**One Lover Short of A Midsummer Night’s Dream**

Marion looked up at the sound of young Réme taking a jump in the paddock set up beside the formal garden. Bringing his horses had been a deal breaker when the family moved from Ventura to Polarfrey. With that ensured Réme was perfectly happy.

Rika seemed happy, too. But all she needed was to be in the same time zone as both Remonte and Réme for contentment.

Marion looked up at the yellow sun in a purple-azure sky that gave heat and light to this pleasant scene. It was easy to forget that the sun was an artificial one, in a carefully calculated orbit around the planet. Up to fifty years ago, Polarfrey had been a cold, dark place with little cheer outside the habitats provided for the miners and their families. Now it was very nearly a desirable place to live and work. Only the fact that ore mining was the principle industry held back the outermost inhabitable planet of the Gallifreyan system.

They had seen the artificial sun close up on an orientation tour. Deep filters on the windows of the shuttle craft made it possible to admire the technology. Rika had commented later that she would have been happy not knowing what the sun looked like close up as long as it gave warmth and light. Marion rather agreed with her.

“The orbit is programmed to give us seasons,” Rika commented. “We’re in summer now, but there will be autumn and winter later in the year. Actually, because the year is so long here, there are two sets of seasons before the planet has orbited the real sun. I expect I’ll get used to that.”

“I got used to yellow skies,” Marion admitted. “And everything else that came with life on Gallifrey.”

“I had become used to being Venturan,” Rika admitted. “I liked it there. But this IS a promotion for Remonte, and it is important for the political stability of the whole system after the mis-management of the previous governor. Do you know, he had imposed a light tax, saying it was needed to pay for the sun. Yet it had been paid for long ago by a subscription from the mining companies and is perfectly self-sufficient. Even if it was to go wrong, the Gallifreyan government is responsible for maintaining it at no cost to the ordinary people of Polarfrey.”

“I had heard about that,” Marion answered. “Such a charlatan. I’m afraid the High Council are dreadfully responsible for allowing him to get away with it for so long. They have to make up for what the people went through.”

The restitution was happening, bit by bit. Whether it would be fast enough to head off strikes and discontent among the population was what concerned Remonte most. Kristoph, as a sort of extraordinary minister appointed by Dúccesci to oversee the transition had the same concerns.

That wasn’t the reason why they were indoors on a beautiful, if artificial summer’s day, though. There was another matter that had been brought to their attention just after lunchtime that kept them in the governor’s private chamber. All Marion and Rika knew was that it involved one of the mine owners and a group of younger men and women who had been summoned to state their case.

Marion and Rika turned as the French door opened onto the garden. Kristoph brought two young women outside. He introduced them as Belgarac Reddan and Ellianass Drayoth. Marion was puzzled since neither surname was part of the Oldblood or Newblood families of Gallifrey. But these names came from the Polarfreyan tradition.

“Reddan?” Rika queried. “Your father is Erak Redman… he owns the Reddan mining company.”

“Yes,” Belgarac answered. “Father is… talking to Governor de Lœngbǽrrow.”

Marion looked at the other woman. She looked away nervously.

“Ellia’s father WAS my father’s chief mining engineer,” Belgerac explained. “He died when she was young. We were brought up together…. We always thought of each other as sisters… as equals. But my father, it seems, does not agree.”’

“Belle….” Ellia began to say. “I don’t blame him....”

“I do,” Belle answered. “If he hadn’t tried to run my life for me, then yours would not be….”

“It sounds like you ought to tell us the full story,” Marion said. “But have some tea, first.”

The tea was English Breakfast. Rika had acquired the taste from the Earth ambassador’s wife on Ventura and she had received a large box as a leaving gift.

Ellia and Belle were new to the taste. Whether they liked it or not was uncertain. They were too worried about their problem to think about anything so ordinary as tea.

“It’s all right,” Rika assured them both. “You are among friends, here.”

“It’s my father,” Belle began to explain. He want me to marry a man… Konn Lethralix. He is a good man, and the union would be good for business. His father owns a company nearly as big as ours. But… I don’t love him. And….”

“And I do,” Ellia said in a quiet voice. “I have loved him since we were all children together. And he loves me. We even…”

She blushed deeply and turned her face away. Glances were exchanged. Perhaps there were also some telepathic messages, but it was Marion who realised the truth.

“You’re having his baby? How long?”

“A few weeks, only,” Ellia answered. “We thought… they would have to let us be together. But Raddon is here to petition the Governor to force the marriage with his daughter.”

“Which I have refused to do. Even if Ellia and Kohn were not so much in love, I don’t WANT to be part of a business merger. I know it is how it has always been done in our society, but I don’t want to do it.”

“Is there somebody you would rather marry?” Marion asked Belle.

“No. I want to take up a post on the science platform and do mineral research. I don’t need or want a husband.”

“That’s all right,” Marion said. “A perfectly good ambition. The only thing it spoils is a rather nice literary comparison I was making in my head. We’re a lover short of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.”

Rika laughed in understanding. She had seen a performance on Ventura, again, in company with the Earth ambassador’s wife.

Between them Marion and Rika told the story of the pair of couples, Hemia who loves Lysander, Demetrius, to whom Hermia’s father Egeus wishes to marry off his daughter, and poor slighted Helena who is still very much in love with her former suitor, Demetrius. Ellia and Belle saw the similarity with their own case straight away. They smiled at the confusion brought on by fairy potions and laughed out loud at the comedy of Bottom the Weaver and the equally potion-deluded queen of the fairies but their thoughts were with the two loving couples.

“But how does it all end?” Belle asked. Marion began to explain but was cut off by Remonte as he came out of the French door to where the four ladies sat. Kristoph was behind him, followed by Konn Lethralix and Erak Raddon who was thunderously angry.

“It ends with Theseus being a good and wise governor of Athens. I hope I might emulate him this day.”

“You can,” Marion told him. “By doing exactly what he did – letting the young people decide their love affairs for themselves in defiance of fatherly demands.”

“My daughter is… mine,” Erak Raddon said. “She is MINE. She will do as I demand or….”

“Or what, sir?” Remonte asked. He saw his older brother go to sit beside Marion, leaving him to make his own judgement as Governor. He saw Konn Lethralix stand behind the two young women, slightly closer to Ellia, in fact, but not so much that it was noted by Erak Raddon.

“Or I shall call on you to ratify my casting away of the wayward and stubborn child. It is within your power as Governor.”

“By an old and out-dated law,” Remonte said. “One no modern-thinking man would wish to invoke, as I have already stated. You may, of course, cut off your daughter financially as well as emotionally, but I will not give your actions official approval.”

“There is no need,” Rika told her husband. “My dear, you CAN be Theseus in this. Konn Lethralix doesn’t even want to marry Belle. He loves Ellia and she loves him. Let the two of them be happy. You can marry them yourself this afternoon and then broker the business merger separately. Meanwhile, there aren’t any nunneries to send Belle to, but there is a scientific research platform where SHE can be happy.”

“That would be my solution to the purely domestic issue,” Remonte admitted. “But….”

“Sir….” Marion turned to Erak Raddon. “Why SHOULD your daughter be a part of the business merger? She isn’t a mine or a promising seam of ore. She is a young woman with ideas of her own. If you care for her… let her be. Konnx… do you really want to marry Belle in order to gain a stake in the Raddon company? Isn’t Ellia worth more to you?”

“She is worth far more to me. But… this merger…. It means expansion, jobs for many more men, better pay for them….”

“I understand that. But WHY, apart from tradition, must the deal involve Belle?”

“You dismiss tradition too lightly, Madam,” Raddon told her. “And small wonder. Your origin is infamous. And YOURS,” he added to Rika. “A foreigner and a Caretaker….”

“Who both married for love,” Belle pointed out. “They understand perfectly. Father… you have treated Ellia as your daughter since she was a child. Why cannot SHE be the one that is given to seal the merger? She will do so willingly.”

Raddon began to speak then stopped. For the first time there was doubt on his face.

“Are you telling me you didn’t even think of that? Is there some ancient law demanding that older daughters marry first like… like....”

“Taming of the Shrew,” Rika suggested.

“Yes, like that. Do you really want to break the hearts of both your daughters out of stubbornness when everyone can be satisfied if you just let them be.”

“The contract was to include Belle….”

“Let it include Ellia instead and it will be just as solid,” Konn Lethralix vowed. “Sir….”

He put his hand on Ellia’s shoulder and looked at her foster father keenly. There was a long silence and the air shimmered with the tension.

“The same terms?” Raddon asked.

“Of course. Unless you think Ellia is less worthy than Belle?”

“She is a fine girl,” Raddon admitted. “Very well, let us draw up a new contract.”

“Wedding, first,” Rika suggested. “Then contract. Then a dowry for Belle that will allow her to pursue her career without recourse to a man.”

“Then Remonte officially changes his name to Theseus of Athens,” Kristoph added.

Neither Konn nor Raddon fully understood the reference. Belle and Ellia promised to explain later.

“Mind you,” Marion said as Belle and Rika began talking to Ellia about an emergency wedding gown. “I honestly don’t know why Shakespeare had to make everything so complicated.”