**Mostly about Oriana**

“Galliss had to stop the car three times on the way here,” Marion admitted as she sat on a comfortable seat under a shade in the Dower House garden and accepted a cooling drink from her mother-in-law’s footman. “I felt so very sick. Worse than any time before when I was pregnant.”

“I will give you a preparation for that,” Aineytta told her. “But those symptoms should soon pass. Or if they don’t, at least with winter coming in a few months you will be at home more often, anyway.”

“That’s true,” Marion admitted. It was mid-Septimus, now. The warm afternoons turned to cool evenings very quickly, and the mornings took time to warm up. In a few weeks’ time, they could expect the weather to turn much colder. Mount Loeng House would be a quiet retreat for Marion.

But there was a point when retreat became prison, when solitude became loneliness.

“Come and visit,” she asked. “I don’t want to spend all winter in the White Drawing Room on my own.”

“You will have plenty of visitors,” Aineytta promised. “Once your pregnancy is formally announced everyone will want to pay their respects. The advent of an Oldblood heir is a great joy that everyone will wish to share.”

“Not everyone,” Marion answered. “There are still those who think I should not bear children.”

“There were some who said the same about me,” Aineytta noted. “Take no notice of such intransigence.”

“Some of the remarks have come from Oriana,” Marion admitted, though she hated to do so. Aineytta was proud of her family. She loved her children. The fact that her eldest daughter displayed such elitist attitudes distressed her.

“Oriana has no excuses,” Aineytta said. “But she is an unhappy soul just now. Her husband is under suspicion along with his brother for this scandalous drug smuggling that has been going on. She is feeling the humiliation of sudden silences when she walks into the Conservatory, whispers and gossip behind her back wherever she goes.”

“That is no reason for her to be spiteful to me. She knows very well that I wouldn’t spread such gossip... even if I had been to the Conservatory lately. My stomach has not been strong enough for places where food is served. I haven’t even been to my own kitchen for at least a fortnight.”

“Spite is indiscriminate. But it is also easy to dispel. Give it your silence and it will wither like an unwatered plant. Meanwhile, it is to be hoped that Lessage is not so fully involved in that disgraceful business as rumour suggests. Moony is utterly outraged at our family being even distantly connected with the matter.”

“So is Kristoph. He has been quite vocal on the subject. I’m afraid he DOES think Lord Lessage is involved. Not with the actual smuggling, but perhaps financing it. And even for love of his sister he is not going to prevent that possibility being investigated.”

“Nor should he!” Marion looked around at her father-in-law coming across the lawn to them. “I rue the day our daughter was joined in Alliance to that profligate fool. If he is proved a criminal as well, then it will be a lesson to us all, but the blame and the shame stop with the House of Lessage. Our House stands away from them. Oriana can decide for herself which she stands with.”

Marion was surprised by the ferociousness of his comments. She had always found her father-in-law to be a gentle soul, usually wrapped up in his scientific thoughts.

This drug smuggling scandal was upsetting a lot of people in different ways.

“Sit down, my dear,” Aineytta said. “Have a calming herbal infusion.”

Her husband sat and accepted an iced version of the infusion with fruit added. He smiled indulgently at his wife and drank it slowly.

“I think a glass of that imported single malt my son indulges in might do me just as much good,” he admitted. He was going to say something more, but a disturbance inside the Dower House interrupted his thoughts of calming beverages. A footman tried to announce the disruptive visitor, but the very subject of the conversation, Oriana Lesage, stormed past him.

Marion wasn’t in any sense scared of Oriana, but she really wasn’t in the mood to talk to her. She sat further back in her shaded chair hoping to be inconspicuous.

It was partly successful. Oriana was too angry to take notice of her. The retired Lord de Lœngbærrow was the focus of her ire.

“My husband has been arrested,” she said. “YOUR son was there.”

“My son... Your brother?” he asked in case there was confusion.

“My BROTHER!” Oriana spat out the word as if it were poison. “He told the Castellan that Segev was involved in the Jex smuggling along with his brother, Anil. He was there when the Chancellery Guard searched our home. OUR HOME. Men... some of them of common stock... went through every room, every outbuilding, all of the gardens. They touched all of my clothes. I... I feel contaminated.”

“And did they find any drugs?” her father asked, ignoring her histrionics and focussing on the plain facts of the matter.

“No. Of course not. But... They took away evidence from Segev's private study. It was....”

She stopped speaking. There was something about the way both her parents were looking at her so scathingly that finally penetrated all of her attempts to be outraged.

“They FOUND proof of your husband’s involvement in this disgraceful business?” Her father asked.

“Yes. But they never would have come to our home if Kristoph had not encouraged them to do so. He brought the shame, the indignity, upon us. “

“He did not,” Aineytta said in surprisingly calm tones. “Tell the truth, daughter, and do not shame your father’s great lineage with deceptions.”

Oriana opened her mouth to speak, then stopped. Her expression and cheek colour told of acute embarrassment.

“Words are not needed,” Aineytta continued. “You are my daughter. I bore you within my body. I can see your thoughts as clearly as when you were nourished by my blood. I see exactly what happened. The Castellan was fully prepared to arrest you as an accomplice to this disgraceful matter. You lived in that house of shame. You were, at least so he thought, party to your husband's business affairs. Kristoph protected you. He assured Pól Braxietel that you were too naive, too much the ‘decorative’ wife to share any blame. That is why you were free to come here with your cries of betrayal instead of answering to the Castellan’s interrogation along with that shameful husband of yours.”

“Is that the truth?” her father demanded.

Oriana nodded. Her face was fully red with shame, now. To be deemed innocent of a crime because she was too stupid to know about it was an added level of embarrassment.

“Shame on you for twisting your brother’s good intentions towards you in that way,” Aineytta told her. “Where did you get such deceitful ways, if not from living in a House of Shame where it seems that lies have been common currency for a long time.”

Again, Oriana had no words with which to defend herself. In her embarrassed silence, her father stood and squared his elderly shoulders. Scientist though he was, happiest among telescopes and mysterious tools for measuring the distances between stars, he was the elder Patriarch of an Ancient and Noble House of Gallifrey. In that moment nobody could be in any doubt about that, least of all Oriana.

“Then the situation is clear. The House of Lœngbærrow stands aloof from the shamed House of Lessage from this day until its honour is restored by some later deeds. You, daughter, have a clear choice. Stand by the husband you pledged your Alliance to, share his shame and be separated forever from all honour... or stand with the House of your birth and keep your honour and your dignity.”

Oriana looked at both of her parents for a long time, as if she was thinking long and hard about her position.

And so she should, of course. Oldblood Houses stood or fell upon their honour. The House of Lessage was a Newblood House, its fortune made by commerce, but it, too, stood or fell by its honour - and that was now in shreds. A lowly scion of the family committing a crime might be overlooked, especially if that scion was disowned. But the head of that House, Segev Lessage, Oriana’s husband, was accused of conspiracy to commit a despicable crime. The whole House was shamed by that.

“I cannot stand aloof from my husband,” Oriana said weakly. “I bear his child. It is a son.”

“Daughter... You did not say....” Aineytta was surprised. Marion was even more certain that Oriana had not even noticed her presence.

She was surprised to find herself sympathising with Oriana's plight. Her husband might be imprisoned for his crimes. On any world, in any social class, having a baby in that situation was terrible.

“The child is of MY line as much as it is of the Lessage line,” her father told her. “And MY line is the one that can be traced back to the first Twelve Houses. Stand with us, with the family that has loved you from the day you were born. Your brother who is Patriarch since I retired to the peace of this Dower House will allow the child to bear our family name. He need not carry the shame of his father’s dishonoured House.”

Oriana gave a soft cry and knelt at her father’s feet. She spoke in Old Gallifreyan which, to Marion’s ears had a strange cadence. She asked his forgiveness and begged to be received back into her birth family.

Her father replied in the same old version of the Gallifreyan language accepting her petition.

And that settled the matter. She was forgiven all of her mistakes.

“Come, now,” Aineytta said in gentler tones. “Sit in the shade with Marion. I am going to fetch the herbs you both need as a tonic at this time in your pregnancies.”

Oriana looked at Marion for the first time since she arrived. Her expression was impossible to gauge. She sat next to her in the shade and seemed relieved to do so.

“I... expect you find all this amusing,” she said with her last vestige of pride.

“No. I find it all dreadful. I... also wonder why it is that there is no concept of innocent until proven guilty about this matter. Surely there is a possibility that your husband is not involved? Everyone is assuming the worst.”

“No, they should believe it,” Oriana admitted, her head turned to avoid eye contact. “I WAS foolish not to realise what was happening. I knew he had paid off many of his debts. I didn’t know he had committed a crime to do that. I had never even heard of the crime he committed. This substance... Whatever it is called.... I had never heard of it....”

“Nor had I, though I know of illegal substances that are bought and sold in other places. It is a problem on my world. I was shocked to learn that such things might be happening here. I hope Pól is able to stamp it out quickly. But I am sorry that his doing so causes you grief, especially with a baby.... “

“The months ahead... seem bleak. Even with father’s promise... My child will be less than yours. He will not be the Patriarch in the fullness of time. “

“They will be cousins. They can play and grow together... Prepare for that dreadful Untempered Schism together. That’s all that really matters.”

“They will be Prydonians,” Oriana reflected, and she had forgotten in that instant that she was talking to somebody she considered inferior to her.

“Not until they are much older. I won’t see my child graduate from the Academy.”

It was a plain fact. Marion was not complaining. But in her vulnerable time Oriana saw that she was not the only one with problems - possibly the first time in many years that she had done so.

In the moment of détente Aineytta came back into the garden carrying large glasses of something blue with what looked like rose petals dissolving into it.

“Drink it as soon as the last harmona petal dissolves. The best of the medicinal value is in that instance. Drink it quickly. It isn’t a tea to linger over.”

They drank. It tasted like an effervescent fruit cordial. Both women felt energised and healthy almost immediately. For Marion, the sick feeling in the pit of her stomach that had been there since the lagoon crossing in Venice was gone. For Oriana, a quite different discomfort was relieved, though one she was too well brought up to talk about.

“If anyone should be accused of distributing mysterious drugs, it should be Aineytta,” her husband joked.

“Oh, no, father. I cannot make light of that subject,” Oriana protested. “It is too dreadful.”

“I agree,” Marion said. “We should talk of other things.”

“We shall talk first of daily tonics that will give you both strength,” Aineytta decided. “And other preparations that will make the second and third trimesters easier. You will need iron, Oriana. You, less so, Marion. Your Human blood makes it for itself, but it would be good for the Gallifreyan child you carry.”

“We are in your hands, Mama,” Oriana admitted. For a moment, she almost smiled. Despite her troubles having a baby was a joyful thing, and Aineytta was there to give her all the help she could.

But then the trouble returned to her. Kristoph came to the garden. The footman didn’t even try to announce him, instead discreetly backing away.

His expression was unreadable, but everyone looked at him with trepidation. Oriana reached out and found Marion’s hand to cling to. Aineytta stood and embraced her son. He responded in kind. His father stood, too, his instincts telling him that there was news that would chill the warm afternoon air.

“Oriana,” Kristoph said. “I am sorry.”

“Sorry for what?” Marion asked him. Oriana couldn’t speak. She couldn’t even raise her eyes to look at her brother. “What has happened that was worse than it was before?”

“Much,” Kristoph answered. “Much that is worse.”