

The characters Jeffrey Andrews, Na'Krista Nahala Keth, Kamram Keth, Na'Kesta Keth, Tegram Keth, Traci McDonald, Bosteg Haas, Kestam Ramm, Treman Baze, Merret Treet, Tascal Hone, Hallett Trasc, Hammet & Na'Kayla Nahala (nee Keth) Craine 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 Eight

“Back To Work”

Kam looked at the fields of white that surrounded them, feeling a bit nostalgic at the moment. It had been some time, sixty years or more since he had been around this much snow. There was some majestic beauty to the coating of white that covered everything. And maybe it was the silence that added to the overall experience.

“Kam?” his mate bid, shaking his arm to garner his attention.

He looked at his wife and smiled. “I'm sorry. I was thinking about the time Bost and I went to the Southern pole of Elazia. I remember how it was just like this; quiet, calm and maybe it was just a bit overwhelming.”

“I will agree.” Kess offered. “Have you taken your motion sickness pills?” she questioned.

“I have.” her hubby agreed. “How I can fly in an airborne craft and ride in an intergalactic flagship with no problems but become ill in a ground vehicle, I do not understand.”

“Maybe if you operated the vehicle?”

“Me? Operate Jeffrey's truck?” Kam retorted. “That would be ill-advised. I might have an accident.”

“Jeffrey has said he will sit beside you and coach you.”

“I still think it to be ill-advised.” Kam put on the table. “The last ground vehicle I attempted to operate on Prossimus Six ended in disaster. It took five days to repair the damage I had created on the loading deck of *The Blade*.”

“You know very well the Prossi were just taking their time, attempting to pad their repair bill. Our troops could have done the same job in one-half the time.”

“Now I know why you lead the Financial Committee.”

“Kam, I found a number of things wrong with their work. They had billed us for work done two or three times and they actually billed us for their sub-contractors.”

“When did you review the invoice?” he asked.

“When practically every ranking trooper that was on that mission was talking about your accident.” she replied.

“It was blown all out of proportion.” Kam countered with a dismissing wave of his hands.

“According to the report that was filed, you drove a Lestim Mk XI loader into an open elevator shaft! If you had not damaged one of the elevator door limit switches, as it was stated in the report, that elevator could have come down on top of you before they cut you out of the loader.”

“I’m sure that Mark XI could have supported the weight of that troop elevator.”

“A Lestim wheeled loader is built out of incredibly substandard material!” Kess blurted out. “Lestim Heavy Industrial has recalled all civilian versions of that same loader to prevent further lawsuits! Why the military still uses them, even with their horrendous track record . . .”

“Kess, we use them because we still have Mk XI loaders in operable condition. The Military Appropriations Committee keeps denying any further purchases of support equipment.”

“Gah!” the female elazi blurted out in frustration. “Sometimes I wish I were on that Appropriations Committee! They will spend funds on totally unneeded items, then deny essential support equipment purchases!”

“Nothing is stopping you from taking a seat on that committee. Two seats will be coming open in a short span of time.” Kam pointed out.

“I know,” Kess replied, pursing her lips as she thought about it. “I just feel like I would not have time to give the position proper attention.”

“You have plenty of time.” her husband suggested, right before a sound garnered their attention.

Kam and Kess heard Jeff start up his truck so they knew their trip would be beginning in a few minutes. The sound became louder when the vehicle exited the barn and louder still as Jeff pulled around in front of the house, on the snow-covered street. Krista was in the front seat, next to her future *One Love* and Hallett Trasc was in the bed, kneeling on a pad.

“Shouldn't you be in the cabin with the rest of us?” Kam asked his Sub-Commander after they had walked up to the road from the front porch.

“I will be fine back here. Besides, I need to be able to address any problem from a full-circle vantage point.”

“Very well, then.” Kamram assisted his mate into the truck, taking the back seat with her. He shut the door, put on his seatbelt, made sure his *One Love* had hers on and then tapped Jeff on the shoulder. “We are ready.”

“You could have drove, you know.” the human offered up.

“No, I wish to be a passenger so I can enjoy the scenery.”

“Okay, Father Kamram.” Jeff replied. “Here we go.”

Kam took in the view out of his window, looking at a world blanketed in white. He remembered Talas Three, a cold, almost dead planet they had discovered. The Talasians were holding onto their world with a vengeance and they flat rejected an offer to relocate them to a warmer planet. That concerned the Elazi greatly.

The scientists on board that research vessel knew there was nothing that could be done for Talas Three short of terraforming it, which the Elazi did not have the technology to accomplish. Ten years down the road, Talas Three was devoid of inhabitants and the Talasians were no more.

Kamram then thought about Zandru One and Two, the twin worlds that were moons, actually. The two worlds orbited a large, completely dead rock that had once been Zandru Prime. The Zandru didn't remember the reason for the mother planet being dead but once again, the scientists studied that cold rock. It had been devastated by nuclear war. The decay rate seemed to indicate Zandru prime had been dead for more than a million years. Kam's brother Tegram was right about something; war had no winners.

Kamram and Na'Kesta were somewhat let down when they finally made it into Auburn, since they had both enjoyed the ride across the snow. They had giggled and laughed from the excitement of blasting through snow drifts and the occasional long run at over forty miles per hour.

If the parents of Na'Krista were saddened that the fun was over with, there was one person that was really let down. That person was Na'Krista Keth. She had been informed by Outpost Auburn's commander that her presence was requested by her squad leader at Outpost Roseville. Krista had communicated the desire to use some of her leave time to be with Jeff but it was denied on the basis of a need for her to be with her team.

Some allowances had been made for her however, letting her be with Jeff on her three days off each rotation. Her father even arranged a shuttle for his daughter's use, depending on availability. At least Jeff and Na'Krista could call each other once the cell tower near Jeff's home was repaired, which would take a day or two at best.

“I'm going to miss you,” Jeff offered up to his future wife, hugging her tightly.

“I will miss you,” the furry female replied, taking in his musk to remember him by.

Sub-Commander Trasc waited as long as he could before he cleared his throat to get Jeff and Krista's attention. “I am sorry but we must be going.”

Na'Krista kissed her future *One Love*, then begrudgingly boarded the shuttle. She was waving out the window at Jeff with a sad look on her face while they lifted off and turned toward Roseville.

“Jeffrey Andrews?” an familiar Elazi voice bid, breaking Jeff's musing as the shuttle slipped out of sight.

Jeff turned to see Tammat Trax, dressed in medical scrubs. “I was asked to . . . um . . . detain you for a few moments. We have been informed by the Ambassador Prime that you will be going to Elazia. In such case, you need the required vaccinations before you leave Earth.”

“Vaccinations?” Jeff asked carefully. “You know, Na'Krista didn't say a thing about having to take vaccinations.”

“That's not surprising.” Tammat stated. “It's not often that another species travels on one of our flagships to our homeworld.” After a moment, he added, “A world that you will soon claim as a home, from what I have overheard.”

“So, when do we start?” Jeff inquired.

“If you would follow me, we can start round one of three.” Medic Trax replied.

“Three rounds?”

“Yes, but they are just a few small doses each time.” The Elazi offered up with a crooked smile. “Our genetic chromosome build is so close, I'm surprised that humans as a whole do not have a pelt or a tail.”

“Okay, let's get this over with.” Jeff mused, following the technician to their dispensary.

Several days later, Jeff was sitting on his front porch, looking at the fresh snow that had fallen the night before. All evidence of footprints and vehicle tracks had been obliterated by the fresh blanket on the ground and for some reason, that made him miss Krista all the more.

Looking up, he spotted an Elazi craft headed for Auburn at a slow rate of speed. Jeff wondered what they were up to, since they were sure the RUSA had been ferreted out of the hills the other day. Well, maybe they weren't. If the rogue soldiers were hunkered down, the only tell-tale signs would be smoke from the fires that they would need to cook and stay warm with.

Pushing up his left sleeve, Jeff examined the most recent vaccinations that he had been given. One had bruised, which was a good sign and another had raised a welt, which was acceptable. The third and last one had itched like mad, which he had been warned would happen. The medication Tammat had given him to combat the itch was very effective. Jeff had been asked to use a swab to apply the gel but as usual, he got into one of his bust-ass hurries. The end of his right index finger had been numb since yesterday.

He mused about leaving Earth to travel through space to Elazia. From what Tegram had said,

there had been exactly four other humans that had made the trip. Traci McDonald and he would be the fifth and sixth.

There was one thing that he really wanted to see up close and personal. That item would be *The Flagship Korrallid*. Just the fact that it could be seen from Earth with binoculars seemed to spark his interest. The thought of how this gargantuan object could travel at *Faster-Than-Light* speeds was mind-numbing, to say the least. Na'Krista and Kamram had both tried to explain this 'Singularity' power source to him and the theories behind slipstreaming through space but it all seemed so foreign. It was like something out of a science fiction novel.

Jeff found himself thinking about how Krista made him feel. There was something about her, maybe it was her innocence, that made her so attractive. That, and her smile which seemed to melt his heart. Or maybe it was her cobalt-blue eyes that seemed so infinitely deep. He had to face it; she owned his heart.

He wandered back inside and began to fix a meal, since he was becoming hungry. Maybe a lunch would help to distract his mind for a bit. While he waited for a skillet to heat up so he could make some fried potatoes, Jeff smiled at the book on the counter that he had found at the General Store. It was an interesting tome called 'An Idiot's Guide To Elazia'.

Apparently, the book was authored by an Elazi, working with a human to transcribe the information accurately. Just reading about the area around Na'Krista's home city of Kas'Madelle, he thought it might be a bit warm but beautiful, nonetheless.

Jeff put a bit of shortening in the skillet, then he added his chunks of diced potatoes. Using a wooden spoon to keep the chopped spuds from sticking, he thought about Krista some more. Her education seemed to be one that could be described as a college level degree, since she had taken classes at what seemed to be a university.

Krista had spent two years away from home, studying writing in the major Western city of Hes'Mi'Dalla. This city was an ocean-side metropolis of six hundred thousand Elazi with two houses of higher learning and the Global Senate. That was one thing Jeff didn't quite grasp, that this race of beings were united under one government. Maybe that was because there weren't as many Elazi on their planet as compared to humans on Earth.

That book that Jeff had procured also told of the planetary conditions. It didn't seem like it was that much warmer than Earth but there were other things to consider. There were thirty-one Earth hours in a day and four hundred and eighty-seven days to a year. Jeff thought about that for a moment and realized Krista was actually older than she had mentioned. Her twenty-seven Elazian years worked out to thirty-six Earth years.

Another interesting thing about Elazia was the gravitational difference to Earth. Elazia had roughly a twenty-one percent higher gravity and the atmospheric pressure at sea level was almost eighteen pounds per square inch. The book warned that it took the first two humans weeks to acclimatize themselves. That was one thing he would have to keep in mind.

Jeff put a griddle on the stove and put some slices of canned, spiced ham on to cook. He added some pepper and bit of salt to the potatoes, then he broke two eggs on the griddle to go with the

meat and potatoes. This was one of his favorite meals and probably one that he shouldn't eat so often, due to the various things found in that canned ham product.

His meal prepared, Jeff sat down at the breakfast bar that divided the kitchen and dining room and pondered what to do with his home while he was away. He thought that he might ask Stan Galli to look after it but with winter coming on, Stan might not be able to get to his home on a regular basis.

He could just winterize his home like he had done the first few years after the cabin was built. Jeff pondered that, since the roads near his home would be impassible to a wheeled vehicle until spring. With permission, he had parked his International pickup at the Svensen's home in Auburn, leaving the Mattracks installed on it when he was out of town. He was then able to reach his cabin with ease when he wanted to use it for a week or two. Maybe that was what he would do.

"Madame Ambassador, this is what we are proposing," the RUSA Captain offered up to the beings seated around a large conference table. "We will cease all hostilities and allow all of our prisoners safe passage back to a ship that is leaving our planet." The young officer looked at his crib notes, pushed his glasses back up on his nose and continued. "In turn, your forces will leave the planet within seventy-two hours. This is a very generous offer."

Na'Kesta Keth crossed her arms and shook her head as the RUSA representative sat back down at the table. She knew this wouldn't fly with the Elazia Global Senate. They wanted to see the RUSA prosecuted for the damage that had been done and the lives that had been lost. She had listened to hours of RUSA rhetoric and truthfully, she had become sick to her stomach from it.

"No. That offer is totally unacceptable," she replied flatly, laying her ears back just slightly from her bottled up anger from having to deal with this obvious lackey. It was very clear that he had been sent to this very important meeting just to piss them off.

The representative from the U.N. Chimed in. "We are in agreement with Her Esteemed Ambassadorship. Your offer cannot be accepted. You must lay down your weapons and surrender. That is the only response we will accept. Per Madame Keth's request, your soldiers will not be prosecuted for deserting their posts. We only want General Calhoun. Deliver him to the nearest military base and we will drop all charges against the remaining renegade soldiers."

"I cannot accept that counter-offer," the young soldier retorted.

"Then think about this, Captain Ronald Brandon, Reformed United States Army," Na'Kesta said in a cool, level tone of voice, "If you do not surrender General Calhoun within twenty-four Earth hours, we will be sending over fifty-thousand additional troopers dirtside with only one thing in mind: kill every renegade soldier that we can find." She tossed a railgun round on the table before she continued. "You know damned well you have no armor that can stop one of these rounds. They can pierce your best composite armor like writing paper. My troopers will be carrying railguns along with Squad Impulse Rifles and they will have very specific orders; kill first, ask questions later. Capish?"

The captain gulped as the round rolled off the table and landed in his lap. “We . . . maybe . . .” Ambassador Keth interrupted his train of thought.

“There is no 'maybe' in this. This is not an idle threat, this is fact. We are through being the nice guy in this little altercation. As I see it, you have just under twenty thousand soldiers and we have close to one-hundred thousand in combined forces. Would you admit that this little skirmish will become very one-sided if you do not surrender your rogue commander?”

“Um, yes, it may become a little one-sided.” Captain Brandon agreed.

“How about very one-sided?” she offered.

“Yes, Madam Ambassador. I will agree that it would be a lop-sided battle but that is all I have been allowed to offer, officially.”

“And what would an unofficial offer be?” Na'Kesta asked carefully. She could sense his trepidation building and he was having a hard time sitting still.

“Madam Ambassador, how about I just give you General Calhoun's GPS coordinates? I mean, we thought we were right but when we learned of how your side was not openly trying to kill our forces, we began to question our leader.” He then looked away in embarrassment.

“Continue,” Na'Kesta requested.

“There has been extreme dissent within our ranks.” the captain stated. “It's been tough to retain our troop strength with this happening. I would probably state our numbers at less than fifteen thousand. We do not have the resources to fight a sustained battle against your troopers, plain and simple. Those are the hard facts in a nut shell.”

“You are sure of your facts?” the Marine Corps General at the table asked.

“I'm sure, Sir.”

“This changes things.” Kess commented. “If you can give us the location of General Calhoun, someplace where he will be for one hour, we can capture him safely. I just need your assurances that this isn't a trap. If it is, we will turn loose the dogs, as you would say.”

“It will not be a trap.” Captain Brandon replied. “I need time to get my subordinates ready to bug out and leave the General high and dry.”

“Very well, Captain.” the ambassador stated. “We will be hearing back from you in less than a day. The Elazi wish to end this quickly and it's my hope that your troops who support General Calhoun will surrender once we have their leader in custody.”

The Captain stood, nodded to each member at the table, turned and left quietly. General Davis, who had been sitting to the left of Na'Kesta, stood and waited until she had left her seat to shake her hand.

“Nice bluff, Ambassador Keth. You looked so serious when you told Captain Brandon what would happen . . . to . . .” He stopped talking when he observed the determined look on her face.

“That was no bluff.” she stated firmly. “In fact, it was an understatement of our forces. We have almost two hundred thousand troopers in orbit, waiting patiently to come dirtside and decimate every RUSA soldier we can find.”

“Oh . . . Shit.” the Marine said reverently.

“Understand this, General Davis. We are prepared to give the RUSA the same thing we gave the Bil-Cmela. When we pushed back against our oppressors, we nearly sent them back into their stone age.”

“Madame Ambassador, I dearly hope it does not come to that.” General Davis commented.

“We hope it does not come to that, either. Since *The Awakening*, we have not been a warring race except when the Bil-Cmela subjugated us. That has been the only time in over three thousand years that we have declared war against another race. It was not a pretty sight.”

“I will take your word for that.”

“I will be seeing you soon.” Kess offered as she bowed slightly, then made her way out to the parking lot in front of the Headquarters building at Beale Air Force Base. Sub-Commander Trasc was waiting for her, standing by an armored shuttle that had its powerplant on standby.

“My Esteemed Ambassador, I trust the negotiations went well?” he inquired as they boarded their transportation.

“I think the negotiations went well, after I made it very clear we were not going to just leave the planet.” she replied. “Now, will we be picking up Na’Krista and delivering her to Jeffrey’s home?”

“She is impatiently awaiting our arrival.”

“I see.” the female Elazi mused. “Sub-Commander, are you hungry?”

“Yes I am, My Esteemed Ambassador.” the dark one replied.

“Hal, you know you can call me by my private name. You earned that right many years ago, before I married Kam.”

“I know, Kess. It’s just . . . it’s hard for me sometimes, to see you with Kam. You know I still love you. I try to temper that by being professional at all times around the two of you.” He turned around in the pilot’s seat to look at her before he continued. “We both realize that our joining would not have been allowed. I was not of a high enough station to be permitted to claim you as my *One Love*.”

“Hal, I still care for you and you do know Kam sees you as a brother.”

"I know he does because he has told me so. Out of respect for you, he used his connections to promote me to Sub-Commander in charge of Orange Detachment."

"Hal, I hate to admit this, but that was my request that Kam put you in the command position you now occupy." Kess put forth.

"I thought so, Na'Kesta. I suppose a belated 'Thank You' would be in order."

"Hallett, I had you promoted because I knew you would protect both Kam and myself. That is how you are."

"I am glad you see it that way."

"Hal, since Krista is so impatient, I think we should find a *Jack In The Box* somewhere. I am somewhat hungry for a spicy chicken sandwich."

"Are you sure? Na'Krista will be waiting for us."

"I am sure, Hal. My least daughter will just have to wait a bit longer."

"As you wish, Kess." Hallett Trasc was smiling to himself as they lifted off, knowing Kess was doing this just to bug her youngest daughter. He didn't have an issue with that, since he was thinking a Big Mess burger and a vanilla milkshake would be a nice afternoon meal. At least he knew the ambassador would take a burger and an order of fries to Krista as a peace offering.

Jeff looked up from his book that he was reading, a novel called "Destiny's Change". He kept hearing noises outside, possibly some Elazi aircraft flying about and the sounds were becoming distracting, to say the least. The noises became louder, some footfalls on the porch were heard followed by what seemed to be a familiar voice.

"Jeffrey Andrews?" the female voice beckoned. "Jeffrey Andrews, are you home?"

Jeff opened the front door, thinking it was Na'Krista but instead, it was a pale gray-white female that resembled his future wife, close enough that she must be family.

"Um, who are you? Are you by chance Na'Kayla?" he asked.

"Sub-Commander Na'Kayla Nahala Craine, Ninth Squadron, Third Battalion, Elazian Trans-Atmospheric Forces, at your service!" she said with glee. "I finally get to meet this mysterious Jeffrey Andrews that owns my sister's heart!"

"Please come in." Jeff offered. "It's amazing how much you look and sound like Krista."

"I am taller, stronger and prettier than her." Na'Kalya said with a cute little smile.

"Would Krista agree with that?" Jeff retorted.

“Not at all. She believes that as the least daughter, she has all of mother's good looks and all of father's intelligence.”

“That's what I thought. Um, what brings you here?”

“We're looking for a squad of RUSA soldiers that are getting pretty good at evading us. We needed to camp overnight so we could be nearby in the morning, when they attempt to move again. Could we make camp on your property?”

“That's fine with me.” Jeff agreed. “Is there anything that I might help out with?”

“Well, Krista said that you might not mind if I asked to use your dining room table for my equipment. Some of my computers and radio gear do not like the cold.”

“I guess that would be fine, too.”

Na'Kayla smiled widely. “We will be careful with your home, Jeffrey. I will instruct my troopers to be considerate of your belongings and we will put something over your table before we put out our equipment.”

“Mi casa es su casa.” Jeff offered up.

“Gracias.” Na'Kayla replied. “I will treat it like my own.”

Na'Kayla's technicians had taken over Jeff's dining room with their equipment so he and his future *One Love* were eating an evening meal at the breakfast bar between the kitchen and dining areas. Na'Krista had scoured Jeff's cabinets and had used the ingredients she had selected to create a hot canned, spiced ham sandwich with steamed vegetables on the side.

“Not bad for an improvised meal.” Jeff commented. “Your sister says you're the cook in the family.”

“Mother is the cook.” she retorted. “I merely learned how to make her recipes correctly.”

Na'Kayla was sitting close by so she put her two cents in. “What is wrong with my cooking?”

“You use too much spices.” Krista shot back with a smile.

“I've never heard that before.” Na'Kayla turned to the smoke gray male sitting to her left and nudged him. “Hammet, do I use too much spices?”

Hammet turned to look at his *One Love*. “Do I have to answer that question?” he inquired.

“Yes, you must answer.” the pale female replied. “I will not be angered by any answer you wish to give.”

“Okay.” Hammet kissed his wife, then replied. “You use a little too much spice, which in itself is not too bad but the real problem is the fact that you use the wrong spices at times. Some things, like cured *targ*, does not need additional pepper. And furthermore, this 'Oatmeal' which I am fond of, does not need salt, pepper or red pepper flakes.”

“Why didn't you tell me before this?” the pale female asked.

“I didn't want to upset you.” the dark male offered up. “I love you too much to let trivial things like spices interfere with our joining.”

Jeffrey smiled widely at the look on Na'Kayla's face, one of pure astonishment. “Now that is true love.” he commented. “Hammet was content to put up with Na'Kayla's cooking because of his love for her.”

Ham leaned back in his chair so he could see his future brother through joining. “I put up with it because frankly, I cannot cook. Better something that is somewhat tolerable than nothing at all.”

“Ham, my late wife Terri couldn't cook, either.” Jeff admitted.

“So you know what I am up against.” the dark Elazi retorted.

“If you would like, I can teach you some basic cooking, if we can find the time.”

“I will hold you to that offer.” Hammet replied.

About that time, Krista touched Jeff's hand and spoke up in English. “Jeff, I wish to bring up something very important. Well, two things.”

“Go ahead.” Jeff offered.

“Could we talk in private?” she asked.

“Sure. I have just the place.” he replied.

Jeff took his future *One Love* by the hand and led her to the hallway. He pressed in what looked like a loose nail in the ceiling trim of hall, which made a hidden door spring open behind them. He opened the door fully, turned on the lights in the now-visible stairwell, and motioned for her to follow him. Once they were on the stairs, he pulled the door closed behind them.

“This is my safe-room and firearms storage.” Jeff explained. “If anyone shows up unannounced that seems a little too hostile for your tastes, come down here. They can't get through the steel core door if you bolt it from the inside.” He then showed her how to do that.

At the bottom of the stairs, it was apparent that this safe-room was constructed under the guest bedroom upstairs. It wasn't too big but it seemed to be equipped for an extended stay. Jeff took the time to make sure Krista knew where to find food, water, the folding cot and the flashlights in this semi-bunker. He also made sure she had the combinations for the gun safes committed to memory.

“Is this private enough for what you want to say to me?” he asked.

“Well, maybe just a bit too private.” she replied with a nervous smile. “Jeff, there is two things you need to know before we are joined.”

“Go ahead.” he bid.

“Um, I was joined to another male, but he was shipped out on a space mission that same day, before we could make our joining final. Because he was killed when *The Great Hope* was destroyed by the RUSA, our joining was nullified.” Krista seemed somewhat upset to admit that fact.

“I don't have a problem with that.” Jeff put on the table. To him, that seemed very trivial, at best. It was certainly not something that would make him think differently of her.

“You are fine with that information?”

“Don't looked so shocked, Krista.” Jeff stated. “I love you. That's all that counts.”

“I am so glad,” she said softly as she wrapped her arms around her lover and held him tightly. On her home world, that would have been something that would have narrowed her suitor base considerably.

“Is that all you were worried about?” Jeff asked.

“No, that is not all.” she replied. After a moment to think of how she wanted to word what she needed to say, Krista spoke her mind. “Um, I'm not sure how you will perceive this. Do you remember when you said in passing, that you didn't know how you would afford a home on Elazia?”

“Yes, I did. I just don't have the resources for that and it bothers me, too.”

“Well, we do not have to worry about that.” Krista put forth. “I already own my own home. It was given to me by my father's mother when I became of majority age.”

Jeff hesitated for a moment to reply, waiting for the other shoe to drop. He could see the confusion in his future wife's eyes as she searched his for a response.

“That's it?” he asked.

“You are not upset by the fact that I own a home?” she asked.

“Should I be?”

“Jeff, it is almost always the male that provides the home for a joining.”

“And you think I would be upset?” Jeff asked. “I am not upset. In fact, I am glad you have a home we can settle down in, especially since your mother and father both seem so determined to

get you into the Diplomatic Corps.”

“As a diplomat, I might do a substantial amount of traveling to other worlds.”

“Look, I’ll support you in whatever you wish to do, Krista. I love you and I intend to join with you. Where we live is not important, as long as we are together.”

Jeff held his future wife, knowing that he loved her so much, he would do anything for her. It was good to know that their housing situation was under control, giving them a house on either homeworld for their use.

He did wonder, though. Would he be accepted into House Tal-Hassanai? Would they have to become Free-Lancers if he was not accepted into his future wife's House? His future father-in-law did seem positive that he would be accepted with open arms.

Jeff hoped Kam was right, that he would enjoy living on Elazia. That would be a long way to go just to find out he didn't like Krista's planet. On the other hand, for Krista, Jeff thought he could learn to like the planet. With her beside him, anything seemed possible now.