

The characters Jeffrey Andrews, Na'Krista Nahala Keth, Kamram Keth, Na'Kesta Keth, Bosteg Haas, Kestam Ramm, Tremen 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 Five

“Family Reunion”

The personnel in the Travis Air Force Base control tower watched their screens as the Elazi medium cruiser *The Oraskinal* made its descent from over the high desert East of Reno, Nevada, headed Westward towards them. Three chase planes had been sent to escort the cruiser, F-22 Raptors from the 144th Air National Guard Fighter Wing stationed at Hammer Field, Fresno, California.

“Travis, This is Escort One. We have visual and you are *not* going to believe how big *The Oraskinal* is.” the pilot in charge of the flight commented.

“Copy, Escort One.” the traffic controller replied. “I have *The Oraskinal* on screen. I will agree; it is one huge blip on my radar.”

The next voice to be heard was one with a heavy accent, sort of Baltic-sounding. “Escort One, this is *The Oraskinal*, High Commander Dunmin Dorsett in charge. We request your pilots try to stay out of our wake and please refrain from flying under the craft.”

“High Commander Dorsett, this is Escort One, Major Alan Hebert. We will heed your request. Please follow the craft in front of you, Escort Two will bring you onto your landing vector.”

“I copy, Major Hebert.” the Elazi commander stated. “I will keep this frequency open in case you need to communicate with us.”

“Ten-Four, High Commander. Major Hebert standing by.”

Alan settled in about two hundred yards off the port bow of *The Oraskinal*, still somewhat in awe of the ship. There were many things to marvel at but as a military pilot, two things stood out.

One, *The Oraskinal* had no wings, so it was possibly acting as a lifting body. Well, a lifting body that was four hundred and nineteen feet long, two hundred and eleven feet wide and one hundred and fifty-five feet tall. It was fortunate that someone at NORRAD had confirmed what unit of measure that the Elazi had used in describing the measurements of the craft.

Two, it was bristling with rail guns, energy weapons and what looked to be retractable missile arrays. This was one ship that he would never in a million years try to tangle with because *The Oraskinal* was one impressive mobile war machine by anyone's standards. What Major Hebert really wished was that he was not flying at the moment, since he thought the real floor show

would be watching this behemoth land.

Air Force Colonel William Dearborne watched the Elazi medium cruiser slow down to an impossibly slow speed, forcing the escort fighters to fly on past or risk stalling their Raptors. The radar had the craft at some forty knots on final, just completely absurd to him. And indeed, it was huge. He no longer needed binoculars to see it at over one mile out.

“Travis, this is *The Oraskinal*. I have your runway on visual.” the radio crackled.

“Copy, *Oraskinal*. You are cleared to land.” the traffic controller replied.

All eyes were glued on the hulking piece of matte-black technology that was moving entirely too slow to stay in the air. The radar operator had stated the speed at twenty-five knots, then the ship just slowed and stopped about half-way down the runway, about a hundred feet off the ground. It was hovering silently, the only noise being the occasional station-keeping thruster firing. The tower personnel looked at one another, puzzled, right before the radio came to life again.

“Travis, we have arrived. I am being directed to ask for something called a “Follow Me Truck” to assist in locating our designated parking area.”

“Copy, *Oraskinal*. We will be sending the truck your way right now.” the traffic controller replied. While he called the “Follow Me Truck” into action, Colonel Dearborne looked at his adjutant and commented on the situation.

“You know, they have technology that I cannot even begin to fathom.” he stated, pursing his lips as he watched the ship begin to move again, following the ground vehicle to a point on the ramp where visiting squadrons would park their craft. “How that ship, at eighteen hundred tons, can hover like that, with just a few small attitude thrusters holding it in place, is beyond my comprehension.”

The female Staff Sergeant nodded in agreement. “Colonel, I understand the Elazi procured their technology from a race called the Bil-Cmela. Apparently, the ship is powered by something called a 'Singularity', whatever that is. When the RUSA destroyed *The Great Hope*, the energy of that Singularity being released was what caused all of the destruction.”

“I see.” the colonel mused. “Well, I personally see the Elazi as an ally to the United States. Ambassador Na'Kesta Keth will be meeting with some of our top brass from The Pentagon. I understand we will be giving support to their cause and we will be giving them troops to assist them in rounding up the RUSA so they can be tried in court.”

“Sir, has Ambassador Keth been notified that the meeting has been postponed until tomorrow?” Sergeant Janine Drake asked.

“Oh, great.” the colonel muttered. “Well, I guess I will be informing her face to face.” Before Sergeant Drake could comment on the situation, they were being hailed to follow a security detail, their destination being *The Oraskinal*.

“Well, here we go,” Colonel Dearborne stated, straightening his uniform as he followed the Military Police to his imminent meeting with the Elazi brass.

Kamram stood behind his *One Love* and assisted her in latching closed her ceremonial armor, a suit that was not used as everyday wear by her but worn for special ceremonies and events. Her armor covered her torso, arms and lower legs, allowing for a ceremonial skirt of heavily embroidered dark green fabric to finish her ensemble. The carbon-titanium alloy had been polished to a blue-chrome mirror shine for her, courtesy of the staff armorer. After he had ensured the suits' sleeves had been attached properly, Kam used a polishing cloth to remove his fingerprints. He then added her dark green cape for her by clipping it to the provided studs on each shoulder.

“You look regal, my love,” he offered up as he assisted her in getting a hair clip into her long, almost white hair.

“As do you,” Kess replied, turning to smile at her husband. Kess took the polishing cloth and wiped a couple of fingerprints off of Kam's armor, then gave him a kiss for good measure. She sat the rag back on her dressing table, glanced at the chronometer, then back at her mate. “We must be going. Our detachment is no doubt waiting outside our door.”

The door opened when they approached it to reveal Sub-Commander Trasc and his highly-trained subordinates, all wearing full Dah'Trat polished cobalt-copper-aluminum ceremonial armor.

“We are on time.” Hallett Trasc stated quietly as his detachment surrounded their charges. With practiced precision, they began to walk in step towards the Number One Restricted Elevator.

While they walked along, Kam made a comment to his mate. “I detest these ceremonial killentra.” he stated, fussing with the front of what amounted to a kilt. “I feel so . . . so exposed.” he added with a frown.

“I think you look like a proper warrior in your killentra.” she put forth. “It is interesting that the humans have a garb called a 'kilt'. The name and design are very close to our killentra. While we are here, I intend to procure one or two for you to wear back home on Elazia.”

“I might be interested, should they have one made from hides of one of their animals.”

“I have done some initial research. They have kilts made from processed hides of their bovine animal.”

“Bovine?” Kam mused. “Is that the animal called a cow?”

“Yes, it is.” Kess replied. “I understand they have hides in black color. That would look very distinguished on you.”

“As long as it is not ceremonial blue, that will be fine.” Kam fussed with his killentra again, wishing he had worn full undergarments instead of a killentra brief. Hopefully, the wind wouldn't be blowing when they disembarked. No need to show the world his almost-bare behind.

Colonel Dearborne watched as the ship extended twenty-four delicate-appearing landing legs and gently sat down on the ramp. After a moment, a number of sounds were heard, followed by a huge portion of the belly of the hull lowering to the pavement. Three loading ramps on each side extended to provide access to this flat-floored platform, then to his amazement, two Elazi rolled out a gray carpet from somewhere in the middle of the platform, down the center ramp and out onto the concrete.

“A gray carpet?” he mused, looking over at Sergeant Drake to see her reaction.

“Well, different races might use different colors for ceremonial circumstance.”

A small detachment hurried out of the bowels of the ship, took up a place at the bottom of the carpet-covered ramp and began to play what must have been a ceremonial tune for the Elazi brass on some very odd-shaped stringed instruments. Just moments later, another detachment armed to the teeth with impulse rifles made their appearance and headed down the ramp.

At the bottom of the ramp, the detachment split to either side and allowed two Elazi to emerge from within the detachment's protection. It wasn't until now that they realized the detachment towered over the two they were protecting, possibly close to eight feet tall on the average and they were all solid black in coloration.

The two Elazi approached Colonel Dearborne and the buff-colored male extended his right hand as he spoke.

“I am Ambassador Prime Kamram Keth and this is my wife, Her Esteemed Ambassador Na'Kesta Natana Keth. We are pleased to meet you.”

“Pleased to meet both of you.” the human replied. “I'm Colonel William Dearborne and this is my adjutant, Sergeant Janine Drake.”

“*May peace follow you wherever you go,*” Janine offered up in Elazi, clasping first Kam's, the Kess' hands in hers.

“*And may peace visit you often,*” Kess replied, smiling widely at the sergeant's proper use of Elazi protocol.

“My Esteemed Ambassador Keth, I regret that I have some news to pass on.” the colonel stated. “Three of our officials are snowed in back East so they will not be here until tomorrow sometime. I know we had a meeting scheduled but this weather issue was unforeseen.”

“This will be fine.” Kess replied. “You see, our daughter turned up missing a few days ago after a military engagement with the RUSA. Her beacon has been located so we would like to see about

her as soon as possible. If we could have some way of contacting you, I would think we could have a meeting in two days time.”

“I have a cellphone at your disposal.” Sergeant Drake offered up, taking a military grade Kyocera phone from her purse. She watched Kam look back at his detachment and nod ever-so-slightly. The trooper with the most decorations on the front of his armor quickly jogged over to take up a place beside the Elazi male.

“This is my adjutant, as you would say. Sub-Commander Hallett Trasc will hold onto the cellular device and act as our point of communications. Sergeant Drake, if you would be so kind as to instruct Hallett Trasc in the use of this device.”

“*With great pleasure.*” Janine Drake replied in Elazi.

While the two adjutants went over the use of the push-to-talk cellphone, Colonel Dearborne brought up something important.

“Sir, Ma'am, may I offer you some transportation to wherever you need to go?”

Kam smiled. “We thank you deeply for your thoughtfulness, Colonel Dearborne. We have arranged for a shuttle from Outpost Roseville to transport us.”

“I see.” the Air Force officer mused. He was about to ask if they would like some refreshment when another Elazi craft, a small bus-sized shuttle landed nearby. The door on the side opened, a ramp extended and a lone male Elazi appeared at the door. The individual straightened what appeared to be a kilt-like garment similar to the one Kamram wore, only in a dark red hue, looked around and then headed in their direction. The buff-colored male was smiling as he made his way toward them.

“Field Commander Bosteg Hass.” he offered up to the colonel, extending his right hand.

“Colonel William Dearborne. I believe we have talked to one another.” he offered, shaking the commander's hand firmly.

“Yes, I remember talking to you yesterday concerning the miscellaneous needs of *The Oraskinal's* crew while they are berthed dirtside.” Bosteg then turned to Kam and Kess. “How was your passage?” he asked as he hugged them both.

“We fared well, my friend.” Kess replied.

“Are we ready?” the commander asked.

“I think so.” Kam replied, noting that Hallett Trasc seemed to be done with his briefing.

“Then we will go. I have Na'Krista's squad members with me and a firm lock on her beacon coordinates.”

After shaking hands with the colonel, all of the Elazi present boarded the shuttle along with the

solid black troopers. As the craft lifted off silently and turned toward Roseville, William looked over at Janine. She had a very puzzled look on her face.

“Sergeant, is there something wrong?” he asked.

“No, Colonel, there is nothing wrong.” she replied.

“Well, you have an odd look on your face, Janine.”

“Yeah, Hallett Trasc asked for my phone number.” she offered up. “He said he would would have a few days off while he was here and he wanted to go sight-seeing. He thought since I spoke decent Elazian, we would get along just fine.” After a moment, she added, “He also thought I was very beautiful, too.”

Very interesting people, these Elazi.” William mused. “Very interesting beings, indeed.”

On board the shuttle *Pontain*, Kam was receiving a briefing concerning the weather after they had stopped at Outpost Auburn to pick up Kestam Ramm and his unit. The Ambassador Prime was still in awe of the amount of water this planet possessed. It was a good thing that the Majoras race didn't have interplanetary capability or they would be here in a heartbeat, making an attempt at colonizing Earth.

The Majoras, a water-dwelling species, had been looking for another world to call home, just to ease their overpopulation. Some Majoras had even taken to learning to breathe air, just to live on the land masses that made up forty percent of their world. He still thought it didn't look right, a Majoras with scales but no functioning gills. Just not right at all.

“Anyway, you should have been here when the storm hit.” Bosteg continued, indicating the ground below, blanketed in white. “I sent Kestam Ramm to go look for Na'Krista but his detachment didn't make it to Outpost Auburn before the snow was falling too fast for their ground vehicle to cope with in the mountains. That's when I asked them to hold for your arrival and better weather.”

“You have made good decisions, Bost.” Kess stated. “I knew she was safe, as soon as we were in orbit. No need to endanger troops if we don't have to.”

“A mother's intuition?” Bosteg questioned. When Kess nodded, he made this comment; “I will never understand it, but it is there. A mother can always sense their offspring.”

“Ambassadors, I have the building in sight. It appears to be a home of some sort.” the pilot offered up. “I think this might be the roadway below us, according to my sensors. I will land here, where it is somewhat level.”

The ship gently landed, kicking up snow from its four shrouded lift rotors that obscured it for just a moment. After making sure they were on secure ground, the pilot shut down the powerplant and opened the side door. Once the ramp was down, the Dah'Trat troopers and Commander

Ramm's unit took up their places and scanned about for signs of movement.

Satisfied that the immediate area was clear, Commander Ramm motioned to the craft. That was when Bost, Kam, Kess and Trooper Trasc headed down the ramp and toward the front door of the log cabin. They walked up to the dwelling, went up the steps and formed up at the front door, Kam in front, Kess to his side and the troopers behind them. Kamram looked at his mate, straightened his killentra one last time and gave a very firm knock on the door.

Jeff heard the craft land and he had to admit to himself, he was nervous about this. Trying to remember what Krista had told him to say, he straightened his clothes one last time as he heard footfalls on the front porch. He really wished Na'Krista was beside him but she was still hurriedly trying to dress after they had fixed her a vent in the pants she had chosen to wear.

The knock startled him, making him have to take a deep breath to clear his head. Jeff then went to the front door, steeled himself and opened it. As he was warned by his charge, her father, mother and two others were standing there and the one that surely must be Ambassador Prime Kamram Keth was not looking too happy at the moment. Jeff spoke up, trying to remember the words.

"Ambassador Prime Keth, My Esteemed Ambassador Keth, I am Jeffrey Andrews and I welcome you to my home. May peace follow you wherever you go." the former Marine managed to say without mangling the language.

When Jeff stepped aside for them to enter, the Ambassador Prime strode into the room with purpose, looked around, then turned to look at Jeff with questioning eyes.

"Where is my daughter?" he asked calmly in English. Before Jeff could answer, Krista came bounding down the stairs and practically bowled over her father as she hugged him.

"Father! I am so glad to see you!" Na'Krista blurted out in Elazi. She then began to have a kiss and hug-laden conversation with her father.

"I am Na'Kesta Keth, Na'Krista's mother. May peace visit you often," the elder female Elazi offered up to Jeff after she got his attention. "Give them a moment, then we can all converse together. The two with us are Commander Bosteg Haas and Sub-Commander Hallett Trasc." she stated, indicating the troopers behind them. Kess and Jeff then noticed Kam was holding his child at arm's length, looking at his daughter's apparel with great scrutiny.

"Where is your uniform?" he asked, examining the blouse and pants carefully. Krista had on a short-sleeved blouse, pale cream with a pale purple flower print and some pale purple slacks that matched the color of the flowers. *"You look nice, I will admit but you are a soldier. You should wear a uniform."*

"Father, I wished to look my best today. Jeffrey Andrews and I have something of importance to talk to you about." she countered.

“Na’Krista, this had better be important for you to be out of uniform.” Kam commented.

“It is very important.” Krista stated, motioning for Jeff to join her. Once he was by her side, she continued. *“Father, Jeffrey Andrews and I wish to become joined.”* Krista nudged Jeff in the side with her elbow, reminding him to say his part.

“Ambassador Prime Kamram Keth, I wish to be joined to your daughter.” Jeff managed to say in clear enough Elazi to be understood.

Bosteg nudged Sub-Commander Trasc and looked up at him. The trooper was smiling, enjoying the show in front of him. Commander Haas was enjoying this, too. He always liked to see how his good friend Kam could control his emotions but this would be a time when Ambassador Prime Keth would most likely lose it.

Kess walked up beside her mate, who appeared to be gobsmacked and took his hand in hers, making him look over at her. With a wide smile, she asked the obvious question.

“Kam, are you going to answer their request to be joined?”

Kamram looked at his *One Love*, then back at what might turn out to be his future son through joining. “I, erm . . . Yes, I must reply.” he put forth in English. “Na’Krista, are you sure of this?” he asked.

“Yes, father. I am sure.” the daughter replied.

Kam then looked at the human in front of him. “Jeffrey Andrews, are you sure of this?” he questioned.

“Yes, Ambassador Prime Keth. I am sure. I am deeply in love with Krista.”

Kam seemed to get upset. “You called her Krista, her private name. Have you had relations with my daughter?” the Elazi asked in a louder, firmer voice.

“Father! We have not had relations!” Krista blurted out. *“I allowed him to call me by my private name! I was injured and he was treating my injury! He is a doctor! A doctor and a warrior!”*

“You were injured?” Kamram questioned, looking very concerned at the moment. He turned and looked at Sub-Commander Trasc before issuing forth a command. *“Please have our medic look after my daughter.”*

“I am doing well, father!” Na’Krista almost shouted, getting her parent's attention. *“Jeff has stopped the bleeding and he has closed the wound.”* she offered up in a normal tone of voice.

“Still, I would like our medic to check you over.” he father retorted. *“Do not argue with me, Medic Tascal Hone will check your injuries.”*

“Yes, father.” Krista agreed in a deflated tone of voice. There was no use in arguing; her father would get his way, one way or another.

Tascal Hone made his appearance, doing as he was bid by Kam. Once Krista had lifted her blouse, the solid white Elazi medic examined her wound thoroughly. He did seem confused so he asked Na'Krista a question.

“Trooper Keth, who tended to this injury?”

“Jeffrey Andrews treated my injury.” Krista looked over at her future *One Love* and smiled. “Jeff, please tell Medic Hone how you administered aid.”

Jeff cleared his throat. “Uh, I tried to use a medical adhesive at first but the injury, caused by a bullet wound, did not stay closed. The wound channel was through the dermis, epidermis and down into the muscle. I decided the only way it would stay closed was to suture the skin back together.”

Kamram broke in to the conversation. *“Medic Hone, has Na'Krista's wound been tended to properly?”*

“It has, Ambassador Prime.” the white Elazi replied. *“The sutures, although primitive, will do quite well.”*

“Thank you, Medic.” Ambassador Prime Keth said to Tascal before he turned back to Jeff. “Now, my daughter indicates that you are a doctor and a warrior. Please elaborate.”

Before Jeff could answer, Kess broke in. “Kam, we have time enough left today for this line of questioning to continue later. I think our daughter and her future mate might like to sit down to a meal with us. That way, we can get to know Jeffrey Andrews better in a relaxed atmosphere.”

“And where would we dine?” Kamram put forth.

“Bost has offered to transport all of us to Auburn. He has informed me of the fact that there is a very nice establishment within walking distance from Outpost Auburn that serves something called pizza and beer.”

“It is good food and drink, Kam.” Bosteg interjected.

“Very well.” Kamram agreed. “We will dine in Auburn.”

Jeff helped Na'Krista to don one of his Mil-Spec short winter parkas over her Earth clothing, then he put on a similar garment to keep himself warm. Kamram had suggested to Krista that she should put on her armor but she protested, stating the need to clean the dried blood from inside of a number of sections of her suit. Jeffrey then fussed with his kilt, worn at the suggestion of his future mate.

“You look nice in a kilt.” the young female Elazi offered up while she straightened the knot in his tie for him. “It looks almost like a killentra.”

"I always feel so . . . so exposed in a kilt," the former Marine replied. "Good thing I have the common sense to wear some briefs under it and not go 'Regimental' like an idiot. I just hope your father doesn't think I'm copying him by wearing a kilt."

Krista offered her thoughts. "You have said, the tartan is the unofficial tartan of The United States Marine Corps, something you called a 'Leatherneck tartan'. That is your warrior tartan, Jeff. Just like the dark blue killentra is the color of my father's position on the Global Senate. He will see you for the warrior that you are."

"I'm glad you have confidence in me, Krista."

Na'Krista gently gripped Jeff's chin and made him look directly at her. "I have all of my confidence in you, Jeffrey Andrews. I know you will make a good impression on my father and mother." She then caught him off-guard, slipping her hands inside his coat to hug him before she gave him a kiss.

"Let's go." Jeff suggested after they broke off their kiss. "I think your mother and father may be waiting for us."

The pair stepped outside the front door, then Jeff took the time to close and lock it behind them. They were escorted by Sub-Commander Trasc to the waiting shuttle, where another Dah'Trat soldier directed them to a pair of seats across from Krista's parents.

Jeff followed protocol by fastening his seatbelt and shoulder harness arrangement, noting to himself that the adjusters were not that far off from something found here on Earth. The craft shuddered just slightly, lifted off and turned toward Auburn. Kam and Kess were having a quiet conversation with one another about something while the male tapped on a tablet with a stylus and appeared to be pointing out things of importance. Jeff was listening to the language, not understanding it but it did seem to have a pattern to the sounds.

"What are you thinking?" Krista asked him, startling her future *One Love*.

"I was listening to your parents talking."

"You understand Elazian?"

"No, but it seems to have a pattern that I can pick out."

"I could acquire an audio learning device for you so you could learn our language while you sleep."

"That actually works?" he asked, having used a commercial learning program while he was in the Marines to become fluent in Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese, just in case he was ordered overseas. It wasn't easy to learn the languages and his retention was terrible.

"We have used our learning system extensively. I needed nine days to learn English and that was longer than most."

"Maybe I might try it, then." Jeff mused, right when he noticed that he had been holding Krista's hand. "Is this okay?" he asked, giving her hand a squeeze.

"Even if it weren't, I am enjoying it immensely." It was clear that Krista was not going to allow him to let go of her hand until she was ready for him to do so.

The small group was well into the extra-large Mountain Mark's combination pizza when Kam sat his piece down and looked up at his daughter's benefactor.

"Jeffrey Andrews, do the colors of your kilt hold some significance?"

"Yes, Ambassador Prime." Jeff replied. "Almost all kilts that are color patterned, known as a tartan, have ties to a clan. Some clans are old warrior clans."

"I see. What clan affiliation does your tartan carry?"

Jeff smiled. "It is actually an unofficial tartan but its ties are to the United States Marine Corps. The tartan is known as the Leatherneck tartan."

"Ah, you are a warrior with the Marines. I have heard much of them."

"Retired, actually." Jeffrey offered up. "I served the Marine Corps for twelve years as a doctor, then I moved up here on a permanent basis after my commission was over."

"Commission? You are an officer?" Kam queried.

"I was an officer, a Major."

Kam smiled. "On Elazia, you would keep your title for life. It has been that way for more than one hundred years where an officer would keep his or her title."

"That sounds like Elazia honors their soldiers." Jeff offered up. "Here, I can't say that. The United States send their men and women off to war and when the soldiers return, they are practically discarded, tossed aside."

"I have heard of this, too." Kam replied.

Jeff sipped his beer, then continued. "I was stationed at Fitzsimons Army Hospital when the American-Chinese war broke out. I was reassigned to the department that rehabilitated injured soldiers that had lost a limb during the war. What I saw was the government, forcing us to get these soldiers through our facility just as fast as possible, just to save money. It wasn't right."

The former Marine stopped, looked down at his hands, then back at his future father-in-law. "Our government didn't care if these soldiers were reintegrated back into society. No jobs were held open or created for the returning soldiers. Those soldiers that needed medical care were denied by a system that makes you wait forever to get simple medical assistance. I'm sure that

you've heard stories of our war veterans that are homeless with no job."

Kam nodded. "I have to say, it saddens me to think a warrior is discarded after he or she gives their all for their country." the Elazi Ambassador Prime commented. "This does not happen on Elazia. We care for our warriors."

Jeff sat there digesting what Kamram had just said. He took a sip of his beer, then he looked at the buff-colored male Elazi. "You know, I think I like your planet. You make it sound like your planet is a good place to call home."

Kam nodded in agreement after he sipped his beer. "Elazia is a very good place to call home, Jeffrey Andrews. I am sure you would like it there."

That evening, Jeff was adjusting the forced-air heater's thermostat to seventy-two degrees to accommodate his impromptu visitors. He had offered up that he had a guest bedroom so the ambassadors had graciously accepted an offer to stay at his cabin for the night. Krista had proven that she was good on her word that she would pay him back for his kindness by having some of her squad thaw out the frozen regulator on his propane tank and place the insulating blanket back around it.

The ambassadors had already retired to their room on the first floor so after he had made the adjustments to the heat, Jeff snuggled up with Krista on the loveseat, enjoying the fire in the fireplace crackling. Sub-Commander Trasc and one more Dah'Trat soldier, Trooper Ronmet Crail were sitting at the dining room table behind them, playing an Elazi version of cards. Apparently, Ronmet was the better of the two at this game by the sounds of it.

"Krista, you're not getting drunk, are you?" Jeff asked, observing her empty Dos Equis bottle beside her on the end table.

"No, I am tired." she replied in a sleepy voice. "I am tired, and I am happy. I am with my future *One Love* and my parents are here with us. What more could I ask for?"

"How about a king-sized bed to share with your future *One Love*?"

Krista turned her head to look straight at Jeff. "As long as you're not thinking of having relations. That must wait until we are joined to become fully intimate."

"I can wait." Jeff put on the table.

"Very well. Let's go to bed after you help me to put on my night clothing. I believe I have consumed too much beer."

"Just as I thought."

Jeff guided his future wife toward the master bedroom, taking in the whole day in retrospect while he assisted Krista to carefully ascend the stairs. If anyone had told him a few days ago that

he would fall in love with an Elazi and he would have two Elazi ambassadors in his home, particularly ambassadors that would be his future in-laws, he would have told that person that they were out of their minds.

How things can change in a hurry, he mused. How things can change.

That night, Jeff laid in bed, listening to Krista snoring lightly while cuddled up against him. Today was a day that he would not forget, not soon, anyway. He had come to know the Elazi race better, from what was said about how they had been searching the stars for sentient races to trade with and share their knowledge with.

Even Hallett Trasc had proven to be an interesting being. Jeff had carried on a chance discussion of the weather with him only to discover the Sub-Commander liked the cold. Where he was from, it did not snow but there were ice storms for most of the winter. As a result, the Dah'Trat, as they were known by, had thicker pelts from living in that environment. He also explained that all Dah'Trat were the same black color, they think, to soak up the warmth from the sun.

He also thought their height was a side effect of their diet. Those Dah'Trat that had lived away from the Northern cities and consumed a more normal diet, lost the height after a few generations. He also told Jeff that on occasion, those that move away from the North would have a solid white child, usually male. Again, Hallett attributed that to diet.

Jeff also learned that Na'Kesta was not originally from House Tal-Hassanai. She had been born into House Tal-Rimestai, a House known for their politicians. That was why her accent sounded just a bit different and not the same as her daughter.

He found it interesting that even though Na'Kesta was only a member of a Regional Senate, she had been selected by the Global Senate to oversee setting up relations with the military. Apparently, Na'Kesta was thought of very highly. Even Kamram had stated that he didn't understand why his wife didn't occupy his seat in the Global Senate.

All in all, they seemed to be very nice people that he would be proud to claim as in-laws.