

THE PRESENT

By Richard Tornello © 2011

Why am I here you ask? I'll tell you.

I needed a gift for the Earth Winter Solstice Holiday for my wife Susan. She had accompanied me here with the other 49 childless couples to work as "pioneers". We were establishing The Springboard To Space for future planetary exploitation and travel. The company RENMIBEE and The Republic OF TEXAS were working together to accomplish this before other organizations arrived here. Every couple worked. We would be well rewarded for our sacrifices.

Time is not rotationally based as on Earth, but strictly clock based. We still celebrated our culture's holidays. Some called it Christmas, others The Solstice. I called it big trouble because the supply ship that had the gift for my wife, left it on earth. The holiday was the next day. I was so SOL. What was I to do?

We were allowed to carry so little in the way of personal stuff. I had my pet plant, a cactus that required very little water. That had to be explained to the company. Water was more expensive than unobtainium. They let me take it. It liked limestone based soils, lots of sunlight, which we had in abundance, and very little water. It is native to my Republic. Cultivated, it takes less than three years to bloom. They are so pretty.

Sue was allowed to bring some family treasures. She collected rare buttons from all over the world. She kept them in a display case. The case was small and light. Buttons, who would have guessed? A happy wife is a happy life, trust me. I wanted to keep it that way.

So what was I to do? Could I rip the button off an official passing through, like my college roommate used to do with hats? He stole a cops hat while the cop was sitting at a bar getting a bite to eat, and a fireman's hat, at a fire. I don't have those type of balls.

The other domes were too far away to purchase anything. The PX here was closed. Besides, they had so little of anything that would represent the feelings I have for her. Oh, and I forgot to mention it's was our tenth wedding anniversary and third year here in the dome.

I was looking out my dome window of our apartment. The sky was beautiful. I had my telescope pointed toward The Button Galaxy. It was magnificent. Maybe a screen shot of the galaxy done up with some alternative color might be a nice holding present until that special gift arrived on the next freighter.

Susan walked into the room; she was in something sexy, and accessible. It was obvious she was expecting something, and not just me.

I just wanted her to be my sex slave for the day, and nothing too kinky or painful. She never said no, and I guess for our tenth, I was going to get my wish. Oh my god!

Her beauty and her smile and her willingness inspired me. And then the solution, the gift hit me.

I said, "Sue tomorrow, I will take your watch and you can enjoy the day off to yourself if you like, or you can call in sick and we can share it together. It's your choice."

I continued, "Here's my prized cactus, a *Lophophora williamsii*. All the flowers are beautiful and have bloomed. They are called buttons. I know you love buttons. Dry them and mix them with tea. It will be magical, and it will be wonderful."

She grinned, gave me a kiss, copped a quick feel, and said, "They're beautiful."

"Happy Solstice." We both said to each other.

I gave her some magic buttons. She dried them in the wave. They weighed about 60g dried and made enough tea for both of us.

We sipped the tea and enjoyed the aroma. When we were finished I was sitting, smiling, just looking at her. She loosened her blouse and came toward me. I got my wishes that whole night, and we both got something that was mind blowing.

We celebrated a solstice that went on for what seemed like forever. Neither of us had ever experienced anything like that, alone or together.

We both got busted the next day and sent back home that very week on the shuttle that forgot my original gift. Home was something we both desired but never admitted, not wanting to put a damper on our working situation.

After the Solstice we had new desires. We really didn't care about any bonus.

So as you can see, we are home. As a botanist, I can always find a job.

BTW, one more thing, Anhalonium overrides most forms of birth control.

Happy New Year!

THE END