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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Fourteen

“Overstepping Boundaries”

Krista came to, her head full of cobwebs from whatever concoction that was in those darts they were hit with. She tried to lift a hand to her head to rub the sleep out of her eyes, only to find she had been immobilized very effectively.

Someone had dressed her in a heavy knit dirt-side armor undersuit and that person or persons had coated the outside of it with a thin layer of Gel-Seal, a spray-on substance used to patch vacuum leaks in a ships' hull. While she felt comfortable in her confinement, there was no way she could get herself out of this. Someone would need to saw through this with the appropriate high-speed cutter. From what she could tell, they at least had the decency to put an absorbent sanitary undergarment on her.

Looking down as best as she could, they had done her fully, from her neck down with the exception of her hands. Looking up, her head bumped the chains that she dangled from. That started her to swinging ever-so-slightly. From the smell of it, the Gel-Seal was fresh and it had not stopped out-gassing yet. It was cured enough, however that it was just like steel.

Jeff was laying on the floor across the small bay from her, clad only in his sleep pants and chained to a wall by his wrist. From the looks of it, they were in the loading bay of a medium utility craft. It was most likely still in one of *The Korrallid's* landing bays, since it was not under power at the moment. As Jeff would have said, finding them here would be like finding a particular needle in a stack of needles. Yelling as loudly as she could, she could not wake her future husband. This was getting worse by the minute.

She just prayed that Jeff, Hallett and Merrett were all okay.

. . . and she had a suspicion that this situation had “Tah'Nash” wrote all over it.

Hal had a small device in his hands that had a display on it, giving him distance and azimuth/elevation information. The numbers were not steady but they stayed within a certain range that seemed acceptable.

“What is that?” Marlett asked.

“I had a suspicion this might happen.” the senior Orange Detachment trooper replied. “I told Krista her dietary supplement pills had been misplaced when we came up from dirt-side so I provided her with a fresh bottle. Those pills are filled with tracking transmitters. By taking one each cycle, she should have several in her digestive tract by now.”

“So, where is she?” the younger trooper wanted to know.

“Up and aft, maybe in a landing bay.” Hallett stated. “There is too much metal in this ship for the signal to be accurate at a long range but it will allow us to find her. Hopefully, Jeffrey will be with her.”

Orange Detachment made their way through the ship, trying to make it look like they were just out and about. In reality, they were diligently following the signals emitted by the three miniature transmitters inside Na'Krista. Eventually, they ended up in Landing Bay Port Lower.

“Blast the Stars!” Marlett muttered under his breath. The landing bay was designed to contain fire and shrapnel in case a damaged ship landed. Some of this shielding was causing major reflections of the signals, making his scanner show only general directions for the devices.

“I expected this.” Hal stated. “Well, fan out, heading aft and start looking inside everything with a door or hatch.”

His detachment split up into armed pairs, starting a methodical search of the area. One thing burned brightly in Hal's mind; the bastard that darted him was going to pay dearly for that little indiscretion. Nobody does that to Al'Hallett'an Trasc'lan and gets away with it.

Na'Krista wondered what would be happening to them, since they had been in that ship's hold for some time. It did not take long for her to figure out their fate; two Elazi, wearing full body stockings, heads included, entered the bay. One male carried with him a heavy striking weapon used to train new recruits. It may have had padded ends, but the weapon weighed enough that it could inflict serious damage to the recipient of the blows. That recipient would most likely be her intended.

“Well, look who's awake.” one of the males spoke maliciously. “We wouldn't want you to miss us forcing your human to give up his claim to you and your possessions.”

“You've made a huge mistake.” she countered. “Whatever you think you will gain, you will not. Jeffrey will . . .”

“The human is not the real issue.” the second put forth. “He will give up his claims to any gain he may make through joining before we are through and you will give up your property. That is the only outcome that will be acceptable.”

Na'Krista watched the two males haul Jeffrey to his feet and splash him with water to bring him around. Once he stood on his own two feet, not quite fully aware of his surroundings at the moment, the taller of the two took the weapon in hand, prepared himself and struck Jeff in the

sternum with the end of the weapon in a thrusting motion. Her future husband was hit so hard, his feet left the floor and he flew to the end of the chain around his wrist. After a very sudden stop, he fell to the floor in a heap.

“So, as you can clearly see,” the shorter male stated, “Your human will not be able to endure this beating we will give him. If he is smart, he will concede before we injure him too greatly. When he does, you will either concede your claims, too or we will kill him.”

The taller of the two males started to move toward Jeffrey just as a pair of chestnut-furred arms shot out from the darkness behind him, dropped a garrote around his neck and tightened it firmly. It was Jo-Linn's husband, Kenn-Jim Farnissen controlling that simple but deadly weapon. The shorter male, once he had observed the attack on his accomplice, turned to run. The problem was, there was another very sturdily-built pale buff-colored Pak'Saa'naani male in his way. That male wielded an Earth-manufactured Rawlings aluminum softball bat. It made a very unusual 'tinging' sound when the shorter of the two unknown males was hit in the left knee, dropping him to the deck. Just moments later, Jo-Linn entered the bay, followed by most of the members of Orange Detachment.

“Well, aren't you in a predicament!” the spotted femme blurted out once she had observed her friend's situation and took the time to tap the shell surrounding the encumbered Elazi femme with her knuckles. “Hal, help us get Krista down from here?” she asked.

“See about Jeffrey first!” Na'Krista countered.

Several of the Orange Detachment had already surrounded Jeff and proceeded to access his situation while they removed the chain from his wrist. It didn't take long for a medical unit to arrive and whisk Jeff off to the main medical facility on the ship. Once they had made sure he was on his way, Jo-Linn and Kenn-Jim came over to see about the bound Elazi femme.

“Um, you're going to be a while in that mess.” Kenn offered up. “I can take you to Hann-Tom's metal fabrication shop where we can cut you out of that Gel-Seal.”

The buff-colored Pak agreed with Kenn-Jim. “I have high-speed cutters in my work space. I've heard of this being done to somebody by the Tah'Nash but I had never observed it first-hand.”

“Well, it's not bad, but I want out.” Krista put forth evenly. “I also want a crack at those two that assaulted us.”

The buff colored Pak male frowned. “You had better be patient. I estimate about ten hours to cut you out of that Gel-Seal.” Hann-Tom put forth. “I hope you have an absorbent garment on under all of that.”

After he had been patched up, Jeffrey had been escorted by Merrett from the main medical facility, over to the utility shop that was situated between landing bays Port Upper and Port Lower. He had donned some hearing and eye protection, the intent was to stay near Krista while the two Pak males cut her out of her confinement. Due to her proximity to the cutting being done, she had

earplugs, goggles and a serious-looking respirator to protect her lungs. They had even went so far as to drape a towel over her face to keep the bits of Gel-Seal from being caught in her fur.

“Jeffrey, you may want this,” Hallett offered up, holding out a respirator for him.

“I think you're right.” Jeff agreed. He donned the breathing device, then he sat back down by Krista's left side, opposite the two males wielding cutters and took up her hand to reassure her. From what he could see, this stuff was very difficult to cut, to say the least. The sealant was throwing sparks at times but it also seemed to be gumming up the cutters when the technicians would try to get any speed up. This was slow going and it would not get any better as time went on and the remaining Gel-Seal cured completely.

Krista squeezed his hand to get his attention. “Jeff, I'm getting thirsty.” she stated loudly.

“Okay, I'll get you something to drink.” he replied. Before he could get up, Hallett handed Jeff a bottle with a straw in it.

“I anticipated her need for refreshment.” the ebony warrior put forth.

Kenn and Hann stopped their work and tipped Krista up to make it easier for her to drink her water. They took the delay to change the cutters on their tools, since the Gel-Seal had a component in it that was somewhat abrasive, dulling the high-speed cutting tools.

“Krista, how are you holding up?” her *One Love* asked, concerned that she had been in that encasement for some time now.

“I've been better, my love.” she admitted. “I'm going to need to take a long, hot shower once I'm out of this mess. I'm hoping to be free of this before the need to 'take a dump', as you would say, gets too great. As it is, I've had to void my bladder already. How embarrassing, soiling my undergarment like a small child.”

“I'm sorry, Sweetheart.” Jeff put on the table.

Kenn cleared his throat to get the couple's attention. “Na'Krista, may we continue?”

“Yes, Kenn. I've had enough to drink for now.” she agreed. “How much longer will you be?”

“Another three hours, if I have my guess right. I am so sorry we cannot go faster.”

“It's alright, Kenn. I know you're doing your best.”

The two Pak males tipped Krista back horizontal and began to work on her confinement again, trying to make one cut that would separate the suit top and bottom. It was explained that this method of separating the shell would take the least time. At least Jo-Linn had said she would return in time to bring Krista some clothing to wear back to their suite once she had been freed.

While he kept his future wife reassured that he was there for her, Jeff thought about the situation. In his opinion, this had gone far enough. Once Krista was free, they were going to arm

up for their own protection and he would talk with someone about setting the door for their suite to open only for them and Orange Detachment, if that was possible. The two Elazi males that had kidnapped them, had just walked in on them with no signs of forced entry to be found.

Putting a hand to his shirt pocket, he felt the Amp-Light knife Jo had given him. She had demonstrated it for him on a piece of titanium clamped in a vise where it had cut through the inches-thick metal like a red-hot knife through warm butter. Now he knew why it was banned in a few solar systems. Jo had told him to use it only if it was his last resort.

Jo-Linn had also directed him to lock it up in their room safe when they arrived at Pharrpoint Station or risk being arrested if it was discovered in a casual search of their quarters. She had stated that since he was a human, they would probably search the room for anything that might fall under Galactic Quarantine And Confiscation regulations. Jo promised to sweep their quarters by tomorrow at the latest, just to make sure things were within regulations.

By the looks of it, Krista was about three-quarters of the way to freedom, so that meant about two hours left to go. Settling himself on his stool better, Jeff knew Krista would be on the warpath when she was free of her form-fitting prison. Moments ago, she had promised her mother that she would not do so but once her parents had left the room, she had told Jeff that what her parents did not know wouldn't hurt them. She seemed pretty serious about that fact, too.

In a 'seedier' section in the aft area of the ship, a pale gray femme Elazi walked on the metal deckplates almost silently, being ever vigilant of her surroundings. The steel mesh-reinforced black leather jumpsuit she wore hugged her curves, displaying a body that did not belie its eighty-plus years of life. Her garment would also protect her from most conventional cutting weapons and claws. The ballistic armor in the torso of the suit would protect her against any small projectile weapon, too.

Although she was armed with a disruptor pistol and a Vibroknife, her main armament glinted in the light as she advanced upon her quarry. The female in question wore forged titanium claw sheaths applied to her claws, giving her ten rapier-sharp tools at her disposal. A very old, traditional armament, in the past worn by those of stature. Nowadays, they were seen as ceremonial jewelry and were not commonly sharpened to a razor's edge like the ones she wore.

Stopping outside the doorway to the room she knew held her quarry, she waited until she heard a double-tap on a transmit switch through her earpiece, letting her know things were set. She used her override code on the door, then she advanced through the portal with purpose, strode right up to the smoke gray male sitting on the edge of a desk and gripped his neck with her right hand, piercing the skin in five places. One claw was perilously close to his jugular vein and her thumb claw was right over his windpipe.

“Esteemed Ambassador! Please let go of my . . .” His request was cut short by her glare.

“Shove it, Rellan Trent!” she spat out. She then brought up his right hand that held a percussion weapon, his wrist in her firm grip, her claws unsheathed fully, poised to rip into the tendons that controlled the fingers. “You speak one more word without my permission, you lose the use of

your hand. Understand me?"

Rellan nodded slowly, realizing the gravity of the situation.

"Now, you tell your retinue to drop their weapons, all of them." she stated in a level, strained voice.

"What if I don't?" he retorted, cringing when he heard multiple railguns charging their capacitor banks.

"If they do not give up their weapons, they will all die. No being will care that my detachment has disposed of a Tah'Nash contingency."

"You heard The Ambassador. Give up your weapons." Rellan told his group. Several of Orange Detachment stepped into view, taking all of the weapons proffered up and a few that were hoped not to be discovered. Several soft thumps were heard, followed by several key Tah'Nash soldiers falling to the deck, knocked unconscious.

"Now that we have that distasteful detail taken care of, you will tell me who has ordered my daughter killed. Right now, if you value your life."

"We cannot tell you. You know that to be true. A soldier's oath prohibits us from revealing our orders." Rellan replied.

"Very well. Marlett, please pummel this being until he tells us who is behind all of this."

Kess let go of Rellan and stepped back, giving her chosen warrior room to do what needed to be done. Out of the darkness strode the solid black Elazi, wearing his house loincloth, a leather upper body harness and an evil grin. He stopped in front of his target, nodded to his employer, then looked at his mark.

"I do not wish to kill you, but I will if it comes to that conclusion. Speak up or prepare yourself for my wrath."

When Rellan failed to tell Na'Kesta what she wanted to hear, Marlett began to pound upon the smoke gray male, the first roundhouse punch decking him. The warrior picked Rellan up off the floor, and held his left shoulder, claws out while he pounded on the unlucky Tah'Nash soldier with his left hand that was clad in the Elazi version of brass knuckles.

Several minutes later, when Rellan was revived from being beaten unconscious, Marlett hoisted him effortlessly to his feet and started pounding on the dark gray Elazi's midsection. After the third punch, the recipient of Marlett's wrath held up his hands in defeat as he dropped to his knees.

"I will tell." he wheezed out, after spitting out a mouthful of blood. "Do not hit me again. I will break my oath. I denounce my allegiance to the Tah'Nash."

Na'Kesta walked up to the beaten male and grabbed his jaw, making him look up at her. "Pledge

your life and your honor to House Keth'lan, Rellan Trent'lan.” she demanded.

Rellan looked up at the female glaring down at him and gulped. “I cannot, My Esteemed Ambassador. I am a Trent'lan, sworn to our house.”

“You will swear your oath to House Keth'lan or you will die.” she stated malevolently. One of her hands went around his throat, the fingers poised to rip out his jugular and the thumb claw set to tear out his windpipe. She then began to put pressure on his neck, sinking in her claws slowly.

“Stop! Stop!” Rellan blurted out in an effort to save his hide. “I swear my life and my honor to House Keth'lan! I will tell you who my orders came from! An'Retten'af Trent'lan directed me to kill Na'Krista and her human pet!”

Na'Kesta smiled slightly, then she spoke quietly but with authority. “I have orders for you, Rellan, now of House Keth'lan. Once we are back on Elazia, you will ferret out An'Retten'af Trent'lan, kill him and put his dead body on a stake outside Dassan Trent'lan's office window. Is that understood?”

“Clearly, My Esteemed Ambassador!”

“I have further orders.” Kess continued, “Any one of your former Tah'Nash contingency that do not wish to serve House Keth'lan, you will kill them and put their bodies out an open airlock.”

“Yes, My Esteemed Ambassador!”

“You had better get your injuries looked after,” she said very noncommittally, letting go of her newest house member and allowing him to sag to the deck. “Remember, there is no place for any of you to hide on this ship. I have proven that point by locating you and your band of miscreants.”

Rellan watched the matriarch of House Keth'lan, his new house, leave the area with her detachment of troopers. This had become very distasteful to him, being forced to pledge his very soul to House Keth'lan to prevent his death at Na'Kesta's hands. A death that would have been slow and very painful.

He was a warrior and his word that he had given the Ambassador was golden. As such, Rellan would not go against the directives given him. He was now stuck with doing Na'Kesta's bidding, ordered to kill a member of House Trent'lan and put his corpse on display. That action would have declared war in the old days, before *The Awakening*. Nowadays, it was a way of dishonoring a house and if there was a house that deserved it, it was House Trent'lan.

There was one consolation to the agreement, however. House Keth'lan would protect him now. This he was sure of. Now to find out who would follow him and who would be going for a space walk sans protection from the vacuum.

Jo-Linn and Jeff stood by while Hann-Tom made the last cut on the Gel-Seal that held Krista captive. The incision was made, the top of the rigid containment was tested to see that it was

loose, then the two Pak males turned their backs while Jo-Linn and Jeff lifted the top off and sat it aside.

Krista was assisted in sitting up so she could wrap herself in a robe brought to her by her femme Pak'Saa'naani friend and from the smell of it, she needed a shower right away. Several Orange Detachment troopers were waiting as an escort once she was standing, taking them through the ship to their room along a pathway that was not heavily occupied. Everyone was armed, including Krista. She was carrying a Squad Impulse Rifle, set for full power and it was clear she would use it at the slightest provocation.

Once in their quarters, she made a bee-line straight for the bathroom. The robe was dropped at the doorway to their facilities, she placed her soiled undergarment in the appropriate bin, then Krista stepped into the shower. Moments later, the water was on, very hot and she was scrubbing at her fur furiously, soapy lather going everywhere. That concerned Jeff greatly.

“Krista, are you all right?” he asked. She stopped lathering her fur and slumped against the wall of the shower, sobbing. Jeff entered the shower and knelt next to her, taking her in his arms, even though he was being soaked by the flow of water. “Krista? Talk to me, please?”

She had to fight to staunch the flow of tears before she could speak clearly enough to be understood. “I feel so violated!” she blurted out. “Some males must have touched my naked body without my permission and I was forced to soil myself like a newborn! I feel dirty all over!” she growled out between sobs.

Jeff helped her to stand, then he held her to himself while he began to lather up her fur for her. She was still very upset but she allowed him to assist her in showering up. Once she was clean to her satisfaction and all of the soap was rinsed from her pelt, Jeff guided her to the drying booth to let her dry off while he stripped off his wet clothes and found them some robes to wear.

After getting his robe and finding hers, he waited with his back turned while she finished drying off. Why he did that, he wasn't sure, since he had just been with her in the shower. He felt the robe being taken from off of his shoulder, then the door to the booth opened.

“Feeling better?” Jeff asked as he turned and took his future mate in his arms, holding her tightly.

“I am still upset.” she replied. “We're going to fix that door first thing.” she put forth as she went to the communications console and contacted Billeting. After a short conversation, she sat down and rubbed her face.

“Well?” Jeff inquired.

“Our door is being locked out to all access except our cards and Orange Detachment's codes.”

“Your parents?”

“They are locked out, too. Just in case their codes were compromised.”

"I see." Jeff looked up to see his *One Love* was making another call, contacting Hallett Trasc to bring them some food.

"I am not leaving this room unless the ship is coming apart at the bulkheads." she stated firmly. "Furthermore, I'm going to have Hal bring me a sidearm that I'll figure how to sleep with. I will not be taken against my will again."

The door chime sounded again, letting them know someone was outside that didn't have an access code or card that was programmed for their door. Krista shook her head, motioned for Jeff to get back, then took up the Squad Impulse Rifle. Making sure it was armed and charged, the upset femme tapped in a code on a panel by their bed and leveled the weapon at the door.

"Enter with your hands out, palms forward!" she shouted as the door slid open.

"It's your mother, Krista!" a familiar femme voice replied before she stepped into view. "Would you shoot your own mother?" she asked with a smile.

"I am sorry, Mother." Krista replied. "I was . . ." She stopped talking when she noticed her parent's apparel. "Mother, what have you been up to?" she asked.

"I had . . . *something* . . . to take care of." was the somewhat evasive reply.

"There is more to it than that." the daughter retorted. She laid down the rifle, walked up to her mother, took her mother's right wrist in hers and brought that hand into view. The tips of the claw sheaths were clearly visible and slightly stained with blood. Krista tested one, just to confirm it was as sharp as it looked.

"Mother, where have you been and does this have anything to do with what happened to me?"

"I have been . . . *somewhere* . . . and I did have to make a few demands of some former Tah'Nash operatives."

"You went by yourself?"

"I had half of Orange Detachment with me." the elder Keth'lan related. "This needed to be done, Krista. I cannot stand by while something terminal happens to you. I stood by once before and lost my mother through joining. I will not lose another family member."

Krista was appalled by that thought. "Mother, you might have been killed!" she blurted out.

"Hardly," Na'Kesta retorted. "There is something you need to know, both of you." she offered up.

"What would that be, Mother Na'Kesta?" Jeff asked.

"You need to know of my past, all of it." the elder Keth'lan replied. "When I was just twenty-two summers old and fresh out of The Academy of Political Science, I was approached by a male that had some very different views from what I was taught. He explained that the political system

was broken and it was in need of repair from within.”

She sat down before she continued. “That male, Terret Frail'lan, told me that he could get me into politics, so long as I would do little 'favors' for him from time to time. He made it sound so exciting at the time. Little did I know the whole truth about him. By accepting his offer, I unwittingly became a Tah'Nash operative.”

“MOTHER!?!” Krista was shocked by that admission from her parent.

“That's all water under the bridge.” Na'Kesta retorted. “I fulfilled my side of the agreement, doing his bidding when he demanded it of me. I never killed but I did my share of bloodletting with these.” She flashed her metallic claw sheaths to make a point. “I began to see that yes, the government was broken, but not like Terret let on. I did what I could at a local level to fix the problems and I feel like I've made a difference.”

Krista was still in a state of mild shock. “Mother, I take it you're still Tah'Nash?”

“I am, but my position in the local senate has some very important perks. If anyone were to try to disclose my affiliation, I would have them taken care of.”

“Mother, you're scaring me.” the younger Keth'lan femme put forth while she tried to steady her nerves.

“Krista, I have been Tah'Nash since long before I joined with your father. If I were in danger of being killed, I would be dead by now. To ensure your safety, I'm calling on the loyalty and honor of the Tah'Nash.” Kess reached into the small bag she was carrying and brought forth two small cases, handing one to Jeff and the other to Krista.

“Please open the cases.” Kess asked. When they did so, the box held an amulet that depicted a flying bird-creature holding a sword in its beak. In its talons was a rose-like flower and what appeared to be a cluster of grapes. The creature appeared to be wearing a tabard with some markings on it, one clearly spelling out 'Na'Kesta' above a crest.

“What is this?” Jeff asked after he had lifted the bauble from its holder to examine it.

“Wear it around your neck and if you are confronted by Tah'Nash, just show that to them. The operative will not harm you and they will be obligated to assist you in any way possible. It will mark you as untouchable.”

“I see,” the human mused while he put it around his neck. “How will I know the person confronting me is Tah'Nash?” he wanted to know.

Kess nodded. “They will be wearing a ring like mine.” She extended her hand so they could see the square pale lavender stone set in a gold ring.

While Jeff committed the look of the ring to memory, they were joined by Marlett, who had changed back into his duty armor. He had a bag with him that he gave to Kess, then he went to stand guard by the door.

“I have one more thing I need help with.” Na'Kesta put forth. “I don't want to be seen dressed like this. Please help me to remove my claw sheaths and help me out of this jumpsuit.”

Jeff sat down on the floor at his future mother-in-law's feet and had her rest her left hand on her knee. While Krista worked on her mother's other hand, Jeff used the tools given him to release the claw sheaths from Kess' claws. He wondered just how effective these were as a fighting tool and that question was answered before he could get the first sheath off, drawing blood from both of his hands in the process.

And if there was one thing he wanted to do, that was to sit Kess down and ask some very pointed questions about the Tah'Nash. For his own safety, Jeff knew he needed to know the whole truth, not just the parts Kess wanted him to hear.

He also wondered if Kamram was Tah'Nash, too.