing out the eliminated girls. It’s worse than how they do it on Strictly.”

“Why eight of them, though?” Yas asked. “I thought it was ten – leaving twenty of us to go on to tomorrow’s round.”

“You didn’t hear?” Miss Sheffield Social Services said with a slightly too gleeful tone of somebody with gossip to share. “Miss Fake Tan resigned. She claimed that she had a professional modelling contract that clashes with the swimsuit round, but I think there’s more to it than that. She had a row with Una just before lunch. She accused her of stealing her boyfriends.”

“Boyfriends, plural?” Yas queried. “Talk about the pot calling the kettle. “Who’s the other resignee?”

She looked around at the remaining contestants as she worked it out.

“Paulette – Miss Sheffield Steel. But she’s so quiet and NICE. Why….”

Nobody seemed to know. All agreed that they were sorry to lose Paulette while feeling the exact opposite about ‘Miss Fake Tan’ but they didn’t know what had happened.

Both gave Yas food for thought as she waited to go back on stage in her turn to be interviewed. The contest organisers had managed a minor coup by engaging BBC Breakfast’s Charlie Stayt to conduct the interviews. He smiled warmly at her and invited her to tell him what she thinks would make the world a better place.

She took a deep breath and launched into an answer based partly on her own personal experiences growing up in Sheffield and partly on the many different people and cultures she had encountered travelling with The Doctor.

What planet Earth needed, she said, was true equality of race, gender, orientation and other causes of division and discrimination. Humanity needed to celebrate its wonderful diversity and cherish the freedom to do so. Her hope for the future was that all nations would embrace those freedoms completely.

She was applauded warmly as she ended her speech. Charlie shook her hand with a genuine smile. As she went back to the green room, she was hugged by two contestants who thanked her for standing up for fellow lesbians. She thought about correcting their mistake but realised that her plea for equality meant that nobody had to explain anything.

Besides, she was distracted by Una’s interview. Charlie was obviously smitten as he invited her to sit before him, her legs crossing beneath the satin evening gown in a sultry manner that captivated him even before she spoke. He asked the same question as before - what does she think would make the world a better place.

“Absolute loyalty and subservience to me,” she answered with a wide smile before going on to outline her idea of a world in which the Human race would be enslaved to her Elven kind.

At least, that was what Yasmin heard. Looking around the green room at the rapt attention, the blissful smiles on the faces of the other contestants, at the enchanted expression Charlie Stayt had on screen, it was clear that everyone else had heard something different. The applause at the end of her speech was overwhelming, and to add insult to injury, Charlie went so far as to kiss her on the cheek. This, too, seemed right and proper to everyone around Yasmin.

“She’s going to win,” Liu said with a regretful sigh. “She’s just amazing. None of us stand a chance.”

“Yes, we do,” Yas answered her, though the way everyone flocked around Una when she returned to the green room suggested otherwise.

“I still don’t think I like her,” Liu added. “But she IS so very amazing and beautiful and talented.”

“Hold onto that first thought,” Yas said and wished the evening was over so that she could find her friends and talk about this.

“She had them all,” she confirmed when they met for a late supper at the Chinese Kitchen. “Everyone… everyone bought into her.”

“It’s still wearing off afterwards,” The Doctor assured her. “But it is getting stronger.”

“I’ll say,” Graham confirmed. “She told everyone the most outrageous things and they heard peace and love.”

“It hadn’t worn off Charlie Stayt,” Ryan pointed out. “I saw him getting into his car, and he looked hypnotised. It’s a good job he had a driver. I wouldn’t have trusted him behind the wheel.”

“Kissing her was a bad idea,” The Doctor agreed. “Physical contact is the most potent. He’ll be all right by morning. They all will. But her power is growing. If she isn’t stopped, she’ll have everyone permanently under her thumb.”

“By the way,” Graham said as The Doctor mused over ways to combat the Elven influence. “I know why Miss Sheffield Steel was pushed.”

“Pushed?” Yas queried. “She didn’t resign?”

“She was pushed,” Graham insisted. “Disqualified because somebody found out that Paulette used to be Paul. She’s…”

He didn’t have to continue. They all grasped the implication.

“The rules state that contestants should be BORN female,” Ryan noted. “But she was really pretty, and her talent slot was amazing. She belonged as much as anyone else.”

“Nobody cares at Eurovision,” Graham noted. “Why should a beauty contest be any different.”

“I didn’t think trans rights was something you were into,” Ryan said. “An old bloke like you….”

“Less of that sort of cheek,” Graham responded. “To tell the truth, it’s not something I’ve really thought about before. Except for the Doc, and she’s a different story altogether. But Paulette told me this afternoon. I don’t know why she told me except she was feeling a bit nervous and she said I looked kind. I wasn’t sure what to say. I hope I WAS kind to her.”

“I wish she’d told me, too,” Yas said feelingly. “That’s EXACTLY what I meant about equality in my talk. If only I’d really known. I had a sort of suspicion. When she said she wasn’t allowed to do rhythmic gym at school, and her choice of a gender neutral martial art. I should have said something in my interview about those kind of rules.”

“No,” The Doctor told her. “I agree wholeheartedly. Of course, I do. It’s tough being a woman when you’ve been a man for a millennia. But we need you to get through the rounds to keep an eye on Una. You can't be controversial. I’m sorry.”

It explains something, else, of course,” Yas added, while she considered The Doctor’s injunction. “From the start Paulette seemed attracted to Una – when it was just men flocking to her. The glamour must have hit something in the DNA.”

“That’s important,” The Doctor said. “I might be able to do something with that. Well done, Yas. And well done, Graham, for being a friend to Paulette. Everyone needs a friend.”

“When this is over,” Yas vowed. “I’m going to send her flowers, and I’m going to send the contest committee a letter of protest. I think a lot of the other ladies will sign it, too. But, ok, I’ll be good and toe the line until then.”