**Tyrolean Interlude**

Looking at a map of their tour of Italy, Marion would have to admit that there was very little geographical sense in it. The journey from Rome to a weekend in Venice and a week in Florence, then Capri followed by the Amalfi coast was based purely on the order she had thought of those places when the quite last minute decision to take a long trip away from Gallifrey was mooted.

This last leg of their journey brought them several hundred miles north, to the mountains of the South Tyrol, an area she had never visited and only vaguely knew about.

This was Margarette’s choice. She had visited the German-Italian speaking region as a child, when her parents were alive and she still had some pleasures when she could evade her half-sister’s petty meanness.

It was, everyone admitted, a wonderful choice. The luxury Alpin Panorama Hotel Hubertus built on the sunny slopes of the Geiselsberg above the wide Olang valley was as modern as the Villa Cimbrone was traditional with bright, well-proportioned luxury suites with a choice of views over the valley or the mountains.

The hotel's most famous facility, a glass bottomed ‘Infinity Pool’ that stretched out from the hotel over a breathtaking cliffside was an immediate draw for the whole party.

Once they had become used to the idea of swimming out over such a drop, visible through the water and glass, it became the first thing they did in the morning before breakfast, and last thing at night with underwater lighting and the stars shining down from a velvet sky that immediately followed a bronze sunset.

Margarette and Avery were swimming together while Marion and Talitha enjoyed multi-coloured drinks on poolside sun loungers. Marion’s lounger was in chair position. She had learned many aristocratic behaviours such as drinking a cocktail without smudging her lipstick, but doing that lying down without tipping the drink over her designer one-piece was a bit harder.

“They look happy,” she remarked, and Talitha knew who she meant.

“But there are still problems to be resolved,” Talitha admitted. “I’m quite happy to release Avery from his position as our personal security officer. Malika can confirm the same with his Presidential Guard commanders. And I have a feeling Hillary knows how to get him Italian citizenship without going through much in the way of official paperwork.”

“German, possibly, since that is Margarette’s nationality,” Marion thought aloud. “I can’t remember which countries are part of the EU and allow right of abode automatically. Ironically, considering I’m the one from Earth, Hillary seems better at these things than me.”

“Hillary has a lot of hidden talents. But what will the two of them do, whatever part of Earth they choose to live in? They’re going to need a home, and money to live on. I can certainly persuade Malika to make some kind of financial arrangement for Avery. But Margarette is penniless thanks to that sister of hers.”

“She has said she doesn’t want to prosecute Lisolette for defrauding her of her inheritance. I’m not sure I’d be as kind to her.”

“Its not kindness,” Talitha said. “She just doesn’t want anything to do with her sister. Hillary contacting the German tax authorities and freezing Lisolette's bank accounts is enough revenge. Her sister won’t like being poor, I suspect.”

“Avery and Margarette don’t seem to care if they are poor,” Marion noted. “As long as they’re together. Which is romantic and sweet, but not quite fair, somehow.”

“I can make sure Malika arranges a LOT of money for Avery,” Talitha said. “Though I don’t know how he would feel about that. It feels like charity, doesn’t it. Avery isn’t the sort of man who would be comfortable with that. He comes from a Caretaker family. He worked hard to be a Chancellery guard and to gain promotion and then transfer to the elite Presidential Guard – all by his own hard work. But he’s too young to have earned very much of a pension and he would know that only too well.”

“We’ll think of something,” Marion promised, wondering how Gallifreyan money was even exchanged for Earth currency. Kristoph had no trouble, but how would Avery open a bank account?

After they showered and dressed for lunch, the entire matter was taken out of their hands.

Hillary was excited at lunch, but wouldn’t tell anyone why. After they had eaten, though, she invited everyone to a private drawing room for the use of hotel guests with confidential business to conduct.

They were surprised when two men in business suits entered the room.

“This is Herr Gunther Fischer, of Fischer, Fischer and Bauer, solicitors of Frankfurt, and Herr Conrad Achterberg of Deutsche Bank, which is, of course, a leading financial institution in Germany. Herr Achterberg is from the Frankfurt branch.”

Margarette clutched Avery’s hand tightly. Both looked nervous. Frankfurt was, of course, Margarette’s home city. Two important men from that place arriving here at their Tyrolean hotel was worrying to them both.

After shaking hands with everyone the two men sat and opened briefcases full of documents.

“May I first confirm that one of you ladies is Fraulein Margarette Möller?” asked the solicitor.

Margarette looked even more worried but admitted that she was. The solicitor then asked her to confirm her identity, which worried her again, but Hillary presented Margarette’s passport. It was several years old, but the photograph was clearly of her. Herr Fischer showed the passport to Herr Achtenberg who nodded in agreement.

“I have been trying to find you for some years,” the bank executive said. “Since you turned eighteen and your trust fund was due to be signed over to you.”

“My trust fund?” Margarette answered uncertainly. “But Lisolette said that there was no money... That it had been invested badly.”

“Nonsense,” Herr Achtenberg responded. ”The fund was invested in a diverse and thoroughly profitable portfolio. Without your signature on certain documents it has remained intact and in fact, continued to grow. You may not realise that you ARE a very wealthy woman in your own right.”

“But Lisolette...” she began. “She said....”

Herr Fischer coughed and took over the explanations.

“I don’t imagine it will be much of a shock at this stage – Madame Hillary has explained something of your situation – but the fact is, your sister not only lied to you about your financial position, but when her own bad investments reduced her income, she fraudulently took out several large loans using your trust fund as collateral. On top of that, she has paid for several expensive hotels in various parts of Europe using credit cards she defaulted on once their limit was reached.”

“More than one financial institution is preparing to press charges against the elder Fraulein Mōller,” said Herr Achtenberg, taking the lead again. “That is why her accounts were all frozen three weeks ago following a tip off about her financial irregularities.”

At the mention of tip offs, everyone glanced at Hillary, who looked perfectly innocent – a state nobody who knew her believed in.

“None of that is anything to do with you, Fraulein Margarette,” said Herr Fischer. “You should not concern yourself in any way. If you have any worries or questions at all, I am happy to advise you. Fischer, Fischer and Bauer represented your father for many years, and we would be happy to deal with any legal matters for you.”

“Thank you,” Margarette answered. “I... might need some advice, soon. But....” She looked at the representative of Deutsche Bank. “How long would it take before I can use my money?”

“I have all of the papers here,” Herr Achtenberg assured her. “With your signature, I can open a current account allowing you access to cash and a gold standard credit card. The bulk of the money... with your consent... should remain in the share portfolio and high interest savings. I have a temporary bank card I can authorise immediately should you wish to buy clothes and... do other things young women like to do.”

“It will be good to pay back Madame Talitha for the clothes I have been able to buy thanks to her generosity. But... There is something a bit bigger....” She looked at Avery and he nodded.

“After I have signed these forms and I am in charge of my own affairs... can we all go down to Valdaora for a few hours,” she said. “There is something Avery and I would like to show everyone... Including both of you, mein herren.”

The two businessmen were a little surprised by the request, but they had travelled to the Tyrol to be of service to Margarette. They agreed to join the party in an eight seater taxi used by the Hotel Hubertus’s clientel to get down to the towns and villages of the Olang.

Valdoara was a charming little town with most of its buildings, private and public, built in a traditional Tyrolean style that only avoided cliché because they didn’t have men in lederhosen lurking outside.

Margarette brought everyone to a hotel much more modest than the Alpin Panorama. In its restaurant they had locally made hot biscuits and coffee served in the German way with a huge ‘schlage’ of thickened cream.

“It was this coffee that attracted me to Hotel Offenbach,” Margarette explained. “We had carbonara for lunch and finished with the coffee. The best tastes of both Italy and Germany in this place which is the best of both countries.”

Everybody knew enough of the turbulent history of the two countries, and the political football the Tyrol had been through that turbulence. It was peaceful and stable, now, and did very much represent a pleasant merger between two cultures.

“Are you thinking of making a home here in South Tyrol?” Marion asked. It was certainly a good compromise – Italian enough to be a complete break from her unhappy childhood and youth, but German enough to feel familiar in all the good ways -like thick cream in her coffee.

“Avery and I have been to lunch here several times,” Margarette continued. “And... we found out that it... The hotel... Is for sale. The couple who own it want to retire... buy a small house and relax. And... We wondered if... if we could buy the hotel.”

“I was going to ask if I could borrow the money from you and Lord Ducescci,” Avery said to Talitha “We would pay back every penny, of course....”

Marion again wondered about exchange rates with Gallifrey.

“But if I have my own money... We don’t need to borrow from anyone, do we?” Margarette looked at the solicitor and bank official. They both looked at Margarette and smiled in the indulgent way of a pair of uncles.

“You two think you can manage a hotel?” asked Herr Fischer. They said they were ready to try. He suggested they might look into local night classes in business administration so that they would know what they were letting themselves in for. Hillary applauded the idea and the two budding hoteliers agreed that it might be useful.

“Let us look into it, from both a legal and a financial point of view,” Herr Fischer suggested. “May I inquire, if it is not too presumptuous... if this is going to be a joint venture as a married couple?”

Both Avery and Margarette blushed. They had not formally announced any such thing, though in their hearts and minds they were quite certain.

“Yes,” Margarette replied emphatically. “A new start.... With a man who came to love me when he thought I was penniless. I know I can trust him to share my fortune.”

“Then congratulations are in order to you both,” Herr Achtenberg said. “I hope you will allow me to remain your main financial advisor, though you will need a local bank account for your new business.”

Margarette, who woke that morning without any bank account at all, took having more than one of them relatively easily.

“I’m going to have to arrange Italian citizenship for Avery,” Hillary said later, out of earshot of Margarette and her new advisors. “That is about the only thing standing in their way, now.”

“We’ve never asked how you manage these things,” Talitha said. “But I for one am quite glad you do.”

Later, Talitha and Marion had very welcome news that their husbands were on the way to join them in South Tyrol, their mission in another galaxy done with.

“Just as well,” Marion said. “We are about to lose our protection officer.”

Their explanation amused the two Time Lords, who promised to expedite Avery’s departure from the Presidential Guard and his permanent emigration from Gallifrey. Malika also promised a lump sum payment for Avery, in the local currency. As much in love as he was, it was good for a married man to have his own money .

“What happened with your peace mission?” Marion asked when they had exhausted their Italian holiday news.

“We made peace,” Kristoph confirmed. “That’s all anyone outside of the High Council needs to know. Don’t any of you worry about it.”

They didn’t, and their arrival a few days later was a joyful one.

“I am almost sorry we’ll be going home, soon,” Talitha commented. “It has all been quite amazing.”

“Frankly, I need a holiday before I report back to the Panopticon,” Malika answered her. “Kristoph tells me this region is at its best in winter, with skiing and toboganning... Whatever that is. I propose we check out next week, and take the TARDIS six months into the future. We can have a winter holiday and see how Avery and Margarette are getting on, and thanks to the gift of time travel, still be home before the Cúl nut harvest.”

Kristoph smiled in agreement. He wasn’t ready to step back into the complexities of Gallifreyan life just yet, either. It would suit him very well.