**Meanwhile on Gallifrey…. Part Two**

The headquarters of the Celestial Intervention Agency, the political police force of Gallifrey, was full of dead men, some of them on the floor, some in chairs, slumped over their computer terminals.

“What… happened to them?” Talitha asked.

“Murder,” De Lún answered darkly. “Cold blooded murder.”

He bent to examine the closest body, noting that it was a woman, not a man – the Agency recruited both genders.

She had died of suffocation. Most of the upper part of her body was covered in a milky white film almost like a spider web. It must have been flexible when it touched her skin, but dried and contracted rapidly. Her fingers were tangled with the stuff as if she had tried to tear it off her mouth, proving that it was a long, cruel death.

“All of them? None were able to fight back?” Talitha questioned as she recognised the director of the Agency among the dead. He had visited her home for dinner often. She felt his death in a very personal way.

“Not… quite all.” De Lún saw a movement in the corner of his eye. “Come out from there. It’s all right. We’re on your side.”

A young man with pale features and a nervous expression stood up from behind a desk. He tried to point a gun but he was so scared he dropped it. Talitha picked it up, quickly. De Lún put a reassuring hand on the young man’s shoulder.

“I’ve been out of what my son calls ‘the scene’ for a while, but I think I may still be recognisable as a Time Lord of honour?”

“Yes, sir,” the young man answered. He tried a bow to his elder and social superior but he was too wobbly on his feet to manage it. “I am Luthfi Gulang. People usually just call me Lu.”

“An agent?”

“Yes… that is… no… I mean… I interpret algorithms. I cross reference cases and… and… I’m a clerk.”

Even the Celestial Intervention Agency needed office workers.

“I… was in the stack. It’s what we call the database… where the case files are stored. It’s lead shielded. Nobody knew I was there. When the… bomb….”

“Bomb?”

“I don’t know what else to call it. A device… it exploded and covered the whole room with that… stuff. They all died. Look…”

He reached for the computer terminal under which he had been hiding. His wobbliness was apparently caused by cramp from curling up in the foot space beneath the desk while silently operating the terminal. He played back the security footage of the very room they were in. Talitha gasped in horror as she saw first-hand what she had only imagined before.

“That man… the one who walked out of the room just before… it happened. He’s the one who shot Malika… he’s the ringleader.”

“Ingio Calado,” Lu confirmed. “Yes… he is… was… one of us. He… betrayed us… betrayed us all.”

Lu flipped the view on the computer screen. A sequence of images showed the aftermath of another massacre. The Chancellery Guard had been taken by surprise, though they had been simply shot down by the men in the black uniforms who transmatted into their barrack room. The more unusual means of murder was reserved only for the Agency elite.

The communications centre, including the Transduction Barrier guards had also been taken down violently. As unarmed civil servants, it was even more terrible to see how they were massacred.

“Transmat within the Panopticon?” Talitha queried. “It shouldn’t be possible.”

“That’s why he hit the Celestial Intervention Agency first,” De Lún suggested. “He could take down the shields to let his soldiers in.”

“Where did he get the soldiers?” Talitha asked. That question had bothered her from the start. Private armies were not something even Oldblood patriarchs generally kept, and Calado was a scion of a Newblood family who made their fortune in offworld trade. They didn’t have huge estates with hundreds of Caretakers swearing allegiance to them.

Offworld trade… the very subject Malika had been talking about when this all began. But that was a coincidence, surely?

“Look at this,” Lu said in a dull, fearful tone. He had turned to the live broadcast from the Panopticon just in time to see five councillors executed – not by the guillotine, but simply by shooting them.

“They’re selecting the oldest, those without regenerations left,” De Lún said. “At least to start with….”

The reason for the selective executions was clear. As the last man fell, Calado turned to President Dúccesci who, though wounded, was still alive, slumped awkwardly on the Throne of Rassilon with two of the rebel soldiers flanking him.

“Five more will die unless you tell me what I need to know. I want the Temporal Portal. Give me the Key to unlock it… the Key only the President has access to.”

“I won’t,” Dúccesci responded. “You will have to shoot me in my other heart first.”

“Don’t think I won’t,” Calado replied. “How many regenerations do you have left? I can make you suffer over and over. But seeing others suffer for you is more interesting for now.”

“You can kill all of us,” Dúccesci responded. “But you will never rule Gallifrey by force of arms. There are too many loyal citizens….”

“Rule Gallifrey?” Calado laughed. “I don’t want to rule this pitiful world. I want to buy worlds of my own. The Temporal Key will give me unlimited wealth and nobody can stop me.”

He laughed in a cold, menacing way and ordered the selection of another five councillors.

“Malika is brave,” Talitha said in a small, choked voice. “But so many are dying for his bravery. I almost wish… I wish he would give them what they want to save the others.”

“It’s not a political coup,” De Lún mused. “It’s… robbery. Just robbery.”

The idea had not occurred to him. Greed of that sort was never a driving force on Gallifrey. Political ambition was lodged in many Time Lord hearts, and there had been plots to seize power by those who felt they weren’t rising fast enough, but murder on such a scale just to accumulate wealth was almost unthinkable.

“I don’t understand, still,” Talitha said. “Why does he need this… Portal?”

“The Temporal Portal… is a device that breaks all of the protocols that prevent anyone on Gallifrey from using time travel to change Gallifrey’s past,” Lu explained. “It is held here in the Celestial Intervention Agency headquarters, but the ‘Key’ is entrusted only to the Lord High President. Only he could open the Portal.”

“He wants to use it to make money retrospectively, investments using future knowledge, that sort of thing,” De Lún guessed.

“I still don’t understand,” Talitha insisted “Surely he could just take a TARDIS back in time and make those investments….”

“He would be caught,” Lu replied with utter confidence. “The Civil Service monitors that kind of thing constantly. What he wants is to change the past to his advantage without any way of tracing the changes. It is precisely why we are forbidden to travel back in Gallifrey’s own time, and why he needs to break the protocols.”

“I think there must be some deep-seated resentments involved, too,” De Lún added as they witnessed another five men, all Oldblood patriarchs, murdered. “The violence of his actions… they go beyond mere greed.”

“Sir…” Lu began to say tentatively. “He… has shown us how we can defeat him and make all this right again.”

“How can it ever be right? So many dead already….”

“The Portal can only be opened by the Lord High President … and he is sworn never to do so unless Gallifrey is in extreme peril. But… to stop Calado getting control of it… we could use it ourselves… to stop him doing what he has done.”

“How?” Talitha asked. “Malika is the only one with the secret.”

“Not so,” De Lún said. “And we must hope that Calado doesn’t realise this, or Malika’s life will be worthless.”

“FORMER Presidents have the Key, but the knowledge is locked in their memories when they step down from the office,” Lu explained.

“I am a former President,” De Lún reminded his companions. “I have the knowledge. It could be retrieved with a simple mind probe.”

“There is nothing simple about a mind probe,” Lu reminded him. “It is normally used to extract confessions from criminals.”

“Nevertheless, it could work. The only question is, should we do it? The Portal should never be used except in extremis… when Gallifrey is in terrible peril. This… is a dreadful situation… but it IS just robbery. Even if he DOES execute the whole of the Council….”

“No… it isn’t terrible peril like… I don’t know… an invasion by some terrible enemy race,” Talitha said. “But think of the families devastated by these murders. Think… of what he could do to the economy if he could travel back in time and subvert market forces. He could ruin us all… leave everyone on this planet, from Caretakers to Oldblood, destitute... and you are right... he seems so resentful… I think he would. Life would be changed utterly for everyone.”

“We must stop him,” Lu insisted. “We must stop him before he begins… before THIS happens.”

He waved around at the room full of dead agents. This was the place where it began. The bomb that killed them all was the first action of Calado’s plot. If that was stopped….

“Very well,” De Lún decided. “Prepare the mind probe.”

It was, as Lu said, an instrument of torture, and inflicting it on an elderly Time Lord was a terrible thing. Talitha watched fearfully as Lu operated the machine. If De Lún was killed by it, or even worse, injured mentally, it would only compound the horror of this day.

It was painful, but he bore it without complaint. When it was over he looked around at his two companions and nodded grimly.

“Fetch the Portal. I have the key.”

Lu brought the device. For all its potential power, it resembled a ceramic egg with a very tiny panel of buttons. De Lún carefully entered the long code that had been hidden in his head since he had been President for a term in much younger days. Then he set a time co-ordinate. He looked around again at Lu and Talitha.

“If this goes wrong, the paradox may fracture all of time and cause untold damage to the universe. If it goes right… I’m not sure what it will mean to the three of us….”

“I think I know,” Talitha answered him. “I’ve been thinking about it. But it doesn’t matter. Just give me the portal.”

“Give it to you?”

“Lu can’t do it. There is too much danger of him coming into contact with his earlier self. You could do it, but I don’t think you should. You’ve already risked enough putting yourself through the mind probe. And besides… I would be doing it for Malika.”

Again, De Lún nodded without speaking. He gave the device to Talitha.

“Good journey, my dear,” he said.

What happened next was a little unclear. De Lún recalled seeing Talitha disappear into thin air right in front of him. He recalled saying something to Lu, then going towards the passage back to the public gallery.

He didn’t remember actually making the journey back through the passage.

But he was in his seat again. Malika Dúccesci was winding up his speech about offworld trade. As he did so, a clerk from the Castellan’s office stepped up to the dais and handed him a note. He read it and his expression changed briefly. He glanced up at the public gallery, though it was unlikely that he could see anyone sitting there. After a slight pause he called on the Chancellor to make known his views on the offworld trade Bill.

In the gallery, the former Lord de Lœngbærrow moved from his front seat to sit next to the lady sitting quietly at the back. At the same time, a door in an alcove that nobody ordinarily noticed quietly opened. The young Celestial Intervention Agency clerk called Luthfi Gulang, known to his colleagues as Lu, slipped into the seat beside them.

“It’s strange,” Talitha said. “I seem to have two separate memories. In one I’ve just been sitting here listening to boring details of commerce and looking forward to tea with Malika later. In the other….”

She looked at her two companions who nodded in understanding. They had the same dual memories.

“I materialized in the middle of the Agency headquarters… everyone stared at me… I was scared they were going to shoot me or something. Then I reminded them… and myself… that I am the wife of the Lord High President. I told the Director about Calado. He was arrested and his bomb defused. His men were captured before they could transmat into the Citadel. By the way, most of them are not Gallifreyans. They are hired mercenaries from offworld. I knew there couldn’t be that many disloyal people on our world.”

De Lún let that pass. He knew disloyalty could be found anywhere, but if Talitha wanted to believe otherwise he could let her.

“I was a part of it all,” Lu said quietly. “I helped save everyone. But now it didn’t happen and they don’t know. I’m just a clerk.”

“I can probably say something to your boss… get you a promotion,” De Lún told him.

“No,” Lu answered. “I like being a clerk. I like that everyone is alive because of me, but I don’t need to be rewarded for it. It’s all right.”

“Good man,” De Lún told him.

“I don’t think I’ll mention any of this to Malika,” Talitha admitted. “We were just going to have a nice meal together after the session. I don’t want to worry him.”

“Quite right,” De Lún told her. He smiled softly. “I think I might tell my son. Some quiet afternoon over a glass of that single malt he is so fond of, I might tell him about the one time I got to be a real heroic de Lœngbærrow, true to our ancestral blood.”

“I think that would be all right,” Talitha assured him as Lu quietly stood and headed back to the secret door and the Chancellor’s voice rose up from the Panopticon floor - and life went on as usual.

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