**Meanwhile on Gallifrey….**

The long retired but still revered astronomer, Chrístõ de Lún de Lœngbǽrrow, had dropped into the Citadel, the political centre of Gallifrey’s capital city, almost by chance. He had heard that his successor as Chief Astronomer was attending a committee meeting and had hoped to discuss the latest findings on black holes with him.

He was disappointed to find that the committee meeting had finished early and the Chief Astronomer had already departed for his observatory at the southern pole.

With nothing else to do for the afternoon he signed the visitor’s book and went to sit in the public gallery to watch the day’s proceedings in the Panopticon. It was something of a novelty for him. He had spent a time many years ago as a High Councillor, considering it his duty to his world and to his family line, but he had rarely come to the Panopticon as a mere spectator.

It was quiet in the gallery. There was a semester break at the Academies so there were no students and the debate going on was not especially controversial. There was only one lady sitting near the back row as he took a seat in the front. He nodded to her politely and she acknowledged him in the same way, but the gallery was not the place for conversation. He discreetly settled himself and gave his attention to the Lord High President’s speech about offworld trade.

It was dull stuff and his mind drifted, lulled by the sound of Lord Ducessci’s slightly disinterested voice on a topic even he wasn’t especially enthusiastic about.

He – along with all of the slightly stupefied councillors below - was jolted awake a little time later by the sound of the West Portal crashing open. This huge door made of seasoned Granitewood was only ever opened on ceremonial occasions such as the inauguration of a President or an Oldblood wedding.

It was certainly not the means of ingress for a company of armed men wearing a black uniform with a strange logo on the chest. The few Presidential Guards within the chamber were quickly overwhelmed. The only one that tried to resist was shot dead immediately. That ended any possibility of rebellion from the ranks of the Councillors, though the chances of that amongst the old men in their gowns of office were remote to begin with.

Only one put up any kind of fight. The Lord High President himself, Malika Dúccesci. Chrístõ de Lún didn’t see exactly how he was subdued. He had already moved from his front row seat and was at the side of the lady in the other part of the gallery. He gently but firmly put his hand over her mouth to stop her screaming and pulled her into a dark alcove near the gallery entrance.

“Lady Dúccesci, as your life depends upon it, don’t even let yourself scream inside your own head,” he whispered. “Keep quiet and still in all ways.”

Talitha Dúccesci did just that. De Lún felt a surge of pride in her effort to calm her mind in such shocking circumstances. He held her close as he pressed himself into the recess and waited.

He didn’t have to wait long. Three of the black clad men burst into the gallery and searched thoroughly before deciding that there was nobody there. As he had hoped, the perception filters they were both wearing as visitors to the public gallery protected them. When one of the men glanced at the alcove his mind simply slid past without noticing anything.

As soon as they were gone, De Lún reached out for a small panel in the wall and pressed apparently randomly. A door opened behind them. He stepped back into the secret space with Lady Dúccesci.

“This passage is soundproofed and lead lined against psychic detection. You can scream if you feel the need, though do have consideration of my eardrums.”

“I… don’t want to scream,” she answered. “That time is past. But… Malika… what did they do to him and… who are they?”

“Malika is alive,” De Lún promised. “When a Time Lord dies violently every Time Lord near to him would feel it intensely. I feel sure you would know it in your hearts, too. Conversely you would know that he is alive, though in grievous circumstances.”

“Yes, yes I do,” Talitha admitted. “But what is happening?”

“A political coup,” De Lún answered. “I’m not sure who is the instigator. I don’t recognise the family crest at all.”

“I suppose that would be a little foolish… to launch a coup with anything that obvious to identify the origin before the plan is complete. But who on Gallifrey has his own army? And… where are we going?”

The passage was dimly lit but she could just about see that it sloped down a little and carried on for a long way.

“We’re going to the Celestial Intervention Agency. This is one of their security passages leading from the public gallery to their headquarters under the Panopticon.”

“The Celestial Intervention Agency have their offices beneath the Panopticon? I didn’t know that.”

“You have never been Lord High President. Awareness of SOME of the Agency’s security measures comes with the august honour and responsibility.”

“I’m afraid I didn’t know that you had been Lord High President,” Talitha admitted. “I should pay more attention to political history.”

She thought about what she had said.

“Oh, dear… I don’t mean that you belong in history….”

De Lún smiled slightly and let her awkward faux pas go. This was no time for social etiquette. Besides, right now, he didn’t feel as if he was a part of history. He felt curiously alive. He wondered if this was how his son had felt when he had done his shadowy and dangerous work for the Agency.

He was leading Talitha along the dark, tight corridor far more quickly than an elderly Time Lord ought to be able to move and it did seem quite incredible to think that his term as President was more than three millennia ago.

“Don’t worry,” he assured her. “I still remember the passwords.”

Talitha started to say something about that, but thought better of it. In a matter of minutes her world had been turned upside down. Her husband had been shot, and even if he wasn’t dead, he was a prisoner of these people who had taken the Citadel by force of arms. Her role as a devoted wife of a political leader had crumbled in that instant. Now she was a fugitive from the new order, running from almost certain arrest and detention.

And beyond her own personal problems, what was happening to the city, to Gallifrey? It was unlikely that a military coup would mean a happy future for anyone. Her mind filled with the dreadful possibilities, the cruelty, oppression, atrocities of all kind against the people of all classes.

“Sweet Mother of Chaos, Talitha,” De Lún exclaimed, turning to look at her as her thoughts overwhelmed him. “What in creation are you thinking about? What is a ‘guillotine’?”

“It is a means of execution – by decapitation…. A machine that decapitates people. I read about it in a book called ‘A Tale of Two Cities’. I borrowed it from Lady Marion’s free library a little while ago. It… is a story, a novel, but I understand that these things really happened on Earth… people were executed just because they were the aristocrats of that time. If… if this is some kind of popular uprising… by the Caretaker class… we are the Aristocrats of Gallifrey.”

“I’m sure nobody is going to cut off heads in the Panopticon,” De Lún assured her.

She wasn’t assured.

“There are many other ways to kill people,” she pointed out. “And.. you don’t know any more than I do what is really happening or why.”

If she had been Human, she might have been crying. As a Gallifreyan, without tear ducts, it was possible to appear outwardly stoical, but her distress was undeniable all the same.

“That is true, I’m afraid. But you must have hope, my dear. We are Gallifreyans. We do not give up to tyranny without a fight.”

That was not really true, either, De Lún was forced to admit to himself. The last time Gallifreyan manhood was seriously tested was the Sarre War when his son was a young man. But that was fought many light years from Gallifrey. The ordinary people were not touched by the violence of it except when the news of casualties came back to them. Ordinary people in the Capitol had never had to take up arms and fought for their very homes and the freedoms they took for granted.

How would Gallifreyans react to a new regime? Would they fight or would they comply?

He really wasn’t sure he could speak for the rest of his species. He only knew that he himself, was not going to give in easily. He was an old man even by a Time Lord measure of age. He was an academic who had spent most of his life at a desk. But he had the blood of soldiers in his veins. He was the grandson of Chrístõ Mal Loup, the Wolf, one of the greatest military minds in the history of Gallifrey, as well as the last man to bring an army into the Panopticon.

He was the father of Chrístõ Mian, the Executioner, the man who most successfully wielded the Celestial Intervention Agency’s sword against all enemies foreign and domestic.

That was the genetic stock he came from, and he wasn’t going to let either his grandfather or his son down.

“My son….” He whispered as the implications for his own family hit home. “My wife….”

Aineytta was offworld, visiting Earth with Kristoph and Marion. They were all safe.

No matter what happened here, they were safe.

Kristoph would certainly have fought this insurgency, if he was able. He would put his life on the line for Gallifrey without a moment’s thought.

But he was safe.

They had been moving steadily along corridors and down steps. They had descended far below the Panopticon. Just as Talitha was really wondering where they might actually be going they reached a door set into the wall. It was made of ribbed metal and looked very secure.

There was a keypad next to it. Without a pause, De Lún punched in a long sequence – the Presidential Code that opened many secret doors in the Citadel.

It opened this door and the two fugitives stepped forward into a well lit room that set them both blinking after the gloom of the passage.

When her vision cleared, Talitha screamed.

The room, 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. An eerie silence broken only by the automatic noises coming from the computers made the scene even more chilling.

“What… happened to them?” Talitha asked.

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