**Ex-Presidents Day-Part I**

The executive lounge was near the top of the central tower of the Citadel with a glorious view of the plaza below through the floor length windows. Refreshments prepared by a top chef were laid out on a linen covered table. A wall sized televideo screen with glorious high definition images showed the Panopticon in all its glory on a special ceremonial day.

The lounge had been prepared for a special group of the high-born ladies of Gallifrey, the wives of former Lord High Presidents.

There were seven of them. The elder Lord de Lœngbǽrrow was the first, though actually not the oldest still living President. His human daughter-in-law had trouble encompassing the fact that it was three millennia since he had retired from the honoured position in order to return to his favourite occupation as Chief Astronomer of Gallifrey, dividing his time between the observatory at the southern pole and his home and family that he loved just as dearly as the most compelling black holes in the quadrant.

So he always assured his wife and children, and Aineytta had never let on to anyone if she ever doubted his word when some obscure astral body thousands of light years away commanded his attention.

After him had been two men who had died in office. The first, named by De Lœngbǽrrow as was his right as the retiring President, was Lord Carul Argenlunna, loved and respected in equal measure by all classes of Gallifreyan society. He had served for two decades before dying suddenly and tragically when the presidential shuttle crashed on approach to the Venturan space port.

Lily d'Alba Argenlunna, cousin of Carul Argenlunna, as well as widow of Jules d'Alba who had also served as Lord High President for a short time represented both of her late relatives with quiet and assured grace.

Because Argenlunna died without naming a successor, this had been a difficult time in Gallifreyan politics. The power vacuum was filled, in a far from satisfactory way, by one Deccan Kocieda. He was a younger son of a younger son of a Newblood family who had the odd distinction of not holding the title of 'Lord' in his own right before becoming President.

That was not the sole reason that he had been unpopular with the Oldblood elite. More ominously, he had tried to pass several laws that would have reduced the influence of the Oldblood families in the social order of Gallifrey. Kristoph had explained it to Marion as like the efforts made from time to time to remove the House of Lords from British politics, admitting that it wasn't a completely accurate analogy, but the best he could do.

But Koscieda was not just a reformist. The suspicion had always lingered that even being president for life wouldn't be enough for Koscieda, and his next move would be to appoint himself as some sort of absolute dictator without the checks and balances of the High Council.

Even before Marion asked the obvious question Kristoph denied strenuously that any Oldblood family had paid an assassin to poison him in his sleep. That was a scurrilous lie that had been quashed almost as soon as it had been given air.

Besides, he added quietly, and with a wry smile, the Celestial Intervention Agency didn't do privately funded assignments. The expression in his eyes even as he smiled with his mouth had made it clear that NOBODY asked the other obvious question.

Marion didn't ask!

 The man who succeeded Koscieda in a hurriedly arranged ceremony, had been old even by Gallifreyan years when he took the oath, an odd choice for a strenuous role in politics. Nevertheless, Lord Chiron Reidluum had been an able and respected leader. He had retired from political life nearly eighty years ago and he and his wife, Lady Andrissa, were only rarely seen at public events. This was one of those infrequent times when they came to the Capitol from their country estate. Lady Andrissa was the acknowledged FIRST First Lady among those in the gallery. She was not in the best of health these days and walked slowly with a stick. She was brought to the lounge by a special Presidential Guard escort who made her comfortable on a wide sofa where she could lie down if she was tired. Her granddaughter-in-law, Mia Reidluum, was settled beside her in her electronic wheelchair.

Sitting near the Reidluum ladies was Bellira Gyes, whose husband had been Lord High President when Marion came to Gallifrey to marry Kristoph and take her place amongst the ladies of the Oldblood aristocracy.

Lady Alanna Stǐllhǽvęn was one of those aristocrats from birth, but confessed to feeling a little out of place among the First Ladies as her husband, Almanzo Gris Stǐllhǽvęn had only been Lord High President for a few hours when a sudden illness forced him to name a successor. Even those few hours, though, entitled him to be counted amongst those great leaders of the Gallifreyan people and for his wife to sit with the noble wives.

That named successor, of course, had been Kristoph de Lœngbǽrrow, a popular choice amongst the people despite some political enemies. He had never intended to be President for life – not even for a decade. He had stepped into the role only out of necessity and was determined to resign when a suitable choice came along.

His choice had been Malika Dúccesci, an Arcalian, traditionally a political rival of the Prydonian Chapter that the de Lœngbǽrrow patriarchs adhered to. But Malika was an able politician, loyal to his planet first and foremost, and he had proved to be a good choice in every way.

Talitha Dúccesci sat by Marion's side. They were friends beyond the political interests of their respective husbands. Both were proud to be amongst the wives of so many great men, and a little in awe of the women they were keeping company with.

"I wonder if Malika and Kristoph feel the same way?" Talitha whispered. "Are they sitting in the ante-room feeling like the new boys in the senior common room?"

"I don't think so," Marion answered after thinking about that for a few minutes. "Except for Chiron Reidluum they are all family friends - or actually family in the case of his father. He spoke of looking forward to meeting Reidluum for the first time in fifty years."

"Lord Chiron sent a very nice message of support when Malika was invested," Talitha noted. "He approved of the choice, but he said that appearing at ceremonies was tiresome."

"He didn't have an opportunity to send a message to Kristoph. His investiture was so sudden. But I know he approved of him, too. And more importantly, having Reidluum's approval mattered a great deal to Kristoph. If he ever had any doubts about taking on the huge responsibilities, he remembered that he had men like him behind him."

Marion looked around at the other women she considered friends, women she often lunched with in the Capitol or dined with at their country homes.

She smiled suddenly as a thought occurred to her.

"The reason we're all here in this room… is because by long held tradition wives attend only the last part of the ceremony honouring our men."

"Yes," Talitha answered, perhaps wondering where her friend was going with that comment. Here in the Citadel there were so many psychic dampeners that it wouldn't have been possible to read her mind even if she had considered doing anything so impolite.

"One day, long held tradition might have to consider the possibility of a First Husband. There are already quite a few women in strong positions within the High Council. It could happen. Or… what about those Time Lords with that gene… that allows them to change…. One day tradition might have to be shaken up."

"Yes, it might," Talitha acknowledged. "That will be interesting. But for now we're all women and our spouses are all men. Tradition is safe for a generation or so."

Marion nodded. Then they all turned to pay attention to the screen. The ceremony that honoured the living Presidents was about to begin, though it would still be some time before the Presidents themselves were still not actually present in the Panopticon, yet. The Chancellor, Premier Cardinal and Gold Usher made a colourful triumvirate in blue, scarlet and gold upon the hexagonal dais where the Throne of Rassilon stood empty. There would be a processional entrance of the Presidents after a certain amount of glorious pomp and ceremony.

The ceremony began with some loud and rather dramatic music. Marion was reminded of the weightier works of Wagner – if any of his works could be considered 'light'. A huge pipe organ that took up all of the space behind the Throne Dais was the source of the music, played by a man in a green robe.

Marion looked at her gilt edged programme for the evening. The piece of music was written some six thousand years ago by a man called Marvix Kocieda, and was titled Gallifrey Mine.

Kocieda? Marion wondered at the coincidence of that name – the name of the one former President of three millennia not represented today.

This composer must be a different Kocieda, Marion considered. He had to be a father or grandfather or uncle of that Deccan Kocieda whose name had been all but erased from the line of Presidents.

But that title – Gallifrey Mine – put together with that family history was a little disturbing - especially when the music sounded so Wagnerian. Wasn't Wagner Adolf Hitler's favourite?

But perhaps that wasn't Wagner's fault, since he lived and died in the century before Hitler was born, and after all she was the only listener who would make that association here on Gallifrey.

In any case that piece of music came to an end at last. It was followed by a much gentler piece played on Gallifreyan harps, instruments with a similar sound to the concert harps Marion knew, but in two halves, hinged in the middle, the left side played by the left hand and the right side by the right hand. It sounded like two harps played at once and was very pleasant to listen to.

That was followed at last by the Gallifreyan Anthem, known as Gallifrey: Our Childhood: Our Home. It had always seemed to Marion that the title was oddly sentimental for the stoical Gallifreyan, but all the same it was a beautiful tune and she felt the same pride in it that those whose childhoods had been spent on Gallifrey. She and her friends stood in the VIP lounge along with those in the Panopticon itself.

As it ended, everyone remained standing for a fanfare that introduced the Presidents entering in procession. The Great Doors were opened and there was an air of expectation.

But when the fanfare ended, there was an awkward silence. The Premier Cardinal turned to the Master of Music who restarted the fanfare.

But as it died away the only person who appeared was a young Chancellery Guard who ran in through the Great Doors, his breathless cry loud in the silent Panopticon.

"They're…. Gone."