

The characters Jeffrey Andrews, Na'Krista Nahala Keth, Kamram Keth, Na'Kesta Keth, Bosteg Haas, Kestam Ramm, Treman Baze, Merret Treet, Tascal Hone, along with the characters Torvald and Victoria Svensen are the property of Kellan Meig'h and may not be used without express written permission.

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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Four

“Admissions Of The Truth”

Later that evening, Na'Kesta went in search of her *One Love*, who had mysteriously went missing. He had to be somewhere on *The Korrallid*, since no craft had launched since she had last been with him. She stopped in the middle of Twenty-Seven corridor, near bulkhead one-hundred fifty-three, turned and looked up at her escort.

“Sub-Commander Hallett Trasc, are you positive that have you not seen my mate?” she queried.

“No, I have not, Esteemed Ambassador. Please wait for one moment and I will make an All-Call.” The tall, heavily built, solid black Dah'Trat warrior opened a comm channel, cleared his throat and spoke firmly but not too loudly into the comm link strapped to his wrist. “Orange Detachment, please identify and state if you are with Ambassador Prime Keth.”

“Orange Two, negative.”

“Orange Three, negative.”

“Orange Four, negative on the Ambassador.”

“Orange Five, negative.”

“Orange Six, negative.”

“Orange Seven, affirmative. I am currently with Ambassador Prime Keth.”

Trasc's left eyebrow went up in amusement as his copper-colored eyes twinkled. “Orange Seven, location please,” he requested, trying to keep a neutral sound to his voice. He knew the Ambassador Prime was just trying to find a quiet place to think. Probably in the most out-of-the-way location he could find, no doubt.

“We are onboard *The Oraskinal*, Orange One.” came the answer.

“Trooper Marlett Blane, please be more specific as to your location.” the lead trooper asked, since it was a big ship.

“Under the primary navigational helm station, Sub-Commander Trasc.”

Kess smiled, then opened her comm to the detachment's channel. "Inform Ambassador Prime that I will be there in a few units of time. He is not to leave the command center for any reason short of a ship-wide boarding unless I give him clearance first."

"I will inform Ambassador Prime of your wishes, my Esteemed Ambassador Na'Kesta Keth."

Kess looked up at her escort again. "It appears we have a walk ahead of us. Please escort me to Docking Bay One Upper."

The trooper took up his place, slightly to the left and one step behind the smaller near-white Elazi as they began their journey across the ship. He enjoyed duty with the Ambassadors, since they did seem to care for one another, they didn't argue about petty things and they respected their detachment's position in the scheme of things.

Kess and Trasc had finally made it to port-side Docking Bay One Upper, the home to a number of craft, including *The Oraskinal*. It was a big, looming piece of technology that occupied about a fourth of the landing bay. It appeared even more oppressive up close due to its matte black hull coloration, the natural hue of the physical shielding of the craft.

The Ambassador and her escort walked across the bay, in between landing pods three and four of the twelve on the starboard side, to Vehicle Access Ramp One that was attached to the loading floor, a section of the hull that dropped out of the belly of the beast.

The loading floor, originally designed by the Bil-Cmela to load refined alloy ingots onto the ship, took up about one-third of the belly. Six ramps allowed loading and unloading of just about anything that could fit on the loading floor, manage to clear the bottom of the main hull as it was being loaded and fit into a storage bay inside. *The Oraskinal* was capable of transporting two full battalions, their gear, their supporting services personnel along with their specific gear.

In the center of the loading floor was the central column, an area used as offices for the Load Master and their subordinates along with the elevators used by personnel going to the upper reaches of the craft. Arriving at a restricted use elevator, Trasc keyed in his code, an override code, calling the elevator to the loading floor level. The doors opened, Na'Kesta stepped inside and she was quickly joined by her escort.

A short ride up through the ship brought them to the command center level, where they de-boarded the elevator car. A turn to the left and a short stroll down a wide corridor brought them to the largest bulkhead door on this level, The Command Center. Off to the left, feet sticking out from under a console was Trooper Blane, holding tools in his hands and Ambassador Prime Keth, looking up into a panel with a logic probe in his possession.

Once by her husband, Kess cleared her throat and when she received no response, she tapped her *One Love* on the foot with the tip of her shoe. Startled by his mate, he sat up quickly, banging his head soundly on the underside of the console.

"Blast the Stars! Who dares to interrupt . . ." Kam blurted out, stopping his tirade when he

observed the being that dared to break in on his 'quiet time'. "Oh, my love, what may I do for you?" he asked, obviously embarrassed by his premature outburst.

"I have been calling you for some time, Kam." she replied, sitting down on the deck near her mate.

"I have been busy." Kamram offered up, taking her hand in his and kissing it lightly.

"You have been thinking." she countered.

"Kess, you know me too well." he put on the table. "As do these two," he added, indicating their troopers.

"I am sorry, Ambassador Prime." Trooper Trasc put forth. "You know I cannot ignore a direct order from our Esteemed Ambassador to find you."

"This is true." Kam agreed. "Troopers, please step out into the corridor. You do not need to close the bulkhead behind you." Once that had been done, Kamram turned to his mate. "Did I upset you by finding a quiet place to think?" he asked.

"I knew you were somewhere on-board, although I do not see this as a quiet place to think." she replied. "I just wanted to spend some time with my husband, that's all."

"Tomorrow, we will be busy." Kam stated. "I understand you will be meeting with top officials from The Pentagon. Are you still going to ask for support from their government to actively go after the false army?"

"Yes, we need that support." Kess agreed. "I am positive that the President of the United States does not want this rogue entity to cause any more trouble than it already has."

Kam nodded. "You must stress that we wish this to be a 'No Kill' campaign. We will use non-lethal means as much as possible. We wish for there to be no more bloodshed."

"I am sure they are in agreement." Kess mused. "I will also ask for advisers from their branches of their military. We would do well with the intelligence that they could provide." She smiled, kissed her husband on the lips then motioned to the console. "Enough talk of war for now. Please show me what is so interesting under there."

Kam slipped back under the console, then helped his wife to get in beside him. Pointing to the open panel above their heads, he took the logic probe in hand, activated it and touched a connection before he spoke up.

"This is the input from the primary sensor array. It gives the navigational positioning to the flight computer . . ."

Jeff was laying on the divan, watching the sky begin to lighten through the living room curtains.

It had been a very unusual night, sharing a bed with Krista again, this time because his furnace wouldn't light for some reason. He knew he would have to have someone look at it as soon as possible, since it would take an inordinate amount of wood just to keep his home warm this winter.

At some point in time during the night, she had rolled over to face him and he had reciprocated by taking her in his arms. Why he had done that, he did not know. At the moment, Krista had her nose buried in his chest, snoring lightly, cuddled up tightly to him for warmth. The female Elazi stirred just a bit, yawned and looked up at her benefactor.

"You are awake. I hope that I am not the cause of your sleeplessness." she commented. She then made a very astute observation; "You are holding me."

"Um, yeah." Jeff replied. "I'm not sure what prompted me to do that."

"I feel protected in your arms." the furry female offered up. When Jeff began to release her, she protested. "Please hold me for a span of time. I miss being close to another being."

Jeff gulped. "Okay, I'll, uh . . . I'll hold you for a while but I will need to get up soon and put some more wood on the fire."

He knew this was wrong but it felt so right to him at the moment. The previous evening, Na'Krista had sat patiently and kept up with his running account of his life, seeming to be very interested. She did have a number of questions, that at times were very hard for Jeff to answer. By answering those questions, she had forced him to look at his life in a different way.

They had shared a dinner of grilled venison and mixed vegetables with some local red wine to go with it. Krista had admitted that the small amount of wine she had sampled had went to her head very quickly so she made do with water for the rest of her meal.

While they dined, she told a bit about her culture's background. She had mentioned a time when the Elazi were enslaved, but she did not continue down that road, preferring to go on to tell about the first space-wayfarers that explored the stars near their home planet.

The pair had ended up in the loveseat near the fire, mostly enjoying each others company while the fire crackled softly, sometimes talking about some random subject. Jeff remembered asking about the passage from her homeworld, specifically how much time it took. He was quite surprised when she offered up the fact that it only took fifteen days to make the voyage. Na'Krista had pointed out that she didn't completely understand the slipstream dynamics that were involved to do that, only that their ships were powered by something called a 'Singularity' that was enclosed in a heavily shielded container.

Eventually, they had to share a bed again when the furnace failed to light, probably due to a frozen regulator valve on his propane tank. At least the divan was a better bed than the camping mattress on the floor and for a reason only Jeff knew, he sort of looked forward to her close company, even if one part of his brain kept shouting out its warnings to him. Was that the part of his brain that didn't want to see him hurt by this possible relationship? He didn't know.

Na'Krista laid there quietly and listened to Jeff's rhythmic breathing, wondering why she had these feelings running through her head. On the one hand, she knew she was falling in love with her benefactor. On the other hand, a part of her brain kept warning her not to get involved with an Earther. Eventually she would leave for Elazia, forced to break off her relationship.

What would her parents say if she decided to stay here? It was generally accepted Elazi policy not to populate other planets with their kind. Their stay was only for scientific and historical reasons, not to begin a new Elazi colony.

She had overheard some of the other Elazi soldiers expressing their desires to stay here, despite policy and that made her think; maybe she could stay, as long as her father did not send the Dah'Trat detachment to find and retrieve her. It wasn't like that had never happened before. Her older sister Na'Kayla had been retrieved from Prossimus Six when she had decided to join their moderate political group on a whim.

Krista felt Jeff wrap his arms further around her, hugging her tighter. She wondered if he was falling in love with her from the way he was acting last night and this morning. When she had pointed out to him earlier that he was holding her, he acted embarrassed. Then, when she had asked him to hold her for a span of time, he didn't seem to hesitate, so maybe he did have feelings for her. It would be nice to know just how he felt about her but Krista didn't know how to breach that subject with Jeff. Well, maybe in time he would breach it himself.

The Ambassador Prime and his wife were in their quarters, suiting up for their trip from high Earth orbit down to the surface, or "Going Dirtside" as they were wont to say. It was standard operating procedures for all personnel going from vacuum to atmosphere in a ship to wear their environmental suits with the requisite bubble helmet attached, just in case the hull was breached before landing. Kam was suited from the waist down and he was currently assisting Kess with her suit.

"Kam, are you sure this goes on this way?" she questioned, trying to get her tail down into the hard articulated sheath connected to the lower torso section.

"My mate, just let your tail go slack. It will slide in easier that way." the male suggested.

Kess took a deep breath, relaxed and made another attempt at donning the portion of armored vacuum suit. This time they were successful.

"Kam, why do we have to suit up? Isn't *The Oraskinal* shielded sufficiently to protect us?"

Kamram looked up at his mate with great concern. "Need I remind you of what happened to *The Great Hope*? The ship's singularity shielding was breached by one of those primitive projectile weapons."

Na'Kesta held up her left leg so her husband could slip the leg portion on for her. They did not

have much trouble with that so the other leg shell, followed by her boots were applied. Kam then put the torso rings on his mate, then assisted her with the upper torso section. Because the armor shell was universal in the sense that it could be used in a vacuum or dirtside, Kam helped Kess to engage the sealing ring of the inner pressure suit to the neck seal of her armor.

“You would think that we could have improved this blasted neck seal,” Na'Kesta commented as she ran her fingers between the seal and the fur on her neck to settle it properly.

“I'm sorry your seal irritates your neck.” her hubby retorted. “We have done much to the design after we copied it from the Bil-Cmela suits. I suppose if we had scales on our necks instead of a pelt, we would not be annoyed by the seal.”

Kamram helped his *One Love* with her sleeves and her gloves before he finished suiting up himself. It did not take long before he was clad in his armor so he took the time to fit Kess' environmental pack to the back of her armor. The pack attached to the suit in the same manner as an equipment pack, engaging the air, electrical and communications connections as it was snapped into place.

Kess offered her helmet to her husband, standing still while he placed the clear bubble over her head and engaged it to the adapter ring. Kess pressed the activation button on her sleeve, powering up the environmental and comm systems.

“Can you hear me?” she asked while she checked for any signs of the pressure suit leaking.

“Four by four.” Kam replied. “Any leaks?” he asked in return.

“No leaks. Systems show blue across the board.”

“Kess, assist me with my pack?”

“Okay, hold still, then.”

Kess effortlessly lifted his environmental pack into place, engaged the upper tabs and lowered the pack down into engagement with the lower tabs. She then gave it a tug, just to make sure it was secure.

“Thank you,” Kam offered up after he put his helmet on and powered up his systems, making sure his suit's systems were blue across the board. “Audio good?”

“Four by four, my love.”

They put their systems on *Standby* and removed their helmets for now, since *The Oraskinal* was not set to launch for another Earth hour. They had set up two 'perches' to sit down on due to the fact that their suits wouldn't allow enough flexibility to sit down in a normal chair. Straddling their perches, they sat down on them, allowing the suits to hold their weight.

They were silent for more than a moment so Kess spoke up.

“Kam, are you nervous concerning this mission?”

“I would be lying if I said I was not.” he agreed. “I am very uneasy concerning our daughter. I was in hopes her transponder would have sounded and we could have obtained a lock on her location.”

“Bosteg would have contacted you if that were to happen.” Kess stated.

“I know, Kess. It worries me.”

“Kam, I just know she's safe, wherever she is.”

Kamram gave Na'Kesta a knowing look. “A mother's insight?”

“Yes, a mother's insight. I know you cannot feel her presence but I can. She is down there, Kamram Keth. Our child is down there.”

The Ambassador Prime was going to state his thoughts about this 'Insight' when they were interrupted by Sub-Commander Trasc.

“Ambassadors, it is time. I have been requested to escort both of you to *The Oraskinal*.”

“Very well, Sub-Commander.” Kam replied.

The Keths picked up their helmets and followed Hallett Trasc out into the hallway where the rest of Orange Detachment was waiting. With professional aplomb, the detachment surrounded their charges and began to walk in step through *The Flagship Korralid*, headed for Landing Bay One Upper.

Jeff was sitting at the kitchen table, watching Krista dissect a small piece of electronics that was supposed to be a distress beacon. While it looked like it was intact, it had suffered some damage during the firefight that had occurred down the road. She was being very careful, making notes as she went to help reassemble the device properly. She looked up at Jeff and frowned.

“I know my video equipment intimately but I am not familiar with a beacon's design.” she explained. “It is still not powered, which puzzles me.”

“Battery connections?” Jeff offered up.

“I see them, but they seem to be connected.” Krista looked at the person that surely must be the desire of her heart and gave him a crooked smile. “If you would, please look at it for me? You might see something that I do not.”

Jeff traded chairs with her and looked over the small, intricate item carefully. He was using his best magnifying glass to see anything that might be amiss. After almost giving up, he spotted a connector that did not look fully engaged.

"This might be it." he stated, using a pencil to point out the issue.

"That does not look fully seated." she agreed. Using a tool that was akin to a jeweler's screwdriver, she carefully nudged the connection back into place. Once it had made connection, the little device began to chirp.

"Is the beacon working now?" Jeff asked.

"I think it is." Krista replied. "The signal should bounce off of one of your satellites and be received by Outpost Roseville." she added with a sad tone in her voice. She knew if her people came for her, that would be the end to any hope of a relationship.

"You sound like you don't want to be found, Krista." her benefactor offered up.

Na'Krista looked at her hands that were clasped together on the table, wondering if she should say something or not. She didn't want to lie to Jeff but she didn't know how he would take the truth. Giving it some more thought, she opened up her heart to him.

"I do not wish to be found, not right now," she stated, carefully picking up the beacon and switching it off before she sat it back down again. "I wish to spend my time with you, if you would let me," she added, wiping at a tear in her left eye.

Jeffrey Andrews sat there, stunned, finding himself unable to reply to that admission from the female Elazi. It was such a shock, it took him more than a few moments to pull his thoughts together. Once again, she had forced him to look at his life differently and this time, Krista had made him admit to himself that he had fallen in love with her. Taking a deep breath to clear his head, he spoke his mind.

Krista, I think I know what you're asking." Jeff put forth. He stood on shaky legs, went around the table and reached out to her. She stood and he took her in his arms as he said, "I want you to spend time with me. For as long as you would wish to. Forever, if that would please you."

"Forever would please me." she admitted, trying her best to keep from crying.

"Then you will stay with me forever." Jeff replied. He held her for a span of time, letting her sob quietly on his shoulder. Just as he was about to say something, Jeff had a revelation. "Um, Krista, is there some Elazi protocol concerning asking for your hand in marriage?" he asked.

She looked up at him with red-rimmed eyes and nodded. "There is protocol. We have done the first protocol, saying our love for one another. Now you must be questioned by my mother to make sure that you are a suitable son through joining and you must ask for permission to join our house from my father."

"Join your house?" Jeff asked, puzzled by that statement.

"Yes, you must join my house, House Tal-Hassanai." Krista pointed out. "You must belong to a house and not be a . . . oh, I think it would translate to being classified a freelancer. Freelancers

are not allowed to just join into any house they choose. If you did not belong to a house, I would be forced to become a freelancer by joining to you."

"I take it that is not desirable?"

"No, it is not." Krista agreed. "The only other way into a house is through ritual challenge and combat. You would make a challenge to the head of a house and then fight a designated house champion. If you defeated him or her, you would be accepted into that house."

"Do you think your parents will accept me?"

"I think so." Krista mused. "You are a warrior and a doctor. You would be looked upon highly for your skills."

"I'm retired from both professions." Jeff pointed out.

"It will not matter, I think." the furry female shot back. "Your standing as a warrior and a doctor, retired or not, will have high standing." Krista reached over and picked up the beacon again. Switching it back on, she smiled at her future mate. "Now I wish to be found by my parents. You and I have much to say to them."

Jeff and Krista had sat down on the loveseat, just holding one another and letting the emotions flow. He had his back to the corner of the seat and she was draped across his chest, snuggling up to her future *One Love*. Krista looked up to say something, right at the same moment that a very deep rolling booming noise was heard, followed by the house shaking just slightly.

"I think that was artillery fire." Jeff offered up.

"No, I know that sound." Krista retorted. "That was a medium cruiser coming dirtside."

"Are you sure?"

"Very sure. I lived near a spaceport for most of my life so that sound is very familiar."

"Your parents?"

"Maybe." she answered. "It would be good if it were. I want you to meet them and I want them to meet you." Krista looked down, then back at Jeff. "I only wish I had some nice clothes to wear for the meeting and not this utility suit."

Jeff hugged her. "You know, I have some things that belonged to Terri that might fit. They were packed away in vacuum bags years ago but I think they will be fine after we freshen them up a bit."

He stood, helped his future mate to stand and led her upstairs to the master bedroom. For some reason, he just couldn't seem to wipe that silly grin off of his face.

“Ambassador Prime, we have picked up a locator beacon registered to Na'Krista,” Sub-Commander Trasc offered up as he tried to triangulate the coordinates. “Her beacon is not far from the location of the engagement with the RUSA.”

Kess turned to look at her mate. “See? A mother's intuition.”

“Kess, it may only be her beacon.” Kam suggested, not wanting to get her hopes up.

The Elazi mother was determined, however. “Trasc, please ping her beacon with our challenge signal.”

“Yes, Ambassador.” the black Elazi replied. He pressed a button on his console, sending a signal to her beacon, hoping Krista would send a reply signal. He knew in his heart that a response from dirtside would brighten NaKesta's mood considerably.

Jeff and Krista were opening a few vacuum-packed bags of clothes, looking for a particular one that Jeff knew would exist. Just as Krista opened her third bag, she dropped it on the bed and ran downstairs as quickly as she could. Jeff arrived in the kitchen just in time to see her pick up the beacon, that was making a different sound and switch it to what was now a third frequency. She then smiled widely and held the beacon to her chest as she took a few giddy hops for joy.

“What was that all about?” he asked, totally confused as to why she would do that.

“They have picked up my signal!” she blurted out. “They have found us!”

“Is this a good thing?” Jeff questioned.

“That challenge signal was my father's frequency that he uses when my mother is with him! They are here!” she exclaimed.

Jeff, not knowing what else to do, took her in his arms and held her while she began to cry with joy. Her family was coming for her and soon, he would be meeting his future in-laws. In his eyes, this would probably be the wildest thing that he had ever done in his life, asking for an Elazi female's hand in marriage. Boy, were her parents in for a big surprise.

“My Esteemed Ambassador, Na'Krista's beacon has replied to the challenge signal.” Sub-Commander Trasc offered up, smiling inside when he observed NaKesta's eyes light up. “Using Earth satellite images available to us, we have her coordinates pinpointed to a building with a few outlying structures. It might be a home of some sort.”

“Kam, I told you.” she said to her mate politely.

“I was being hasty.” he replied, trying not to look too defeated. “Once we have landed, we will

take our detachment and a half-brigade to go find her.”

“Kam,” the female Elazi said, looking quite exasperated. “We will take our detachment and we will borrow a few troopers from Bosteg. That will suffice.” The Ambassador Prime started to rebut that thought but she had held up her hand to him in a dismissing manner. “You may be Ambassador Prime but I'm Krista's mother. I know best.”

“Agreed, Kess. We will do as you suggest.” Kam stated, trying not to look even further defeated. Sitting there, thinking it over, he wondered why he was Ambassador Prime and not his mate. Clearly she could politically outmaneuver him any day.

Looking over at his mate, who seemed very pleased with herself, Kamram shuddered. Na'Kesta preferred to stay within the regional Senate, where she ruled the financial committee with an iron fist. He blanched to think what she would do at the global level. Then again, maybe she should be occupying his seat in the Global Senate.

Settling back in his seat better, Kam looked over his itinerary for this visit. There was a lot to accomplish and little time to do so. Using a stylus to rearrange a few things, he tried to get his mind off the situation at hand. He just hoped Krista was in good health when they found her and there would be no surprises in store for them. He surely disliked surprises.