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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Thirty-Five

“Slippery Slope”

Several planetary rotations later, the Dannen'lan sisters were putting previously learned skills to good use, assisting with the operation of an Orlemberry picker platform. It was an odd machine, requiring three operators besides the six pickers that rode the platforms, picking only the berries that were at that 'ripe for market' stage.

Na'Cira was on the left platform, judging whether or not the machine needed to slow down due to a number of ready fruit while her sister rode herd over the right one. Up on the control station arch that spanned up and over the bushes, Hallett Trasc'lan was their operator for the day, being coached by the regular operator.

Na'Mari held down the button on her panel that would gently slow the equipment because her pickers were getting a bit behind. She was thankful the orchard had the guide bollards that the platforms would ride against, rather than using the trunks of the bushes. As such, the platforms that were just off the ground had a very smooth ride.

“Is there a problem?” Hal asked, using the headsets they had been given to communicate to each other.

“I have a bush that has a great deal of ripe berries,” Na'Mari replied, pointing out the next bush just now in a position to pick. “It is loaded. How about your side, Cira?”

“My side is loaded, Mari.” Na'Cira agreed. “Hal, go ahead and slow up to minimum speed. The next bush after this one is loaded, too.” As the former Orange Detachment leader brought the machine down to the lowest picking speed, the trainer with him offered his thoughts;

“There is a diagonal line right through the whole orchard where the fruit ripens early and to be honest, they earn as much income as the rest of the orchard does.” Jevvan Kavret'lan put forth. “If you go to the main house, look from the garage Southeast or from the dining room Northwest. You can tell there are more Kebra fruit on the trees and the Orlemberry bushes are loaded with berries. We will have five or six bushes like that one,” he offered, indicating the bush being worked at the moment, “Then it will go back to the way we were picking at the start of the row. Once in the next row and the ones after, we will have a similar situation occur on that diagonal line.”

“Why do you think that is?” Hal mused.

“It was said, Sa'Kayla Keth'lan knew why this was so, as did her father. They were murdered before they could pass on the reasons for the abundant fruit and berries. The murmurings say their deaths were over the secret of the diagonal line of fruit. Some would like to suggest it was a family member that murdered them.”

That made Hallett think; was this the reason someone wanted Na'Krista dead?

Deciding he would share that information with Marlett, he gave his attention back to doing his job as operator for the day.

Jeffrey finished up with his last class session for the day, completing his first day as an instructor. Watching his students file out of the classroom quietly, he was sure this was going to be less of a job and more of an adventure. They had to be the most motivated pupils he had ever had the opportunity to instruct.

His *One Love* was sitting in the back of the classroom, gaining what knowledge of the French language she could while being unable to see the video board or a manual. Blinded like this kept her from teaching in her classroom so she had decided to just hang out with her husband, with her commander's approval, of course.

“Ready to go home?” the Earther asked, helping his *One Love* to stand up.

“I think I'm ready to go.” she replied. “Today seemed exhausting, even though I didn't do much at all. When I went to the base doctor this morning to let him examine me, he gave me some medication and set me up with some high pressure atmosphere treatments. He also wants me to be on a Helox based breathing treatment for at least two *Heth* per rotation until I can see again. The doctor said he would send out the equipment I need to our home before mid-day.”

As he helped his wife to stand up, Jeff looked at a notification on his comm unit indicating their ride back home was on the ground by their classroom building. Reading the signs once they were outside, he guided his *One Love* to her skimmer where Na'Cira was waiting.

“Good first day back to work?” their azure-toned chauffeur asked as she helped to get Na'Krista into the craft.

“It was good for Jeffrey,” Krista replied, loosening her tie and unbuttoning the top button on her khaki blouse. “I just sat in the back of his classroom most of the day. Wish I could have read the video board or a manual.”

“How well can you see, if at all?” Cira asked. Na'Krista shrugged her left shoulder and sighed before she replied.

“I can make out light and dark and I could make out when Jeffrey was walking in front of the video board. As of this morning, I still can't see the biggest letter on the vision chart well enough

to make out what it is.” she replied. “This is not going well, Cira. I was hoping to get my vision back in a ten-day but it's not looking so good to meet that mark.”

“I'm so sorry this happened.” the azure femme offered. “I would switch places with you right now if could. If there's anything I can do to help, let me know. I would be right on top of it.”

“Well, tell me how the harvest went today.” Krista suggested. “Did we pick a good amount of Orlemberries?”

“Seven thousand, two hundred *Zet* today after a very late start.” she put forth. “Na'Mari almost fell off the platform when Hallett turned sharper than needed at the end of a row. One of the pickers, Gerret Semmit'lan caught her before she was off the machine.” That made Na'Krista smile so she decided to share her thoughts.

“I can't tell you how many times I have almost fell off the platforms myself.” Krista offered up. “That's why we put the bollards in; a far more stable ride and it saves the trunks of the bushes.” After a pause, she shared this snippet; “My father and mother have both fallen off my Simmon deck picker, the one that you were most likely using today. If you don't throttle down to an idle at the end of the rows, your staff will sometimes leave the platforms, not of their own volition.”

“Now that sounds funny to me!” Jeff blurted out. “Your parents, falling off an agricultural machine!”

“It was not funny at the time.” his wife explained. “My father was furious at me because I was driving and I guess he expected me to warn him I was turning! Mother was laughing at him being angry at me, not paying attention so when I turned at the end of the next row, mother fell off!”

“Oh No!” Na'Cira said while trying not to laugh.

“Oh Yes!” Krista retorted. “She fell into a mud bog that was the result from over-watering so she was covered in mud, head to foot. Father started laughing uncontrollably and he fell off too, into an Orlemberry bush! He was covered in purple juice from the berries that were probably entirely too ripe to pick.”

There was something Jeff wanted to know, now that they were talking about the harvest;

“I keep forgetting how much a *Zet* is. Is it roughly nine-tenths of a pound?”

“No, a *Zet* is one-point-one-six-nine American weight pounds. I know it's confusing, to have to learn a new weight system.” Krista put forth. “I had trouble with distance and weight measures the entire time I was on Earth. I also had trouble with weeks with only seven days, months with varying number of days that made no sense of order and that whole leap year thing being every fourth year, instead of every fifth year.”

After the two troopers assigned to their detail were on board and Na'Cira finally got their transportation ready to fly, she asked a question;

“Straight home or is there somewhere else you would like to go first?”

“There is a place,” the buff femme offered up, “We would like to go to that custom leather shop in North Kas'madelle, the one by the A'Pari-style restaurant. I suppose we could eat while we're there. My treat.”

“I know the place.” their pilot stated. “About one-half *Heth* and we'll be there.”

Arbiter Gammal Everet'lan pushed his chair back from the computer terminal, took off his glasses and rubbed his face, hoping to disperse the fog surrounding his mind. It had been a long day in the law library, looking at texts and cross-referencing them to digital documents. Some of those digital pages were from before the advent of “Live Scanning,” a method of reproducing every nuance of the written word, such as notes, scribbles and thoughts added by some author or another at some long-ago date. As such, the text of the old-style scans were extremely hard to read or in some cases, illegible.

So far, what he had found gave him no reason to believe the documents and reference material he was researching were not what they claimed to be. From the original draft of the law, through to the actual vote tally and a bit of video from the Senate floor vote, this was all factual. He still had several days to go before he had to make his report to the senior Arbiters so he thought he would just continue to dig, just to see what he could find.

Standing and stretching out, the oddly-toned male walked over to the restroom off of the foyer and took care of some pressing business. While he was washing up afterward, he looked up in the mirror at his visage. Gammal was looking at a white-pelted Elazi in the mirror, but he was not what would be called a throwback by any means.

He was tall, robust in build with amber-colored eyes, not the white of an artifact. His muzzle was wider than what would be considered normal and his ears were more like a *Fask-aal*. His hands and claws were more like the leonids too, being larger and more muscular than a normal Elazi would have been born with. He often wondered, if the possibility existed that he himself might possibly be part *Fask-aal*.

He knew he was born premature, or that's what he was told by his mother. His birth date was not quite seven tenths of a solar cycle after his parent's joining date, so that could corroborate the premature birth theory.

His mother and father both had buff colored pelts and blue eyes. It really seemed odd that he would have amber eyes and there was no telling where his coat color or lack thereof came from. His father had always treated him like he was part of the family, a blood related child when he was growing up but the fact remained; *was* he actually related to *both* of his parents? Knowing what was in the paperwork he was working with, there was a possibility he might end up in trouble, too.

Dassan Trent'lan was looking over the numbers from the days' harvest, feeling not particularly impressed with the day's totals. It was meager by Trent'lan standards, only three thousand and eighteen *Zet* of Orlemberries and only four hundred *Zet* of Kebra fruit. That disappointing amount came from the trees that were across the avenue from Na'Krista's early ripe crops. This meager return was after fourteen *Heth* worth of picking in his orchards by a top-rated contractor.

This harvest was not off to a good start, further punctuated by the buyer that had purchased the whole harvest from his niece. In passing he had commented on the transaction, letting Dassan know the generous weight amount he had acquired from the Andrews'lan station.

He felt like he had been given a raw deal when his father gave his sister those lands, units of soil that could be exploited for untold riches if he had his suspicions right. There was something, some mineral, possibly Tavserinite in the soil. Just one *Zet* of that rare mineral would sell for thousands of Crown. Dassan could not imagine the possible riches that lie untouched under those few units of land.

The buff-toned male had always wanted to do some test drilling, just to confirm if it was Tavserinite in the soil but the bore hole would have to be deep to actually confirm those theories. Kebra trees had a main tap root that went dozens of *Catre* deep. The same went for Orlemberry bushes. Somebody would notice a deep drilling operation before long, even if he started on his property and went in at an angle to go under his niece's land.

He hoped to end this troublesome issue before next season, just so nobody would notice him digging up that land that would soon belong to House Trent'lan. A hired assassin would meet with him soon so they could hash out an agreed upon price for Na'Krista's head. This would finally be the end of the wait for Dassan.

“This is delicious!” Jeff offered up as he tore into another slice of an A'Pari Tem-An-Tra, something akin to a pizza. The flavors seemed to be very traditional Italian to him, something that seemed odd considering they were light-years away from Earth. “This is almost like something you would find in Italy, not Elazia.”

“It is popular in this region.” Trooper Treet'lan offered up. “West of Kas'Madelle, at the coast there are literally three or four A'Pari restaurants in each small town. The style tends to reflect the Tarrenton and Borreign regions of their homeworld. Intricate and delicate flavors and textures combined just so.” That made Na'Krista smile.

“Take what he says with a grain of salt.” she offered up to her husband. “When we were stationed together on Earth, before he was assigned to Orange Detachment, he preferred hamburgers and beef tacos over anything remotely classy, I think you would say.” That made the smoky-black trooper look up at Krista in surprise.

“I beg your pardon!” Merret blurted out in english. “I prefer hamburgers from the eateries that served “Old Fashioned” burgers. Jeffrey, you know what I'm talking about? The sloppy

burgers. I also preferred authentic Mexican fare over fast food. There is a Mexican place near where we were quartered in Roseville that serves some very good tacos and burritos.”

“I know the place. El Churro Loco is the name, if I'm not mistaken.” Jeff put forth. “Their chili is very good and so is just about anything off the dinner menu. Can't go wrong there.” he added.

“The tamale plate with rice and beans was very good.” Trooper Treman Baze'lan offered up. “I had a few dishes there that were not too hot to eat. I was told some of them had Poblano peppers in them.” the buff tan male put forth. “I brought back some seeds so I can grow some peppers next planting season.”

“I have a question,” Jeff stated, “I was told I could pass as a Comeri or an A'Pari. Is that true? I think it's strange there are races that are light years apart but look so much alike.”

“You could pass as either race.” Treman offered up. “In fact, the first time I met you in the mountains above Auburn, I thought you were A'Pari. Your kilt is just like a garment they wear for ceremonies with the exception of theirs being a solid color.”

“That makes sense.” the Earther offered up. “I had wondered why my kilt didn't cause a stir. Now I know why.”

Jeffrey and Na'Krista were working their way through an evening bowl each of *Fradunam* soup, made fresh by the housekeeper. It was a vegetable soup of sorts, almost a gumbo without meat. It was filling and it seemed to be relaxing, too.

There was one thing about this soup; it seemed to have a latent fiery nature to it. His lips and tongue were slowly beginning to burn from some root or vegetable that was in the stock. While they consumed their meal, Jeff wanted to get some further information about Krista's condition.

“Kitten, how does Trinn gas affect your sight? I couldn't find much on that subject when I did a general search of the public InfoNet.” Krista sat her spoon down carefully so she could reply to that question and know where her utensil was afterward.

“The active ingredient in Trinn gas is Trinvanicine Sulphate. Normally, an Elazi, Bil, *Fask-aal*, Sa'naani or Pak'Sananni could be kept under for weeks with no ill effects. That doesn't apply if you're Elazi with type “D” Negative blood, like me. Our blood in that type is close enough to human type “O” Negative to be interchangeable with no dangerous side effects.

“If I'm exposed to Trinn gas, I don't have a certain antigen present in other blood types to prevent the metabolized byproduct of Trinvanicine Sulphate from causing my lenses to cloud up. It's not permanent, but it will take a bit to recover.”

“How many types of blood are there?” Jeff wanted to know.

“There is Type A, B Positive, B Negative, C Positive, C Negative, BC Positive, BC Negative, D Positive and D Negative. Type A has no denat factor so they are a universal donor. They just can't take any blood except A or Universal Plasma.

“The blood types can only donate to that same type except D Negative. We can give to anyone except type A due to a low Denat factor. That's why my armor and uniforms have the badge with the red and white stripes. At a glance, you can see I'm a good donor for just about any situation.” That made Jeff think about something.

“How does the military deal with the Type A situation? Also, I'm O Positive. Who can I receive blood from?”

“You are lucky to be O Positive. You can receive Type A or Type D Positive and Negative blood. As far as the beings that are Type A, the military won't allow them to serve off planet. They would be instructors like us, nowhere near a battle field. So, if you see an Elazi that's solid buff tan with light blue, almost white eyes, they are Type A with no reservations. It's part of their genetic makeup.”

“Buff tan with pale blue eyes,” Jeff mused, “Commander Darren Fellen'lan is buff tan with pale blue eyes. He also has that Northern or Central Arri accent like I seem to have picked up from the training tapes.”

“I think I know him.” Na'Krista commented. “He sat in on a few of my classes when I first started to teach. He would be Type A unless he's dyeing his pelt. Next time you see him, see if he has a blue and white badge for Type A.”

“He does.” Jeff replied. “It's in the same place as your red and white badge on your uniforms.”

“Well, he's a good donor for both of us, then” Krista put forth. “I need you to help me take my evening medication and set up the helox treatment gas and mask for me.”

Na'Krista had taken her pills and slammed down a medicinal concoction that was mixed into a glass of water for her. Whatever it was, it had a horrible stink to it according to Jeff. He was not sure how his *One Love* managed to drink that cocktail of medication without gagging on it. Afterward, he pulled the cart with the pressure bottles on it to the couch where his *One Love* was currently awaiting him to help her out.

“This is an odd affair.” he noted as he removed the hood-slash-mask from the box it had been shipped in. “An almost clear, stretchy hood with the mask integrated into the front of it. I guess it covers your whole head and neck snugly.” he commented.

“You're correct.” she replied as she examined it with her hands. For some reason, it seemed somewhat familiar to her, too. “This is usually found on combat ships so the mask will stay in place, no matter how hard the ship is rocked around in battle.”

Turning it inside out, Na'Krista began to adjust the polymer mask portion to fit her better, tweaking the molded-in strips of metal to closely match her anatomy. After a few more adjustments to the areas around her nasal bridge and chin, the buff-colored femme was happy with the fit.

“You can turn on the gas flow to the amount indicated on a tag that should be attached somewhere.” she offered up. Once Krista could sense the mixture flowing, she pulled the hood over her head and straightened out the collar on her neck. Krista momentarily closed off the gas vent on top of her head, allowing the hood to balloon up just a bit. Once she uncovered the opening, she smoothed the hood back out around her head and ears as it deflated.

“Does that hood fit okay?” Jeff asked.

“Well, I guess it's okay, since I'm not feeling uncomfortable and the fit is not too tight.” she replied as she finished straightening the hood. “Just a funny taste in my mouth from one of the needed intrinsic gasses in the mix and my voice sounding like a very small femme child.” Her voice was very high and squeaky, now that her lungs were filled with Helox.

“I've set a timer for two *Heth*. Would you like to listen to some music while you take that treatment?”

“I would like that.” she answered. “I think I have some classic Earth-based Rock And Roll loaded up on my music deck.”

By her request, Jeffrey shuffled through the selections until he found some proper Southern Rock for them to listen to. Setting the volume at a high enough level for Krista to hear clearly, he sat down on the couch next to his *One Love* and sipped some local craft beer while he zoned out on the music.

He did take a moment to silently pray to his God for her quick recovery.

Na'Cira sat her binoculars down and rubbed her face, tired from laying on the ground in a hot, stuffy obscuration suit. The fabric was very easy to see through from the inside but from the outside, they seemed to blend into the bushes they were hiding in. The suit used 'Coalescing Tubes' woven into them to relay the view from one side to the other, essentially making them disappear from view.

“Na'Mari, where did you get these suits?” She asked quietly, checking the batteries on her binoculars before getting settled a bit better to do some more observation.

“They are Sa'nanni Military issue. I have my connections from my mercenary days.” the elder sister replied. “That Elazi male in the office with Dassen, do you recognize him?”

Cira zoomed in closer, trying to get an image of the male in question. “No, I do not recognize him. Maybe a Sweptlander by the pelt color?”

“Doesn't dress like a Sweptlander.” Mari offered up. “He's wearing way too much fabric, not enough leather.” After a moment, she added this; “Look at his knife in his belt.”

“A Knife Of Bends!” the younger femme blurted out. “He is *Tah Gahn!*”

“They no longer exist.” Mari offered up. As far as she knew, The Order had been disbanded long before she was born. It didn't make sense for a being to carry a knife that could get him killed just for carrying a forbidden weapon. “He is an enigma, Sister.”

“I have his image! Finally!” the younger sibling said almost too loudly. “I'll run him through the visual database. We will find out just who in the blazes he really is.”

The rust colored male sat down his glass of *White Fire* on the corner of the desk and looked at the print in his hands again. It was an image of a buff-colored female standing with a male, a Comeri, maybe? They were both dressed nicely, possibly for a joining.

Her dress seemed like it had come from some other planet and the male was wearing a *killentra* of sorts, woven in an odd multi-color pattern. Both of them had Elazi officers' rank tabs on their garb.

“This female; her name?” he asked, wondering what the situation was that caused the request to be made. It must be serious, to offer such a huge reward for a few moments of time.

“Her name is Na'Krista Andrew'slan, formerly a Keth'lan. The Earther with her is her *One Love*, Jeffrey Andrews'lan. I want them both dead. Is that understood, Saar Mavvit'lan?”

“You seem too anxious to see her demise, my employer. Care to elaborate?”

“It is not your business! Can you do the job or not?” Dassan shouted. This mercenary he hired seemed to be hesitant to earn a ransom in Crown. That didn't make sense to the buff-colored male.

“I will do my due diligence, since you indicated she was a Keth'lan. If there's one thing I do not want, it is a mob of Keth'lans trying to remove my pelt at the same time, if you get my drift.”

“I see your point.” Dassan agreed. “Still, time is of the essence. I need her gone in the next ten-day. Can you do the job or not?”

“I will contact you tomorrow regarding my details to receive your payment.” The rust colored male then turned and walked out the side door to Dassan's office.

“The database indicates he's Tavmet Mavvit'lan. Former Agra Zone Eleven arbiter, one tour of the Varpur smelting complex assault, rank of Trooper Grade Three. He worked as a private

arbiter after his discharge, license suspended three cycles ago and charged with tampering with a witness in a murder trial.

“Eleven-fifteenths of a cycle in Hes'mi'dalla prison, now works for the city of Gan'fangr as a department clerk for the lands division.” Na'Cira offered up after Tavmet left Dassan's office.

“Hmm,” Ma'Mari mused, “So, how does our mystery male factor into this? Doesn't seem like a mercenary to me.”

“I don't like this.” Cira put on the table. “Let's track him and see where he goes.”

“I'm ahead of you.” her sister retorted. “I put a tracker on his vehicle on our way to this spot. I had a feeling we would need to track him down.”

Tavmet left Dassan's office, shaking his head in disgust. In his opinion, this whole feud, war, whatever you wanted to call it, could most likely be settled by a face to face discussion. A meeting that his possible employer was reluctant to engage in. Dassan wanted Na'Krista's land and Tavmet was sure Dassan could well pay a more than fair price for said land, based on what was being offered for Na'Krista and Jeffrey's deaths.

The rust-hued male eased into his Taftra sedan and brought his fob up to the power padd to start the vehicle. As the turbine powerplant settled down to a steady idle, the center glass display flashed an alert signal in one corner. Touching that symbol, an outline of his vehicle was displayed, along with an icon that indicated a tracker had been attached to his roller. Another icon became visible once he zoomed the display out, indicating the receiver was about four hundred quatres from him, in the bushes.

Looking in the rear view display, he could not make out an outline of any being but it did tell him Dassan was being watched. It was probably time to check in with his boss concerning this new occurrence. He touched an icon for communications, then another for the being he wished to talk with. He could hear the sounds of a connection being made, then a voice came across the speakers in his roller.

“Tavmet! Good Eve!” the male on the other end bid him. “What may I say it the occasion for you to contact me?”

“I have an unusual situation on my hands.” he replied. “May I come see you tomorrow before mid-meal? Maybe we can go to that outdoor dining facility near your home and have a meal while we talk. In my opinion, it is quite urgent I meet with you.”

“I would enjoy that.” the unknown male on the other end of the line offered up. “I will see you before mid-meal, then.”

As the line went dead, Tavmet thought about it for a moment or two. This vehicle had a tracker on it so maybe he could use his other roller or possibly his skimmer tomorrow. At any rate, he wasn't worried at the moment about being followed by unknown beings. His home had a top notch security system installed that would render any intruder incapacitated.

Jeffrey was busy that evening before bedtime, taking care to arrange the clothes he had sent to him by his old friend Stan Galli. In a few days, his firearms he requested would clear Customs and he would have to go sign for them at the Port Authority importation office. It was a matter of policy and not a discriminatory act against him, concerning the weapons. His guitar should be packed with the rifles so that would be nice to have around. In all honesty, the Earther didn't know he would end up living full time on another world so if he had remotely known this would happen, Jeff would have packed up his things to bring along when he traveled to Elazia.

Jeff looked over at his bride, arranging the items she had sent from Earth for her. It was purely by luck she had asked Stan if he could do a shopping trip for her. The youngest of the Galli daughters agreed to help her father so Krista had sent him funds through civilian channels to cover such a foray.

So far, everything had fit as expected so she was trying to get everything into her closets. As it were, Jeff had to put his kilts and kilt jackets into the spare bedroom closet, since his closet space had not been sufficient. Her diminished sight wasn't helping either, requiring him to step in from time to time and arrange things for her.

Stan had sent along some of the pictures that were in the living room of the cabin, some decorations and a few reminders of his birth home. His photo albums had been sent, too so Jeff took a moment to find a spot for them to live.

One of the photos was of him when he was commissioned as a doctor in the United States Navy. That was a very important day for him. The next framed image was of him wearing the uniform of the United States Marine Corps. He had been assigned to The Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Medical Division at Twentynine Palms, California and just seven months later, the Pentagon had decided to move all commissions for Naval personnel serving a Marine unit over to the Marines, making the Marine Corps a separate entity in the military hierarchy.

He remembered that day, when he went from a Lieutenant Junior Grade in the Navy to First Lieutenant in the Marines. It was a few years on that he finally made the grade of O-4 Major, to be a field grade officer. That was around the time the American-Chinese war broke out. Jeff was transferred to Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Aurora, Colorado to rehabilitate the soldiers that had lost limbs during the war. That was also his station when his first wife and child were killed during the bombing raid on Monterey, California.

Thinking about that time in Earth's history, he was positive that when he finally passed through the veil, he could answer the question put forth by the deity *Od'Tra The Wise* concerning the winners and losers in war. There were no clear winners, only loss on both sides.