**Mostly about Orin**

It was not yet spring on the southern continent. Rather, a dismal thaw was turning the landscape a muddy grey. It was the least inspiring time of the year.

Marion looked at the terrain from the back seat of Aineytta de Lœngbærrow’s car. Her mother-in-law had prevailed upon her to come on this drive, but her heart wasn’t quite completely in it.

She knew she ought to make the effort. Aineytta had been quite correct when she brought the matter up.

“You haven’t been to see Oriana since the naming ceremony.”

It wasn’t accusing, just a statement of fact. But still, Marion had no answer to it.

“I haven’t felt well enough to travel,” was her only excuse.

“But it isn’t just that, is it?” Aineytta had replied.

“No, really” Marion tried to say. “It’s just the thought of travelling across country and feeling sick in the car.”

But Aineytta knew the truth. She waited until Marion admitted it.

“Last time… when we lost baby Christian… when I went to Liverpool afterwards… everywhere I looked there seemed to be women with prams, newborn babies and proud mothers. And I couldn’t bear to look at them. I know it will be the same…. I won’t be able to look at baby Orin. I’m not sure I can look at Oriana. I don’t blame her in any way. But… I just…”

She hadn’t been able to talk any more. Her throat had felt constricted.

“I understand,” Aineytta told her. “But isn’t it better to face your fears than hide away from them? Besides, Oriana is starting to feel as if you blame her.”

“Blame her… for what?”

“For having a healthy baby when you didn’t.”

“No… I never… Oh, of course it isn’t that.”

But perhaps it was, just a little. Perhaps Aineytta was right.

In a way.

So, she put on a dress suitable for visiting and got into the car. If the journey had been quicker it might have been easy, but the long, dismal trek across the dripping plain left too much time for misgivings. She really wasn’t sure what she was going to say to Oriana or how she was going to feel at all.

She still wasn’t sure what she was going to say when the car came to rest in front of the beautiful house she called Fallingwater. The thaw meant that the name was appropriate again. The sound of the waterfall that the house straddled was still as tuneful as ever.

But so much had changed since she last visited this house.

Perhaps too much.

Oriana’s greeting was congenial enough. She seemed positively glad to see her. For a few minutes there was a flurry of orders to servants to bring refreshments and the ritual of pouring herbal tea and passing around biscuits. There was no need for any sort of conversation beyond ordinary politeness.

But then, as they retreated from the tea table to the long sofas that Marion had helped to choose for the wide, airy drawing room a woman in a nursemaid’s uniform brought the baby to Oriana. Marion tried not to look envious as her sister in law fed the baby.

“I’m glad you decided against a wet nurse,” Aineytta told her daughter. “It is so much more natural to feed him yourself.”

“I hate it at night,” Oriana admitted. “When it is dark and a little cold and I feel tired because it was only a few hours since he went to sleep. It’s hard to be cheerful about motherhood, then.”

“Yes, I’m afraid it is,” Aineytta answered with a knowing smile. “In the great houses in past generations, it was common for a nursemaid to bring the child to the mother’s breast while she kept on sleeping. I always thought that was a very lazy practice.”

Oriana, to her credit, managed to look as if that idea appalled her.

“You never did that?” she asked her mother.

“No. But being tired in the night was still a struggle for me. Of course, in the Caretaker villages the solution was easy. Two mothers would take turns. One would be available to feed both babies while the other slept or more often than not, worked. Don’t look so appalled. Its certainly no worse than employing a wet nurse. At least they did it out of friendship, not as servants, and the babies thrived well enough with two mothers.”

Oriana couldn’t contemplate the idea. Marion was a little puzzled by the idea, too. She couldn’t imagine it in the streets of Birkenhead where she was a child. Perhaps in tribes of Aboriginal Australians or the Inuits of the Arctic circle countries where family units were less self-contained, but not in the culture she knew.

“It… is possible… to save milk in bottles for during the night,” she said, to the surprise of the other two women. “Then the nursemaid could feed the baby if you are very tired. It… is also useful if you have to be away from him for an afternoon or evening.”

“Save the milk?” That idea didn’t seem to have occurred to either of the Gallifreyan women.

“It is how a lot of women on Earth feed their babies naturally, while also being able to have jobs. The equipment for expressing the milk is readily available in shops like Mothercare. I….”

Marion stopped talking. Thinking of Mothercare reminded her of those many women with healthy babies that she had envied. For a little while, talking about the practicalities of feeding Oriana’s baby she had managed to control her feelings, but Mothercare tipped the balance. She sat back and closed her eyes, breathing slowly and deeply.

Oriana finished feeding Orin and got ready to give him back to the nursemaid.

“He needs changing,” she said to the girl.

“Wait…” Marion opened her eyes again and stood up. “Are you… seriously… going to give your baby to another woman to change his nappy?”

Oriana was puzzled by the very question. Aineytta laughed softly. She knew what was coming without any need of psychic precondition.

Marion crossed the few feet of soft carpet and took the baby from the maid, passing him straight back to his mother before sending the girl to fetch the necessary materials for a nappy change.

“You’re his mother,” she said, barely thinking about that brief few seconds during which she had held baby Orin. She wasn’t going to dwell on how very tiny and light he still felt after his premature birth. “Even if you ARE an aristocrat, born with a silver spoon in your mouth and all that, you SHOULD change him at least once in a while. You should be ashamed of yourself not to want to be involved in every part of his care.”

“I AM involved in his care,” Oriana protested. “But… the changing….”

She wrinkled her nose distastefully. Her mother laughed again.

“Marion is right,” she said. “You should do the nastier jobs some of the time.”

“I’m not sure I know how,” Oriana admitted. The maid was back and Marion instructed her to lay a soft towel on the tea table, then set the powder and creams and cleaning wipes beside it.

“That is a VERY expensive rosewood table,” Oriana pointed out.

“Then you need a changing mat for future use,” Marion replied. “Put the baby down on the towel for now.”

Oriana did so, then looked at her mother and then at Marion, even towards the maid. Her helplessness was clear on her face, but none of the three were offering assistance. It wasn’t the maid’s place to say so, but she privately agreed with her employer’s sister-in-law.

With no other option, Oriana began to unfasten the baby-grow and, with some suggestions from Aineytta, performed the task of cleaning her baby.

Marion allowed the maid to assist in so far as removing the used nappy and the wipes. Who wouldn’t want help with that? But she let Oriana apply the cream and talc and open up the clean nappy for herself.

“I… don’t know what to do,” she said holding it up to the light. “Which way….”

“Follow the arrows,” Marion told her. “Actually, I think these Gallifreyan ones are a bit rubbish. We SHOULD have a trip to Liverpool for supplies. I could show you the equipment for saving milk, while we’re at it. Plus, there are loads of lovely baby clothes. The hover mode on Gallifreyan prams is superior, admittedly, but everything else can be got in Lord Street.”

As she talked she didn’t let herself think about anything other than shopping for her nephew. Oriana didn’t even think of that while she worked out how to use press on tabs to secure a nappy.

But it wasn’t rocket science, after all. Before she knew it, the job was done. She lifted Orin into her arms and cuddled him. She got talcum powder on a fine chiffon dress in the process, but that didn’t matter as much as she thought it would.

“It is never going to be your favourite activity,” Aineytta assured her. “Any woman who says different is a liar. But he is your baby and everything you CAN do for him rather than passing it on to a servant is a bond between you and him.”

“I… think I understand,” Oriana admitted. “You… had dozens of servants. But… you did all these things yourself?”

“Of course, I did. MY mother would have thought I had become a spoiled, lazy woman if I hadn’t. I liked having servants once I got used to it, but I cared for my own children.”

It was still a novelty to Oriana. She sat with Orin on her lap and thought about it a little more.

“How exactly are Earth nappies better than our ones?” she asked Marion after a while. “We have the best technology in the galaxy. We have the secret of time travel. Surely we know how to make something like that.”

“They don’t have enough layers and they let the wetness back onto the baby’s skin,” Marion answered. “The best Earth ones have a one-way membrane that stops that happening. They don’t need changing as often.”

“Then we shall definitely buy some of those,” Oriana decided. “It will be less work for the maid as well as for me. It does seem odd, though. Your world is so primitive, but they thought of such things as a one-way membrane for a nappy.”

It occurred to Oriana that ‘primitive’ wasn’t such a tactful word to use. She apologised – something else that was relatively new to her.

“It is called hubris,” Aineytta explained. “We are high and mighty people with the secrets of the universe at our fingertips, but we forget about the simple things. There is a lesson to be learnt.”

“Or perhaps Earth people would have learnt to master time travel if we’d spent less time on the design of baby products?” Marion suggested. It was a joke, perhaps not the best joke ever, but she at least felt able to make one. Oriana laughed politely. So did Aineytta.

In the midst of the laughter, Aineytta took Orin from his mother’s arms and gave him to Marion.

“It’s time you held him properly,” she said. Marion was surprised to find that she was getting a lesson, too. She cradled Orin gently in her arms, his lightness still taking her by surprise. She did so without tears, without a choked up throat or any feelings of regret. She smiled at his upturned face and caressed his cheek. She noted that, while being as light as a full term newborn he had the fine motor skills of three months old, able to grip her finger in his hand, to focus his eyes on her. His neck muscles were strong and he didn’t need as much support to stop his head flopping. He was growing into a healthy young son of the House of de Lœngbærrow.

“No woman can resist a baby for long,” Aineytta said with the smile of one who had achieved all her goals for one afternoon.