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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Eighteen

“Darkness And Light”

Jeffrey, Na'Krista, Na'kesta and Sa'Densa waited patiently while Kamram was settled in his room within the main hospital on the flagship. From what the Earther could overhear, it was not a serious injury to his future Father-In-Law, just something that required a few dozen staples to close his scalp. He was going to be held overnight however, just to ensure he had not suffered a concussion.

Jeff was thinking about the news that had been conveyed to them earlier in the day and that thought made him shudder. He remembered what that insane captain had done to some undeserving Elazi soldiers so he actually feared for his future family's well being. If there was a way to return to Earth quickly, he would go on an expedition himself, just to retrieve Na'Kayla and Hammet. He owed them that much.

Thinking back to the America-China War, the images of the injured soldiers being filtered through Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Aurora, Colorado kept coming to mind. Warriors missing arms or legs, learning to function with prosthetic limbs with some so mentally scarred, they really didn't understand where they were or what had happened to their bodies. Jeff hoped nothing dire had happened to his future family members, nothing to place them in that mindset.

Krista had checked on her father just briefly, before the doctors had shoed the family members from his room. Noting her subdued demeanor, Jeff decided he would take her back to their cabin and make her rest. Before they left for their digs, he made the effort to ask for some medication to help her relax. It pained him to see her in this condition.

“Come on, Krista. Let's go back to our cabin.” he told her quietly. “You need some rest.”

“I . . . I should see about taking the next ship back to Earth. My sister needs me.” she countered.

That statement upset Jeffrey. “Um, what would you do once you got back to Earth? How would you find her?”

“I would put together a retrieval party.” the buff-colored femme offered up. “I would do something to find my sister.”

“And you would end up captured yourself.” Jeff suggested.

“I would not!” Krista blurted out. “I would be sure of my objective, do my recon of the area and make sure I was armed with heavier weapons than the RUSA possessed. I would not fail!”

“Okay, that sounds like an admirable plan. How do we get back to Earth?” Jeff asked, his curiosity piqued now.

Na'Krista went to a terminal, logged in and started her search for transportation back to the Terran solar system. After a few minutes, it was clear she had found the one fatal flaw in her plans. “We would have an issue.” she offered up. “It would seem we are in a lull, as far as ships going to the Terran Sol system. No ship leaves for Earth until what would be mid-December of your calendar. That ship would be our ride back to Earth after our joining.”

“Any alternates available?” Sa'Densa asked.

“Not unless we covertly appropriate *The Oraskinal*. That would be the only ship available on short notice that can slipstream.” Krista replied. She gave thought to doing just that; they would never make it out of the hanger before the ship was disabled and they were arrested. She could see the look on her father's face in her mind's eye if they did steal the medium cruiser. He would most certainly read her what Jeff had called the riot act, long version. “So much for that flawed plan.”

Jeff hugged her, then he kissed her on the lips. “Come with me. Let's get you some rest. I can tell you're stressed out.”

Krista allowed Jeff and Sa'Densa to escort her back to their quarters, not arguing the issue with them. It was clear, whatever happened to her sister, Na'Krista would not be able to help. She would have to pray to her Gods for her sister's protection.

She thought back to that day in the mountains above Auburn, doing her part to video the engagement with the RUSA forces. Armed only with a sidearm, she was chased up the side of the meadow by enemy fire. Her first choice for cover proved inadequate, which was proven by the lone 5.56 NATO round somehow defeating her armor.

Thinking it would be a better place to seek temporary cover, she scrambled into the back of what she thought was an abandoned vehicle, the truck that belonged to her future *One Love*. Krista heard the Elazi craft leave the area but before she could signal her squad for help, Jeffrey drove off with her in the back! Thankfully, her first interaction with him had worked out for the best.

Na'Krista hoped with all of her heart that her sister would safe and would be recovered soon.

Na'Kayla tugged at the strapping that held her wrists firmly to the table she was secured to, running scenarios through her mind as to what to do to escape this detention facility. The splitting headache she was suffering was no doubt from some drug administered to her at some point in time. There were a few Earth medications that the Elazi reacted badly to and whatever they gave her must have been on that very list. After tugging against the pinion for her right wrist again, she almost thought of giving up, since the situation seemed hopeless. In hindsight, if it had not been for the piece of metal embedded deeply in her left thigh, shrapnel from the armored scout craft's untimely ion reactor explosion, she would not be in this situation.

From what the pale gray female could see, she was in what appeared to be an operating room of some kind. A nurse had set up an intravenous line in her left arm and she had quickly cut away her fur around the metal still lanced through her leg while another nurse put an oxygen mask over her face. What bothered Kayla was the lack of a response to any attempt to converse with either of the females.

More troubling was the fact that after a short conversation between one of the nurses and what must have been a doctor that had come into the room momentarily, the femme had shaved the entire front of Kayla's torso, from just above her pubic bone, all the way to her neck. The areas around her injury and her upper body had been swabbed with some orange colored liquid, then something had been added to her IV, a medication that made her feel slightly numb all over. At that point that doctor came back into the room and walked up to her left side.

"I'm your surgeon, Commander. My name is Doctor Ronald Prichard." he stated very calmly. "I have been told by my Base Commander that I must remove this metal from your leg," he stated, giving it a tug to see her response to his aggravation of her injury, "And, if we have time, I'm going to do some light exploratory surgery. Nothing major but since you're the first living female that I've had the good fortune to examine, I thought I would take that opportunity."

Na'Kayla was stunned by this news from what was obviously a madman, so stunned that the pain from his stimulation of her injury didn't register in her brain. She had heard of various insane Army soldiers doing heinous acts against the Elazi. "You can't do that! The Geneva Conventions prohibit . . ." The doctor interrupted her diatribe by holding up his hand.

"Sorry, Commander but you're not Earth-born. The Geneva Conventions do not apply to your race." He took a moment to look at her vitals before he continued; "I'm going to try not to kill you but you might wish you were dead tomorrow, once the pain from your surgeries hits you and we don't administer any medication to help you rest."

"You can't do that!" Na'Kayla blurted out, frightened by the thoughts of being opened up and have some nut case probe around inside her body, doing who-knows-what.

"Now now, be quiet," the doctor retorted as he prepared to remove the metal that had been driven roughly through her thigh. "Keep it down and we will be done shortly."

While the surgeon turned his attention to her leg injury, Na'Kayla slumped back against the table, hoping for a quick rescue or if it came to that, a quick death.

It was oh-six-thirty hours local time and Sub-Commander Rellen Sandren'lan stood around a table with his newly-appointed squad commanders, going over the logistics of their assault upon what was known in English as Camp Folsom. This encampment was a commandeered former auto mall near Lake Natoma and Highway 50. The RUSA had built a perimeter around it with re-purposed shipping containers, according to his recon specialists.

The Reformed United States Army soldiers were guarding the facilities by walking the roofs of the containers, armed with light automatic rifles. The main gate was being protected by another

one of those kinetic energy weapons, sitting on top of a double stacked container to the right of the gate. The left side of the gate was guarded by what appeared to be a rocket launcher.

Recon Specialist First Sammet Frain'lan gave his take on the situation, putting markers on the overhead map they had displayed on a tablet, one that they had pulled from the Internet. "The containers seem to be empty of any living beings, according to our acoustic scans. I would approach from the North, taking out the containers on what they have decided is their safe side. We will have to cross a civilian highway, so we will have to hold fire until we are on top of their barricades. This building, the largest one from what we were able to see once we had a drone in the air, seems to be the medical area. Initial scans show what we have determined to be doctors and clinical technicians walking in and out of it, wearing what appears to be . . . uh, surgical scrubs."

"Specialist, where are our people being held in this compound?" Sub-Commander Sandren'lan wanted to know.

"Right here," he replied, pointing out what had been the used car sales offices. "I have reports that six of our people were observed in that general area. The building has been fenced off to contain our troops."

"Listen up, squad leaders. My call sign will be Zav'Nath. First Squad, call sign Abatis, you will block the highway to protect civilians, then you will breach the back of the compound. Second Squad, call sign Beren, you will breach the front gate just a few moments later. Take out that kinetic weapon and the rocket launcher before you enter the compound. Mechs one through four will hold a perimeter around the building holding our people. Mechs five through eight will form a barrier around the medical building. Third Squad, call sign Wagern, split up and overrun the medical and prison buildings. Fourth Squad, call sign Laster, round up every RUSA soldier you can find. Separate the officers from the enlisted. Any questions?"

Second Squad leader Ferren Zaan'lan spoke up; "What are the estimated forces behind the walls?"

Specialist Frain'lan nodded. "Just one moment." He then brought up his communicator and opened a channel. "This is Rigel One calling Rigel Two."

"Rigel Two, go ahead Rigel One."

"Rigel Two, give me a high altitude infra-red and heat signature drone over objective Zenith."

"Affirm, Rigel One. Drone away."

They waited a moment, then the map came to life with numerous orange dots inside the compound. While most of them stayed orange, some switched to a green hue, indicating possible Elazi prisoners. "The computer extrapolates approximately eight hundred souls. Most seem to be in the area set aside for rest."

Rellen looked at the others, then nodded. "If there are no other questions, I have one additional order for all of you. We will take no officer prisoner. Once we have them rounded up, we are to interrogate them for all information, then we will terminate all high ranking officers. The

compound will be obliterated by high yield munitions from a *Terror Bird* air to ground heavy assault craft.”

“This sounds like a *Death Storm*,” the Third Squad leader commented.

“It is,” Rellen agreed. “We are to become *The Death Storm Bringers*. There is one last item from Commander Haas'lan. Apparently, a conversation held last day with The Pentagon found the Marines more than willing to assist us. They are the HMM-774 *Wild Goose* squadron, flying CH-46E Sea Knight helicopters that have been modified with fixed medium bore rail guns on their port sides. They will squawk IFF Zulu Charlie six-six-five. All ground mobile soldiers will have transponders with the same squawk. Use USMC Tactical Six channel for all radio transmissions.”

“Is that all?” Trooper Zaan'lan asked.

“We have an Elazi coordinator that will be with the HMM-774. His call sign is Tango. The ships will be Tango One through Tango Six. If you need support from them, call Tango Actual and provide him with a nine-line. I know all of you have been briefed on how to do that. Now, put on your heavy armor so we can, as the Earthers say, saddle up and get this show on the road.”

The Sub-Commander started putting on his heavy armor plating, ones that would protect him from large caliber projectile weapons, then he waited until all the drop-ships were ready to depart. Once that was accomplished, he boarded the armored attack ship *Kreshka*, knowing in his heart they were going to ruin a few individuals days.

Colonel Marc Thompson walked into the temporary detention center, looking at his paperwork once more before knocking on the door to the holding area for injured prisoners. It was his duty, as commander, to make sure his prisoners were taken care of and given the required medical care.

Giving thought to it, continuing these attacks still felt wrong to him, especially after what he had heard about Captain Goodings' mountain foray and his untimely death. Colonel Thompson's commander had died in the last engagement which was the reason he was now in charge. Maybe they should declare a cease fire before more lives were lost. While he pondered those thoughts, the guard came to the door.

“Good morning, Sir.” the private offered up with his salute.

“Good morning, soldier. I need to talk with Sub-Commander Craine'lan and make sure her injuries were cared for by Captain Stewart.” That made the private look at him strangely.

“Sir, Doctor Prichard had her delivered to his operating theater about an hour ago. Something about an exploratory surgery.”

“Oh shit,” the Colonel muttered, “I had better get over there quickly before he harms the Sub-Commander.”

“Why the concern, Sir?”

Colonel Thompson looked at his subordinate with a pained look in his eyes. “She is an Ambassador's daughter. I do not want to bring a shit storm down on top of us, that's why.”

Na'Kayla kept nodding off from the medication that had been administered to her, waking only when the surgeon in charge of her care would tug excessively on the sutures that he used to close the wounds to her leg or when he deliberately poked at the wound proper with a finger out of spite. He noticed that she was awake again, so he spoke up.

“How are we feeling?” he asked, knowing full well how much pain she was experiencing at the moment.

“If . . . if you're done, just let me up from here.” she countered, blinking her eyes to clear them. Her leg, from what she could feel, was one massive flare of pain now that the steel had been removed. That, and the bridge of her nose hurt like hell from having an oxygen mask that did not fit her physiology, jammed tightly over her face.

“Oh no, I can't let you up, not yet.” the surgeon retorted. “You will lie still while I do just a bit of exploratory here.” He picked up a sterile marker from the tray beside him and began to plot out an incision from well below her belly button, up to the bottom of her sternum. “If you will hold still, please?” he asked, scalpel in hand, right before he began to make his first cut into her hide.

That first incision hit her like a ton of bricks, making her arch up off of the table in pain. It had hurt so bad, she couldn't make a sound at first. Once she had gotten back her breath, she screamed a feral wail of anguish. This only deterred the surgeon momentarily. He began to cut again, being none too careful in the process. Na'Kayla felt herself almost passing out, then something fiery was being introduced into her IV line that slammed her back to full awareness.

“Can't have you passing out on me like that. How will I know if I'm causing you harm from a lack of knowledge of your physiology?” Doctor Prichard asked.

“You're killing me, you fracking *B'Taagh!*” the Elazi femme blurted out through gritted teeth.

“No, your vitals seem good to me.” the sawbones put on the table while he used retractors to open her abdominal cavity. “Now, be quiet, please?” The doctor picked up a large pair of tweezers and he was just about to begin his exploratory when Colonel Thompson burst into the room.

“What in hell do you think you're doing?!?” the Base Commander blurted out as he pushed the nurse on the right side of the table out of the way so he could see about his prisoner first-hand. “Na'Kayla Craine'lan, are you okay?” he asked when he noticed she seemed to be awake.

“Pain . . . too much pain . . .” was all she could say in reply, stunned by the pain from her incision and that retractor rudely holding her abdomen open.

“Doctor, close her up. That's an order. I know what you're up to and for the record, I recall no abdominal wounds noted during her initial examination.” Colonel Thompson stated.

Na'Kayla was only half-hearing the conversation due to the pain, even though the drugs in her system had prevented her from passing out to some degree. What she did notice was the Colonel working with the strapping around her right wrist. She felt if come free, then the Colonel held her arm by the wrist, making her understand not to move her appendage. The base commander then slipped a pistol into her grip, making sure she had it firmly in hand. That forced her to pay attention to the two officers' heated discussion.

"I see no reason why I should close her up, not until I've had a look around and took some pictures to document the Elazi physiology." her surgeon brought up. He was obviously unaware of her having a firearm in her possession. She carefully pushed the safety off, pulled the hammer back and brought it to bear on the source of her torture.

"Close up my . . . my body or I wuh . . . will shoot." she growled out, trying to keep her mind focused. Her one-handed aim was not the steadiest, but it would do.

Colonel Thompson snorted in amusement, enjoying the look of disbelief on the doctor's face. "I think I would do as she asks."

"Wha . . . you are both insane!" Doctor Prichard exclaimed as he took a step back from the table.

"Three count, then . . . then I shoot." Na'Kayla hissed, clearly in severe pain. "One. You had bet . . . better do something." Na'Kayla warned. "Two. Don't think I . . . *Guh!* . . . I won't shoot." she admonished after a pause to clear her vision.

"If you kill me, who will close you up?" Doctor Prichard asked flippantly.

"I'll take my chances with some other surgeon." she replied through gritted teeth. "Three."

She waited a few moments to see if Doctor Prichard was going to do something for her. He played his hand confidently by crossing his arms and taking up a stance that seemed to indicate he was not going to comply. Na'Kayla then painted the wall with the surgeon's blood.

The Elazi Sub-Commander reluctantly gave the Colonel back his firearm, swallowed back the rising bile in her throat and took a few deep breaths to clear her mind. She looked at the Colonel with pleading eyes and made her request; "I think I have . . . *Gods!* . . . suffered enough for . . . for one day. May I please have . . . *Guh!* . . . a real surgeon now?"

The Colonel was just about to jump in and use his field medic skills from years ago to help her when they both heard the distinct sounds of medium and large bore rail guns being fired.

Sergeant Lonnell Hirsch watched the surrounding areas for possible trouble, using his night vision binoculars to assist his viewing acuity. It was close to an hour until sunrise, so it was just light enough to make it hard to see anything clearly across the street from their front gate with the naked Mark 1 eyeball. He had kept hearing things, muffled noises, but the direction was hard to pinpoint. What further bothered him was the fact that he no longer heard any traffic movement on Highway 50.

Noticing some activity in the trees in front of him, he focused on the source. That's when he observed the huge railgun barrel protruding from a large Oak, the opening at the tip sparkling with energy from the capacitor bank being readied for discharge. It was quickly joined by three more weapon barrels all charging like their brethren. Lifting his radio to his ear, all he heard was a screech from an audio jamming signal.

Shaking his head, he turned to get off of the top of the cargo container that supported the missile launcher and go report the possible intrusion. Just as he touched the ladder, that first loud shriek of a round being discharged hit his ears. That was the last thing he heard before his world was turned upside down.

Sub-Commander Rellen Sandren'lan watched on as the front gate to this rogue encampment was breached by the mechs, the operators using the grips to tear the remnants of the gate away for ground troops to enter the compound. The missile launcher and that kinetic energy weapon were the first two casualties of the engagement, taken out by his mechanized warriors. His *Terror Bird* had already taken several strafing runs at the RUSA helos, taking them out of the equation. That had paved the way for what would be the end of this engagement.

The helos from HMM-774 had made their appearance right after the gate breach, the soldiers deliberately wearing desert camo to make themselves stand out from the RUSA regulars. He was particularly pleased with the interaction between Elazi and Marine forces. They seemed to complement each other, covering each other as they made their way across the enemy compound. The Sea Knights call signs Tango Three and Tango Four were systematically taking apart the shipping containers in strategic locations by punching holes through the barricade, making the compound less than secure.

“Pilot, take me to the area designated as the hospital.” Rellen asked, wanting to know who was being taken care of. *The Kreshka* landed, aided by a Sea Knight, call sign Tango Five, laying down withering twenty millimeter suppression fire for them. The Sub-Commander took a small mixed contingency of USMC and Trans-Atmospheric Forces soldiers with him into the building, finding no resistance to their entry.

They took several different halls that branched off from the main foyer, looking to see if any Elazi were inside. A large number of the Trans-Atmospheric Forces were found in makeshift beds, including Hammet Craine'lan. The last door in the left hall proved to be the one they were looking for but it was not what Rellen expected; there was a quite dead surgeon on the floor and a RUSA officer, a Colonel, feverishly working on closing the incision down the front of Sub-Commander N'Kayla Craine'lan.

“Step away from her!” the commander of the assault party shouted, bringing his railgun to bear.

“Only if you want her to die!” the Colonel shouted back. “I need an Elazi surgeon in here stat! I have no idea how to close her up properly!” The RUSA officer turned to look Rellen in the eyes, giving away the fact that he was scared for his patient's life. “You, help me out here! Get some blankets and cover her up! She's shivering badly!”

After a moment to gather himself together, Sub-Commander Sandren'lan went to the shelves and grabbed several blankets. He put two of them over Na'Kayla's legs, then he took the third one and did his best to cover her upper torso, leaving the wound area accessible. Having some training as a field medic, he took some sterile drapes and covered what he could of her torso.

“Get the straps off of her ankles, would you? We need her free from this table so you can get her to your medical facilities.” Colonel Thompson suggested. Sub-Commander Sandren'lan did as he was asked, multi-tasking by calling for his field medic at the same time.

“I have help on the way.” he related to the base commander, once he had ended his conversation. “There may a problem, however. He is only a field medic. I do not know if he will be able to help.”

“Find my surgeon.” Colonel Thompson retorted. “Blond-haired Captain. His name is Joshua Stewart. Find him and get him here right now. I think she's going into shock.”

Na'Kayla felt deathly cold all over and she was beginning to shiver uncontrollably. She really wanted to relate her condition to anyone that would hear her but the pain was pulling a coating of blackness over her mind. It really felt like she was falling down a dark tunnel on her way to the hereafter. Somehow, that was comforting to her. The voices around her, and her perceptions of the bustle in the room, were slowly fading into the background of the blackness.

If she were indeed dying, she felt no fear. She knew the answer to the riddle of war, so getting past *Od'Tra The Wise* would be no problem. There were family members there that would welcome her to a land on the other side of the veil that was not saddled with war or strife.

“Na'Kayla?” a female voice beckoned. One that did not sound familiar to her. The dying femme looked around, finding herself somewhere that might have been in the hills above *Kas'Ma'Delle*. That, or the hills around Loomis, California. Looking down at her body, it appeared as if she were wearing her combat armor that had been polished to a golden sheen. As Na'Kayla looked around for the owner of that voice, another female just sort of appeared from somewhere in the trees and walked up to her.

“Do I know you?” she asked, finding this person in front of her, wearing the garb of a diplomat, reminded her of a family member that was known only to her by pictures and video.

“I am Sa'Kayla Mira Keth'lan, your father's mother. I came here to see after your soul. You are in danger of your soul becoming lost and your physical body dying.” was the answer.

This bothered Na'Kayla. “I am dying?”

“It is very possible that you are.” Sa'Kayla put her arms around her granddaughter and held her tightly. “I want you to stay here with me for a while. Others are working on your physical form, repairing the damage done by that insane alien. I will hold your soul, keeping that part that makes you who you are, safe.”

“Will I live?” the younger Keth'lan asked.

“We are all in hopes you will survive this.” After a moment, Sa'Kayla continued. “No one came to comfort me when I was murdered. My soul wandered the ethereal wasteland of death for a very long time, before I found the entrance to *Os'Kad M'Tra* quite by accident.

“When I entered the gates, *Od'Tra The Wise* did not ask for the answer, for he knew that I was well aware of the pain and the loss. Because of that, he conferred the rank of *Esed-Fanzaa Rann* upon me. I now search for the lost souls of our lineage, protecting them or assisting them in the passage through the gates.”

There was something Kayla wanted to know. “Mother Sa'Kayla, who murdered you?”

“This pains me to tell you this. My brother, Dassen Trent'lan took my life.” Sa'Kayla explained. “I think your father knows this, too. Dassen wanted my home and property that were rightfully mine by my fathers' gift for my joining to Af'Jesett'an Keth'lan, your father's father. Dassen wanted the land for the riches that it would bring him, riches that he would not have to work hard for.”

Kayla thought about that; an extended family member that she thought fondly of, had murdered his own kin. Only a monster, a cold blooded *B'Taagh*, would kill his own sister.

“Do not trust him.” Sa'Kayla told her granddaughter. “He will murder again to find gain. You must know that. Stay clear of his sphere of influence for you will only be dragged down into despair by him.”

“I . . . I feel warmer now.” Na'Kayla offered up. She felt safe and protected, now that her past kin held her tightly.

“More have come to help me.” Sa'Kayla replied. “More of your kin have come to help me anchor your soul so that it will not slip through the gates. We will help you find the strength to survive.”

The younger Keth'lan looked around to see more people materializing around her, moving in to reach out and put a hand on her, conferring their strength to her. There were hundreds, maybe thousands of all pelt colors, smiling and giving her raw energy to bolster her body and mind. Some she thought she recognized, others, she did not know but it was clear they were related to her. While she watched, the crowd opened to allow one more to approach her.

The male in question was dressed in ceremonial robes that were of a very old style, a rich, deep green coloration of a high priest. He was not that tall and by the way he walked, the individual must have been physically impaired. Once he was closer, she could make out his fur was not a pale gray, but a solid white and his eyes were just as white with vertically slit pupils.

“Na'Kayla Nahala Keth'lan, I heard your soul cry out to me from far away,” he said quietly in a very old dialect. It was so old she should not have understood it, but she made out what was said clearly.

“Who are you?” she wanted to know.

The ivory-hued priest smiled warmly and spoke again in her native dialect. “I am the one that once brought peace to our people. While I died before world peace was declared, it is not your time to die this day. Na'Kayla, you have a destiny to fulfill. You will bring forth the truth in an old, almost forgotten matter. That, and you will protect your sister at a critical juncture in time.”

“When will I do this?” she asked.

“You will know the time.” the priest replied. “Now, you must rest and conserve your energy if you are to survive. Rest, for we will always be with you.” Al'Merit'an Temmer'lan touched her forehead with his stumpy hand, making her sag into the embrace of Sa'Kayla and her family members, resting deeply. He knew she would be the catalyst in this family struggle.

“Well, I don't know what to make of that.” Colonel Thompson mused as he looked at the Elazi soldier's stats on the monitor. “she has warmed up several degrees, her pulse has slowed and her blood pressure is back to almost normal.”

“Are we out of the woods yet?” Captain Stewart asked. He didn't want to take the time to look for himself while he was being assisted by the Marine and Elazi medics in closing this grievous incision.

“It is possible that she is being held from crossing into *Os'Kad M'Tra*.” The Elazi field medic offered up. “Her body no longer shivers, too. We will be victorious over death.”

“Maybe we should push another bag of that universal plasma?” Doc Stewart asked of the Elazi medic, Specialist Garren Drexel'lan.

“Yes, we should. She had bled heavily. Your whole blood, 'O' Positive, would be better for her if you have some available.”

“Okay. Nurse, push two liters of 'O' Positive.”

“Yes, Sir!” The nurse broke away from what she was doing and set up another bag of blood for Na'Kayla. “Sir, her temperature is back to Elazi normal. Her vitals are normal across the board.”

“And that is that, the incision is closed.” Doctor Stewart commented as he stepped back from the table. “Let's clean her up and prepare her for her flight to a hospital that can care for her properly.”

Colonel Thompson and Doctor Stewart both turned to leave the room, but they pulled up short when they were confronted by a Marine Colonel who was leaning against the door frame, waiting for them finish their work. The Marine smiled at them and saluted back when the two RUSA officers saluted him.

“Colonel Thompson, I'm Colonel John R. Stankewitz, commander of the VMM-774. I have been given the task of rounding up all RUSA soldiers and taking them to Travis AFB.”

“I am willing to surrender to you.” Marc put forth. “I will not put up a struggle.”

The Marine smiled at them. “Actually, I watched a good portion of that bit of surgical procedure. I was impressed by the way all of you worked together to save her life, human and Elazi, side by side.”

“Well, I couldn't let her die. It was unfortunate that a madman got to her first.” the Base Commander offered up.

“I'm assuming the madman would be the KIA on the floor?” Colonel Stankewitz asked.

“First Lieutenant Ronald Prichard. He had a bit of a mean streak in him, Sir.” Captain Stewart put on the table. “He was always wanting to make himself an expert on the Elazi physiology.”

“I see. I surmise that bit of information will be in your report to me, Captain Stewart?”

“Yes, it will. I had already relieved him of his duties and I had requested a replacement as of yesterday.” the surgeon offered up.

What sounded like a huge craft was landing out front so they all went to see what was transpiring. The commotion turned out to be an armored medivac transporter, *The Cholart*, sent down from *The Battle Cruiser Sharp Fang* in high Earth orbit. Once it had settled on its landing gear, the sides and back opened up and Elazi medivac teams spilled out, thirty or more medics in all.

“This way!” Sub-Commander Sandren'lan shouted, motioning the teams to the building that held the injured troopers. With quick precision, they began to load out the injured individuals, putting the ambulatory into the front area and bringing the more seriously wounded to the back ramp where the awaiting specialist medical crew members were stationed.

Garren Drexel'lan was still finishing up with Na'Kayla when a transport team arrived to take his charge. With practiced precision, they finished the cleanup work, swapped out the Earth monitors for their own and slipped the gray femme off of the operating table and onto a field mobility stretcher with its wheels extended.

“Her vitals are nominal blue at the moment. Na'Kayla Craine'lan is ready for transport.” the lead tech addressed his crew. “Put her in the back and stay with her. I will find her mate and load him out with her. That will help her stability, to have Hammet Craine'lan with her.”

The Cholart had just lifted off when Sub-Commander Sandren'lan approached Colonel Stankewitz. Showing proper military protocol, he came to attention and saluted the Marine officer. “Sub-Commander Sandren'lan reporting. My commander radioed me and instructed me to talk with you.”

The Colonel returned the salute. “Sub-Commander, regretfully, I must inform you that I am taking charge of the RUSA soldiers. I know you were to perform something called a *Death Storm*, but I'm sure you will agree with me. There has already been too much bloodshed on both sides. I will be taking all of the RUSA soldiers into custody.”

“I will turn over command of this operation to you.” the Elazi soldier replied. “And, I will agree with you. There has been great bloodshed in this struggle.”

“And what of your injured?” he wanted to know.

“They are going up to *The Sharp Fang*.” Sub-Commander Sandren'lan replied. “They are better equipped to deal with battlefield injuries of the more serious nature.”

“For what it's worth, I hope they all recover.” Colonel Stankewitz offered up.

“Thank you, Sir. I hope the same for your injured soldiers.” the Elazi replied.

The Marines loaded back into their helos and with a final wave of the hand from the Colonel, they lifted off and headed back towards Travis, now accompanied by numerous transport ships of both human and Elazi design. The RUSA troops had went with the Marines, only with some hesitation. The armed Elazi contingent had made it a no-brainer for them, knowing how the alien forces felt about the RUSA. Rellen keyed up his radio and made his announcement;

“Everyone saddle up. Let's head back to Outpost Roseville and allow our *Terror Bird* to finish off this compound.”

He looked around, made sure the vicinity was vacant, then stepped back inside his ship. As the back door closed, he watched as the first buildings were turned into dust and debris.

Aboard *The Cholart*, Hammet Craine'lan sat near his *One Love*, allowing a medic to work on his wounds. The smoke-hued Elazi had taken a few close range direct hits from a heavy machine gun and as a result, his armor had spalled inside, filling his right arm and upper right torso with shrapnel.

“You should be ready to return to action in sixty days or so.” the medical specialist mused while he bandaged up Hammet's arm.

“I will be finished with my enlistment by then.” he retorted. “I have had enough of that soggy, wet, snow-covered rock. I am more than ready to leave this Gods-forsaken Terran system and return to a civilian life.” After a few moments, he asked an important question; “How is Na'Kayla? She hasn't moved since we boarded.”

“She is sedated right now. I think Na'Kayla should rest for a while and she will be in bed for a few days to allow that injury to begin to heal up.”

“That is good, that she rests. She was in great pain last day, when we were detained by the RUSA forces.” Hammet agreed.

“You've said what you're doing about finishing your enlistment, so what of your *One Love*?” the medic queried further, “How much longer does she have to serve so she can complete her enlistment?”

“Not much longer than I do.” Ham stated. “What she is short, I am sure we can buy out. It's not like she will be back in action anytime soon.”

“This is true.” the medic agreed while he entered some information on a padd. “I see that both of you have been booked on the *Troop Transporter Hyannis*, to leave for Elazi in two Earth days.”

Hammet looked down at the resting gray femme and nodded. “that would not a moment too soon.” He took Na'Kayla's hand in his and held hers against his forehead, struggling not to cry. “It would not be a moment too soon.”

That evening, aboard *The Hyannis*, Hammet sat by Na'Kayla's bed and awaited her return to consciousness. She had been sedated for her ride into orbit and the subsequent trip through the ship to her medical berth. Her lips and nose had finally regained a better color to them and her breathing had become steadier. Ham sat in a chair by her bed, struggling to stay awake due to stress exhaustion.

Na'Kayla was beginning to realize she was becoming coherent again, gritting her teeth as the headache that had woke her made her feel nauseated. There was a world out there, calling for her to come back to the land of the living, unaware of her pounding head. She tried to sit up, only to be rewarded by intense, searing pain down her mid-line.

“**Gods!** What happened to me?” she blurted out while she held her abdomen gingerly. It felt like her internal organs were trying to escape her body. It hurt so bad, she saw spots dance before her eyes.

“Kayla! Don't try to sit up!” her husband admonished, putting his hands on her shoulders to press her back down onto the bed and hold her down. “You are in a bad shape, my life mate. Just stay still, please?”

Once the gray femme had gotten her breath back, she asked a pseudo-serious question; “Ham, am I alive or dead?” Hammet could see the glazed look in her eyes, signs she was not feeling well at all.

“You still live.” he replied. “You will not be up and around for a while. The incision down your torso will need some time to mend.”

“How long?” she asked in a strained voice.

“The doctor thinks you may need at least ninety days to recover enough to be re-certified for combat. He did not say if this was an absolute or if it was what he hoped for you. I am sorry you had to hear that from me.”

The gray femme shrugged her left shoulder. “It's for the best, if I do not recover sufficiently to be re-cert'ed. I would not wish to be back in action in a reduced physical capacity, possibly endangering others around me.” she offered up. “We may have to buy out the remainder of my enlistment if I am short some days.”

“I will get the paperwork so we may look at your options.”

“Ham, where are we, at the moment? I've never been in this sickbay.” she commented, once she could see clearly.

“We are on *The Hyannis*, docked with *The Sharp Fang* in Earth orbit.” the smoke gray male explained. “I will be going down next day and gather our belongings from Outpost Roseville. The day after, we will return to Elazia. You will probably be sent to *Ground Forces Base Post Fontaneauz* for treatment and therapy.”

“I have been to *Post Fontaneauz* for mountain survival training. It's not that bad there. A cool breeze comes off the mountains in the evening. It will be nice to be home again.” Na'Kayla mused.

“Yes, I look forward to being home, too.” Hammet agreed. “It will be mid-summer, just in time for first *N'Ga* berry harvest and my mother's fresh berry pies.”

“Real, fresh *N'Ga* berries . . .” She could almost taste them in her mouth; sweet, slightly crunchy with that chewy texture that only comes from berries freshly picked. “How long before we arrive home?”

“I have heard it will take at most, eleven days. We will not be stopping at Pharrpoint.” Ham offered.

“Eleven days is not too long. I can be patient.” Truth be known, Na'Kayla knew she was in no shape to go shopping on Pharrpoint. Even though it disappointed her, it would be good to be home again. She hadn't been back in over four years so she was anxious to see her dwelling again, to sleep in that sinfully soft bed with her *One Love*. Those thoughts would carry her, helping her to be patient on the trip home.

“I am going to find my bunk.” Ham stated as he got up. After kissing her, he spoke again. “You should get some more rest. I will come and see about you tomorrow, after I have retrieved our belongings.”

Kayla watched her mate begrudgingly leave the room, so she would take his advice and rest, but not before she talked to her mother. Her family needed to know she was safe. Straightening out her hair with her claws, she pulled the communication device over so she could make a call to her parents.