

Of Fairy Tales and Time Agents

By Penny

18th August 6983

Space Traveller 2 – Currently in orbit around Earth

There's a popular fairy tale that has been handed down from generation to generation, from parent to child, for many years. It has changed form slightly over the centuries, as all stories do: details had been expanded upon, other details left out altogether and new events added in as time progressed.

But some things are always constant.

The story always starts with a beautiful blonde princess with cheeks the colour of roses. It was said she travelled through all the dimensions in time and space with her handsome prince in their magic blue time machine.

Some stories would say that this time machine was nothing more than a small blue box that could barely fit one person, let alone the two of them. But most stories would describe it as a wonderful and huge castle that could travel great speeds and distances. These stories would speak of swimming pools in libraries and ever-changing rooms with wardrobes that offered an unending choice of clothing for every species imaginable, not just humanoids similar to the princess and her prince.

Somewhere along the way, all the stories would say, the princess and prince picked up another companion; the ever-charming captain. Now, the captain was not the kind, altruistic type of person that usually travelled with them.

Not by a long shot.

No, the captain was a con man and a former Time Agent. The fabled Time Agency had long since disappeared, and no one truly knew what it used to do, but every now and then, an agent would turn up out of nowhere, wreak absolute havoc and then disappear again. And at first, it seemed the captain would be like every other disreputable time agent.

For the captain to have been both a con man and a Time Agent, he needed to undergo many changes to make him worthy of travelling with the princess and prince. And indeed, by the time he parted ways with them, the captain was a reformed man. He had by now earned the right to call himself a hero, as many would later come to do, had he felt the inclination.

Before they left him though, the princess gave him a parting gift. For the princess loved

her captain so much that she called upon all the magic of the time machine and gave him the gift of immortality.

Although the captain would sometimes consider his gift as a curse, he returned to the planet Earth and used his gift to protect the prince's favourite planet from thousands of evil monsters. He re-shaped something called the Torchwood Institute into an organisation that he thought the prince would be proud of and defended the Earth, in his honour.

While he was with the Institute, the captain came across an earthling who was said to have a magical voice, with vowels that could reduce the captain to a melted puddle. The earthling was not a con man like the captain had been, but he tricked his way into the captain's life, so eager he was to get into Torchwood. After a while though, after a few treacherous ups and downs between the two, the captain and his earthling fell deeply in love.

United, they defended the Earth together, standing up to the evil monsters. One terrible day though, the inevitable happened, and the earthling fell, to the race known as the 456.

The captain was devastated by the loss of the man who was his partner, friend and lover and he left the planet vowing never to return. One day though, the captain began to pull himself back together and he started devising a way of getting back at the 456.

The prince heard of his plan, and even though the princess no longer travelled with him, and the prince no longer looked like the man the captain had known, he went after the captain trying to stop him. When he caught up with him, the captain had just discovered the 456's latest plot to steal the offspring of the people of a humanoid type planet. The prince, once he saw what the 456 were going to do, decided to help the captain after all and together they rescued all the children.

And if the prince saw the captain lay a trap that would wipe out the entire 456 race after the magic blue time machine had left, well, he never said a word.

The people of that planet were so grateful to the prince and, most especially to the captain, that they declared a national day of honour for the captain. He begged them to name the day in honour of his beloved earthling who he still missed desperately.

And to this day, that planet still honoured the day, on behalf of the captain's earthling and all the others who had fallen to the 456.

As I kissed my foster sons goodnight, after tonight's rendition of our favourite story, my mind began to wander to the part where the fairy tale turned to legend.

For it was also said, that when the earthling lay dying in his captain's arms, he had begged him never to forget him. The captain promised him immediately that he never would, and it was now the stuff of legends that the captain would return to the Earth

once every one thousand years, on what would have been the earthling's birthday, to commemorate their time together and to simply remember the man he loved. And most likely still did.

As I grew up, that story had stayed with me. The dedication that the captain showed to return every one thousand years seemed to me to be truly exceptional. I knew that no one would ever love me that much, but somehow that never mattered. Not when I knew that there was still such a love left in the world.

After my foster sons fell asleep, I readied myself to go out. The boys were old enough to look after themselves, should they wake up while I was gone, so I knew they would be fine.

The planet Earth had long been polluted so much so that life could no longer be sustained there, but people still made pilgrimages to view the planet that gave birth to the human race. I had spent the last nine months making sure I would be on this space ship, making sure that I would be overlooking the planet Earth at the time the calendar clicked over to August 19th.

Should the legend be true, the year 6983 would mark the 5th of the one thousand yearly visits by the captain, and if it really was true, I wouldn't miss it for the world.

I made my way to the bar, and as soon as I got there, I noticed a lot of extra people were there, including a number of people from my home world. It was rare to see my people this far away from our planet, but as they all acknowledged my presence with a subtle nod of their heads, I supposed that it wasn't all that unexpected. I recognised a lot of their faces, and although I didn't know any of their names, they would have been there for much the same reason as myself.

For that planet – the one where the captain had saved the children from the 456 – was my home planet. And even though I have no idea how many “greats” appear before his title, my great-great grandfather was one of the children the captain rescued. If the captain hadn't saved his life, then I would never have existed, and my foster sons would, quite likely, still have been homeless. I think it's a safe bet that the other people present from my planet would all have a similar story to tell.

I bought myself a drink and sat down near the window to wait and, as I did wait, my thoughts turned to my two boys. Jack, the oldest, had been with me for nearly two years now. His family had been killed by invaders and he was the only survivor. He had a lot of adjusting to do and we had had many rough patches. With the amount of love and care he needed, I had long ago decided he would be the only child I would foster.

That changed about six months ago, however, when I received a message from the fostering agency. They had a child there for whom they couldn't find anyone to take him in; he was a trouble child with a capital T. I told them no, but they sent me his details, and included a picture, regardless.

I sat in my living area and stared at the picture of the child. There was just something about this kid that grabbed my attention. Whether it was the sad half-smile on his face, or the soulful blue eyes, so similar to Jack's, I didn't know. But in the end, what sealed the deal was his name. Out of all the names he could have... I would now have my very own Jack and Ianto.

Within weeks, I knew I had made the right decision, as the two boys, with their matching blue eyes and matching personalities, had become inseparable. Ianto had a slight speech impediment, which had drawn constant teasing from children around him, which had in turn led to some of his behavioural problems. Jack, however, had no issues with Ianto's voice, declaring it to be the most beautiful thing he had ever heard. He soon took Ianto under his wing, and protected him as best he could.

I was torn from my thoughts of the boys about ten minutes before midnight, when a hush went through the bar. I looked up to see someone new had entered. He looked to be not much older than me, had short spiky hair that was vaguely messy yet still stylish and was wearing a long bluish, grey coat.

Everyone watched as he got himself a drink and walked over to the window that gave the best view of the planet below. We all continued to watch as he stood there, looking out the window, not even taking the smallest sip of his drink.

As the clock ticked over to midnight, he finally raised his glass and in the silence of the bar, could clearly be heard to say "Happy Birthday Ianto!"

He turned around then and stopped in shock as, to the last man, the entire pub stood up and raised their own glasses in a toast. Emotions played across his face and a tear finally escaped down the side of his face, as everyone simultaneously said two words.

"To Ianto..."

He looked around at all of us, and as his gaze passed over me, I was struck by what a familiar shade of blue his eyes were. He seemed to thank us all with his eyes before leaving the bar. We all stared after him in shock. The legends were real!

I looked around at all the other patrons from my planet and we all nodded at each other again. I knew that I would see them all, as I did every year, when we got together on our home planet for our annual celebration of our national day of honour, "Ianto Jones Day".