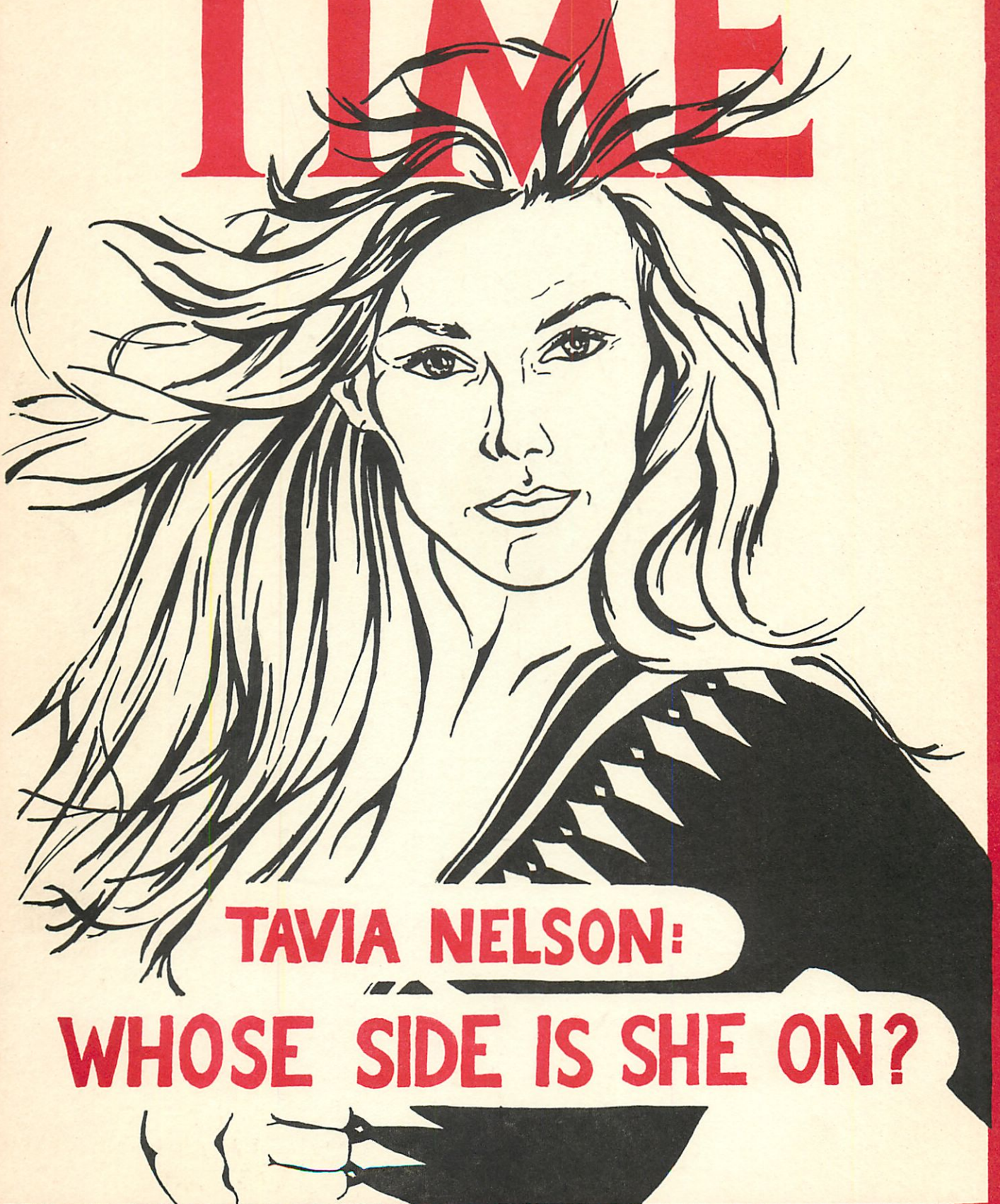


NU ORMENEL COLLECTED

VOLUME 5

TIME



TAVIA NELSON:

WHOSE SIDE IS SHE ON?

NU ORMENEL COLLECTED

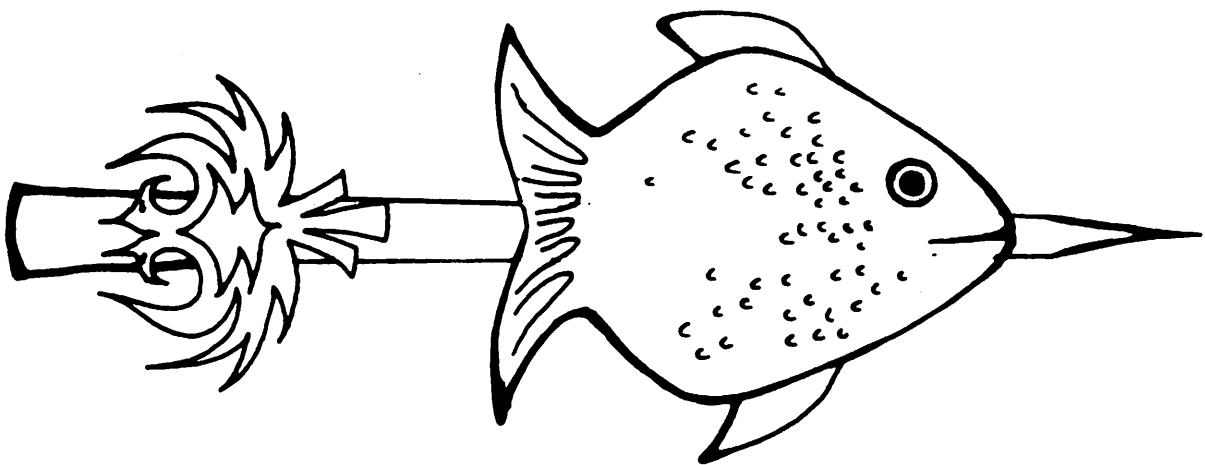
Volume 5

BY FERN MARDER AND CAROL WALSKE

ARTWORK AND LAYOUT BY CAROL WALSKE

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Fern Marder and Carol Walske
342 East 53rd Street, Apt. 4D
New York, NY 10022

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PREFACE

Our first full-length zine, Threshold, appeared in February 1978. Alkarin Warlord came out the following September. In February 1979 came Nu Ormenel Collected, Volumes 1 and 2 and Arakenyo, followed in September 1979 by Volumes 3 and 4 and the Songbook. No, we didn't go off to the Kilingarlan since then (too bad. . .).

In May of 1980 we completed our 'experiment,' and published Dagger of the Mind, in which appeared the Nu Ormenel story "A Winter's Dawn." We wish we had a nickel for every comment we got regarding the 'end of the series.' Hell, we haven't published anything else in sequence, why should that story be any different? It just happened to come together at that point in time.

Which brings us to Nu Ormenel Collected, Volume 5. Funny thing about Volume 5--this wasn't supposed to be it. When we finished 3 and 4, Volume 5 was some nebulous collection of stories we'd written for private consumption, a humorous language-cum-travel guide, a rewrite of "First Meeting" (no, that still hasn't gotten done. . .), and a possible reprint of "A Winter's Dawn." Then, just as a private joke, Carol started working on a story about Kor and Tavia and a lot of fish. At the time, she was doing it just for the halibut. As it grew, and grew, and grew, we were soon headed for a full-size novel. Which we decided to publish by itself. Heh, heh.

In September 1980, we went to Noreascon II with terrible colds, and thus spent a lot of our time in our hotel room. We had seen the Broadway show, Evita, about three weeks before that. Fern was fooling around on her guitar and somehow the subject turned to Evita, and Tavia and Kor, and so, the first, laryngitis-tinged lines of Tavita were born--"Don't cry to me, Federation; the truth is, I never loved you." And thus are new Volume 5's born.

But what is this all really? Just for the Halibut is a comedy/drama set in the series some six years after the end of Alkarin Warlord and Tavia's return to the Federation after the war. Also, it falls a matter of days following "A Kilington Heritage" (Volume 2) and Kor and Roan's reconciliation. Furthermore, it falls concurrently with "I'll Give You the Wind" (Volume 4)--which we wrote with not the slightest idea that Halibut was going to happen.

If you recall, Volume 4 contained a few pieces of what was supposed to be The Homecoming (the zine that wasn't). And, at the time, we said that we weren't able to do The Homecoming because it had grown into a series of novels, rather than stories. Well, Halibut is one of those novels--the one about Tavia and Kor in the Federation. (No, you don't want to ask about the other novels. . .)

Now, Tavita is a whole different kettle of fish (sorry, couldn't resist). It is definitely 'alternate Ormenel,' a 'what if?' Tavita is a complete rendering of the Evita libretto--plus one additional song at the end, because we wanted a rousing, happy ending. For those who have never heard the score (the two-record album set includes the entire show), it's a truly fine piece of work and we heartily recommend it. Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice have produced another superb contemporary opera--we thank them for their inspiration and extend all due apologies for invading Argentina with Klingons.

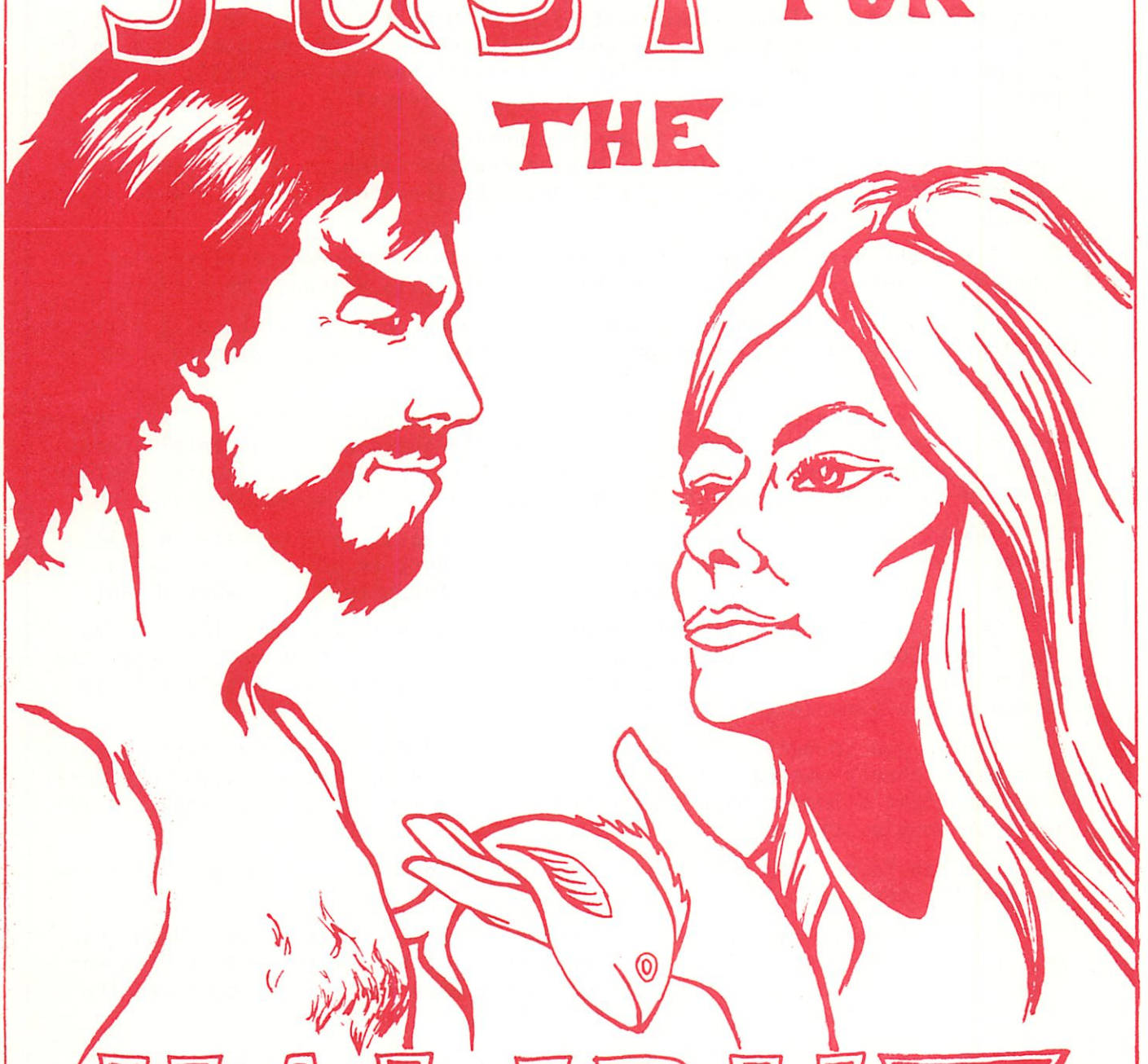
Knowing the score is not a prerequisite for reading Tavita by any means. If you do have access to the album (and/or the complete libretto provided with the record or with the sheet-music book), then you might have fun following along. By the way, in the few instances in which the libretto differs from the album, Tavita follows the album.

We would like to thank Leslye Lilker for her input in this madness--comments, questions, support, concern, and patience in times of terrible puns, fish jokes, and the nineteenth draft of the ending. Thanks also to our stalwart Kyrol Waters, who kept Tavita's secret that crazy weekend and beyond, put up with gaps and gaping chasms, and got blessed with safeguarding the draft-with-no-ending. And for her amazing resilience.

But no, this didn't all take a year and a half. Meanwhile back at the ranch, we took a trip to Spain and Portugal, adopted our third cat, Fern changed jobs (yes, again), Carol did a lot of painting--and we're writing a long novel about which we will say only that it is science fiction, it is not Star Trek, and we do not intend for it to be printed offset.


But, till next time--keep your swords sharp.

**JUST FOR
THE**




HALIBUT

C. WALSKE



AUGUST 5, 2245
SATURDAY AFTERNOON



Commodore Roan Morgan nudged one of his four Klingon companions and stage-whispered, "Follow me and just watch." With that, Roan walked jauntily from the beam-down station to the uniformed man at the check-point desk in the colony arrival terminal. He drawled, "I haven't been on Proalfalfa in some years. Can you direct us to East 53rd Street, please?"

The guard looked up, making an involuntary motion as if to salute at the sight of the Star Fleet officer. Then he saw the Klingons in the Commodore's company, and his jaw dropped. "East 53rd?" he repeated blankly. "What do you want on East 53rd Street?"

The light-haired human officer gave the elegantly dressed Klingon at his right a meaningful glance. "We're here to see Tavia Nelson," he declared.

"But you can't do that!" protested the guard, with a fulminating glare at the four silent, watchful Klingons. "There haven't been any warning orders-- I mean--oh, hell."

The guard's reaction was as the Commodore had predicted to his kilingaven friend. The Star Fleet officer wondered if the guard wasn't an Intelligence agent, stationed here to keep an eye on visitors to the Nelson house. Before he could say anything, though, he was preempted by the Klingon at his right.

The kiling stepped forward to the desk. "Excuse me," he said in coldly polite tones. "I am the Emperor Kor Alkarin, and I am going to see Tavia Nelson. I don't think you have the authority to stop me from going where I want."

The man gulped at the word 'Emperor.' He also took a long look at the Star Fleet Commodore's insignia, and decided that discretion was, indeed, the better part of valor. "Any groundcab will take you there," he said sulkily. "I don't have time to give out directions."


"Thank you so very much for your help," said Roan, knowing that his sarcasm was probably wasted. "Now why don't you go report in and say that several Very Important Klingons have penetrated your vigilant security. That should get your people stirred up."


The man found nothing to say. Roan nodded good-bye to him and strode on through the terminal.

Once outside, Roan hailed a groundcab. The five settled in. Roan, Kor, and Kor's son Karras Taralkarin got into the seat behind the driver, and Kor Alkarin's two personal guards sat down in the back seat. Roan declared their destination and the groundcab roared forth.

Roan, sitting in the middle of the seat, fidgeted. "I think that the alert is out to Star Fleet Intelligence," he commented to Kor and Karras. "Just what we need, more trouble with SFI. I hope this isn't a mistake, Kor."

The kiling, who was glancing apprehensively out the window and scowling over their mode of transportation, turned his gaze toward the human. "Are you worried, Kirin?"





"I think you'd better start calling me Roan instead of Kirin," he said. "Hell yes, I'm nervous. The last time I saw Tavia was six years ago, just before her trial. We had a rather unpleasant, um, altercation. And it doesn't help me any to see you so tense and anxious."

Kor looked at Roan, and then at Karras. They were both waiting for his response. "You're supposed to congratulate me on my air of confidence and hope," he replied dryly. "Actually, I'm going to see Tavia because I'm more afraid to retreat than I am to continue forward. Besides, cowardice does not become the *Ormen*."

Karras, sitting on Roan's other side, perched forward and studied his father curiously. "*Akra*, it sounds like you're about to face an enemy instead of your onetime life-sharer," he remarked.

Kor considered that for a moment. His eyes were focused on some distant point ahead. "I'd rather face a war or political crisis," he said frankly. "I have no weapons or skills to deal with such a situation as this. Never mind. We have no choice but to continue onward."

The chime announced the arrival of visitors. Tavia Nelson came running down the stairs to the ground floor. Panting, she stopped in the front hall and pushed her flying blonde hair back out of her face. Muttering unkind remarks about reporters and curiosity-seekers, she yanked open the door and stared out. At first sight of the five people on her front porch, her brown eyes widened and she almost choked.

There was a pregnant silence, during which no one moved or said anything. Finally Tavia opened the door wide and stood to one side. She said, in a not-quite steady voice, "Please come in."

The two kilingau who were obviously Alkarin's bodyguards were the first to enter the house. They bowed politely to her and stood to one side.


Roan Morgan gave Tavia a brief, hopeful smile as he came in. Tavia stared at him, realizing that he hadn't been in her house in over fifteen years. But her attention was only momentarily diverted. Roan was followed by Kor's son Karras, who grinned impishly at Tavia and murmured, "Nice to see you again. . . *Ama*."

Her face colored at the Agavoi word for 'Mother'; she didn't try to answer. She was looking at the *Ormen*, Kor Alkarin, who hesitated before he entered her household. He stared at her, looking as if he wanted to speak but didn't know how.

She reveled in the sight of him, his long cloak a swirl of blue and turquoise, the elegant comfort of his long, finely made leather tunic, the sword at his side. His black hair was longer than when she'd seen it last, his beard full and neatly trimmed. He looked poised and self-assured. He was smiling at her with casual friendliness, as though they'd been separated for only fifteen minutes instead of six years. A wave of unreality suddenly washed through Tavia, followed by a feeling of trepidation. She had no idea how to deal with Kor, or the situation his presence created.

She collected herself, and remembered that courtesy was a





haven to retreat to. "It's not the Rasethi Sarin," she said, half-wistfully, thinking of the Emperor's palace, "but please be welcome." She held out her hand.

He made a brief deference and took her hand in his strong grasp, obviously grateful that she had chosen the safe, easy formalities. "Thank you." The gleam of a grin stole into his eyes.

She smiled with real amusement at that, for her 'domain' was a three-story, weather-beaten house that belonged to her father, its only graces consisting of a wild-rose garden and the fact that it was only a short distance from the beach. She let Kor in the door, then shut it and leaned on it for a moment.

The house was cool and held a fresh scent of a salty, tangy wind from the ocean. Tavia and her guests walked through the entry-hall, through the living-room and out onto the house's back porch.

Tavia gestured to the scattered deck chairs. "Well, why don't you settle down? Let me go make some fruit juice or something."

Kor sat down. His two bodyguards looked at him, waiting for instruction. "I'm quite safe here," he commented to them. "You can do as you please."

"Thank you, sir."

Tavia looked at the two guards, both tall, broad kilingau, dark and imperturbable. "I don't think I know either of you---" she began.

"My apologies," interrupted Kor, looking annoyed with himself. "Jyo and Heri RifEshiwor, two of my personal armsmen. This is Tavia Nelson."


Even as she smiled in welcome at the two, Tavia was astonished that Kor could have forgotten a matter of such simple etiquette, he in whom courtesy was as automatic as breathing. She was also chagrined that he had called her only by her human name, indicating perhaps that he didn't feel she still had a right to the name Katlena Alkarin. "Why don't you wander around?" she said to the two armsmen. "There's usually all kinds of strange people lurking in the bushes around here--Star Fleet Intelligence agents, gossip-mongers, reporters. . . Why don't you see what or whom you can scare away?"


The two smiled and thanked her. "Come back sometime tonight," said Kor casually. He waved a hand at them in dismissal and they went off.

Tavia went into the kitchen, glad for the chance to escape, if only for a moment, so that she could compose herself. Selfconsciously, she glanced down at herself and grimaced: they would choose to drop in on a day when she had begun to clean up the attic. She was wearing dust-streaked denims and a shirt of her father's, a loose cotton rag that proclaimed 'Fish or Cut Bait' in large letters across the chest.

What in the name of Maraku and Godfrey's Ghost are they doing here anyway? she asked herself. She pulled out a tray and some glasses, got out some fresh-squeeze drange juice and ice cubes, and began assembling drinks. She frowned when she realized that she'd filled seven glasses without noticing the number. *Damnitall, Tavia, you're forty-five years old; stop acting like a nervous teenager!*

She put four full glasses on the tray, picked it up, squared





her shoulders, and headed out back toward the porch.

Karras rose to help her with the tray. She smiled at him, eyeing his gold shirt. "I must admit, I never thought I'd see you in a Star Fleet uniform," she remarked. "I heard about the exchange program and your assignment to starship duty. Congratulations--or should I extend my condolences?"

"Congratulations, I think," said Karras cheerfully. "The Federation isn't as bad as I thought it'd be." He raised his glass to her, bowed slightly, and drank.

Tavia stood still for a moment, looking at the three men, even though Kor made a gesture inviting her to sit in the chair next to his. "Well, welcome," she said, feeling awkward. "I must say this is an unexpected. . . pleasure."

"Sorry we didn't give you any warning, Tavia," said Roan uncomfortably. "The *Ormen* is on his way to Terra and thought he'd stop by Proalfalfa. And it does make a nice place to give the ship and crew a rest."

Tavia glanced at him sharply, realizing that she'd ignored Roan in her surprise and excitement at seeing Kor again. She wanted to ask Roan if the only reason he'd thought to come was to be Kor's escort. Before she could speak, Kor interposed.


"If I had openly announced my desire to come to Procyon Alpha III," he said with a restrained smile, "Star Fleet would have undoubtedly found some reason to deny me the privilege, or might have spirited you away. Please forgive my discourtesy in invading unannounced."

Tavia gave a wry laugh. So he'd wanted to see her. . . and had been unsure of his welcome. There was a choke at the back of her throat; she wanted to attack Kor, molest him, assure him eagerly that he was welcome anytime, anyhow. Too many years since she'd seen him. . . The thought of what had passed between them six years before dampened her excitement, and all of the old conflicts rose up inside her to further constrict her throat and leave her feeling helpless. Inhibited by the presence of Roan and Karras, and by her own confused feelings, she said politely, "I'm very pleased you came. I never expected to see you here."


Her head moved to take in the sight of both Kor and Roan, who were sitting not a meter apart, apparently quite content to be in each other's company. Tavia disbelievingly shook her head at the two. Roan had been raised for ten years of his childhood in Kor's domain as the killing's brother. Events had driven them to seemingly irreconcilable conflict--a conflict that spanned some twenty years. She said wonderingly, "The sight of you two--together--is something beyond my comprehension."


"There is no longer Challenge between us," said Kor formally.

"Yes, we decided to start talking to each other again," said Roan with a sheepish smile. "We forgave each other for our mutual stiff-necked pride, and managed to accept each other as former brothers who decided to go very different ways."




"I'm very glad," said Tavia simply. "I wish I'd been there to see it."





"I wish you had been there," agreed Karras. "As it was, I had to bait my father into admitting that his Challenge with Roan held no meaning. I almost got Challenged!"



"My son will never be a diplomat," commented Kor wryly. "But he may make an excellent politician."

"Why, thank you, Akra."

Tavia looked at the three of them. She was gratified to see their easy camaraderie, but at the same time, she felt somehow forlorn, like being caught in a backwater while the river current flowed by. She sat down in the chair next to Kor's and surrendered her hand to his claim.

He gave her a long, measuring look, a look that deepened in warmth and amusement as his gaze moved down to her shirt. He asked conversationally, "What do you do now?"

Tavia made a face. "I do quality control--check bacteria levels and so forth--in the fish at Mrs. Peter's Frozen Fish Factory."



Kor looked at her incredulously. "I'm an ex-convict," she said noncommittally, shrugging. "Let's see--I've been out of prison for almost a year now, but I only got the job six months ago. No good jobs for people like me. Besides, what can an SFI agent do besides spy work?" Her gaze moved up to meet Kor's. She was caught by his expression, a mixture of dismay, anger, and concern. The look quickly faded as he became aware of her scrutiny. *What is your dismay for, Kor? she asked silently. Is it for me, or for my work. . . for the depth of my abasement?*


"Apparently you're keeping a number of SFI agents rather busy," said Roan. The words were wry, but the inflection held a curious twist, of pity and concern for Tavia. He added soberly, "You weren't kidding about 'people lurking in the bushes,' were you?"

"We have a game--Star Fleet Intelligence and I." Tavia smiled reflectively, sipping her juice. "I'm sure junior agents earn extra training credits for keeping watch on me. They also plant bugs--I get to hunt for them. I put one in the dishwasher once. Must've made a delightful noise. The next bug I found I put inside my radio, and turned the volume up full. But I think my father finally complained: the house seems to be clean now, and SFI isn't bothering me too much anymore."

Kor found himself surprised at Tavia's light, bantering tone. She was out of prison, but was still watched, still mistrusted. . . how could she treat it so lightly? Was she content here after all? He stayed silent for a time, only half-listening as the other three talked, intent on studying Tavia and wondering how much she'd changed.

Tavia wondered at Kor's silence, inwardly worrying that, after their long separation, they were now strangers. She let the conversation remain on light topics. . . catching up on Star Fleet news, Karras's adventures in the Federation. . . and in between the easy words her thoughts roamed, through time and memories and the tiny signs of Kor's changing expressions. She had thought she was free of him, both in fact and in thought. But, given her sensitivity to his presence and pleasure at seeing him again, she



realized that her freedom from their relationship was totally illusory. *Damn you, Kor*, she thought, her annoyance somewhat forced, *why couldn't you just leave things as they were?*

"... And then Karras, very properly, pushed the Admiral into the mud puddle." Kor snorted in disbelief; Karras tried to look nonchalant. Roan waited for Tavia's reaction of surprise and glee, but it didn't come. His smile disappeared as he looked at her intently. "Tavia," he said.

She looked up quickly. "Mmm?"

"You haven't heard what I've been saying," he said simply. "What are you thinking about?"

Caught off-balance by the direct question, Tavia hesitated for a moment, hardly capable of admitting her thoughts. Deciding to confront him, she lifted her chin and said calmly, "You. You and the fact that you said you'd 'never darken my doorstep again,' as you so quaintly put it."

For the moment Roan looked angry, disconcerted and selfconscious. But then a new expression of resolve came into his eyes. "I guess now's as good a time as any," he said thoughtfully. He hardly glanced at his two companions; they might as well not have been there.

"I owe you an apology, Tavia," said Roan slowly. "For not coming to see you before this--for holding a stupid grudge. I couldn't quite get over the fact that you had spent the ten years of the war with Kor while I had spent them in prison. I still don't know what you went through then, but I can see what Star Fleet's done to you. I just want to say I'm sorry for misjudging you."

Tavia stared at him, stupefied. When she recovered her voice, she said faintly, "Thank you, Roan. In view of the fact that we haven't had a chance to reconcile our differences, that was a very chivalrous thing to say."

Roan made a deprecating gesture. "Once my Challenge with Kor had ceased, how could I continue to hold one against you?"

"You're beginning to sound a lot like a killing again," she observed.

Roan smiled and threw a glance at Karras. "Blame that on my First Officer here. He's contaminating me."

Karras opened his mouth to reply. He was interrupted by the sound of the front door opening and closing, and a voice calling out, "Anybody home?"


"Out here, Dad."


A moment later, Halvorsen Nelson, a big, friendly man with sandy-red hair, walked out onto the porch.

Tavia cast a quick, apprehensive glance at her father's face. "Uh. . . Dad. . . we have some unusual guests."

Halvorsen Nelson was looking past her to the three visitors. Kor had risen to his feet, and he inclined his head politely as Halvorsen gazed at him.

"Tell me something I don't know," said her father dryly. "There are two Klingons in the garden. Besides, the whole town is





talking about the invasion. Did you know that four Klingons constitute an invasion?"

Kor came forward, and extended his hand in greeting. "Kor Alkarin," he said, a faint smile on his face.

"Call me Halvorsen," said Tavia's father affably. He gave Kor a direct, keen look which belied his mild blue eyes and whimsical expression. He added, "I'm very glad to meet you--finally."

"And I," replied Kor, studying Halvorsen as closely as the human was studying the Klingon. "I have long been curious to meet the father of such an extraordinary daughter."

Tavia blushed; Halvorsen grinned. "Yes, she's given the family a history that we won't live down for another hundred years." His gaze wandered on to Roan and Karras. "It's nice to see you here again after so many years, Roan." There was a delicate hint of sarcasm in his voice; Roan had the grace to look sheepish. Halvorsen continued, looking at Karras, "And, given the startling resemblance, I would judge that you are Lord Alkarin's son."

Karras, well versed in all the human customs by now, came forward to shake hands. "Karras Taralkarin. A pleasure to meet you, sir."

Halvorsen looked him up and down, then smiled. "Strange seeing that uniform on a Klingon," he murmured.

"I believe it's called 'infiltrating the ranks,'" remarked Kor. Halvorsen's head turned quickly, a look of surprised approval in his eyes.

"Cosnider yourselves invited to dinner," Halvorsen offered. "My daughter would be glad to cook for all of you."

Tavia snarled at him and muttered, "Just for that, you get Tomato Surprise tonight."

Roan replied appreciatively, "No, I'm sorry, Admiral---"

Halvorsen wiggled a protesting finger at him. "Aa-ah, I'm retired now. No more rank, no more staff meetings, no more red tape."


"--Yes, sir. Unfortunately, I have a ship to tend, and a space-happy crew indulging in shore leave." Roan sighed. "We really should go find out what's going on before the late-breaking news tell me that half my crew is in jail, or dead-drunk, or worse." He grinned wryly. "I hope the locals don't throw us off-planet before we get our full three weeks here."

"Understood." Halvorsen glanced over at Kor. "You'll be staying for dinner, won't you?"

"It would be a privilege."


"Good." Halvorsen returned his attention to Roan. "But if you'll be here for a while, I'll expect to see you both again."

It sounded so much like an order that Roan straightened to attention. "We'll be glad to. I must say, Star Fleet misses you, sir."



"If they want me, they can look underwater," said Halvorsen cheerfully. "There's a whole ocean out there for me to explore"





with my deep-sea crawler."

Roan nodded. "Karras? Duty calls."

"Yes, Captain, sir."

"I'll want to talk to you again," said Tavia in an undertone, looking at Roan. This Roan, so sure of himself and seeming so 'whole,' was a stranger to her. She felt envious of his independence.

He smiled at her with unabashed anticipation. "Yeah, we have a lot to catch up on. Karras and I'll be back tomorrow afternoon, if that's all right with you."

"Fine. S'ya later."

The front door closed a moment later, leaving Tavia, Kor, and Halvorsen standing together. "Well, if you'll excuse me, I have some research I want to do before dinnertime," said Halvorsen. He subjected Kor to another brief scrutiny and appeared to like what he found. "It's a very great pleasure to meet you, sir. Please make yourself at home; I look forward to talking to you."

"And I," said Kor courteously.

An awkward silence fell as soon as Tavia and Kor were alone together. Tavia smiled, or at least half her mouth did, and she looked at Kor uncertainly. He reminded her of the diplomat-cum-statesman--his expression noncommittal, his eyes revealing nothing.

Kor inquired casually, "May I see more of your house, Katlena?"

A flare of surprised pleasure rippled through her at his private name for her. It was her killingaven name, a name of intimacy. She smiled at him and answered, "Of course you can. There's not much of it, you know."


"This is where you lived your early life?"

"Before Star Fleet, sure." She added with mock arrogance, "There have been Nelsons on Proalfalfa--in this house--for over three generations, imagine that." Kor gave her an arch look, aware that she was teasing him about his acknowledged twenty-seven or however-many-it-was generations of ancestry.


He said seriously, "Well, if this is the domain where you raised, I shall be very interested to see it. You forget Katlena, that although I know--unfortunately--Federation hotels, starports and bases, I do not know what it is to live in a Terran-style house."


They left the sunlit porch. Tavia was worried about what this commonplace existence must look like through his alien eyes, but she was curious to see his reactions.

What interested and tickled Kor the most was the bathroom, with its elaborate devices for procuring, using and getting rid of water. He also liked the kitchen, a streamlined, energy-intensive nook filled with fascinating gadgets.



They went last to Tavia's bedroom. Kor stood in the doorway and surveyed the room, looking for the personal traces of its owner.





The room was light and airy, large, and cluttered with enough furniture and loose items to make it pleasantly chaotic. The walls on either side of the door were covered with shelves lined with books on every subject and in no particular order.

Kor took a few steps into the room and stopped, his attention drawn by a piece of artwork hanging on the wall by Tavia's bed, a piece done in vivid watercolor. . . of a killing, sword upraised, about to meet Challenge. The killing was Kor Alkarin.

Tavia noticed what he was staring at. Her lips curved into a smile. When he turned to give her an incredulous look, she met his gaze openly, her eyes dancing. "Go on, say it," she said, sure that he was going to criticize the artwork.

"I am. . . uh. . . flattered by this treatment," he said, his voice carefully neutral. "Actually, I'm quite relieved that you chose to depict that fantasy rather than some of your other. . . less tactful. . . images of me."

Tavia gave him a sidelong glance and decided that she might be able to get away with teasing him. She said snidely, "I suppose you expected to see a painting of the Emperor up to his. . . ahem! neck in glorious, fury-fevered lust." She paused. "Well, you can't see that one; it's out being reframed."

He turned to her with all the dignified outrage of an aristocrat caught in an indiscretion. "What??"


The barely smothered giggle he heard made him realize that he'd just sprung the trap on himself. He suppressed a smile of his own at the image the joke created, and said, in evil tones, "Katlena, do you remember the knife I wield?" He went on hastily, seeing that she was about to make a vulgar interjection. "I'm going to take it and carve lewd pictures all over your backside!"

They grinned at each other, Kor's face alive with delight and anticipation. Tavia realized suddenly that most of the initial awkwardness between them had disappeared. *Not strangers anymore, now good friends, reestablishing common ground*, Tavia thought, and wondered half-ruefully if their relations could possibly be kept at such a safe, comfortable level.


Kor was having a similar conversation with himself. Before his desire for Tavia became too strong to control, he broke eye contact and walked farther into the room, pausing to look around. It was safer to retreat to casual conversation; he wasn't yet ready to bare himself to Tavia's scrutiny.

"I like your privacy-room very much," he remarked easily. "You're giving me a chance to see your past, your way of life. It's fascinating."

He turned to look at the imposing array of books. Realizing that there were pictures lined up in front of some of the books, he went closer. As a killing, he generally found the taking of photographs an insulting intrusion on one's selfhood. But in this case, since the pictures gave him insight into Tavia's life, he welcomed them.



He smiled at one photograph showing Tavia and her father, taken when Tavia was gawky and uncouth, in her midteens. Halvorsen was proudly holding up a large fish, fully a meter in length. Beside him, laughing impudently, stood Tavia, holding up a wee little fish hardly longer





than her hand.

Kor also took a moment to study a group photo. That was certainly Halvorsen in the middle, the image of the family patriarch, and around and behind him were humans of assorted sizes. He picked out Tavia without any trouble, since she was the one wearing the black shirt emblazoned with 'Chief Spy.' Kor remembered that Tavia had an older brother, too, who must be the dignified young man standing next to her. Her family was larger than he had thought, and he was suddenly assailed by a peculiar mixture of envy and dismay. Envy that she could still claim to be a part of such a family, and dismay that he had once unthinkingly broken all those family ties. He wondered how close Tavia was to all these people.

And then there was a portrait of Tavia and Roan together. The shot was obviously posed, given the way the two had their heads together and held hands with selfconscious artificiality. But their smiles for each other were genuine.

There was a caption on the bottom of the photo: 'On the beach, summer 2225.' Kor smiled wryly as he reckoned the years. That was twenty-one years ago--and just two years before Kor Alkarin had kidnapped Tavia Nelson and sent Roan Morgan off to prison. *How did I dare?* he wondered. *How did--does--she stand my arrogance?*

He made himself look at the other photos. A quick history of Tavia's life. . . Kor was about to turn back to Tavia, when he noticed two frames standing apart from the others. One held the picture of a lovely, dark-eyed woman whom Kor surmised to be Tavia's mother; the other carried a small, imperfect drawing of a kilingaven child--Kirdan Taralkarin.

Kor turned quickly to Tavia. His features held a look of consternation and concern. "Katlena---"

Tavia followed his gesture, and her expression sobered. "My mother, who's dead, and our son," she said softly. "Two who are lost to me." Feeling that that statement was perhaps too strong, she added quickly, "Sorry the drawing isn't very good--I'm no artist."



"Good enough for me to recognize him," said Kor gently. He came close to her, and touched her with hand outstretched.


Tavia felt more uncomfortable than she cared to admit. She hadn't thought that he would see that picture, didn't want old memories resurfacing. . . Their son Kirdan, who must be fifteen years old by now, her half-human, half-kilingaven son that she had left behind her in the *Ormenel*. In a tone that strove for casualness, she asked, "How is he?"

"Disgustingly healthy and energetic," said Kor in a deliberately light tone. "He is also a brat of the first order."

That was what Tavia needed to hear; she laughed. "Oh, really, Kor. As if any child of yours would ever misbehave."

"It must be the impurities in his breeding," said Kor snidely. "Would you like to know what he did only a week before I left for the Federation? He roused a herd of untamed *vuhothu* and let them loose into the streets of the Torshir Orthonik, that's what he did! He was still unable to sit down comfortably when I left."



Tavia's eyes were wide at the thought of a herd of antelopes bounding through the streets of the Kilingarlan's political and social capital. "Sounds like a perfectly normal, well-adjusted kilingaven child," she said happily, not at all sorry anymore that the subject had come up. However, to prevent any further, more serious conversation about their son, she quickly added, "I think I'd better go do something about dinner; my stomach just reminded me."

Kor nodded approvingly. "If there's anything I can do---"

She looked at him in horror. "You don't think I'm letting you anywhere near my kitchen, do you?"

"I'm a fair cook," said Kor mildly.

"Yeah, for Stone-Age cookouts. This kitchen is like a starship bridge, and I'm not letting you touch anything."

He gave her an amused look. "I have been known to command a warship," he reminded her. "But, very well. While you're making preparations, I shall go talk to your father."

A serious note in his voice stirred Tavia's curiosity. "What for?"

He gave her a look, a kilingaven expression that Tavia identified as 'don't-expect-a-direct-answer.' "Your father seems like an interesting man to know."

"Oh, he is," agreed Tavia blandly, and led the way out the door.

* * *

No, Halvorsen wouldn't mind at all if the *Ormen* Alkarin wanted to interrupt his work. He wasn't doing anything more interesting than reading about "Polyp Growth on Harbor Barrier Reefs," and yes, indeed, he'd be happy to talk to Kor before dinner.

Halvorsen sat down in a comfortable armchair beside his office desk; Kor relaxed on one end of the couch. Kor, uncertain of how or where to begin, was silent. Halvorsen considered his visitor and opened the conversation himself.


He said frankly, "You're quite different from what I had expected."


Kor raised his eyebrows in surprise and faint amusement. "From what Katlena--Tavia--has said of me, or from my reputation?"

"Well, both, and of course it's very difficult to separate a public figure from his public image." Halvorsen paused and went on slowly, "When my daughter first came home and told me how she felt about you, I had wondered how and why. It was difficult for her to describe you; how do you quickly convey the picture of a man you've known intimately for eleven years? Seeing you now, I begin to understand and appreciate my daughter's reactions a little better."

"I am amazed and delighted," murmured Kor, in a complete non sequitur.

Halvorsen glanced at him quizzically. Kor met that look, smiling, a gleam of admiration in his eyes. "I did not know what I would find here, but I confess that I came to your house with a feeling of great trepidation. You are the man who perhaps has the best single cause for quarrel with me, and I fully expected to face a difficult reckoning."





"Cause for quarrel?" Halvorsen repeated, his head cocked to one side. With an expression of sudden understanding, he clarified, "Willfully and illegally detaining and imprisoning my daughter, and inviting her to commit treason." He shook his head. "It's Tavia's business to forgive or not forgive you for those actions, not mine. I raised my daughter to independence."

"That is why you've earned my admiration and respect, sir. I did not foresee such a welcome or such open-mindedness from you. It is an honor to know you. . . Halvorsen."

"Thank you," said Halvorsen, an embarrassed smile on his lips.

There was a lull. Halvorsen was looking at Kor speculatively, trying to decide whether or not to ask him something. Finally, he said, "I am told that kilingau don't mind direct or aggressive questions."

"No, we don't."

"Well, I've got one." Halvorsen gazed steadily at the kiling. "Tell me this: have you come to ask Tavia if she'll return to the *Ormenel* with you?"

Kor inclined his head. He answered softly, "Yes, that's why I'm here." He looked searchingly at Halvorsen. When he saw no expression, or none that he could interpret, he said, "May I know how you feel about that?"

Halvorsen shrugged. He seemed uncomfortable, but he said candidly, "You've got me in a weak spot. . . my daughter's life is her own, but she's still my daughter."

Kor nodded his understanding. "You have a son, too, don't you?"

"Yes, and grandchildren, nephews and nieces, and so forth. But don't try to imply that I wouldn't miss Tavia because I've got other family. It doesn't work that way."

"I meant merely to ask if the succession was assured."



Halvorsen opened his eyes wide. Then he smiled. "Yes, 'the succession is assured,'" he said gravely, "although we don't place so high a premium on that as you kilingau do." He chuckled. "It might've been nice, though, to have Tavia's children running around. . ."


"That can be easily arranged," said Kor.

Once again, an expression of astonishment flickered in Halvorsen's eyes. "What on earth are you suggesting?"

From the tone in Halvorsen's voice, Kor wasn't sure whether he'd said something wrong, so he went on, being carefully polite. "If you wanted a grandchild to raise, one of Tavia's and mine, perhaps, or someone else's. . ."

Halvorsen's mouth was hanging open as he stared at Kor. "It's amazing," he murmured. "You learn more about kilingaven morés in ten minutes with a kiling than you do in forty-four years of Star Fleet Intelligence's Empire Watch." He collected himself, and said, with a grin, "No, I thank you for your very generous offer, but I don't need any more children to raise. That would make me feel even older than I really am."



Kor accepted that with a nod. Halvorsen, seeing him so pleasantly acquiescent to conversation, ventured a personal question of his own. "Speaking of age. . . I can't believe you're five years older than I am. . . are you really planning on having more children?"

"I will discuss it with Tavia, certainly."

"Such stamina," sighed Halvorsen.

Convulsed, Kor raised his head back and fairly shouted with laughter. Mastering himself, he asked delightedly, "Stamina in being able to conceive the children or stamina in raising them? Both, I gather. Halvorsen, I think I will ask you to come to the *Ormene1* with Tavia and me, solving your and her pain at being separated yet again. Also, I fear that life will be very dull without you."

"Me go to the Empire?" exclaimed Halvorsen. He realized, after a moment of shocked outrage, that the killing meant no offense--in fact, from the killing-aven point of view, it could probably be seen as a high honor. . . Halvorsen contemplated the invitation for all of ten seconds. "No, thank you," he said firmly. He saw Kor incline his head in a deferential way, apparently a formal acceptance gesture of some sort. He was grateful that the killing accepted his answer without further questions.

"Yes, I'll miss Tavia," her father said pensively. "But then if she were still in Star Fleet or living with someone off-planet, I wouldn't see much of her anyway. She's just a little more distant. . . One thing you could do, is get her to write letters more often."

Kor could see that Halvorsen was deeply troubled by the thought of losing Tavia, but did not want to hold her back. He was silent, allowing Halvorsen time for emotional privacy.

"When will you ask her to go to the Empire with you?" asked Halvorsen abruptly.

Kor hesitated a moment. "Oh, I have three weeks or so to enjoy here; I have a while yet."

"You're afraid to ask her."


Kor gave Halvorsen an astonished look, but after a moment, conceded defeat with a bow. He was gratified to feel no uneasiness or restraint in this personal discussion. He found Halvorsen as easy to talk to as one of his own family. . . The thought was a novel one, but even more surprising was the immediately following wish that Halvorsen was one of his family. "You're very perceptive, sir," he said. "You seem sure that she'll go with me, but I can't be. How dare I ask it so soon? She seems. . . quite happy here."

"She's not," said Halvorsen bluntly. His eyes flashed blue as he gave Kor a quick scrutiny. "Either you don't know her well enough to tell that, or you've been too long separated from her. She's frustrated, irritable, and as stubborn as a goat chewing on an umbrella handle. She's done a damn fine job of putting up with her situation here."

"Why is she still watched?" asked Kor curiously.

Halvorsen let forth a gusty sigh. "Because she was a Star





Fleet Intelligence agent. . . and is a convicted traitor." He spoke remotely, as if talking about a stranger. "The fact that she spent the last five years in prison doesn't obliterate the crime."

"I think I am most sorry for that," said Kor quietly. "If I had known what would happen to her--I never would have let her go---"

"It was her decision," interrupted Halvorsen. "She knew what she was doing. She once said that prison was her way of paying for her disloyalty to the Federation."

Kor accepted that statement in silence, unhappily wondering if Tavia's five-year imprisonment had been less painful to her than her stay in the *Ormene1*. Would she see his request for her to come back to the *Ormene1* as further disloyalty to the Federation? He looked at Halvorsen inquiringly, about to ask him to elaborate on Tavia's current desires, but was forestalled by the sound of the door opening.

Tavia's head poked in the doorway, her expression cheerful, not showing whether she'd heard any of the conversation in the den. "I could use some help," she said. "Overworked and underpaid, that's what I am."

"Sorry," said Halvorsen penitently. "Aren't we being chauvinistic, letting the little woman do all the kitchen work?" He pretended to flinch as Tavia clenched her fist and shook it at him. "What's to eat?"

"Steak with mushrooms and onions."

"Steak? Real steak?" Halvorsen turned and gave Kor an incredulous look. "You must rate, son; the rare times we get beef it's pot roast, or both ears, and the tail."

"You needn't go to any trouble for my sake," began Kor formally, aware that real meat was an uncertain and high-priced commodity in many parts of the Federation.


"It's no trouble at all," said Halvorsen with relish, rubbing his hands together in eager anticipation.


Dinner was a success. They talked politics, which Tavia had been sure would turn the dinner into a battle between the former Star Fleet Admiral and the Klingon. It didn't. Halvorsen's political insights were full of his own unique brand of humor and cynicism, and Kor was able, in a most riveting and candid fashion, to describe the recent cultural exchange talks at Versailles.

Tavia was pleased to see the two of them sharing viewpoints and arguing so happily. It had been a long time since her father had approved of any of her male friends. Tavia was amused by the thought of Kor coming to dinner to be inspected by Halvorsen.

After the meat came bumbleberries with masses of clotted cream. They finished eating in contented silence, and then all three worked to clear the table. They adjourned to the living room, where Halvorsen immediately dived into the day's newspaper.

Kor and Tavia sat down side by side on the living room's long





couch. Kor looked out the windows opposite them. Tree-branches moved across the window-panes. Through the trees he could see the deserted street, the scene soft and grey with the oncoming twilight. He glanced at Tavia, allowing himself a fleeting hope that she would ask him to stay the night.

Tavia was aware of Kor's glance, and also noticed the passing time. Echoing his thought, she inquired, "Where are you staying tonight, Kor?"

"Well, the Starship *Defiant* remains in orbit. . ." He paused, seeing the unspoken invitation in her eyes. He waited for her to say it and make it formal.

She read his look accurately. "Why don't you stay here?" She cast a fond glance at her father, and remarked, "That is, if you don't mind, Dad."

Her father paused in reading his paper and looked at them over the top of it. "Who, me? As far as I'm concerned, Tavia, you were living in unmitigated sin with this man for however many years. You expect to redeem yourself now?"

Kor blinked, not having expected to meet disapproval from Tavia's father on those grounds. Certainly he knew that most humans had many strange ceremonies for sanctifying sex. . . "Excuse me," he said, his tone conciliatory, "have I transgressed? I was not aware that Tavia's and my relations were immoral---"

Tavia's shout of laughter stopped him short. Perplexed, he looked at her, but the wicked laughter in her eyes indicated he'd get nothing straight out of her. He glanced to Halvorsen for enlightenment.

Tavia's father had a peculiar, restrained expression on his face; it was hard for Kor to know what the human was feeling. "Umm, well, yes," began Halvorsen thoughtfully, putting aside his newspaper. He rubbed his chin and avoided meeting the killing's eyes. "There is something you could do to make everything all right. You could do what's decent and marry my daughter."

"Marry her?"

"Yes, in a church, and with a dress and a ring."

Tavia was looking at her father reproachfully. "Uh, Dad, didn't anyone ever warn you that it's dangerous to tease killingau? Like laughing at cats?"

"That doesn't seem to have bothered you," retorted Halvorsen. "Besides, what makes you think I'm kidding?"

Her eyes went wide. "Oh, no, you wouldn't! Dad, honestly! Him in a tuxedo?"


Kor was now quite sure that the System English he had so painfully learned bore no relationship whatsoever to the real language that humans spoke. He looked from one human to the other, wondering if madness was hereditary, or perhaps just infectious.

Halvorsen saw his guest's bewilderment and sobered. He looked suddenly contrite--except that his contrition was belied by a slight twitching at the corners of his mouth. "Would you prefer, sir, to wear a maroon or a blue tuxedo?"



"I regret, sir, that I do not understand and have not





understood a single word you have said," said Kor calmly and with great courtesy.

"What he's talking about," explained Tavia, "is a quaint ceremony we have, called a wedding. A formalization of status, like becoming life-sharers."

Kor spread his hands wide, looking from her to Halvorsen. "I have no objection to abiding by local customs," he said reasonably. "Particularly if you wish it."

Father and daughter glanced at each other. A look passed between them, a knowing look which Kor didn't understand at all. "Do you think you might survive it, Tavia?" asked Halvorsen.

Tavia's mouth curved into a speculative smile. She stared pensively at the floor for a moment, then lifted her head as she thought of something. "There's one very important thing we've forgotten," she said firmly.

Both men turned to her. She looked at Kor, her eyes wide and guileless. "Well, before you make preparations for a wedding, you havta ask the woman if she'll marry you."

Halvorsen frowned at her reprovingly. "It used to be considered polite for the young man to ask the father for his daughter's hand."

Kor suspected, not for the first time during this conversation, that he was being. . . what was the phrase? . . . 'put on.' Keeping his expression entirely respectful, he looked at Halvorsen. "Master Nelson---"

"Since he's head of this domain, that makes him Lord Nelson," muttered Tavia.

Both men ignored that remark. Kor continued, "Sir, I would like to ask you to relinquish your daughter to my care. . . not just her hand, but all of her."

Halvorsen looked at his daughter. "Are you sure you don't mind lowering yourself to his status?"

"I think I can stand it," said Tavia. She pointed rudely. "Do you think you can bear having that for a son-in-law?"



"Why not? It should improve the bloodlines no end. Say, Rikki-tiki-Tavia, where's the champagne? We have to toast your engagement!"


"What champagne?" demanded Tavia, trying to ignore what her father had called her. "You drink like a---"

"Rikki-tiki-Tavia?" interrupted Kor in astonished tones.

Despite herself, Tavia blushed, and then gave her father a look that was, like a phaser, set to kill. "Just a nickname," she said hurriedly. "Never mind." Kor's look indicated that the name had already been filed in his memory, to be dragged out at appropriate intervals.

"Well, considering the occasion, I think I might actually consent to breaking out a bottle of my 50-year-old brandy," said Halvorsen. And, suiting action to words, he disappeared, and came back a few minutes later with a dusty bottle and three delicate, wide-bowl snifters.



Halvorsen poured a small amount of the potent liqueur into each glass. The brandy was warm amber in hue and had a heady scent. Halvorsen handed Tavia and Kor each a glass, and then picked up the third.

The three stood in the middle of the living room in a close circle. Halvorsen rocked back on his heels, holding his glass like a triumphal bequest. "A toast," he said, not very originally. "To the long, happy. . . uh. . . fertile marriage of Tavia Kathleen Nelson and Kor Alkar---" He broke off suddenly. "I'm sorry, sir, I don't know your full name."

"Kor Ariki Alkarin Tertemisar es Kothir," said Kor helpfully.

"Showoff," muttered Tavia.

"---Of Tavia Nelson and Kor Alkarin," said Halvorsen, beamed at the two of them, and inhaled his brandy. Kor and Tavia each took a cautious sip.

Some indefinite time later, Kor's armymen returned. Upon finding that their charge was planning to spend all of his nights with the Nelsons, they looked around rather helplessly, until Tavia offered them the use of the spare bedroom and the pull-out couch in the den. One of them volunteered to return to the *Defiant* to collect some of their baggage. Halvorsen invited them to join in a toast, and they gratefully accepted.

At an even hazier, later hour Halvorsen carefully picked up the brandy bottle and upended it over his open hand. One drop slithered out. "It's all gone," he said, obviously feeling that the others might not have been able to infer that fact.

"I think it's time for bed," announced Tavia. She moved to the foot of the stairs and put a hand out toward Kor. "You coming?"

"With the greatest of pleasure," said Kor cheerfully, and followed her up to the second floor.

They were both silent, until Tavia had closed her bedroom door behind them and turned on a bedside lamp.

"It's a bit small," said Kor.

Tavia realized that he was surveying the bed. "You can sleep on the floor," she retorted.

He pretended to take umbrage. "Would you have the *Ormen* in discomfort on a hard floor while his personal guards sleep in soft beds?"


"But they don't have company," commented Tavia. Kor, taking that as an invitation, smiled and took a step toward her. Suddenly hesitant, she sat down on the edge of the bed and bent down to undo her sneakers.

Kor sat down beside her. He watched her with approving eyes, but as yet made no move to touch her. After a moment, he commented, his tone almost slurred, "I believe it'll be big enough."


Tavia, startled, raised her head. "What will?"

He seemed surprised at the question. "The bed, of course."





His hands moved to the hem of her shirt. "Let me help you with that."



Tavia, feeling her breathing and pulse rates accelerate, let him pull the loose shirt over her head. She reached her hand up to smooth her ruffled hair and then didn't move, as Kor twisted to face her and touched first his fingers and then his mouth to the base of her throat.

She looked down at the top of his black, softly curling hair. She felt a tremor begin deep inside as Kor's head moved down. He bit the swelling of her breast.

She put her hands on his shoulders then, and made him raise his head. Their faces were very close. His eyes were intense and brilliant. "Are you drunk?" she asked, her tone softly accusing.

"No." His gaze held hers. He smiled and added, "Just eager."

Tavia judged her own senses and found she agreed with him: neither of them had consumed that much brandy. "Maybe I should have had more of it, so that I could be drunk," she murmured. She felt Kor's questioning gaze on her and remarked, "Alcohol helps me lose my inhibitions."

He took his hands away from her. "What is wrong?"

She answered obliquely. "It's been a long time."

"Has there been no one else?"

"Oh--one-night stands, nothing important." Tavia searched his face for an expression. "I meant that it's been a long time for us."


"Yes." Kor bent his head and started to undo the clasps at the right side of his tunic.

The syllable hadn't sounded very promising. Biting back a few dozen questions, Tavia moved to help Kor. He responded with a quick smile to her touch, and the two of them rose and helped each other out of the rest of their clothing.


"Damn, you look good," murmured Tavia, surveying Kor. "I wish I could keep myself so fit."

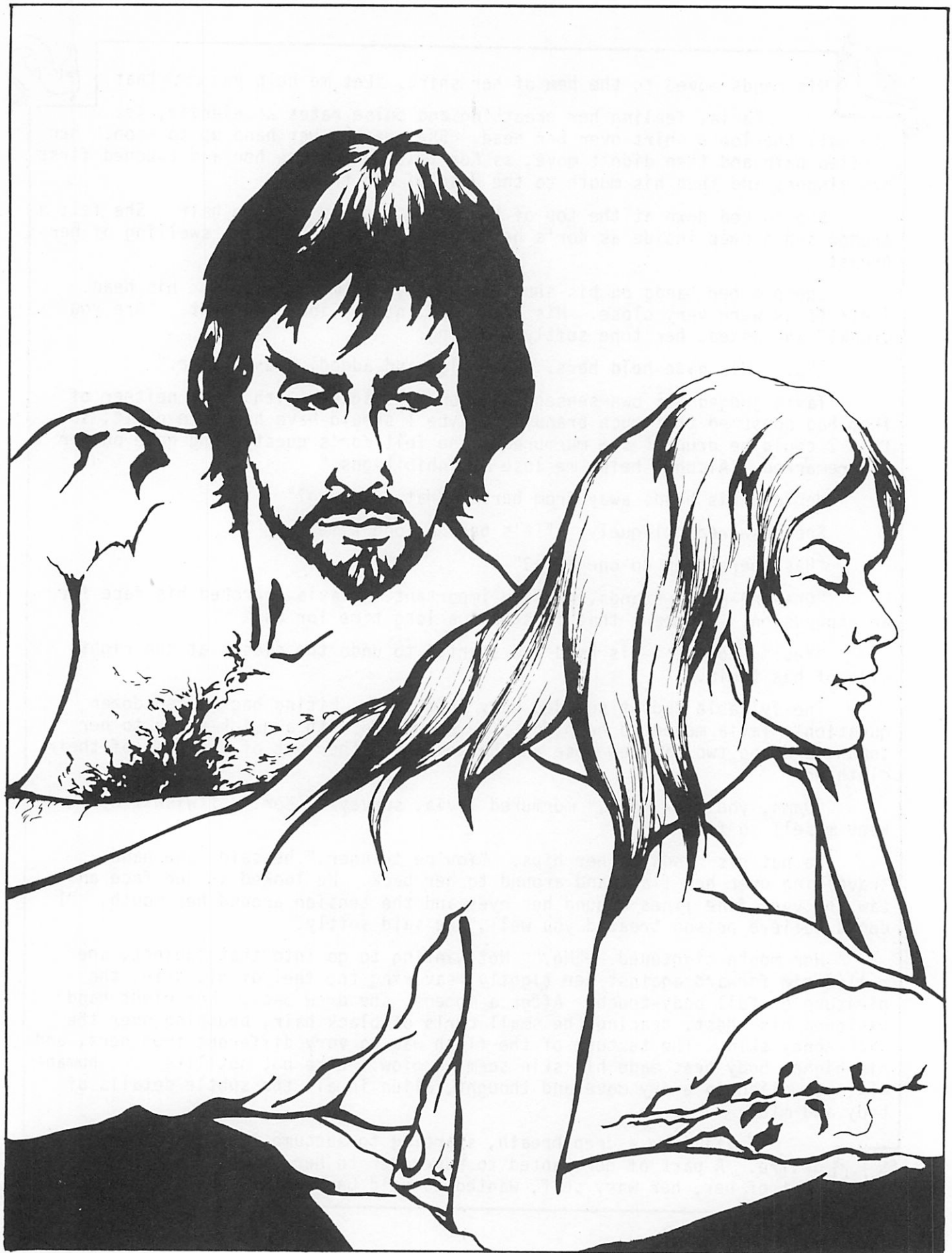
He put his hands on her hips. "You're thinner," he said, one hand travelling over her flank and around to her back. He looked at her face and saw the very fine lines around her eyes and the tension around her mouth. "I don't believe prison treated you well," he said softly.

Her mouth tightened. "No." Not wanting to go into that subject, she pulled him forward against her tightly, savoring the feel of his skin, the pleasure of full body-touch. After a moment, she drew back. Her right hand explored his chest, tracing the small curls of black hair, brushing over the dark-honey skin. The texture of the flesh was so very different from hers, and his higher body heat made his skin seem to glow. Like but not like. . . human-oid, yet alien in every move and thought, alien in all the subtle details of body and mind.




Tavia drew a deep breath, starting to succumb to the lure of desire. A part of her wanted to surrender to her needs. Another part of her, her wary self, wanted to hold back. She looked up





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into Kor's face, studying the lines and planes of it. Once again, she felt the conflicts rise. *Do I dare let myself feel this need for him?* she thought. *I don't want to get trapped again.* She closed her eyes and leaned her head on his chest, trying to find neutral ground.

Kor held her close, apparently sensing some hint of her trouble. His hands were soothing, his touch gentle, undemanding.

For a moment Tavia considered telling Kor that she was reluctant to regain their former shared intimacy. *No*, she thought, willing herself to relax, *I want him. I'm just afraid of what he'll make me feel.*

She encircled him with her arms and allowed her hands to brush up and down his spine. He shivered. She began to use her fingers more energetically, deftly caressing him in certain well-remembered places, stirring him with her touch.

After a moment Kor murmured in contentment, and then the two moved onto the bed, their bodies seeking comfort.

AUGUST 6

SUNDAY MORNING

Both Kor and Tavia rose early the next morning, Kor through years of habit, and Tavia because Kor woke her up. Upon seeing Tavia's bleary-eyed face, Kor suggested some exercise. After moaning at the mere thought of physical exertion, Tavia offered to take him to the beach.

It was just after dawn and the beach was deserted. The tide had receded down the sand, leaving driftwood, kelp and interesting debris to look at. Tavia contented herself with this while Kor took a vigorous swim out to a drying sandbar and back. Then they returned to the house, Kor going drip, drip, drip all the way home.


Kor's armsmen were up and dressed by the time Tavia and Kor strolled into the house. Kor meekly submitted to a tongue-lashing, from the older of the two, for leaving the house unescorted. Kor pointed out that he had been escorted--by Tavia--and then wondered aloud who was going to guard him from his own guards. He went upstairs with Tavia.

They shed their swimwear and got dressed. "Since you interrupted me in the middle of attic-cleaning yesterday, today you can come up and help," she commented.


"Well enough," said Kor. "By the way--what is an attic?"


"A walk-through memory," she said, smiling. "A storeroom for everything you just can't bear to part with, no matter how decrepit or awful the stuff might be."

"A *javandi*, a treasure-nest," said Kor. He ventured wistfully, "My father always took away or ruined my favorite possessions. And then he destroyed all my belongings when I was sent away to prison."



Her interest captured, she studied his face, surprised to





hear him confide such a memory. "I'm finding things out about you that I never knew before," she said. She added, thoughtfully, "I think that's because you're the alien here and have to explain yourself."

He accepted that with a musing nod. "Another very great difference, Katlena, is that I no longer have the war-burden to carry; the *Ormenel* and the Federation have been at peace for a long while now. And here, with you, I can relax."

"I'm very glad you came," she said softly.

He moved closer to her, warmed by her verbal touch. For a moment he considered asking her the question he had to ask, but he refrained, remembering her withdrawal the previous night. Their love-sharing had been more than pleasurable, bringing release to the body's needs and mind's desires, but... their closeness had lacked depth. Kor had felt a barrier between Tavia and him, a shield of Tavia's making. He had too much respect for her privacy and integrity to strike at that shield with his self-possessed question.

Hoping that none of his concerns showed in his face, Kor said lightly, "So am I. Where else in the Federation could I find such delightful company, in bed or out of it?"

She smiled back, but her expression was more rueful than pleased. Kor wondered what he had said wrong.

They spent a pleasant, dusty morning in the attic, unearthing all manner of nonsense and trying to organize Chaos. Kor was amused by the things they kept finding, bits and pieces that continually reminded him that Tavia came from a different way of life. He reflected on this, idly, as they poked through an archeologist's heaven. Not that Kor hadn't always known that Tavia's lifestyle had been very alien when compared to his, but there was a difference between the knowing and the seeing. He frowned into the box in front of him, a haphazard gathering of remnants of a horse-bridle, an ancient, leather-bound book marked A Wrinkle in Time, a much-worn, rakish sun-hat, a collection of handwritten pages, and a small box labelled 'To the Mata Hari of the Twenty-Third Century, from Alex.'


Tavia peered past him into the box and grabbed out the sheaf of handwritten pages. She gave him a menacing look. "That's not for you to read," she remarked. "A lady's--well, a teenager's--diary is a very private thing."


"Full of state secrets, no doubt."

"Who cared about state secrets back then? Sex was the important thing."

Kor gave her a look. "'Was'?" he repeated sardonically. She wisely kept her mouth shut.

Kor resumed his sifting. Perhaps Halvorsen was right; perhaps she was unhappy here; but she was, at the same time, completely relaxed in what was her natural environment. He had stolen her away, placing her in a strange culture, imposing on her all his attitudes and customs. She had adapted, for she was flexible, but it had been an intrusion on every part of her life, including her most closely held privacy. *How could I ever justify*



such cruelty? he asked himself.

One thought led to another, and he was suddenly faced with the most unpalatable question of them all. *I would not give up my Ormenel if she asked me to; why should I selfishly expect capitulation from her?* No answer came, only a mocking echo. *I must wait. I can't reveal my feelings yet,* he told himself. *Not until she shows some desire to see the Ormenel again.* A jeering voice in his mind called him 'coward,' a name he accepted without protest.

When Tavia and Kor could no longer bear the dust and the mess, they broke for lunch. They talked about the wedding; Tavia found herself explaining the necessary preparations in great detail to a bewildered but fascinated Kor. She made Kor promise that he wouldn't spill the beans about the wedding. Tavia, who liked springing surprises, wanted to wait for a suitably dramatic moment to tell Roan and Karras. Kor agreed not to spill any beans.

Late that afternoon, Roan and Karras showed up, trying to be incognito in civilian dress--as if a Klingon and a human in amicable company could be incognito. Roan said that he'd been visiting some of his cousins in Morgantown; it didn't seem to be a pleasant subject, and he didn't go into details. Karras had been wandering around the town. When questioned, he admitted that he'd been regaling children in a nearby playground with tales of how horrible the Klingons really were.

As ever, when there was a lull in the conversation, someone mentioned food.

"I'd like to take all of you to a local fish restaurant tonight," said Tavia, smiling guilelessly.

"Fish?" said Kor, suspiciously.

She gave him an amused, tolerant look. "Fish, love. It swims."

"I don't like fish," said the *Ormen* in a decisive tone. He looked like a six-year-old being offered a plate of spinach or something equally offensive.

Tavia put her hands on her hips and gazed at him in mock exasperation. Karras and Roan exchanged appreciative glances. "You don't like fish," she repeated. "How d'you know you don't like our fish? Just because you overdosed on kilingaven fish when you were young---"

"Is the fish real?" Kor interjected.

"No, it's made of algae, with little plastic bones and glass eyes," Tavia answered sarcastically. "Yes, of course it's real."


Kor winced at the thought of an algae-fish. "What sort of restaurant is it, Katlena?"

Tavia smiled, pleased by his surrender. "It's a real dive--you'll love it. All the fishermen and longshoremen eat there. They pick the fish out of water-pots, clean, and cook them right in front of you if you want."




The issue went on for a while, with circular arguments,





personal attacks, and mock-Challenges. Eventually, Kor gave in, sighing heavily. "Katlena, it is obviously your desire to poison me. I surrender. I trust there will be drink aplenty so that I may drown myself in alcohol."



Tavia paid no attention to this poor-spirited remark. She said, in a tone of complacent victory, "Look, Kor, wouldn't you rather be doing this than going to one of your greatly despised ambassadorial functions?"

Kor, rather reluctantly, conceded that there might be something in what she said.

"Speaking of ambassadorial brou-ha-has," Tavia continued, "you won't want to look like you're dressed to attend one."

Kor brushed his gold-embroidered, fawn-colored suede tunic. "What's wrong with my attire?" he said with affronted dignity. "This is what suits me."

"Well, could you at least leave your sword here?"

"I suppose so," said Kor tranquilly. "I'm not expecting to do battle."

Tavia had an irresistible image of Kor being arrested and locked up for waving a sword about. She was, to say the least, relieved to know that he would leave the weapon behind.

"Will your father be joining us?" Kor asked, partly to be polite, and partly because he wanted to pursue his relationship with Tavia's fascinating father.

"'Fraid not," said Tavia. "He's got a Board meeting at the Nelson Institute for Marine Biology and Laboratory for Exo-piscine Research. That's the NIMBLER, of course." She laughed at Kor's arching eyebrows. "No, I wouldn't make up a name like that."


Tavia turned to Roan and Karras. "What about you two? You've been awfully quiet. Don't you want to go out to eat?"

"I wouldn't dare interrupt," commented Karras. "It's much more fun to watch you and Akra."


"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Roan assured her.


Tavia gave Kor a sidelong look and gestured with her thumb at Roan and Karras. "What are they, the Bobbsey twins?" She got an uncomprehending stare from the *Ormen*, an outraged exclamation from Roan, and a chuckle from Karras. Before they became embroiled in another interesting but absurd conversation on semantics, ancient literature, and clever sayings, Tavia said firmly, "Let's go."

SUNDAY EVENING




Sharkey's Fish and Clam Bar was a noisy, brightly lit restaurant on Morgantown's waterfront. All six of them--Tavia, Kor, Karras, Roan, and Kor's two armsmen--had ended up walking to the restaurant, even though it was three or four kilometers from the house. Tavia had offered the use of her father's groundcar. But Kor, having unpleasant memories of





noisy, jolting groundcar rides, had vetoed that suggestion so vehemently that no one had dared protest when he had said that they would walk.



The restaurant stood at the end of a long, poorly lit pier. Torn nets, bits of fish, fishpots and crabcages were strewn haphazardly underfoot. Fishing boats were tied up along the pier, rocking gently in the slow swell of the black water. It was a cloudy, humid night, with no moon to light the scene.

As they walked in, Tavia spotted the restaurant's owner, a large man wearing an enormous, stained apron, and holding two handfuls of torpedofish. "Hiya, Sharkey. Got any fresh fish tonight?"

"Aw, get on wit' ye." Reprovingly, the owner waved a fish or two at her. His friendly scrutiny had taken in her and all of her company, but he looked neither surprised nor taken aback. "But just a-cause it's you, Tavia, I'll fetch out what the cats wouldn't eat last night." His ever-roving gaze had caught sight of a table being cleared near a rough stone wall. He gestured at it. "Go on, getadda here. We'll take care ayou."

The restaurant was full of fish and people, thrown together at random. Between the tables and against the walls were lined tankfuls and trayfuls of seafish and shellfish, most still alive. Tavia and her party reached their table without mishap and were greeted by a waiter with a face like a boiled haddock. He took an order for a 'little bit of everything, Charlie,' and a full round of drinks.

"How authentic," said Kor dryly, surveying the improbable scene. "How odorous. How magnificent."

"Shut up, Kor," said Tavia, grinning at him.

A basket of fresh salted rolls came, followed shortly by the drinks. Tavia raised her glass, looking around the table. Kor was on her right; Roan was on her left; Karras sat next to Roan; and the two guards, Jyo and Heri, completed the circle from Karras to Kor. "To reunions," Tavia said happily, and drank.

"To reunions," Kor echoed, smiling an amused, secretive smile.



Roan looked from Kor to Tavia, his expression wary. He addressed himself to Tavia. "Okay, what gives?"

Tavia, very carefully buttering a seeded roll, feigned innocence. "I don't know what you mean, Roan."

"'I-don't-know-what-you-mean-Roan.'" That's what you said on the *Explorer* the day I found 428 copies of 'Mutiny at Midnight Tonight' in your office. What are you"--his gaze moved to include Kor--"and you--trying to hide?"

Kor cast a glance at Tavia, who nodded slightly. Kor took a sip of his Bloody Mary, which he had ordered because of its appealing name. Holding it up and gazing at the murky red liquid, he said casually, "I believe this dinner is a celebration. Tavia and I are to be married."

Roan made a strangled noise, which he hastily turned into a cough. "Excuse me," he said faintly, and swallowed half his drink.



He stared at the two of them, wondering why he felt a sudden flare of jealousy. He dismissed it quickly.



Karras shook his head at his father as if the latter had gone mad. In accents of incredulity and scorn, he asked, "Akra, you're not going human on us, are you?"

With both eyebrows raised in arch disdain, Kor surveyed his son for a long moment. Then he said calmly, completely deadpan, "Actually, I'm planning to resign, Karras, and give the *Ormenel* over to you. I like the Federation so much that I've decided to live here always."

Karras simply stared, open-mouthed. Roan covered his eyes with his hand and moaned feebly. Tavia's eyes brimmed with laughter; she and Kor shared grins.

After Karras had recovered his dignity, he eyed his father narrowly and said sternly, "Akra, your sense of humor is totally reprehensible. You just scared me out of thirteen years' growth." Kor assumed his most innocent expression. Karras continued, apprehensively, "Is that really true--you and Katlena being. . . uh. . . married?"

"So that we will no longer be committing a sin," Kor assured him gravely.

That was too much for Roan, who burst out laughing. For several minutes he was helpless, carried away by merriment. Finally, he raised his glass in salute and said, in a shaky voice, "To your marriage, *Ormen Alkarin*. And to you, Tavia. Congratulations!"

Kor accepted the tribute with a slight, dignified bow. Tavia, her voice not quite steady either, smiled and said, "Thank you, Roan. We were hoping that you could attend."

"I'd love to," said Roan.

"Can I be the ring boy?" asked Karras dourly.

"Why, Karras, I had no idea you were so familiar with our customs," said Tavia sweetly. She noticed that Kor was looking blank. "He walks behind us," she explained, "and carries the rings on a silken cushion."

"If he wants to, he may," said Kor.

"Actually, we need him more as best man," replied Tavia.


Karras was giving Kor an incredulous look. "Akra, you don't have any idea of what you're getting yourself into." He shook his head and uttered in doleful tones, "You're never going to hear the end of this."

The food chose that moment to arrive. The waiter deposited a plate of sizzling fish in the center of their table and slithered away. Tavia, who was starving, promptly reached out with a fork to stab a fish. "Dig in," she said helpfully. "Don't be shy--they won't bite."

Roan and Karras simultaneously fell to eating with zeal. Kor's guards, with slightly more decorum, also helped themselves. "Amazing how Star Fleet people react at the sight and smell of real food," Tavia commented. She looked at Kor. Her glance dared him to make a move. "Well, Kor?"

Kor hesitantly selected an innocuous-looking fillet and put





it on his plate. He first took a swallow of his drink, which brightened his outlook considerably. Then he cut off a piece of the piscine denizen, held it up on the tip of his knife, and ate it slowly and thoughtfully.

Tavia waited with baited breath. "Well?" she said eagerly. "Will you live?"

Kor hadn't minded the taste at all. However, having made his stance on fish, he was reluctant to step down from it. "It has an unusual flavor," he said grudgingly. He helped himself liberally to some butter sauce. "It's not bad. . . I suppose."

"Careful," said Tavia. "Don't commit yourself to anything you might regret." Kor lifted one corner of his mouth in a faint snarl. Once he'd made his token complaint, he was perfectly content to eat his fish.

More fish arrived as soon as they were done with the first offering. Two different kinds of fish this time: a skinny little eel-like fish and a large, fat, bewhiskered fish that Tavia said was known locally as an 'Admiralfish.'

The dinner was a many-course meal, involving all the variety of fish that the restaurant had fresh that evening, lots of drink, baskets of bread and a smattering of greens. Their talk, for a time centering on the upcoming wedding, soon became desultory and rather trivial, as each member of the company discovered how the feast truly deserved undivided attention.

The fourth course had just arrived, a melange of whole gogglefish, daggerfish fillets, and breaded scuttles. The six looked at the food, hardly believing that they could possibly have room for more..

"This is gluttony," sighed Roan, reaching for the well-laden tray.

Kor speared a fish for himself. "Now that the restaurant is somewhat emptier, what are they doing to us--feeding us all the extra food?"


"Proalfalfa's got more fish than it knows what to do with," remarked Tavia. "We've got to get rid of it somehow."

"Well, in the Federation I've noticed a great number--perhaps even a plethora--of quick-service eating places, all of which sell inedible, artificial food," said Karras. "Ama, why don't you and Akra start a chain of fish restaurants, and you can call them Arthur Traitor's Fish and---"


"There's something wrong," said Tavia suddenly, just as the noise level in the restaurant dropped abruptly. The company, particularly the two armsmen, stiffened to alertness, looking around.


A man was standing by the kitchen door, from which he had just entered the restaurant. Another man stood by the front entrance. Both carried stocky, blunt-nosed havoc guns.

The restaurant wasn't as crowded now; only about twenty tables were filled. There were perhaps a dozen customers sitting along the bar. No one was eating or drinking or even talking; the restaurant was unnaturally still, its patrons arranged in awkward, frozen positions.




Sharkey, behind the bar, moved suddenly, his hand snaking





out toward a red button on his interlink system. Before he could reach it, the man with the gun sidestepped neatly, bringing up the butt of his gun. The owner of the restaurant fell like a stone as the gunbutt hit him on the side of the head.



The sudden, easy violence shocked the diners. Except for a few. Kor's bodyguards were halfway to their feet, hands reaching for weapons. His gaze fixed on them, Kor spoke with deceptive softness: "Sit down."

The man by the front entrance, surveying the diners with a suspicious, ferret-like gaze, spoke. Though his voice wasn't loud, it carried very clearly. "Everyone just sit quiet and put your money and valuables--rings and watches and stuff--on the table. If you behave, we won't have to hurt anyone." He gestured to his companion. "Al, start working the tables back there."

Tavia's table was the second or third closest to the man by the kitchen door. Karras made a sudden, urgent move. "Karras, no!" hissed Kor.

His son shot him an angry glance. "But *Akra*, they're---

"*Ast-la-mash!*" Kor's whiplash gaze moved to include his armsmen and Roan and Tavia.

There was no disobeying that tone, or that look. Karras shut his mouth tightly over his seething rage and sat very still.

Kor's gaze followed every movement that Al the thief made. Glumly, but with no particular objection, the diners at two tables handed over the valuables. Momentarily, Kor glanced at the other brigand, who, apparently satisfied that no one was going to make trouble, had started working the forward tables. He kept his havoc gun cocked, though, and moved with nervous suspicion.



"Hey, will you look at this!" said Al the crook, sounding pleased. "A bunch of Klingons!"


He came first to Kor, the most expensively attired. He laughed derisively. "A fearsome, savage, Klingon, and he's sitting just as still and cowardly as a mouse!"

Tavia gritted her teeth and waited for the explosion. It never came. She stared at Kor disbelievingly, her eyes searching the blank emptiness of his expression. No, that wasn't quite right; she could see a trace of anger, but he did nothing, said nothing, and moved not at all.


"That's a pretty-looking knife you've got, Mister Klingon, but I wouldn't like to see your hands go anywhere near it," said Al. "Why don't you just--nice and slow--take out your money and put it on the table in front of you?"

Tavia, a dry lump in her throat, couldn't believe this was happening. She cast covert glances at her company, seeing Roan's blank face, Karras's snarl, and the looks of outrage on the guards' faces. *Not in my home town, not on this night, and especially not to Kor!* her mind raged. And she found it kind of hard to swallow the fact that Kor was sitting there docilely, not moving, not even protesting the indecency of this holdup. She stared at him, wanting to scream, "Let's do something! Challenge him!" but she knew, dully, that the only safe way out of all of this was for them to quietly give in.



"I am a kiling," said Kor calmly, stressing the word. "Not a Klingon."



The crook moved forward and jabbed the havoc gun under Kor's ear. "Stop being cute. Get on with it."

Kor didn't even wince. "I don't like spending money for poor service," he observed.

"Haul it out!" The thief was now almost on top of Kor.

With devastating calm and excruciating slowness Kor's right hand moved to the pouch at his belt. Al watched every move.

Kor unhooked the pouch and put it on the table, his hand resting almost in his plate. As Al leaned forward to snatch up the valuables, Kor's right hand shot forward and grabbed the tail of a gogglefish. He shifted suddenly, diving under the havoc gun, and threw the gogglefish exactly as if he were throwing a knife. The fish, with a loud, wet 'smack,' hit the crook in the face, right over the eyes. At the same time, the havoc gun went off, its screaming whistle sending all the restaurant's patrons diving for refuge. Kor sprang at Al, reaching for the gun.

Karras uttered a joyful battlecry, came to his feet and leaped toward the other thief. In instants the restaurant was a noisy, jumbled riot, with bodies on the floor and bodies in the air, and more people trying to escape than to fight.

The two armsmen jumped to their feet. There was a moment's indecision as they faced the fracas. Then Jyo commanded, "You guard the son--I'll take the father!" And they plunged in.



Tavia, not worrying about whether it was fair or not, helpfully hit Kor's opponent over the head with a fish tray. The tray, regrettably, was full of fish--what a waste--and Al and a silver spray of slippery bodies cascaded to the floor. Jyo took the havoc gun from Kor, who had immediately wrested it away from Al, and emptied it of its charges. The guard looked solicitously at his liege, who was panting but looking like he was very much enjoying himself.

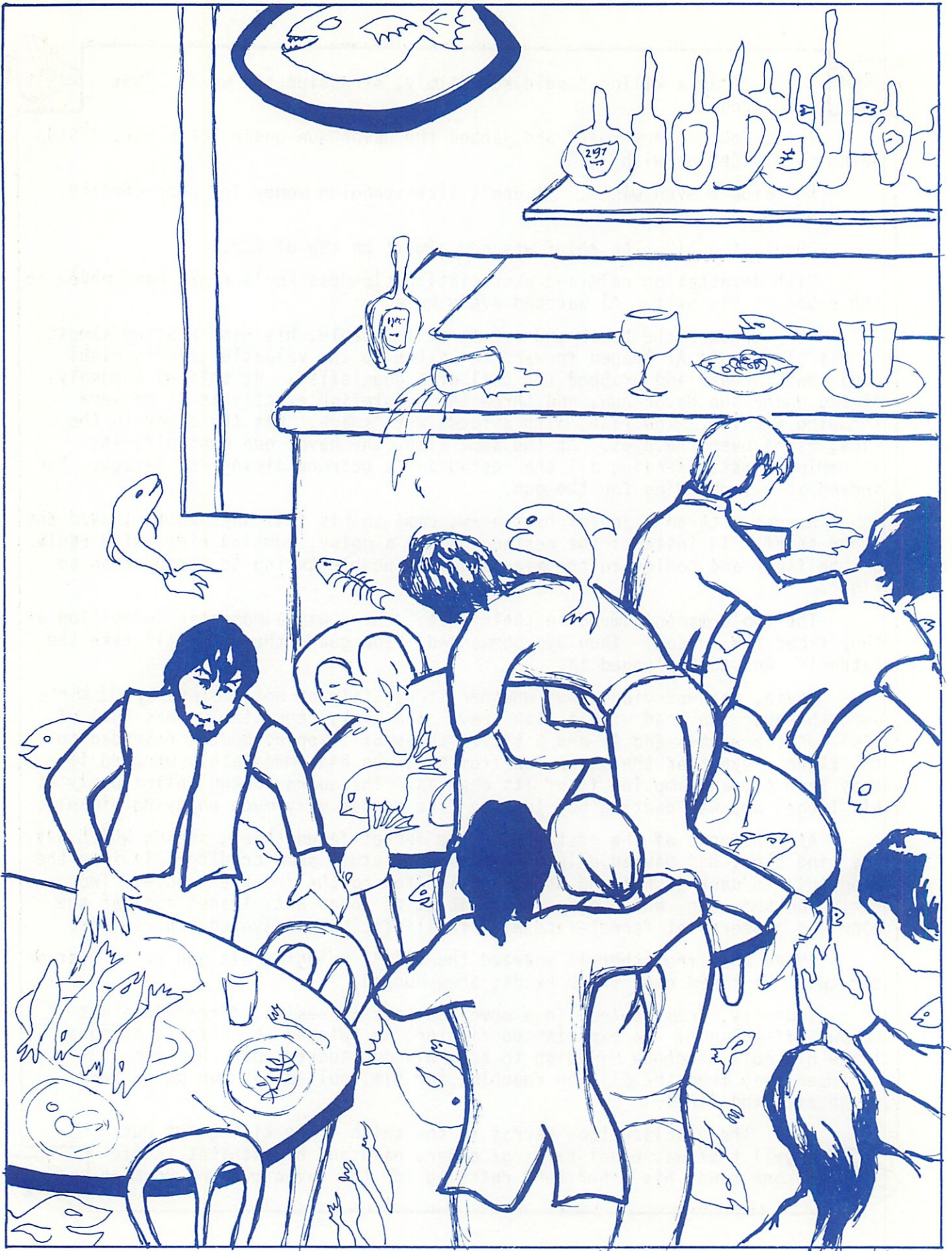
At the front of the restaurant, the ferret-faced thief, seeing which way the wind blew, had paused only long enough to stuff some credit bills into the front of his dark jacket and then scuttled toward the front entrance. Two burly longshoremen, who had been just about to sneak out, leaned against the door and glowered at ferret-face with fatalistic but undaunted expressions.

"Move away from there!" snarled the thief, bringing his gun up to bear on the two. He fired over their heads; they ducked.


Suddenly, from behind, in a move too fast to resist, ferret-face was thrown off-balance. An experienced fighter, he twisted as he fell, doing a lithe hip roll, somehow managing to keep his gun tucked under his arm. He squirmed away from the Klingon reaching for him, pulled his gun up in very rough aim, and fired.

The gunblaze took Karras in the thigh. The kiling let out a yell that was equal parts of anger, pain and bloodthirst. Knife in one hand, his other hand reaching for the havoc gun, he dove on



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top of his adversary.

A moment later, the two were pulled apart by Roan, Heri, and one of the waiters. "The fight's over, Karras," said Roan urgently, kneeling, holding on to his friend's shoulders by main force. A quick glance at Karras's white, blazing expression and a glance at the thief's surly pain horrified him.

"This one'll be dead in minutes," said Heri in Agavoi, kneeling over the thief, looking from Karras to Roan. The armsman picked up the knife and wiped the blade on the thief's jacket. "Small loss."

"*Kuskun*," ordered Roan sharply, outraged, and glad Heri's comment had been made in Agavoi. The guard shut up.

Roan felt the tension of Karras's muscles slacken suddenly, and realized that the killing's anger was giving way to shock and hurt. They were near the front of the bar; Roan pulled and coaxed Karras to move a little, so that he could lean back against the bar.

Sharkey, groaning, stood up behind the bar, helped to his feet by a waiter. He looked around in bewilderment at the chaos. The waiter, acting with quick efficiency, put an opened bottle into the owner's hand, made him lean against the wall, and reached for the interlink system.

A lot of people had slipped quietly out of the restaurant. About fifteen were left, most of them arguing over whose money was whose and wasn't crime deplorable.

Kor, followed more slowly by Tavia, shouldered his way through the crowd to where Karras lay propped up against the bar's front. He was being tended to by Heri. Kor knelt by his son, an expression of angry alarm on his features. His gaze took in the unnatural pallor of Karras's face and the freely bleeding injury. "Karras?"

With one swift glance, Karras assessed his father's feelings. "It's not that bad, *Akra*," he said wryly. "More blood than pain, I assure you. By Chaos, if someone would only bring me a drink, it'd go a long way to restoring my strength!" Tavia slid away to get Karras what he wanted.


"You're soon going to have more scars than I do," said Kor in an undertone, in accents of exasperation.

"Well, it's a good way for me to remember all my battles. Now see, grandson, this one here's from the time I battled the fearsome firebird---" Karras interrupted his bantering to accept the amber-filled glass that Tavia handed down to him. Two large swallows brought a good deal of color back to his face.

"He'll be all right, sir," interjected Heri to Kor. A medic during the last war, he deftly finished bandaging Karras's thigh. "The main worry is the blood-loss. I would suggest getting help, my lord."

"*Sala*," agreed Kor, rising to his feet.

Just at that moment groundcar doors slammed outside, and four armed peacekeepers came into the restaurant in a headlong rush.



"Where were you guys when we needed you 'afore?" asked Sharkey dourly.





The first peacekeeper, two stripes on his shoulder proclaiming him a sergeant, brought his stunbeam up to bear. "Klingons!" he gasped.

"There's been an attempted robbery---" Sharkey began.

As one, the peacekeepers converged on Kor, the two armsmen, and the recumbent Karras. Karras finished his drink and put the glass to one side, his face upturned and alive with anticipation. Kor and his two guards looked at the peacekeepers as if they were a particularly bothersome form of insect.

In chop-licking tones, the sergeant declared, "I don't know what your game is here, but it's all over. Hands on your heads." His face darkened as the Klingons did nothing, merely continued to stare at him in what he considered insolent amusement.

"You fishheads!" bellowed Sharkey. "They're not the thieves--they're the ones who saved our necks!"

The peacekeeper's face colored even darker as confused embarrassment joined his anger. "Whaddya mean?"

Kor and Roan stepped aside, so that the lawman could see past them to the body on the floor, which someone had thoughtfully covered with a tablecloth. Two waiters had dragged the other brigand onto a nearby chair and were standing guard over him watchfully, waiting for him to regain consciousness.

The peacekeeper's gaze took in this scene, moved on to the assembled diners, and came back to rest on Sharkey and the Klingons--whom he still regarded with obvious mistrust. He holstered his stunbeam and took out a hand recorder. "Okay," he said heavily, "what happened here?"

Perhaps a dozen people at once started in on the story from different directions. After a few moments of pandemonium, Sharkey shouted for quiet and got it. Then he told the story, up till the point where he'd been knocked out, and then a waiter who'd been able to see most of the action from a safe vantage point picked up the tale. He warmed to the story as he related how elegantly and heroically the much-abused Klingons had rushed to save the restaurant and its patrons from pitiful penury.

The sergeant listened in bellicose silence until the end. He asked sharply, "Then you--his finger swung down at Karras--"killed one of the robbers in question?"

"Yes, I did," said Karras, raising his eyebrows in faint surprise.

"And he got blood all over my money!" exclaimed a small gentleman from the group of diners. "That thief, he's got my money in his jacket!"

One of the peacekeepers silenced him with an impatient wave. The sergeant fixed Karras with a particularly baleful glare. "You killed him, you say? Where's the weapon?"

Karras made a face, and was about to make an unwise remark when Roan decided to interpose. He could feel Kor also preparing to attack, and hurriedly cleared his throat. "Sir," he said quickly, "it was self-defense."

"Self-defense or no self-defense, we havta take him in."





There's laws against murder, y'know."



"Kripes!" exclaimed Sharkey. "Maybe we shoudda just let them walk outa here with all the money! A guy can't lift a finger t'protect hisself! Who's gonna pay for alla my damages? Who's gonna pay me for the business I'm gonna lose onaccouna this holdup?"

"I should very much like to be able to use this leg again," said Karras, rather faintly. "Would you please shut up and get a doctor?"

The shadows under Roan's brows deepened at Karras's words. He looked down at his friend uncertainly. Then, struck by a thought, he glanced over at Sharkey. "Hey, can you let me use your interlink? I'll get in touch with my starship."

"Whaddya mean, your starship?" expostulated the sergeant, becoming increasingly frustrated at the confusion that he was quite unable to control.

Roan, heading around the bar to the interlink unit, glanced back over his shoulder. "Yeah," he said dourly. "I'm Captain of the Starship *DeFiant* and that wounded Klingon is my First Officer."

The sergeant's face fell. The tortuous complexities of a mixed-jurisdiction, civil and military case were unpleasant to contemplate. Besides, if the Klingon really was a part of Fleet, they would certainly protect one of their own. . .

Kor watched the changing emotions on the lawman's face and decided that it was high time to take over. "In any event," he observed silkily, "since he is a member of my party, he is covered by diplomatic immunity." With one hand, he attempted to pull the gap in his torn shirt closed.

That statement earned him an indignant exclamation: "Who the hell are you?"

Several people--Roan, Karras, Tavia--held their breaths in anticipation. Kor, aware of the changing focus of attention, answered calmly, "My name is Kor Alkarin."

It took a long moment to register--longer than it should have. Then, those few words dropped like a stone into a lake--stunned silence and then ripples of noise spreading through the crowd.

"Well, I'll be happy damned!" exclaimed Sharkey, coming out from behind the bar and stopping in front of Kor. "I wanna shake your hand, sir, I never knew anybody, 'specially a high-up, so quick with his fives as you!" The startled Kor responded as well as he could as the restaurateur reached for his 'fives' and shook them strongly. "You've got my vote, sir, and I don't care who knows it!"

Kor flashed him a quick grin. "My pleasure to join the fight," he said.

The peacekeeper's face had again flushed to an unbecoming puce. His throat moved convulsively once or twice, as if he was trying to force words past the lump. "Ah, hell," he said feebly.

Kor tried to repress his smile but could not. He looked around the restaurant, his gaze touching the faces and eyes of all





those assembled. Already at the center of attention, he allowed himself to show a hint of his authority. Fixing his eyes on the sergeant, he said, with quiet firmness, "I suggest you take the dead away, before it causes any more unpleasantness. I would also suggest that you investigate what has happened to the kitchen staff, since one of the thieves entered through there. If the gentleman whose money is on the dead man does not want blood-stained credits, you can no doubt reimburse him. The other thief is yours for whatever punishment is required by your laws. If you take care of that, nothing more is needed of you."

"Now, wait a minute---" began the peacekeeper.

Kor didn't pay any attention. He glanced around again. "Is there anyone here who has not yet gotten their valuables back? Is there anyone with any grievances?"

"What about our ruined dinners?" asked one woman stentorously.

Kor looked at her well-fleshed form and refrained from telling her that she was better off without the food. He said, curtly, "Would you rather be penniless?"

"I suggest a round of drinks on the house," interjected Sharkey. "Look, folks, I'm sorry all this happened. But you gotta admit we got off lucky this time."

The words, 'drinks on the house,' had a magical, revitalizing effect on the diners. There was a slow but general drift toward the bar.

Kor looked down at the sergeant who was still standing a few feet from him, eyeing the scene with pugnacious hostility. But his three fellow lawmen, Kor was gratified to see, had taken away the body. Two of them reentered the restaurant a moment later and headed purposefully toward the captive thief.

"Well?" asked Kor, somewhat contemptuously, making an all-inclusive gesture. "Is there anything else you need done here?"

The sergeant didn't appreciate the slur on his abilities. "You've still gotta come in to the station and make a statement," he said stolidly.


Roan worked his way free of the crowd at the very front of the bar and rejoined Kor at that moment. "It took me a minute or two to get through," he said. "And then my chief engineer, a good, if conservative officer, didn't want to break local ordinances by making an unauthorized beam-down. Needless to say, a med team should be down any second."

"*Ai, ashavanau Maraku,*" murmured Karras at Roan's words. "I don't know what's worse, getting shot or having to face Hansen."

Before he finished speaking, the door to the restaurant opened again, and three starship crewmembers walked in. The officer in the lead, a tall woman with a firm, strong face, looked at the crowd of people drinking and said loudly, "What is this, the aftermath of a brawl? Let us through, please." The crowd parted. She came through, followed by two medical technicians, one of whom was carrying a collapsible stretcher.

Dr. Hansen nodded hello to the Captain, and in one searching





glance took in the peacekeeper, Kor and his guards, Tavia, and Karras lying on the floor. Without a word of greeting to Karras, she said, with some asperity, "I might have known it would be you. My worst patient--and not just because of your peculiar physiology." She bent down beside him, her compact instruments already out. "You really did it this time. Shall I amputate at the hip?"

"You wouldn't dare," muttered Karras, and shuddered all over as her fingers delicately probed the area of the wound. He gasped, "Where'd you learn your tactics, Doctor--practicing on recalcitrant prisoners during the war?"

"Yeah, that's why I'm such an expert on Klingons," she agreed, applying a hypospray to his leg. "C'mon, Marco, Ann, let's get that stretcher under him."

"My Chief Medical Officer," said Roan for the benefit of those who were staring at her and Karras in bemused fascination. He went on, to the sergeant, "I don't think your security hospital has facilities for treating a wounded Klingon, now does it?"

Before the lawman could think of an answer, one of his men sidled up to him. "Sir, we've about finished here," he said rapidly, not looking at anyone but his commanding officer. "Everyone's story checks with the restaurant owner's and the waiter's. I sent Zeidenboom with cargo to the morgue; the other crook's in the squad car with Hoogenstein. We found out that the thief who came in by the kitchen route had taken care of the cooks and waiters back there with a doze-bomb, but they'll be coming out of it shortly. We've got names and addresses, sir, is there anything else we should do, sir?"

The sergeant slowly mustered the shreds of his authority. "No, Waters, you've done okay."

Hansen stood up and indicated her now-unconscious patient. "Captain, we're going back up to the ship with Commander Taralkarin. We'll beam up outside, away from all these people and clutter."


"Right," said Roan. He looked from Kor down to Karras, obviously torn between the desire to go with his First Officer or to stay to help. He said quietly to Kor, "I think I'll go with Karras, if you don't mind."

"I would be happiest if you were with him," answered Kor, also in an undertone. He added worriedly, "Please care for him. He's. . . more than impetuous."


"Yes, I'm quite well aware of the traits he inherited," said Roan dryly, to relieve the concern in Kor's eyes. He went on, his voice deliberately raised, "Remember, Lord Alkarin, that my starship is entirely at your service."

"Thank you," said Kor, an amused smile almost reaching his eyes. Out of the corner of his eyes, he watched the *Defiant's* crew make their way slowly out, and then he turned back to face the peacekeeper. He said, with the minimum of civility, "I trust you are now satisfied, sir?"

The sergeant set his chin and stared at the Klingons. "No, there's something fishy about all this," he declared. "I don't like the way it smells."



"Yes, the fish on the floor is getting a little ripe, isn't it?" commented Tavia, unable to keep quiet any longer.





The peacekeeper seemed to notice her for the first time. He looked at her, frowning in puzzlement, his frown deepening into a scowl. "Hey, aren't you Tavia Nelson? We're supposed to be told anytime you go out. Whaddyou doing here?"

"Oh, *susif uloki*," cursed Tavia under her breath, wishing she'd stayed in the background and kept her mouth shut.

The sergeant continued with grim satisfaction. "No wonder this situation seemed so funny. If you're involved---" He broke off, his face tightening in suspicion, and he looked around warily. He said, in a scurrilous tone, "What have you got to do with all of this?"

"Oh, after committing treason, robbery seems like a mere peccadillo," said Tavia off-handedly, trying to repress her anger.

The peacekeeper stared at her. Undaunted, she glared back, but neither of them were prepared for outside intervention. All of a sudden, there was a great deal of noise coming from outside: two groundcars stopping, doors opening and slamming, people's voices. One voice rose above the others in an outraged yell. "Hey, get your paws off my videocorder!"

"Uh-oh," said Tavia, getting an idea of what was about to descend on them. "Like sharks, attracted by the smell of blood. . ."

Her voice trailed away as a half-dozen reporters burst into the restaurant, all eagerness and motion. One of them, a curly redhead, spotted her almost immediately and loped over. Seemingly unaware of Kor and the peacekeepers, he threw one arm around Tavia's shoulders in a playful hug. "Hey, Tavia! How's my favorite traitor?"

Tavia winced and pulled away; Kor glowered; the sergeant looked irritated at yet another interruption of his duties. The newsman let go of her and began peering through his videocorder, setting up shots, talking all the while. "Heard there was some kinda robbery over here, couple people dead. . . where're the bodies? Hey, Sarge, didjou let the crooks get away?" A whir told of his camera's activation. "Now lemme just get a coupla shots of---" He stopped short as a hand covered the lens of his videocorder. He looked up quickly. "Hey! Cut that out!"

"I have had enough," said Kor wrathfully. He looked around at the restaurant, now besieged by reporters. "This is intolerable!"

Unfortunately for him, all his exclamation did was catch people's attention. Someone pointed, and someone else said, rather breathlessly, "That's the Emperor!"

Kor acknowledged his error with a grimace, as the sea of piranhas began to surround their prey. Jyo and Heri bravely stepped in front of their lord, ready to protect him till the death. Kor grabbed Tavia with one hand, and snapped at the sergeant, "Follow me. We'll go to your command station with you."

The sergeant, astonished at the sudden capitulation, blinked dazedly, and then followed as the Klingons formed a spearhead to force their way through the reporters. Feeling as though he wasn't really in command of the situation, he gestured at his subordinates





to hurry up and follow along.



It was, altogether, a long and wearisome night. A cramped ride by groundcar to the peace station, and then an interminable wait punctuated by forms to fill out and stupid questions to answer. Further indignities followed as the newsmen arrived on their trail--and this time, there was no escape. It was after midnight when Kor, Tavia, and the two armsmen finally got out and made their tired way home.

AUGUST 7 MONDAY MORNING

Breakfast the following morning was highly original. When Kor and Tavia came blearily down to the kitchen table, they were confronted by bacon, lox and bagels, something brown and viscous in a glass, and a copy of Harold's Tribune at their places.

Halvorsen raised an eyebrow at both of them. "This for the empty stomach," he said, gesturing at the food. He indicated the drink---"This for the aching head"---and last he made an extravagant, sweeping wave at the newspaper---"this to stir up your head and stomach all over again."

Tavia sat down and unfurled the newspaper, as usual fumbling with the oversize pages. Morgantown was still too small to warrant its own videocast system, and the local newshunters delighted in the old-fashioned newspaper format.

What she saw on the front page pleased her not at all: 'Shootout at Sharkey's; Klingons Take Over.' She moaned.


Kor, after a long, searching look at the front page, had put aside his paper and was now helping himself to bacon on a bagel, completely ignoring the fish on the serving plate. There was no expression on his face. "I am going to declare war," he said, with exaggerated calm. "That is, if I am not laughed out of my government by my own people."

Tavia examined a photo of Kor. Kor was definitely not looking his best: he was wearing a torn tunic, and bore assorted bruises and a truly magnificent scowl. The caption read, 'Emperor Kor Alkarin: This Time He's On Our Side.' "Yes, I can see how some kilingau might take this amiss," she said judiciously.


"I wish I'd been there to see the action last night," commented Halvorsen. "The Board meeting wasn't half as exciting, I assure you. Now tell me--since I can't trust the newspaper accounts--what really happened at Sharkey's?"


Tavia and Kor looked at each other ruefully. Kor gestured for Tavia to begin. After a moment's hesitation, she began to relate the improbable tale, stopping only when interrupted by some disbelieving comment or question from Halvorsen.

"So the Tribune isn't so far off," remarked Halvorsen at the close of the tale. "I suppose even they couldn't embroider on such a story."




"No," said Kor, who'd been skimming the text of Harold's





Tribune, "the newsmen were apparently content merely to add in insults and derisive innuendoes. Halvorsen, Tavia, be forewarned. There will be vengeance taken."



This was uttered in such a dire tone that Halvorsen glanced sharply at Kor, wondering if the aggressive killing was serious. "Why?" he protested. "This can only do good to your. . . um. . . somewhat rakish reputation. Just think of the ramifications: in a year or so, mothers will be telling their children of the Hero Alkarin, who rides around on a horse wearing a black mask---"

"So that the horse won't be recognized, no doubt," interjected Tavia.

"--Rescuing innocent maidens, robbing from the rich and giving to the poor, and generally cleaning up the countryside---"

"Don't forget his sword, with which he carves little 'K's' on his victims," added Tavia.

"--And, if you shake a few babies and kiss enough hands, you could wind up on the Federation Council," finished Halvorsen, grinning. "You see, that's a much easier way to take over the Federation than by war."

Kor was looking from one to the other in admiring astonishment. "I think I will decline that honor," he said dryly. "I have enough troubles to take care of in my *Ormene1* already."

Breakfast progressed in silence. Tavia, looking up at the kitchen clock, made haste. "Maraku knows what'll be waiting for me at work today," she remarked to no one in particular. Tapping the front of the newspaper, she continued, "I'm sure my coworkers can't wait to tell me what they think of my latest escapade."

"You could call in sick," said Halvorsen. "After last night's--ah--traumatic experience."

Tavia turned to Kor, pointing an expressive finger back at her father. "You see where I learned my respect for discipline, authority, and commitment? From him."


"I never said you had to go to work at all, Tavia," answered Halvorsen mildly. "Especially not at a fish factory."

"I'm an ex-con and I'm on probation at that job. If I take off, they'll fire me." Tavia's tone was firm, almost defiant. "Now I know you don't approve of my job, Dad, but it's the only one I've got. It gives me independence and a semblance of normalcy."


After a moment of silence, Halvorsen nodded in respect. "I admire your courage, Tavia," he said quietly. "Just ignore me and keep on fighting."

Tavia looked from her father to Kor. She puzzled over his expression, which revealed trepidation and alarm. Under her scrutiny, his features quickly regained their habitual composure.

"It's very important to have your independence," he observed.



His comment was in apparent agreement with her words, but Tavia wondered at the strange note in his voice. To restore the





conversation, she remarked lightly, "Besides, I want to see for myself how the rumors about us are running at the plant."



"Well, while you're at work, I'll entertain my soon-to-be son-in-law with a tour of the NIMBLER---"

"Then we'll all be going fishing today," interjected Tavia.

Halvorsen paused to eye his daughter. "Ours will be on a much more refined level, Tavia, really. By the way, speaking of fish, I was thinking of having some of the family over this week for a dinner party. Friday, if I can get everyone together."

Tavia made a noise of uncertain intent. "'Fish' is too ambiguous," she retorted. "How about sharks--or our native variety of piranhas?"

"I'd like Kor to meet all of his prospective in-laws," continued Halvorsen, as if Tavia hadn't spoken.

Both of them, as if on cue, turned to give Kor a long measuring look. Kor remained silent, returning their gazes with unruffled poise.

"I think the family will be charmed, don't you, Tavia?" asked Halvorsen.

"What family wouldn't be pleased at acquiring an Emperor?" inquired Tavia rhetorically.

Kor, seemingly unaware of being the target for their teasing, just smiled at both of them. "Perhaps you should consider obtaining a throne and some state jewels," said the killing gravely, "so that I may be properly shown off."

Father and daughter looked at each other in consternation. "He's better at this than I thought," said Halvorsen.

"We have to remember that he learned how to fence at the age of five," said Tavia. She made a mock bow to Kor. "Congratulations, Kor; you've just proved yourself the local master at verbal one-upmanship. 'Scuse me, folks, I've got a job to get to in twenty minutes."


"*Osta vinithald*," said Kor in farewell as Halvorsen gave Tavia a casual wave good-bye.

That afternoon, Tavia got home before Kor and her father returned. After washing her hair, she settled down in the backyard, trying to catch the last rays of sun.


Work hadn't been any worse than she had expected. The reactions had ranged from cold-shoulder rebuffs to a strange misplaced envy. The nastiest incident had been when a male friend of hers had walked up to her at break and asked belligerently, "So you'd rather sleep with a Klingon than with me, huh?" When Tavia had answered simply, "Yes," the man had gotten ugly, calling her and Kor names which, while not original, were quite venomously sincere. Tavia sighed. Work was work.

She found it a little hard to believe that so much had happened in only two days. Kor and her father seemed to have hit it off remarkably well. Better than she'd ever expected, unable to think





of anything the two had in common. After a moment she revised that thought. *They're both politicians, and they've both got a thoroughly depraved sense of humor,* she reflected.



That sense of humor--and Kor's easy diplomacy, his friendliness toward strangers--that was also new to Tavia. *Of course, as he said himself, he doesn't have the war to worry about anymore,* a voice in her mind interjected. That was certainly true. . . but something was at odds with that, some conflict that made Tavia frown in irritated puzzlement. And then the questions started rising in her mind.

Why was he so courteous, so pleasant. . . and yet so distant? Why, when she and Kor were alone together, why was it all body-play and no intimate talk? Where were his troubles, his motivations and objectives? Why did she feel as though Kor was keeping a part of himself from her--as though he was hiding behind a mask of smiling urbanity?

Stop it, Tavia, she told herself, suddenly annoyed. *Just because you had five years in prison to psychoanalyze yourself doesn't give you the right--much less the skill--to do it to others.*

She grinned suddenly, a little ruefully. Her main complaint seemed to be that her lover was too charming. "Gotta have something to complain about, don't you?" she said aloud, amused.

She wished that she had more time to spend with Kor. There was too much she had to relearn about him. . . not to mention discovering all the ways he had changed. *Eight hours a day at work doesn't leave us much free time together,* she thought. *And he's only going to be here three weeks.*

Her mind shied away from that time limit and all the questions it posed. Worrying about why Kor had come to see her and whether or not he would leave alone cast too deep a shadow over their time together. *I'm afraid of hearing the answers,* she admitted to herself. *It's too good enjoying his company to ruin it with questions. Who am I to look for trouble?* She knew she was rationalizing, but couldn't find any other way to dismiss her fears.



She forced herself to stop thinking about Kor. Recalling Karras and Roan, Tavia got up from her comfortable lounge chair and strolled inside. After fighting with the colony's perverse interlink system for fifteen minutes or so, she got through to the *Defiant*.

Roan took her call in his office. "Hi, Tavia, how's it going? I hope you realize you're interrupting my lunch."

"Sorry," said Tavia with a laugh. "I guess you haven't got ship-time adjusted to planet-time yet." Suddenly she felt a wave of nostalgia, a longing for the days aboard ship, the freedom of travel, no worries except for a few ship duties. . .

"We're only four and a half hours off planet-time; it's no trouble." He picked up a stalk of blue broccoli and began munching on it. "To what do I owe the pleasure of your call?"

Tavia almost didn't register the question, being busily amused by the familiar sight of piles of paper all over Roan's



desk. "Oh--I called to find out how Karras is. And how you are."



"Oh, I'm all right," said Roan. "You should've seen the reactions of my crew last night, when Karras and I showed up looking like we did. It was all over the ship in five nanoseconds flat. I'm already tired of fish jokes. As for Karras, he's being his usual difficult self."

"He wasn't badly hurt, then?"

"Well, the injury's in a bad spot, he'll have to keep off the leg for a while if he doesn't want to do more damage. That's the real trouble--keeping a normally bouncy killing confined to bed."

Tavia chuckled. "Poor Karras. And I pity your Sickbay staff. We should be glad nothing worse happened."

Roan uttered a sound of heartfelt assent. "What happened at the restaurant after we left last night, Tavia?"

Tavia briefly recounted the tale--it seemed like she had told the same story an infinite number of times already--and reluctantly agreed to save newspaper clippings on the incident for Roan and Karras. She finished by saying, "I'm sorry the evening ended so badly. Now it doesn't look like we'll have much of a chance to talk. I'm going to be busier now than I expected."

"Because of preparations for the wedding," commented Roan. Tavia nodded and then just looked at him, frowning.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" asked Roan.

"The tone of your voice," Tavia replied bluntly. "It seemed a little . . . resentful."

"Oh, I think the idea of you and Kor getting married Federation-style is just delightful," protested Roan. "Is he going to settle down on Proalfalfa and become a nice mundane husband?"

Tavia grimaced. "Roan, don't be obnoxious."

His eyebrows went up in startled defensiveness. "I wasn't intending to be," he said. "I'm just amazed at the way you two do things. I hope your family--and all of Proalfalfa--takes it well."

"Why shouldn't they?" remarked Tavia sarcastically. "For Kor, it's a wonderful public relations gesture." She continued, somewhat stiffly, "I do trust you'll be able to come. And I hope Karras's injury won't keep him away."


"I'm looking forward to seeing the proceedings," said Roan, his tone neutral. "We'll be there."

Tavia felt her irritation growing, and had trouble defining why. Why was Roan acting so peculiar? In spite of their broken relationship, could he be jealous of her and Kor? Tavia didn't know. And an interlink call was no way to find out.


"I'd like you there for moral support," she remarked. "Will you and Karras also be able to come to the pre-wedding party?"

"When?"





"This week. My father's house, Friday night, 1930 our time. It's supposed to be all family. Karras certainly qualifies as Kor's family--and I think Kor might stretch a point to include you, too."



Roan's smile was lopsided. "I'll have to check with the doctor and Karras, but I think we'll make it. We certainly can't strand the *Ormen*."

"I knew you'd understand, Roan," said Tavia gratefully. They chatted for a few more minutes and then Tavia broke the connection. Privately, she had decided not to warn Kor, Roan, or Karras about her peculiar relatives; they'd find out for themselves. She would have enough trouble mentally preparing herself for this dinner party.

AUGUST 11 FRIDAY EVENING

The night of the dinner party was wet and grey. At seven-thirty, when the guests were supposed to arrive, Halvorsen opened the front door, shook his head at the dismal downpour, and shut the door again.

"If we're really lucky," he said dryly to Kor and Tavia, who'd come to see who was at the door, "no one will come."


Tavia feigned hurt surprise. "I thought you were looking forward to this, Dad."

Halvorsen, who was casually dressed in a sailor's jersey and corduroy pants, lifted his hands in an elaborate shrug. "I began counting how many people might actually come," he said. "Even though you're not exactly the most popular member of the Nelson clan, Tavia, you're by far the most interesting. People will show up just to be able to say they came--and, of course, they'll want to see the--ah--newest addition to the family." Kor, as usual, didn't seem to notice that he was being talked about. "I figure," Halvorsen went on, "that we might get as many as twenty-five people--of various ages, sizes, and political inclinations." He looked gloomy. "Well, as long as the wet stuff doesn't run out. . ."


"I am looking forward to meeting your family," said Kor politely to Halvorsen.


Halvorsen looked at the elegantly dressed killing bearing the courteous, sincere expression. "How many years does it take to tell believable lies like that?" he asked interestedly. "I never could. After about five years, Star Fleet took me off the diplomatic-ambassadorial circuit. That's why I'm going to superintend the food and liquor tonight, and leave you two to charm the family. Aha! The doorbell."

He stepped forward, and with a flourish, pulled open the door. Outside stood Roan and Karras, both in Star Fleet uniform, both completely dry. "Welcome to the Proalfalfa Home for Distressed Spacemen," said Halvorsen, letting them in. "Alcohol on your right. Alkarin in front of you. Alkaseltzer after dinner."




Tavia came forward, resisting an impulse to step down hard





on her father's toes. "You're the first to arrive," she said to the two of them. "Tell me--do you have invisible umbrellas or something? How did you manage to stay completely dry? Karras, I didn't expect to see you on crutches. I hope you're not finding it too difficult to get around."



"Don't tell anyone, but we cheated again," said Roan. "I bent regulations a little and had Karras and myself beamed down onto your front porch. All because of Karras's injury, of course."

Kor came forward to stand in front of Karras, giving his son a searching up-and-down glance. "Did you wear that hideous starship uniform on purpose?" he asked sternly, frowning up at him. "Where is your *Tasrakirs* uniform? And your sword? You don't look like any child of mine. And if you don't sit down and rest your leg, I'll---

"You'll what, *Akra*?" asked Karras, grinning at this unexpected welcome from his father. "Such concern is touching. I should get wounded more often. And no, these crutches are not terribly much of an inconvenience. My life has merely become excessively boring." He moved into the living room, cast an appreciative glance at the tables laden with food and drink, and sat down in a strategic location between the hors-d'oeuvres and the sliced meats tables. Kor was about to follow him, wanting to make sure Karras was all right, when the doorbell rang again.

Tavia, who was closest, got the door this time. The opened door admitted ten or eleven people, all with raincoats and umbrellas and even one or two personal shields to keep out the rain. When they were finally sorted out, Halvorsen introduced everyone all around, starting with "Cousin Hjalmer here and my brother Hrolfgar. . ." on down the line to their children and grandchildren. The two youngest, Carlos and Chin Fong Nelson, were only eleven and nine, and were unabashedly interested in both the Klingons and the Star Fleet Commodore.


Thereafter the door stayed open, as the numerous relations of Domain Nelson all arrived in quick succession. Kor, who stood by Tavia in the front hall, was introduced to more than twenty humans, who, because of a strong tendency to fair hair and fair skin, seemed to look embarrassingly alike. He tried to connect names to faces, but it was worse than putting identities to a whole killingaven swarm of Dachathananda.

"I think that's the lot of them," said Halvorsen finally, and moved to shut the door. "Now for some warm drink. Brrr! Who let the cold wet in?"


"My sister-in-law and offspring are here, but where's Roddy?" asked Tavia.


Halvorsen's face, which had brightened at the prospect of drink, flattened out to surprised chagrin. "Oh yes," he said. "Roddy. Well, I know he's planning to come."

"The later the better," muttered Tavia. "C'mon, Kor. Let's get some of the stuffed cuckoo breast before it's all gone."




Tavia's older brother did not show up until an hour and a half after the party had begun. He was let in by someone who





happened to be close to the front door and was heard complaining loudly about the lack of reception. Tavia, seeing him, made a gesture of obvious distaste and went to meet him.



Roderick handed her a dripping umbrella, which Tavia took and helpfully shook free of water. Most of the drops splattered on her brother's pants legs and shoes. "Oh, there you are," he said ungraciously. "Why did you schedule a party at such a ridiculous hour? You should know by now that I always work late on Fridays. And the government offices in Newmerica are an hour's commute from here."

"Welcome to the party, Roddy," said Tavia pleasantly. "So many people have been asking where you were. They've all been saying very nice things about how congenial of you not to be here. Do come in and have a drink or six."

"I suppose the food's all gone," grumbled Roddy, entering the busy, cheerfully noisy living room.

"We made some alfalfa sprouts and wheat germ--on account of your health food fad," said Tavia. She spotted Kor between the fireplace and a food table, and steered her brother in that direction. "Perhaps you'd like a little shredded bark and rose thorns on the side?"

"I'll have some caviar," said Roddy, stopping at a table and scooping up a spoonful and spreading it on a cracker. "Get me a drink, Tavia--that is, if you have anything good. Johnnie Skywalker--Black Label--will do."

"By your command," murmured Tavia. She fixed Roddy straight scotch and then managed to get Kor's attention. She wiggled a finger at him, and he approached slowly, looking inquiring.

"Roddy, I'd like to introduce someone I'm sure you've been dying to meet," said Tavia. She made a sweeping gesture between the two men. "Roderick Nelson--Kor Alkarin. The Emperor Kor Alkarin." Throwing Kor a wary look but deciding he could handle Roddy, she made her escape.


Kor bowed. "It is a pleasure to meet you. Katlena has spoken of you."

Roderick Nelson looked very much like his father, except that the lines in his face were of worry and gloom rather than laughter. He looked at Kor with a certain amount of unconcealed distaste. His mouth was working as if he wanted to say something. Finally, he said sourly, "Her name's Tavia."


A gleam of wariness flickered briefly in Kor's eyes. Then he said, civilly, "Yes, of course it is. But a person need not have only one name. Katlena is her kilingaven name."


"Tavia is and never will be a Klingon," said Roderick, dogmatically.

"I did not say that she was," responded Kor, his politeness now almost glacial. "However, it is to her credit that she has achieved such high status, isn't it? Excuse me." He turned and walked away from Tavia's brother, pushing his anger aside. He went to the buffet table and poured himself a potent mixture of red wine, vodka and soda.



As he sipped the concoction, wondering what it would do to his throat and stomach, he was poked in the side by a very intrusive finger. "Is that real gold?" said a throaty female voice.





Mustering his manners, Kor turned. A woman of uncertain years was standing beside him, giving him a rake-down scrutiny.

Her impossibly yellow hair was piled on top of her head in a peculiar, curling mass; she was wearing strange colors on her face and was less than well adorned by a tight-fitting silver lamé dress. "I've forgotten who you are," said Kor, pleasantly.

A hand came at him; Kor flinched away from it. "Why, that isn't at all kind of you to forget me," said the throaty voice. "I'm Stephanie. Tavia's cousin. My, you really are gorgeous, aren't you? Is that real gold?"

Kor became aware that one overly long fingernail was again pointing at his formal overtunic--deep blue, embroidered with a silver and gold sun pattern. He repressed a desire to flee this predator. "Yes, it is."

"Oh, then you're rich, too, aren't you? Tavia said you weren't starving, but she's so vague, don't you know?" Glittering eyes studied him avariciously. "She's so very lucky, isn't she?"

"I would hope that she feels that way," said Kor, reverting to what he privately thought of as 'imperial deep-freeze diplomacy.'

Stephanie's right hand came out and insinuated itself between his left arm and his chest. She leaned forward, lowering her voice to a murmur. "You seem to like Tavia," she said. "I can see for myself what she likes in you. You're absolutely devastating. . . why don't we go out into the garden, find a soft spot somewhere, and enjoy each other?"

For a moment, Kor was sorely tempted, reflecting what a wonderful chance to teach this slurping vulture a lesson. "No, thank you," he said gravely, carefully detaching her hand from his body.


Her form attempted a sinuous wriggle. "But Tavia doesn't know half of what I know!"

"Since Tavia has had me, and you haven't, that's not quite true," said Kor with bland candor.


Her face flushed an unbecoming red. "You're just plain rude, that's all," she snapped. "I suppose Tavia likes you for your money and your title." Considering that to be a parting shot, she walked off, her head held disdainfully high. Kor turned back to the table and added some straight gin to his drink.

He wandered away from the buffet, pushing through the crowd, determinedly avoiding people's attempts to engage him in conversation. Tavia was nowhere to be seen. Kor went into the kitchen, where he found two small boys amusing themselves by whirling around and around on revolving bar-stools. Halvorsen was also in the kitchen, searching in a cupboard and keeping a wary eye on the two children.

Halvorsen brought two bottles out of the cabinet and looked at Kor. "Howdy," he said. Apparently his first glance had alerted him, for his gaze came back to Kor's face and rested there. He asked mildly, "You having a hard time of it, son?"



"How perceptive you are," said Kor, relaxing his guard. "Or is it showing that badly?"





Halvorsen shook his head. "I guess I've learned how to read you pretty well. What're you drinking?" Kor told him; Halvorsen blanched. "This stuff will be absolutely wasted on you then," he said, indicating the two bottles on the counter. "I bought some champagne for our after-dinner toast. It's got bubbles. They go up your nose, make you sneeze."

Kor laughed; Halvorsen had the knack of introducing the right off-beat note at the right moment. He pointed at the two younglings, who looked like twins. "Who're they?"

"Michael and Brendan de Moncrieff," answered Halvorsen. He made a peculiar grimace. "They're Stephanie Spero's grandchildren, the ones she's always making someone else take care of."

Kor seized on the name. "Stephanie? Is she the one with, ah, blonde hair and silver dress?" When Halvorsen nodded yes, Kor said thoughtfully, "So she has grandchildren. . . she is not married, is she?"

"Not anymore." Halvorsen looked at Kor speculatively. "Of course, she always keeps her eyes open for an unsuspecting victim. . . H'mm. I didn't know her taste ran to aliens. Seems to be a streak of that in my family."

"You're far too good at making deductions," muttered Kor. "It was much easier when humans hated all kilingau as a matter of principle."

"Yes, it's much harder to be a sex object," agreed Halvorsen sardonically. "Cheer up. Think of how dull this vacation could've been for you."

Kor laughed grudgingly, and went back out to the living room to do his duty. *Krassanaiath*, he told himself. *The art of being courteous no matter what the cost.*

He decided to relax for a while and went to sit down next to Karras, whose lap held a plate embarrassingly laden with food. In Karras's right hand was a goblet; on the table to his right was a wine bottle, already half-emptied.

"I admire the way you've made yourself comfortable, Karras," remarked Kor. "I was going to ask if you lacked anything, but I see I don't need to."

Karras grinned. "Well, I haven't tried the small meatballs in wine sauce yet. . ."

"Don't bother; they're algaeballs."

"Thank you for the warning, *Akra*." Karras leaned toward his father and said conspiratorially, "I can strongly recommend having an injured leg when attending a party. You can sit through the evening, and everyone keeps bringing you things to eat and drink."


"Opportunist," said Kor warmly.

After a pause, Karras ventured, "*Akra*, are you glad you came here?"

"Of course. Why?"

Karras made a small movement, seemingly unsure of himself. "Nothing easily put into words," he said slowly, his gaze on his father's face. "Merely a feeling I have, of something left





uncompleted, some tension unresolved."

"You think too much," said Kor lightly.

"That's all I'm able to do, with my leg like this. . ." Karras studied his father's expression again. He frowned and shook his head. "Oh, well. I might as well accept the fact that I cannot tell what you are thinking."

Kor smiled, but he felt uneasy. He didn't want to share his frustrations over Tavia with anyone, not even Karras. He hadn't thought that his feelings were visible.

He was spared further inquiry as two teenagers approached him and Karras. They seemed both hesitant and eager. Kor was puzzled for a moment, then tentatively identified them as Roderick's younger two children. He didn't attempt to recall their names. Looking helpful, he gestured for them to come forward.

They did. The younger of the two, a girl, said, "Could we have your autograph, please, sir?"

"My what?"

"Your signature, *Akra*," explained Karras in an undertone.

"For what purpose?"

The younglings looked at each other uneasily. "Well," began the girl, "we've told everybody in school that you're here 'cause of Aunt Tavia. . ."

"But they don't want to believe that somebody like you is actually staying at a dumb colony like Proalfalfa," interjected the boy.

"So could we each have an autograph to show them?" finished the girl. And from behind her back she produced two pieces of Halvorsen Nelson's stationery and a pen, apparently 'borrowed' from Halvorsen's desk.

Kor gave Karras an uncertain, sidelong glance. Karras, with a grin, murmured, "There's no harm in it, *Akra*. You'll be increasing their status a hundredfold."

"In Agavoi or System?" asked Kor.

The two exchanged glances. "Both?"

Kor smiled to himself and submitted gracefully. "What are your names?"

"I'm Darian, and she's Leslye," said the boy.

Kor hesitated, at a loss to know what to put down on paper. He was amused that the two youngling should approve of him, since their father so obviously didn't. Finally, he wrote for each of them, 'With honor, and wishing honor to your future. From your newest relation, Kor Alkarin Tertemisar.' Feeling as if he was signing a treaty, he repeated the message in System.

"Thanks," said both of them reverently. Leslye studied hers and looked up curiously. "How are you related to us?" she asked.

"You are Tavia's niece and nephew, correct? That would mean I am your--ah, uncle."

Leslye giggled. "Uncle Kor," she said, irrepressibly.





Kor repressed a desire to forbid her from ever using that horrible-sounding appellation again. He pointed at Karras. "Don't you want his signature, too?" he suggested. "He's the Imperial Heir. Your cousin."

Darian and Leslye looked at Karras dispassionately. "Nah," said Darian. "Thanks anyway." Giving Kor one final stare, they slipped away.

Kor raised one eyebrow at his son. "I'm sorry, Karras," he said, with exaggerated inflection. "Your status is simply not high enough."

"I'm not an Emperor," retorted Karras. His face took on a reflective expression. "H'mmm. If they sold one of those, they could probably get over a hundred credits in the right market."

Kor looked appalled. "Do you think they---"

"No, *Akra*, I'm sure they consider them too valuable to sell," said Karras. He grinned. "Just wait till you get to Terra. You'll think your arm's going to fall off."

Kor didn't respond. Instead, he regarded Karras with a critical air, his brow furrowed. Karras was prompted to ask anxiously, "What's wrong, *Akra*?"

"A few days ago you charged me with 'going human,'" said Kor thoughtfully. "I think you accused the wrong person, Karras. You're becoming entirely too familiar with the Federation way of life."

"So summon me back to the *Ormenel*," said Karras eagerly.

"Not just yet," said Kor. "In two years, when you're thirty-five. You'll reach your second majority then, I'll be able to formally declare you my heir, and you can start doing some real work."

Karras gulped. "Something to look forward to," he said faintly.

Just then Halvorsen came out of the kitchen bearing a tray of champagne glasses. He set the tray down on the table next to Karras, went back to the kitchen, and returned with an ice bucket holding two bottles.

The retort of the corks popping was enough to gain everyone's attention. Halvorsen held up one of the bottles, unmindful of the foam running down over his fingers. "Champagne for everyone," he declared, and began filling glasses.

People began to drift toward the table, picking up glasses, handing them back through the crowd. In a few minutes, everyone held a glass, and all eyes were on their host.

Halvorsen, not about to monopolize the floor, beckoned Kor and Tavia to join him. They came forward, taking positions on either side of Halvorsen. Tavia was smiling, half sheepishly, half wryly; Kor's expression was polite and decorous as always.

"The reason I called this family convocation was not just for the pleasure of seeing your faces," Halvorsen began. "Whenever possible, I have ulterior motives."

He indicated Kor and Tavia with a graceful wave of his hand. "I think all of you have been introduced to the *Ormen* Kor Alkarin.





He came to Proalfalfa, not for its fish or its dubious fame as a vacation spot, but for Tavia." He paused, grinning. "I'd like to invite all of you to a wedding in eight days, at the Morgantown church. The two chief participants will be"--another graceful wave--"my daughter and Kor. I'd like to toast them both, and wish them all the happiness in the universe."

There was a murmur of "Hear, hear!" and one loud, "Congratulations, Tavia!" and most of the Nelsons drank to Tavia's and Kor's health.

Roddy ostentatiously refrained from the well-wishing. He came forward and put his full glass of champagne down on a table. His color high, expression bellicose, he glanced from Halvorsen to Kor to Tavia. "I'm not going to join in such a toast," he declared.

Tavia stiffened, her gaze freezing on her brother's face. Recovering quickly, she said acidly, "That's just as well. You've had more than enough to drink already."

"Have you no decency left at all?" asked Roddy bitterly. "As usual, no one ever consults me on how I feel about things like this. As the head of the family, I deplore---"

"Whoa," interjected Halvorsen, quietly but sternly. "You want to run back and rephrase that statement, Roderick?"

Roddy flashed his father a baleful glance. He was obviously too worked up--or too drunk--to care what his words led him to. "I am the head of the family," he repeated. "You've retired. Mom's dead. Someone has to take an interest in the family. The only person you've ever shown interest in is Tavia, your favorite."

"Roddy, you'd better sit down and give your tongue a rest," said Halvorsen evenly, giving a quick glance around the living room. Quite a bit of the family was listening to this scene with avid interest. The more courteous members, or those who didn't care, had left for the kitchen or library. Halvorsen stepped forward and took Roddy firmly by the arm.

His son pulled free impatiently. "I wanna get my say!" he insisted. Showing a bravery that was difficult to credit him for, he strode to within two feet of Kor and glared at him. "You have no right to be in this house," he said venomously, his square chin jutting forward. "I still say we should've never declared peace; we should've continued the war until all you Klingons were wiped out. You don't belong here. And I will certainly never accept you as one of my family; I'd rather take in a plague of rats!"

"Why don't you?" interposed Kor.

Taken aback, Roddy became enraged. "You arrogant bastard!" he exclaimed. "You'd better not try getting married anywhere on Proalfalfa or you'll regret it! You want fishheads thrown at you instead of rice? I'm going to get you kicked off the planet! We don't want you here!"

All of a sudden Halvorsen and his brother Hrolfgar were at Roderick's sides. They took him firmly by the arms, turned him around and began to escort him out of the living room.



"If it is still raining, Halvorsen," said Kor politely, "cold water is an effective cure for tantrums."

"Yeah, we'll do that," said Halvorsen grimly, and he and his brother marched the protesting Roderick out the front door.

After a moment of silence, in which no one could think of anything to say, Tavia spoke up. "I'd like to apologize to all of you for Roddy's. . . drunkenness," she said quietly. She dared a quick glance at Kor, but his face was completely expressionless. She made a half-hearted attempt at remembering her duties as hostess. "There's still plenty of food," she said. "There'll be rum punch in front of the fire in the library in a little while."

Tavia looked around, her eyes full of entreaty. Most of her relations responded to this appeal and began to drift away, forming groups of two and threes and picking up conversations. Stephanie Spero gave Tavia a particularly arch smile as she moved toward the kitchen. Elaine, Roddy's wife, could be seen at the front hall closet, yanking out her family's coats. She quickly herded her children together and left without a farewell to anyone.

Tavia glanced at Kor. He had moved to the bottles, and was pouring vodka over something purple. Vodka-and-drange-juice, probably. She shuddered to think of the mixture of alcohol he'd consumed this evening, but she fully appreciated his desire to seek refuge in drink. Since he obviously was in no mood to talk, she sighed and left the living room.

Halvorsen came back into the house a few moments later. Brushing beads of rain from his clothes and hair, he strode to Kor's side and immediately poured himself a drink.

"You'll be glad to know Roderick's gone home," remarked Halvorsen to Kor in an undertone. "I'm sorry, sir. I'm chagrined that my son should insult a guest in my house."

Kor was looking down into his glass; his gaze was hidden from Halvorsen. "I am pleased to hear an apology," he said, with consummate poise, "but I regret that you should be the one to give it."

Halvorsen grimaced. "I suppose it's my fault as much as Roddy's," he said ruefully. "I never have been able to manage him. What would you do if one of your children was so offensive to a guest?"

Kor evaded the question. "It's not a matter of offense. His remarks were not at all original. Nor did he manage to personally insult me. The greatest harm was in his abrogation of public courtesy and assumption of authority he didn't have, not to mention his unpardonable impunity in challenging you---"

"Stop dissecting his manners and answer my question," interrupted Halvorsen.

Kor raised his head. His eyes were black stone, cold and hard. "If one of my children had acted like that," he said flatly, "I would give him a beating. He would learn to shut up or behave."

"Mmm," said Halvorsen, feeling a little helpless in the face of such stern anger. "Look, would it help if I made him come back



here and apologize to you?"

Kor shook his head. "No. To be blunt, he is your problem."

Halvorsen sighed. "Look, Kor, if it's in your nature to let anger out violently, why don't you just go ahead and do so? You're obviously more upset than you're willing to admit."

"I dislike being discourteous to my host," said Kor stiffly, "but you trespass on my privacy."

Halvorsen's eyes went wide with surprise. "I don't mean to offend a guest," he replied candidly, "but if one of my children acted like you, I'd send him to bed for indulging in a fit of sulking."

Kor raised his eyebrows in polite, elegant disinterest. After a moment, he moved to stand in front of the fireplace.

Halvorsen stared at the killing's back. "Cocktail parties," he muttered, making the words sound like a curse. He sighed again and went out to the kitchen to play with his great-nephews.

Kor stood and sipped his drink--he'd lost count of which one it was--and carefully studied the painting over the mantel of the fireplace. It was a large print, done in an abstract, linear style, full of screaming heads and unattached limbs, titled "Guernica." *I know just how they feel*, he reflected.

He was aware of Karras coming up alongside him. "Akra, where are your armsmen?" asked Karras, also studying the picture.

"I gave them the night off-duty," answered Kor mechanically.

"Didn't it occur to you that you might need their protection tonight? Pity."

Kor scowled, half turning toward his son. "I can take care of myself," he growled.

Karras blinked in surprise. "Don't lose your sense of humor, Akra," he remarked uneasily. "If you do, the next thing to go will be your temper."


"Go talk to someone else," said Kor irritably, reverting to Agavoi. "I'm not in the mood."

"A thousand pardons, Lord Ormen," murmured Karras, and moved away.


The first chance Karras had, he made his way through the group of people toward Roan, inwardly cursing his crutches and how clumsy they made him. Once near his commander, he made a sidelong motion of his head, indicating that he'd like to talk to Roan alone.

Roan came away and helped Karras out into the empty front hall. "You look a bit tired," he observed, watching the killing's face.

"I'm more than a bit tired," acknowledged Karras, leaning against the wall and trying to ease the cramping muscles in his arms and left leg. "Where is Tavia?"



Roan's eyebrows picked up; he looked back into the living room, seeing knots and clusters of talkative Nelsons, but Tavia



wasn't among them. "I don't know," he said. "Is it important?"

"She disappeared after that ego-stuffed *chamaki*. . . after her brother decided to publicly prove just how stupid he could be," said Karras wrathfully. He added, more quietly, "I'm worried for her."

"From what I understand, Tavia's always had trouble with her brother," said Roan laconically. "I thought his speech was just a lot of superheated air, myself."

Karras raised his head and gave Roan a measuring look. "I thought it was unforgivable bigotry," he said. "Maybe you know neither Kor nor Tavia as well as you used to. Both of them took it badly. As anyone might." And he gave Roan another curious, frowning look, as if wondering why Roan hadn't reacted likewise.

Roan was aware of the intent behind Karras's gaze. "Well," he said uncomfortably, "her brother is a narrow-minded bigot, but he's also upset by the idea of this wedding. For her family and a lot of Proalfalfa, it's one more embarrassing scandal. Why is she doing it, anyway?"

Karras stared at Roan, his expression alarmed. After a moment, his eyebrows lifted and his features took on a sardonic look. "Yes, you've got reason to be on the other side too," he said thoughtfully.

"What do you mean?"

Karras shook his head, retreating into inscrutability. "Just that you might not be wholly in favor of a renewed bonding between Tavia and Kor," he commented, and said no more, even when Roan eyed him with disquieted irritation.

"I'll go find Tavia," said Roan, just as glad to have a reason to escape Karras. He determinedly shelved Karras's cryptic observations in the back of his mind.

"Good luck," said Karras, his tone fatalistic.

Roan found Tavia in her father's den. She was standing in the semi-darkness, staring out the window, holding an untouched glass of champagne. As he came in, she turned, her initial expression of irritation fading as she saw who it was.

"I don't mean to disturb you," said Roan, "but a couple of us were sort of wondering where you were."

"Well, you've found me," she said flippantly. "So what?"

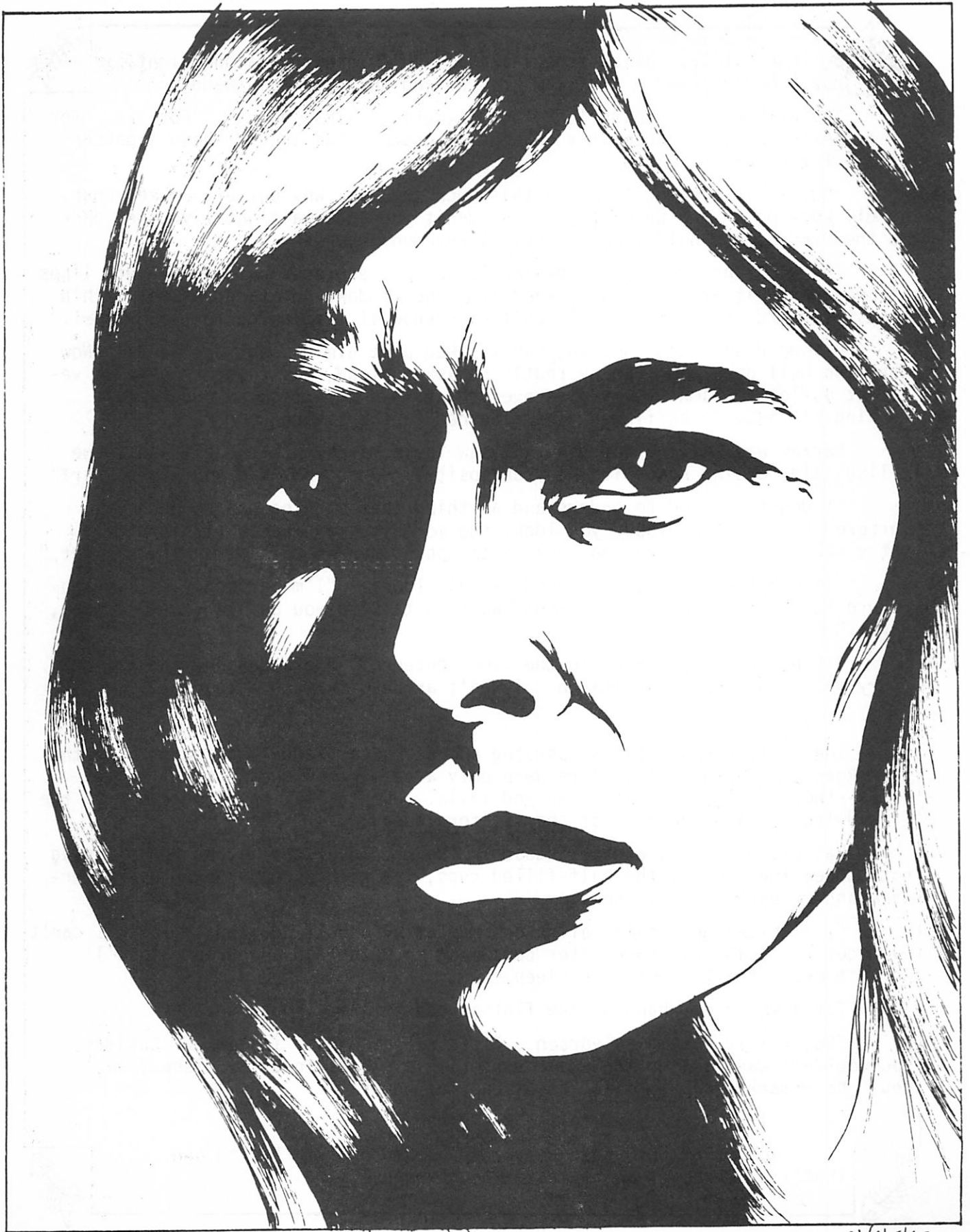
Roan's mouth tightened. He asked frankly, "You hiding from your brother? He's gone."

"Hiding from him? Hell, no! If I ever see him again I'll kill him!"


"Oh," said Roan, wishing immediately that the syllable hadn't sounded so stupid. "You know, maybe it'd all go over a lot better if people knew why you were doing this."

"Huh? What are you talking about?" snapped Tavia.


Roan wasn't sure that he wanted to go on, seeing how uncertain her mood was, but he was puzzled by her motives. "I don't mean to



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be inquisitive, Tavia, especially if you'd rather be alone right now," he ventured. "But why are you and Kor holding a wedding?"



Tavia shot him a sharp look, but answered, calmly enough, "For fun. For my father's sake. Because it's an amusing custom that should leave a person with a lot of good memories."

"But if it's going to cause this much trouble, why bother?" asked Roan, hardly knowing why he persisted. "Why don't you just wait until you get back to the *Ormenel* and hold a new *karumkath* ceremony there?"

"Back to the *Ormenel*," repeated Tavia, her expression freezing into lines of anger and bitterness. She turned from the window and stared at Roan, chin thrust forward in defiance. "I don't even know if I am going to the *Ormenel*."

Before Roan could respond, she stalked past him and out the door. "Now what the hell does she mean by that?" he asked aloud, his thoughts needing vehement outlet. "Damn it, why does everything lead to a fight around here?" Shaking his head in bafflement, he returned to the living room.

Karras was waiting for him. "I saw Tavia march into the kitchen," the killing said, eyeing Roan with wary curiosity. "Just what did you say to her?"

"I don't pretend to understand anything that's going on around here," muttered Roan. "The closer you look, the more you see wheels within wheels. Let's make our excuses and go back to the ship, Karras. It's been a long night."

"It's not over yet," answered Karras slowly. "I'm perfectly willing to return to the *Defiant*, Captain--but I want to talk to you before you go to bed, Kirin."

"'Captain' and 'Kirin' in the same sentence?" queried Roan. He grimaced. "Very well, Commander Taralkarin. I won't argue with such a request."

The party had started dispersing shortly after Roddy's outburst. By the time Roan and Karras left, there were only a half-dozen guests still in the house--those closest to Halvorsen and Tavia. Eventually, the food ran out, the fire dwindled, and the last of the visitors departed.

Halvorsen, Tavia, and Kor stood in the middle of the living room, trying not to see the dishes, the half-filled cups, the edible remnants on every surface and in each nook of the room.



"I'll clean up," said Halvorsen, mustering a half-hearted smile. "I can't ever get to sleep this soon after consuming so much food and drink, so I'll work it off. You two get some sleep."


Tavia waved her hand at the flotsam and jetsam. "But, Dad---"

"No, really," said Halvorsen. "It's not as bad as it looks. Besides, you wouldn't want to see the Emperor up to his elbows in dirty dishes, would you?" he remarked with a flash of his normal humor.


"I would be glad to---" Kor began.

"Oh, shut up," said Halvorsen peremptorily. "Go to bed. That's a decree from the master of the house."



Neither Kor nor Tavia had an answer for that, so the two looked at each other, shrugged, and went upstairs.



Tavia let Kor precede her into the room, and then she closed the door and leaned on it, staring fixedly at Kor. "Well?" she said.

He turned toward her, one eyebrow upraised. "What is it?"

She frowned. "Oh, come on, Kor, stop being polite. I shouldn't wonder if all that pent-up anger in you starts coming out in hives."

He didn't react. After a moment of studying her, he said, "Well, you might have warned me about your family's reactions---"

"And I suppose that all your relatives--not to mention the rest of the *Ormenel*--approved of me?" interrupted Tavia tartly. "You know damn well they didn't!"

A frown creased his forehead. He said, in an admonishing tone, "You asked for my thoughts. I gave them."

For a long minute she stared at him, wondering if his sangfroid was unshakeable. Then she heaved an irritated sigh and said despondently, "Yeah, you're right. Some of my relatives are abominable, aren't they?"

"What surprises me," he commented, beginning to undo his overtunic, "is how well you turned out."


"Just to spite them," she replied. She looked at him covertly, wishing that it wasn't so late, and that the evening hadn't gone so badly. No time to recover lost ground, or to try sharing their feelings. *Besides*, she thought wryly, *he obviously doesn't want to talk*.

She moved to the bed and folded back the spread. Then she sat down and started pulling off her clothes. In the middle of unbuttoning the sleeve of her blouse, she paused, glancing up at the silent killing. It occurred to her that he was the stranger here and could not, according to his sense of propriety, speak out against her family even if he wanted to. *It's probably not so easy for him here*, she thought, beginning to feel a stirring of compassion. She remembered how much he had drunk that night, taking to the alcohol as if it had been a fog to hide himself in.


On an impulse, Tavia got up and went forward to Kor. He had just taken off his silky white bodyshirt and had draped it over the back of her desk-chair. He raised his eyebrows inquiringly at her, and made no move, either in welcome or protest, as she put her hands on his hips. After a moment she slid her hands over his back, clasping her fingers together at the base of his spine.


She raised her gaze and said, in a tone of deliberate lightness, "Did you know that premarital sex was once considered illegal and immoral?"

He seemed intrigued by the abrupt change of topic. He reached forward and began unbuttoning the front of her blouse. "No, but it doesn't surprise me," he replied. "Did you know that among my homeland's domains, not so very long ago, it was required for a new couple to spend a night together in public, where witnesses could vouch for their--ah--ardor?"




"Are you making that up?" Tavia asked accusingly. "I don't





know that I can trust you when you're drunk. Even if you do carry it well."



"It's true," he commented. "No stranger a custom than the one you mentioned. Now, if you want to talk about some truly peculiar customs. . ."

"No thanks," she interjected. "I know as much about kilingau going into heat as I want to know." She pulled Kor to her, trying to imprint his skin against hers, looking for warmth and intimacy. She didn't know if she'd find either, but the feel of him was comforting, and their physical closeness was-- at least momentarily--a satisfying substitute for emotional sharing.

He responded, after a few seconds. His hands slid inside her opened shirt, his fingers stroking, probing. Tavia felt his breathing quicken and his body temperature rise, like a flame fanned into a blaze.

After a long silence, they released each other and finished getting undressed. In unspoken agreement they moved toward the bed.

The blanket and sheet were in the way; Tavia pushed them off the end of the bed. She took Kor in her arms, searching for the places that she knew, the points that stirred and excited, the sensitive skin that responded differently to each caress.

Kor answered her touch, at first tentatively, his fingers wandering over her form. His right hand came up to Tavia's face, two of his fingers outstretched, and he began to trace the curves and planes of her face, memorizing by touch the soft fluidity of her features. He murmured something drowsily, which Tavia didn't catch.



Tavia moved closer to him, intertwining her legs over his, pulling him toward her. Her left hand moved from his hip down toward the soft, curly hair of his groin.

Something was wrong; Tavia felt it almost immediately in the ripple of tension across his skin. Kor was still for a moment, and then he pulled back from her, raising himself up one elbow. He let out a long breath, a sigh that carried a tremor. "I can't find arousal," he said bluntly, his voice low. He closed his eyes briefly. "I'm sorry; I can't."

After the first impact of surprise, Tavia was conscious of an intense feeling of mingled irritation and bewilderment. "Why not?" she asked, the question sounding almost like an accusation.

His reaction to her irritation was anger. "How should I know?" he said sharply. "I'm tired, I've drunk too much unfamiliar alcohol, and I'm old. Is that reason enough for you?"

Tavia was startled at the vehemence of his answer and the sudden light of wrath in his eyes. She drew away. It occurred to her that his unexpected impotence was forcing some of his hidden passions to surface. Something was very badly wrong, something far stronger than a temporary, alcohol-induced loss of passion. She swallowed her hurt and turned her attention to the matter at hand. "Take it easy," she said awkwardly, above all not wanting an enraged killing in her bed. She went on quickly, directly, "I'm not upset with you; it's a common enough thing to happen after the kind of party we just had. Relax, and maybe we can talk about what's bothering you."



"No." His voice was flat and curt. "Leave me alone." And he turned his back on her, lying on his side facing the wall.

After a moment, Tavia got up, and retrieved the bedcovers from the floor. She pulled the sheet and blanket over Kor, who didn't move. Tavia stood at the side of the bed, looking down on him, wishing for the first time that the extra beds in the house weren't occupied by Kor's armstrongs. When she started to shiver from standing naked in the cold, she turned out the lights, sighed in weary frustration, and lay down on the bed. She lay stiffly on her side, her back to Kor, a space separating them. She assumed that eventually her body would get tired enough, and she would fall asleep.

AUGUST 12
SATURDAY NOON

The muted ring of an interlink call echoed through the Nelson house. Tavia, who was in the kitchen cleaning up after breakfast, ran into Halvorsen's den to answer the call.

It was her brother Roderick. Tavia felt a sharp impulse to break the connection, but then she sat down. "Oh, it's you," she said unenthusiastically. "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't hang up on you."

He looked equally pleased to see her. "I want to talk to you," he said. "I'll make this brief, because I'm at my office today." He picked up a folder and flipped through it, as if to show how busy he was.

"Too bad you're too incompetent to get your work done during the week," said Tavia unsympathetically. Her hand hovered near the off switch, but curiosity prevented her from cutting off the call so soon. "Are you calling about last night?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact I am."

"Oh, good. I can't wait to hear your apology."


Roddy's eyes widened as his face flushed red. "My apology?" he exclaimed. "What about yours? Bringing in that barbarian, war-mongering, hairy, sneering---"

"Spare me your tired invective," interrupted Tavia. "You'll never sell that novel of yours if you use so many adjectives."

He glared at her. "You just don't have any sense of decency, do you? Do you know what the town is already saying about you? It's bad enough you've disgraced the name of Nelson, becoming mistress to that Klingon and betraying the Federation, but now you want to make all of Proalfalfa infamous! Marrying a Klingon in a respectable church! I'm horrified at you, and appalled that Halvorsen hasn't done anything to stop this folly!"

"Roddy, you're a better definition of the term Klingon than a thousand of those aliens you so despise," said Tavia, completely disgusted. Her fury gave way to contempt, and a seething resentment that she had a brother who would say and believe what Roddy so loudly said and believed.

"Is this all you called about? You moron. You make me laugh."



"Yes, you've got a wonderful sense of humor," said Roderick bitterly. "No doubt you--and Hal--are doing this as a huge joke on Proalfalfa. But just wait, Tavia. Somebody in the colony government might not like the joke. Neither might Star Fleet Intelligence. You wouldn't much like going back to jail, would you? I suggest you call off this stupid wedding and try living down your notoriety."

"I always did prefer infamy to fame," Tavia snapped, disconnecting the call to stop herself from smashing in the screen. She sat still and stared at the interlink unit, her lips compressed in anger, her fingers drumming an uneven beat on the desktop.

"Who was that, Tavia?" said Halvorsen, entering the den. "I gather it wasn't for me."

Tavia looked up. Her father's eyes widened in alarm and he quickly strode forward to the desk. "What's the matter?" asked Halvorsen, putting a hand on his daughter's shoulder.

"That was Roddy," spat Tavia. "How the hell has he managed to survive this long? I wish I was a killing! I'd Challenge him!"

"Whoa now, settle down," interjected Halvorsen, his tone gentle but firm. He sat down in the chair next to the desk, and reached across the corner of the table and put his hand over hers. "Now calm yourself and tell me what Roddy did this time."

Tavia, recognizing the wisdom of his advice, tried to follow it. "Nothing much," she answered bitterly. "He only threatened to get me sent back to jail, that's all. Dad, what's so wrong about loving a Klingon? Why is my brother such a bigoted louse?"

The lines around Halvorsen's mouth and eyes deepened as he frowned. "You're asking questions that don't have easy answers, Tavia. Roddy doesn't have your intelligence; he's also spoiled and self-centered. I'd advise you to just forget whatever he said."

"He's not alone in his beliefs. Does anybody approve of my relationship with Kor? Is Proalfalfa ever going to forgive me for this wedding?"

Halvorsen tightened his grasp on her right hand. "Aren't you exaggerating a little? Don't let Roddy throw off your judgment." He smiled at her. "I for one can't wait to see your wedding. I couldn't ask for a better man for you than Kor, either."

Tavia looked at him, her nervous movements stopping abruptly. "I don't know why you should look forward to my wedding," she said evenly. "It's a huge expense with very little return. What are you getting out of it?"

"Don't be so material, Rikki-tiki-Tavia. At the risk of sounding overly sentimental, seeing you wedded to Kor is reward enough for me. Tavia, I know that you and Kor were 'married' once, by Klingon laws. But I didn't get to see it. What better way for the two of you to avow your love than a wedding ceremony?"



Tavia's gaze dropped; she pulled back her hand from Halvorsen's grasp and twisted her fingers together in her lap. "That's

the way it should be," she agreed unhappily.

There was a small, still pause. Halvorsen said slowly, "I refuse to accept the implications of that, Tavia. I get the feeling that all Roddy did was set you off. There's a whole lot more trouble than that, isn't there?"

She turned a despairing, angry gaze on him. "Kor won't talk to me! He's been friendly and good company--and about as remote as the Kilingarlan! I want more than that from him. I don't even know if he himself approves of this wedding! Besides, why is he doing it--considering he's going away to the *Ormenel* six days afterward?"

Halvorsen opened his mouth to answer her and then quickly shut it again. "Do you want to go back to the *Ormenel*, Tavia?"

She mistook his hesitation for dismay. "Of course I don't like the idea of leaving you, Dad, but yes, that's what I want! But Kor obviously doesn't want me, because he hasn't asked me to come with him. I won't go where I'm not welcome."

"He hasn't asked," muttered Halvorsen, his words barely audible. He shook his head, unable to tell Tavia what Kor had said seven days ago, in this den, about wanting Tavia to come back to the *Ormenel* with him. He straightened in his chair and gave Tavia a very direct stare. "Look, Tavia, if you and Kor are having trouble, the two of you have to work it out. I'm grateful for what you've told me, but I can't intervene between you two."

"I don't expect you to," she said, her expression puzzled.

Halvorsen grimaced for saying more than he'd intended. "I didn't realize that the two of you hadn't been talking," he went on. "I have one very simple suggestion, Tavia: go talk to Kor. What's kept you from confronting him already?"

"A desire to avoid trouble and keep relations pleasant," she said, her answer swift and candid. "Stupid of me, but I do occasionally wish things came easily. Well, I've never had an easy time of it, and obviously my luck hasn't changed."

Halvorsen watched her, feeling uncomfortable and compassionate, and on the verge of telling her that Kor wanted her as much as she wanted him. He held back the desire to interfere, and said calmly, "What you feel and what Kor feels have to be brought out into the open, Tavia. Obviously both of you have been avoiding that--but there's only a week till the wedding."

"I know," she snapped. A moment later she felt repentant. "I'm sorry, Dad. I've got no right or reason to take my frustrations out on you. I wish I knew why Kor was keeping himself so distant from me!"

"So do I," agreed Halvorsen dryly. He looked at her searchingly and then stood up. "You feel better now?"

She made a face. "Sort of. At least you've forced me to make up my mind. It helps to have someone to verbalize my feelings to."

"Go verbalize at Kor then," said her father. "Listen, I'm going out for a while this afternoon. It's just as well, because

I'd rather not be around when you talk to Kor."

"Why, do you expect a battle? I don't. I know what I want to say to him."

Halvorsen reached out and squeezed her shoulder reassuringly. "I just don't want to get in your way. Good luck; I'll see you later."

Tavia went out of the den, looking around, listening for signs of life. She knew that Jyo and Heri were in the basement, creating some sort of wedding present in the tool shop. "Kor," she called. "Kor, where are you?" She didn't try to keep the exasperation out of her voice.

No response. Tavia walked to the back porch and looked out into the yard. Sure enough, Kor was there, lying in the hammock, looking as comfortable as a cat basking in the sun.

Tavia smiled absently at the sight of the mostly naked Klingon--he'd consented to wear a pair of Halvorsen's shorts, although it went against his grain--relaxing sleepily in her father's back garden. She pushed open the screen door and went outside.

Kor looked up as her shadow fell across him. He was watching a mini-vid, a unit that pulled its programs in from the house's big video system. She caught a glimpse of it before Kor turned it off: he had been watching a repeat of Shotgun, a recent series about Terra's ancient American West.

Kor smiled charmingly up at her. "This net," he said, touching the side of the hammock, "makes me feel like a particularly helpless fish. The slightest motion and I am either entangled or cast out on the ground."

"I'd like to talk to you about the wedding," said Tavia, abruptly.

"Again?"

Tavia waved a hand at his recumbent form. "Oh, is it too much trouble?"

His eyebrows lifted, accenting his alien features. "Of course not," he said. "I just wondered at your air of urgency. Is it because of last night's trouble?"


"What about last night?"

Kor seemed reluctant to speak. His gaze slid over her features, his eyes questioning. "I don't want to speak ill of your family," he said slowly, "but your brother made several. . . threats."

Tavia made an expressive gesture. "That to Roddy. His threats are a lot of wind." She was disappointed, but not overly surprised, that he was avoiding the heart of last night's problems.

"He is not the only one of your family who disapproves of the wedding, or of us," continued Kor gravely. "I didn't know you were rebelling against the greater part of your family's wishes by deciding to hold this ceremony."

"You should know all about rebelling against family," Tavia commented.



His eyes flickered with sudden anger. Controlling this, he said brusquely, "I don't see what point that makes." When Tavia didn't react, Kor went on. "When the idea was first suggested, I assumed this ceremony to be something of a light-hearted jest among you, your father, and me. I have since discovered that it is an important occasion requiring a lot of work, the goodwill of many, and the outlay of a staggering amount of money. Speaking of that, I am concerned that neither you nor Halvorsen have asked me to help pay expenses."

"The bride's family pays for everything."

Her utterly flat tone should have warned Kor not to go on, but he tried anyway. "But if I am able to help in some way, if only with money---"

She cut him off sharply. "The money isn't the point! My father's enjoying this to the limit. And we're not exactly poor--although not in your oh-so exalted class, of course. But what's the use of paying a lot of money and doing a lot of work for something you'll only do once--or something you may not want to do at all?"

Kor got out of the hammock carefully and stood in front of her, his muscles gathering, betraying his sudden tension. He said quietly, "I thought you and your father wanted this ceremony."

"And you don't--that's what you're implying."

His brows lowered and a note of irritation crept into his voice. "I imply nothing. But now you tell me that you don't---"

"Do you or don't you want to go ahead with it?"

Kor, feeling perplexed and aggravated, was silent. Tavia eyed him belligerently, waiting to see if he would react in honest anger. There seemed to be nothing she could say to rouse him beyond superficial reactions. He faced her, offering nothing.

Their glaring contest was interrupted by Roan, who stepped out into the back yard a moment later. "The front door was open, but no one was in the house," he began, looking uncomfortable. "Karras and I wanted to invite you both up to the *Defiant*. . ." His voice trailed away, as he slowly realized the magnitude of the situation he'd walked into. "Sorry for the interruption," he said hastily, and prepared to go back into the house.

"Why don't you join us, Roan?" asked Tavia in a nominally civil tone. Kor shot her an annoyed glance, which she ignored.

"I really don't think---"

"All we're doing is having a fight, Roan," said Tavia with dangerous politeness. "Either you come out here or we'll all go in."

Roan, his features taking on the same wary expression that Kor bore, slowly paced out into the garden. "Is there something you want of me?" he asked hesitantly, obviously hoping that she would answer him simply and then let him escape.



"Maybe I should be marrying him," declared Tavia defiantly to Kor, making a sweeping gesture at Roan. "At least I'd know where

I stood most of the time. He's understandable. He talks, openly and freely. He has problems that he's willing to discuss. Can you say the same, Emperor Alkarin?"

"It is ignoble of you to involve him in this," Kor said harshly.

Roan's face was flaming red with embarrassment. "Hey, wait a minute---" He was ignored, as Tavia continued her diatribe.

"He's always been involved! I knew him long before I knew you! In fact, it was your intervention that kept Roan and me from getting formally engaged to be married--almost twenty years ago! And, indirectly, you created the rift that's separated Roan and me these last six years. So don't tell me he's not involved!"

"I refuse to let you use Kirin as a weapon against me!" exclaimed Kor, goaded beyond all tolerance.

"That's tough," retorted Tavia. She met his glare unflinchingly. "Go on, get mad," she said. "Maybe you'll say something for a change. Maybe you'll forget that you're the *Ormen* and have to censor every bloody word you say."

She took a deep breath, using the moment to choose her words carefully. She was amazed to find herself neither bitter nor particularly angry--just filled with a consuming desire to lay out all the complaints that had bothered her over the past week. . . and more. She lifted her chin and said with provocative contempt, "Look at you, Kor! To the world you're gracious, witty, urbane, courteous--by Godfrey, politeness above all!--elegant, rational, sensitive. And, the next layer down, you're arrogant, hot-tempered, intolerant, willful, and selfish. But what's below that? That's a question I haven't ever been able to answer."

Kor didn't react, seeming caught between bewilderment and rage. "You've attacked my wealth, my position; you've used our relationship and its history against me; you dare to incite rivalry between me and Roan. Do you finish now with an attack on my personality and habits?"

"I forgot to add something," Tavia commented, looking at him appraisingly. "You're also an excellent strategist and fighter. You *kilingau* are all onions--especially you, Kor. Of all the men I've ever known, you're the one who shows the most passion, but it's all on one layer or another, and never from the core."

She went on grimly, with neither rancor nor satisfaction. "That's how you can be honest, yet deceptive; how you can tell lies, by evading the truth; how you can show feeling and yet be revealing only a shadow of yourself. And your honor--that's a shield and a mask, a veneer of formal excuse for inaccessible emotions. As I said, you're an onion."

As she spoke, Kor had withdrawn into himself, to Tavia's eyes becoming more unassailable than ever. "And the point of all this?" he inquired icily. "To return to where we started--the wedding?"

"Oh, *aşhavanau* Maraku and *chiakash!*" exclaimed Tavia, losing all patience. Roan, who had slowly withdrawn from the battlefield and parked in a nearby lawn chair, looked up, startled by her furious Agavoi curse.

"What does it take to get under your hide?" she demanded. "So you

accept all my complaints without protest? And you want to know what bearing it all might have on our wedding? I want to know what's inside you! Seeing you again has done nothing but frustrate me, because you've been absolutely impervious to any intimate word or touch. I thought it might be nice to reaffirm our bond--but you can go back to the *Ormenel*, untouched, unchanged. The wedding's off. Go to hell, Klingon. I don't want you around anymore." And she went over and sat down with a plop on the chair facing Roan's.

Kor was motionless. He stared down at her, his form radiating indignation, astonishment, fury--and over all, an aura of hurt incomprehension. Tavia met his gaze with a defiance and strength of will that outmatched his own. Unable to face the accusing demand in her eyes, he turned away abruptly and strode toward the house.

"Congratulations, Tavia," said Roan heavily as the back porch door slammed. "You really did it."

"You can go to hell too," she said flatly.

Roan said nothing, deciding to wait until Tavia's temper cooled. He hadn't wanted to be involved in this, but now that he was here, he was going to see it through.

He waited, occasionally letting his gaze pass over Tavia's face, wondering what was going through her thoughts. She was sitting still, eyes fixed on some unseen object far away from him, her expression half angry, half defensive. Roan watched her features shift slowly to bitterness and frustration. Then, when her expression showed nothing but self-recrimination and doubt, he cleared his throat. "Uh. . . Tavia---"

"What?"

Roan attempted a smile. "I know we agreed we needed to talk, but. . . couldn't you have found a better time and way to open the subject of our. . . relationship?"

"I'm sorry." Her reply was curt. "I needed a weapon. You were at hand."

Roan asked acrimoniously, "Is that all you wanted me for--as a weapon?"


"At that moment, yes," she said. "I apologize if I hurt or upset you. I don't want to fight anymore."

"All right," said Roan after a moment. He asked, as neutrally as he could, "Tavia, when you told Kor that maybe you should've married me. . . was that also a weapon, or did you really mean it?"

Given the intensity of her gaze, Roan was sure he'd asked the wrong question. But, after a pause, she answered calmly enough, "We only got over our silence a few days ago. Isn't it kind of a quick jump from that to marriage?"

Roan refrained from telling her that she was the one who had first brought it up. He persisted, even though knowing that the answer might hurt. "But were you serious, Tavia?"

Tavia kept an expressionless silence for so long that Roan was afraid she wasn't going to answer. Eventually, she said



morosely, "I don't think a formal relationship between the two of us would work."

Roan looked at her, his gaze level, demanding more.

"You've changed, Roan," she said. "For the better, I'd say. You're a lot more whole. I know what you mean now, when you used to talk about being caught between human and killing." Roan nodded slowly.

"All those years you tried to reconcile your two selves," she went on. "It's obvious that you did it, too, sometime these last few years."

"Now I'm the one facing all those questions. I spent eleven years in the *Ormenel* and learned to act like a killing. That's one of the reasons I came home to the Federation, because I was afraid of what I was becoming. I wanted to stop and take a look at what I was doing."

To Roan, this was revelation. He was astonished that Tavia should be confessing these feelings to him, but was glad that she trusted him enough to be able to talk about them. Perhaps this was what she had been trying to share with Kor and couldn't. He felt compassion stir him. . . he understood, from the depth of his being, the conflicts she was facing.

"So anyway, I came back home to be a human again," she said, her tone somewhat self-conscious. "Star Fleet's locking me up for treason was quite well deserved; I really didn't mind that. Besides, a jail's a wonderful place to think."

"How typical of you to make light of such a gruesome subject," remarked Roan grimly.

"Almost a year ago Star Fleet released me on good behavior. I came home to Proalfalfa. And I discovered I really am a traitor." Her voice rose. I really don't care if I'm a human or killing. I don't hold allegiance to anyone anymore, not the Federation, not the *Ormenel*. I'm satisfied to be different."

"Yes, but is anyone else?" Roan asked wryly. "I mean, does anyone else accept the difference? It's not easy to choose to be alien."

"That's the problem," said Tavia. "Choosing. You've made your choice--you've accepted your dual heritage, and are concentrating on acting as a human. But I don't want that."

"Ummm," said Roan thoughtfully, his gaze on Tavia's face. He asked bluntly, "So you'd rather be a killing. . . do you want to go back to the *Ormenel*?"

Tavia answered, with some difficulty, "I wish you weren't the one asking that."

Roan frowned over the oblique answer. "It might interest you to know," he said slowly, "that, after Kor and I ended our feud, he asked me to return to the *Ormenel* with him--and be his brother again. For any number of reasons, I refused."

Tavia stared. "That bastard!"

"Huh?"



"He hasn't bothered to ask me that question," said Tavia, her unresolved anger rising up again. She got up and took several quick strides out to the center of the yard and back again. "What does he want here? Is he teasing me?" Her steps took her away from Roan again. When she came back, her face held a new, worried look. "Does he misunderstand why I left the *Ormenei* and how I feel?"

"That's more like it," said Roan approvingly before she could walk away again. She frowned down at him in puzzlement. "He doesn't know how you feel any more than you know about him. You're both afraid, and you've been separated for too long."

Listening to himself, he suddenly laughed and leaned back. "Advice to the lovelorn," he said ruefully. "That reminds me of why I came down here in the first place. After the party last night, Karras and I had a long talk." Roan shook his head. "That killing sees and figures out too damn much. He accused me of being jealous of you and Kor and of not being able to resolve it."

Tavia nodded. "I credited it to resentment. After all, one of Kor's less agreeable traits is to walk in and overturn people's lives without their say-so."

"Once a revolutionary, always a revolutionary," murmured Roan. "Anyway, Karras was quite right. So I came down here to apologize."

Tavia looked at him wordlessly. After a moment, she uttered a short, mirthless sound. "What beautiful irony," she said. "Before you can apologize for your jealousy of Kor and me, I offer myself to you and demonstrate that there's nothing to be envious of."

"I wouldn't say that," said Roan. "You're much more in love with Kor--and vice versa--than you and I ever were. Tavia, I regret what might have been for us, if events and Kor hadn't interfered. But I'm not about to start living in the past. I don't begrudge either of you your depth of sharing."

Tavia stared at him. "Roan, that's exactly the kind of statement that makes me feel as though we've never met. Why is it that you've become more open and Kor more obscure?" Roan shrugged.

"I . . . thank you for making yourself clear and for your . . . uh . . . optimism," she went on. "But I feel that your comments about Kor and me are wishful thinking."

Roan ventured, "Don't you think you should talk to Kor about all of this?"

Her face hardened even as she automatically looked toward the house. "No."

Roan sighed and asked rhetorically, "I wonder who's more stubborn--the human or the killing?"

She looked at him. "If you're planning to lecture me---"

"Who me? I haven't said a word about you and Kor screaming at each other."

She relented. "I know you haven't, and I thank you for it. But--oh, hell."

Her voice had changed; so had the direction of her gaze. Roan turned toward the house to see what she was looking at.

Halvorsen waved at the two of them and came out to the middle of the yard. "The wedding date's confirmed," he said cheerfully.

"Next Saturday morning at the church." He broke off, looking from Roan to Tavia. After a barely perceptible pause, he suggested, "Perhaps I should have gone to the mortician instead?"

"Kor and I had a fight," said Tavia flatly.

Halvorsen looked at her, the smile fading from his face as he slowly gathered an impression--from what she wasn't saying--of how serious the fight had been. "I asked you to talk to Kor, not get into a battle with him," he commented.

"Well, that's the way it turned out," she replied, not sounding at all repentant.

Halvorsen shot her a frowning glance. "Where's Kor. . . and his bodyguards?"

"I have no idea," said Tavia. She added, "I thought he was in the house. If the guards aren't in the basement still, I suppose they're out with Kor." She and Roan shared a quick glance of common understanding: the idea of an incensed killing unleashed on an unsuspecting Morgantown was worrisome.

But, not ten minutes after they went inside the house, Jyo and Heri came upstairs. It was quickly established that no one knew where Kor was. Everyone stared at one another, helplessly.

SATURDAY EVENING

Karras, roaming the streets of Morgantown, finally got his clue. "A Klingon with black hair and an angry expression?" said the traffic cop. "Sure. He went into the Hawk's Nest Bar."

When Karras peered into the bar, at first he could see nothing. The owner of the bar had apparently decided that lighting was an unnecessary luxury, or perhaps knew that the patrons would be well-lit enough on their own. There was a scattering of people along an ancient bar, intent upon talk, the videogame above them on a wall screen, or their own private troubles. In the back there were a few tables. That was where Karras finally spotted his father.

Karras leapfrogged in, cursing his bad leg. "A bottle of your best rot-gut," he said at the bartender's inquiring look, and headed in toward the back.

Kor was trying to ignore a waitress who had apparently never before seen a live Klingon and was fascinated by him. She looked up at Karras's approach, her eyes widening at the sight of yet another tall, dark, bearded, and faintly satanic-looking male, and then she smiled in welcoming invitation.

Karras didn't try to suppress his amusement. He looked past her to his morose father. He said pleasantly, "Akra, I think you should know that the female slave trade is illegal here." And he sat down in the chair opposite Kor, leaning his crutches against the table, noticing out of the corner of his eye the waitress' quick, flustered disappearance.

Kor did not even look up from his drink. "Get out."

Karras didn't heed the command, engaged as he was in looking around at the rest of the tables in the back of the bar. He asked thoughtfully, "Ummm. . . where are your ever-present guards?"

"Elsewhere!"

Karras winced at the thunder in his father's voice. "You know they're scared beardless about you. It's fortunate they didn't want to call the local peacekeepers--otherwise there'd be another public scandal."

Karras might have been talking to himself for all the attention his father paid him. The waitress set down a glass full of ice and a bottle in front of Karras. Karras poured an inch or so of amber liquor into his glass. He took a sip, eyeing his father narrowly.

"It's getting on toward evening, *Akra*," he prodded gently.

Kor looked up from his glass. Karras, noticing the blurriness of Kor's expression, didn't know when he'd last seen his father this drunk.

"I don't think Federation alcohol agrees with you," he murmured, trying to hide his alarm.

"Don't you think I know that?" demanded Kor angrily. "Don't you also think I know it's late? Would you want me to show up at Tavia's household like this?"

"She's seen you wine-drowned before," said Karras.

"Yes. But in my domain and when--when relations were better between us." Kor stared down into his glass. Though he was numbed by drink, his features still showed very little of his feelings. "I would not impose on her my incoherence, my madness---"

"And why not?" retorted his son. "That's exactly what she wants of you--all of you, the good and the bad. You would keep from her what you're showing me now?"

"I didn't ask you to come here," said Kor sullenly.

Karras was silent for a moment, gazing at his father, sympathizing with him, yet even more strongly sympathizing with Tavia. "Yes, I can see Tavia's complaint, that you never step down from being Lord of the Domain of the *Ormenel*."

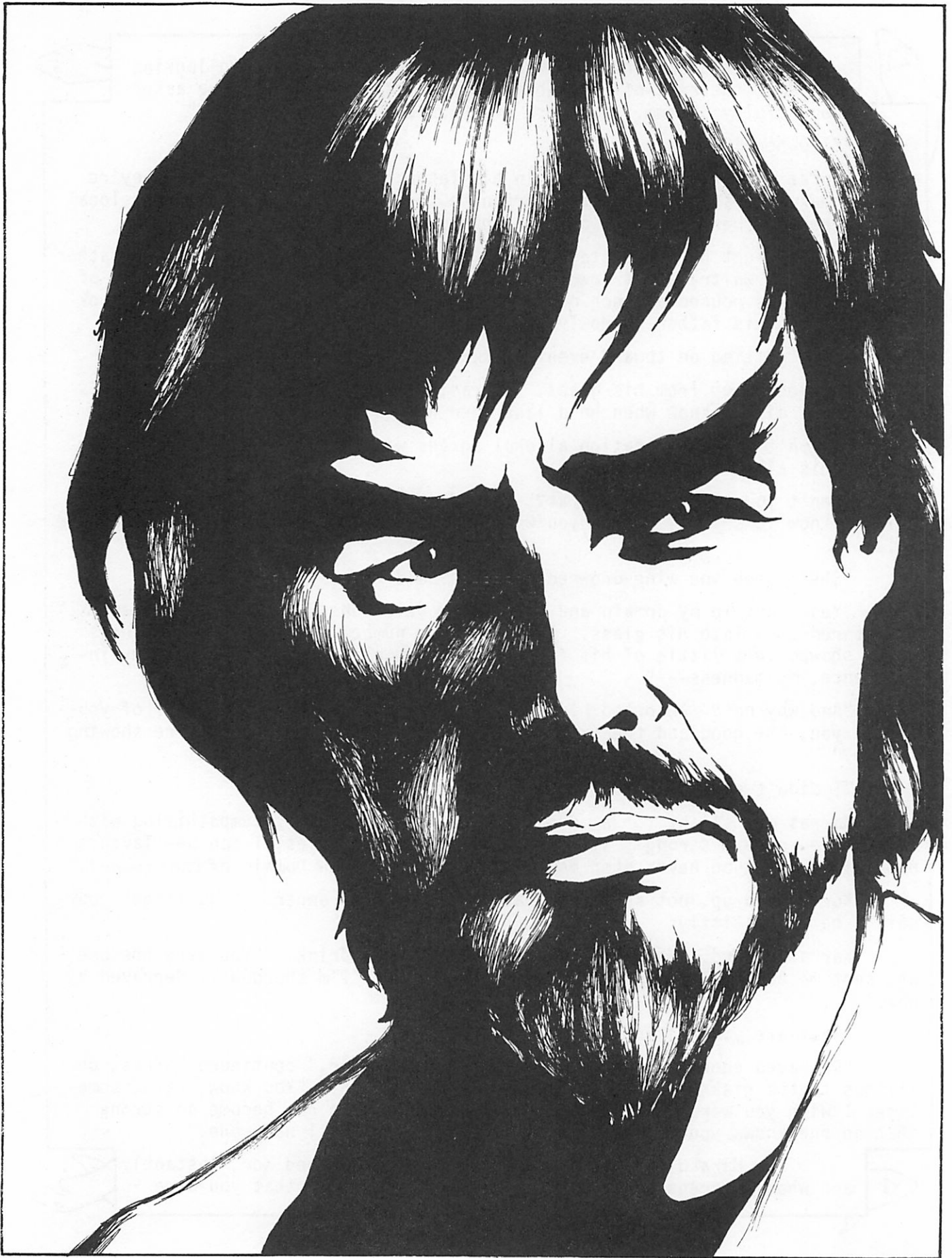
Kor looked up, not so drunk that he was numb to anger. "You forget yourself," he said stiffly.

Karras smiled. He took a long swallow of his drink. "You were the one who sent me here to the Federation," he remarked. "I'm thoroughly depraved by now."

"What are you talking about?"

"Depraved enough to criticize my lord and father," continued Karras, oblivious to the risk his words were letting him in for. "You know, *Akra*, sometimes I wish you weren't the *Ormen*. Your public image has become so strong that no one knows your private self, if indeed you still have one."

"By Maraku's balls, you go too far!" exclaimed Kor, instantly and wholly incensed. "What madness has bitten you that you dare



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such insult? You've grown too full of yourself--first baiting me as regards Roan Morgan, not two weeks ago, and now this!"

"That's better," said Karras approvingly. "Anger is much better for you than self-pity. A bit more alcohol and you'd have been joining your tears to your drink."

Kor, speechless, glared at his intolerably insolent son. He downed the last two inches of his drink. "You should stand Challenge, for dishonoring kinship, for daring such outrage in public---"

"I doubt very much whether anyone here speaks Agavoi, so I wouldn't count that, *Akra*," said Karras. He gave his father an unreservedly affectionate grin and stood up. "I'll be right back." Leaving his crutches by the table, he limped away to the bar, where he said something in a low voice to the bartender.

Kor gazed at Karras in liquor- and anger-fuzzed astonishment. He was dimly aware that all of the conflicts within him were of either Tavia's or Karras's making, and he was also aware that he had fallen prey to their baiting.

Karras half-hopped, half-limped back to the table, carrying a glass full of ice and a yellow liquid. He set it down in front of Kor. "Drink that," he commanded.

Kor, seeing no reason not to obey, raised it to his lips. He grimaced at its bitterness. "What is this?" he demanded.

"Lemon juice," said Karras. "Some kind of Terran fruit. Best thing I've found yet to cure a drunk for kilingau. Chase it down, *Akra*. Please."

Kor, scowling, did as his son asked. It had an amazingly sobering effect--his vision cleared, the numbness in his fingertips went away, and much of his reckless anger dissipated. "You are a most unnatural son," he said, gazing hard at Karras. "I don't know what keeps me from disowning you."

Karras was relieved to hear the sarcasm in his father's voice and to note the return of intelligence to his eyes. "Is it possible I remind you of someone?" he ventured.

"Impossible; I was far worse."

"Then I've still got something to aim for," commented Karras, with a smile.

Kor tried to repress his own amused reaction, but couldn't. "Incorrigible." When he looked up again, there was a question in his eyes. "Karras, how do you know how to bait me into fury so well? And why do you do it?"

Karras smiled fleetingly. "The how I've learned from you, *Akra*, in listening to your councils with kilingau and offworlders, watching how you conduct challenges and treaties. Why? Because I've noticed that after your anger comes introspection and a small amount of humility."

"An excellent assessment," said Kor grudgingly.

"*Akra*, returning to the reason I came seeking you out---"

Kor looked pained, but followed the thought. "How did you find me?" he said accusingly. "Am I allowed no peace?"

"You're lucky you weren't locked up somewhere--for your own safety's sake," said Karras. "As the Captain had apparently forgotten to call as he had promised, I called the Nelson house. And found the aftermath of a truly royal battle."

"It was hardly that," commented Kor gloomily. "Only one side was fighting."

"Neither the Captain nor Tavia were very much inclined to talk about the trouble," Karras went on, gazing at Kor. "After that, I came looking for you."

"I thank you very much for your concern," said Kor, dryly.

Karras was silent for a moment. Then, with careful courtesy, he said, "Akra, my words before were to make you release your anger, so that we could then talk. But I won't intrude further, unless it is your wish."

Kor gave Karras a startled, appraising look, as if seeing him for the first time independent of his role as *Ormen's* son. "You amaze me," he said. "First you infuriate me, and then you outmatch me in courtesy. I surrender, my son, to your masterful strategy."

Karras bowed his head in embarrassed gratitude. "Actually, Akra, I'm not nearly as good at word-fencing as Tavia."

Kor grimaced in agreement. "She could give lessons to stinging-flies, on how to irritate and provoke. I hope that you're never on the receiving end of her ire, Karras. You won't be so admiring then."

Karras made a soft noise of sympathy. "I won't ask what she said," he commented, "but I will ask you why you left."

"I was told, 'Go to hell, Klingon,'" said Kor expressionlessly. "Apparently I have outlived my welcome."

Karras raised his eyebrows at his father's use of the unsavory term. "She must have been more upset than I thought, to call you that," he said, half to himself. "Why haven't you gone back to demand what it is she wants from you, Akra? And to tell her what you want from her? You've been polite and careful and all it's led you to is misunderstanding. With defeat facing you, strike out at the enemy's force with all the weapons and skills you have!"

Kor smiled crookedly. "My son teaching me strategy that any five-year-old should know." He sobered as he realized the unflattering implications of that comment. "I admit that I haven't handled this well," he said, lost in thought. "Nor do I understand all this. She enjoys my company, and has gone so far as to prepare for a ceremony of public sharing. Yet she is settled here, doesn't talk of her past or future, and has evinced no desire whatsoever to change her life again. In fact, we have not talked at all." He grimaced as he realized that that was as much his fault as hers.

Kor looked up, suddenly recalling that he had an all-too-interested listener. Karras was gazing at his father wonderingly, his expression conveying compassion and relief that he himself wasn't undergoing this.

"My advice is for you to go and confront her," said Karras bluntly.

"An easy thing to say," said Kor, frowning. "Particularly as you know so few of the details or ramifications."

"That's why I ask questions and give advice, rather than intervening myself," said Karras promptly. "Only you can act, Akra. Otherwise you might as well surrender to fear and reluctance and go home again. Unsatisfied. Defeated."

Kor rose to that bait as inevitably as the sun rises. "You needn't insult me into taking action," he growled.

"Why not? It works."

Kor gave his son a disdainful stare and rose from his seat. "I'm going back to the Nelson home," he said. "Since I have no credits with me, you may pay for my drinks."

Karras's eyes widened, and then he chortled in an undignified way. "No money?" he repeated disbelievingly. "What would you have done if I hadn't come along?"

"I don't know," said Kor, rising. He picked up his short cape and unfurled it around his shoulders. "The thought had begun to worry me. What's the usual practice on such an occasion?"

"Well, if the owner was really nice, you might get away with sweeping the floor or leaving your jewelry as security," said Karras. "However, bartenders have little sympathy for deadbeats. It might have meant jail--in your case, Akra, that means scandal, reporters, political crisis---"

Kor winced. "Then I am doubly glad that you came to find me," he said. "Are you staying here or coming with me, Karras?"

"Neither. I'm going back to my ship, and am going to try to get some sleep."

Kor laid his hand on his son's shoulder as he came past Karras's chair. "*Roi sikio*, Karras," he said in farewell, his tone gentle.

"Good hunting," said Karras.

When Kor finally arrived back at the Nelson house, it was well into the evening. He rang the doorbell. In seconds, the door flew open, and Kor found himself facing the silent, accusing gazes of Halvorsen, Jyo, and Heri.

Kor took a deep breath. "I ask your excuses for disrupting the household," he declared to Halvorsen, taking a step forward into the house.

Halvorsen moved back, letting him in the door, but the two armsmen kept him from going much farther. Jyo folded his arms over his broad chest and said, his System English very formal, "My lord, I must suppose that you no longer require our skills. Therefore, my arms-brother and I will not intrude upon you any longer. We remove ourselves from your service, my lord."

This was news to Halvorsen; he glanced at the two guards and then at Kor, his expression alarmed.

Kor, at a loss, shifted from one foot to the other. "You would go off and strand me here among the Terrans?"

Jyo looked acutely uncomfortable. Behind him, Heri looked

down. "My lord Alkarin, you leave us no choice," said Heri defensively, his System even more accented than his arms-brother's.

"You went away without us. I would forsake my honor--I would forsake my life before my family's eyes--if anything happened to you, my lord. You are our duty."

Kor's eyebrows raised and he spread his hands in a helpless shrug. "What can I say?" he asked rhetorically. "Will you give me no allowance for occasional madness? I most abjectly apologize."

Jyo looked mortified. "No--no, my lord, you must not apologize to us! But will you permit us to do our duty with honor, *Emisormen*?"

Kor surrendered. "Yes," he said, giving out a sigh. "Now may I come in, please?"

Jyo and Heri both bowed very low and stepped back. Kor walked into the living room, feeling unutterably weary. He shrugged out of his cape; Jyo stepped forward to take it from him. Kor's plaintive gaze went to Halvorsen's face; the ghost of a smile appeared on the human's features.

"I never before realized what an Emperor has to go through with his retainers," said Halvorsen. "You certainly don't have to worry about all that with me."

"I do apologize, Halvorsen," said Kor again, beginning to hate that particular verb. "You are the master of this house, and my irresponsible actions caused---"

"Now don't go all formal and ambassadorial on me; I had too many years of it as an Admiral," interrupted Halvorsen. "I accept what you're trying to say. We'll leave it at that."

"Thank you," said Kor, relieved. He cast a glance around, and then prepared himself for his next, most difficult question. He faced Halvorsen and asked directly, "Where is Tavia?"

Involuntarily, Halvorsen glanced toward the stairs which led to the second and third stories. "Why don't you come into the kitchen, and I'll make you a hot cup of something. You look sort of cold and tired."

"I am," said Kor curtly, "but that doesn't matter. Where is Tavia?"

Halvorsen put out a restraining hand. "She's probably asleep by now," he lied, his expression both frustrated and alarmed.

"I will go see. I want to talk to her." Kor made a move toward the stairs.

Halvorsen quickly sidestepped into his path and decided to abandon all attempts at prevarication. "She's with Roan," he said. "I really don't think she'd appreciate being disturbed."

"With Roan?" Kor's voice rose as his anger and incredulity swelled. He stared at Halvorsen. Tavia's father had always been honest before. Grimly, he wondered briefly if Roan, Tavia, and her father were joining forces against him. With an edge in his voice, he said, "Stand aside."

Halvorsen straightened, realizing that Kor had put two and

two together and come up with 4,000. He glanced at Kor's guards, who were standing well within earshot, looking on impassively. Halvorsen wondered if Kor used them for attack as well as defense. Meeting Kor's gaze, he said simply, "No."

Kor forsook all pretence of civility. Halvorsen, looking at him, remembered the Klingon's formidable reputation as a fighter. With quiet dignity, the human said, "This is my and Tavia's house. I thought I understood that you respected privacy."

Kor snarled and turned away. When he swung around to face Halvorsen again, his face and voice were tight with anger. "You said once before that you weren't going to interfere," he declared. "This is my affair."

Halvorsen stood and judged the hostility of Kor's stance. "The difference between you and me," he said quietly, "is that I'm a man of peace. I'd also rather not be your enemy, and that's plainly what you're headed for." He stepped to one side, putting his hand on the banister. He continued, evenly, "I'll not try to stop you from going up there. But if you cause any violence--if you do any harm to Roan or Tavia--I'll kick you to the end of the galaxy."

Kor stared at Halvorsen. For a moment he wavered, impressed by Halvorsen's firm candor. But the answers he needed waited above, and Kor had no more patience. He strode past Halvorsen and started determinedly up the stairs.

Halvorsen, wearily, went to sit down in the living room. He ignored Jyo and Heri, who also sat down to wait. "This is what I get for letting a thunderstorm into the house," he said gloomily, addressing the wall.

Kor climbed the stairs. They seemed steeper and longer than they had previously; he discovered that he was reluctant to reach the top. His feelings of tension and futility were building too fast for him to control. His carefully planned questions to Tavia about her needs and wants were suddenly replaced by his consuming anger at Roan's intrusion. Stepping onto the landing, he walked to the right for about two meters and came to a halt in front of Tavia's bedroom.

The door was closed. Kor listened, but could hear no sounds from within. He raised his hand to the knob, hesitated, knocked once sharply on the doorframe, and immediately pushed open the door.

Roan and Tavia were sitting on the edge of the bed next to each other. Tavia had her arm around Roan; they were close together, grinning over something in the photo album lying open in their laps. They seemed very content, very intimate, and Kor was further enraged.

They're happy together, all fights or troubles forgotten, he thought. They care not at all where I've been or what I feel. He took one pace into the room and pushed the door shut with a slam that resounded pleasantly in his ears.

Both of them looked up. Roan paled; Tavia raised her head and stared at Kor, her eyes cold. With one hand, she absently closed the album and put it to one side.

"So you've turned up at last," she said. "Your guards were

worried about you."

"At least someone was," said Kor bitterly.

"I think I'd better leave," said Roan nervously, standing up.

"Why bother?" said Kor. "You're where you want to be."

"You're jumping to conclusions," said Roan, coming forward slowly. "That's a mistake. Charging in here ready to kill is another mistake."

Kor's gaze riveted on Roan. "You shut up," said the killing. "If you're not involved, get out. Stay, and be Challenged with Tavia." At that, Tavia rose from the bed, her eyes widening in anger, tension gathering around her like a storm.

"I said I was leaving," said Roan, "though walking out of here is like the referee jumping out of the fight ring." He looked directly into Kor's eyes. "Is Challenge the only thing you can think of? Are you sure you even have a valid reason for it?"

"Get out," repeated Kor stonily. Roan went, opening and closing the door silently. Kor tried to ignore Roan's words, but they taunted him. He hadn't intended to Challenge Tavia--far from it. But his anger and heightened confusion forced him to ill-considered action. "You prefer Kir--Roan's company to mine?" he asked, his tone icily polite.

"At the moment, I do," she answered matter-of-factly. "You haven't given me any reason to change my mind yet."

Kor spat, "Forgive me if I haven't been a paragon of courtesy. Do you think I like it here--being a laughable curiosity for the small-minded natives, an object of insult to your family?"

"What do you think I've been ever since I came back from the *Ormene1*?" she riposted. "Living here is hardly better than prison! I don't think I'll ever live down being called the Emperor's whore! Guess whose fault that is."

"You made your choice to come back here," he said malevolently, "and now you have to live with it. I will no longer tolerate your insults, your attempts to make me into something more resembling a human. I'm leaving."

Tavia stood close enough to Kor to touch him. Her hands moved, clenching into fists. He hadn't changed. Her earlier attack had meant nothing to him. She wanted to hit Kor, to hurt that proud poise--but she didn't know what would happen if she allowed her anger a physical outlet.

Her fury faded, replaced by bitterness. She declared, "You came to Pro-alfalfa and upset my life--in more or less the same arrogant, high-handed way you kidnapped me twenty years ago and sent Roan off to prison. And now you're going to leave. Just like that--no warning, no discussion."

"That's obviously what you want," he said harshly. "What's more, I no longer intend to offer the choice I came here to give you. I hope you can find what comfort you need in Roan, or find someone you can twist to fit your ideas. I've decided to go back to the *Ormene1* alone."

Tavia stared at Kor, wordless while the shock of what he had

just said rolled through her. The sudden silence was as devastating as the quiet after an avalanche. Incredulous, she scrutinized his face, and said numbly, "You've decided to go back to the *Ormenel* without me."

He folded his arms across his chest, planted his feet well apart, and gazed at her defiantly. "That's right."

"How the hell was I supposed to know you ever dreamed of taking me back?" she asked wrathfully. "Was I supposed to pick it out of your mind? Was I supposed to invite myself?"

Kor stood unmoving for a moment, trying to find a point of coherency in the midst of bewilderment and exasperation. "You never gave me the chance to invite you," he said finally, the words sounding weak even to himself. "Everything you did, everything I saw indicated that you were content to be here. I had no reason to believe you would want to return with me. You left the *Ormenel*. I could not assume that you would give up your home and culture again."

"Kor, you bastard, I could murder you!" Tavia shouted. "Why didn't you just ask me about going to the *Ormenel*? Why haven't you been open with me?"

Her words rang in his thoughts, clamoring, mocking. "You want to go back with me?" he asked, uncomfortably aware of how stupid the words sounded.

"Hell yes!" she cried, nearly overcome by a wave of violent relief. "But I didn't want to go without knowing what I was getting into again or who I was going with! You weren't telling me anything about yourself!"

Kor turned his face away from her, as if listening to another voice besides hers. "I have changed that much?" he said softly, his tone halfway between statement and question.

"Why haven't you been open with me?" asked Tavia again, her tone considerably less strident. "Why do you think I've been screaming at you for being so . . . so bloody armor-plated? Dealing with you has been like dealing with a robot!"

Kor felt an urge to sit down, as his physical and mental strength threatened to disintegrate. He had been blind to her feelings; he had been too afraid to ask her her thoughts. *My emotional shields have worked too well, robbing me of insight into myself as well as others.* One thought echoed again and again in his mind: *She does want to go back with me.*

As if caught in a dream, he moved to the bed and sat down on its edge. He said wonderingly, "You're perfectly right. Maraku, what have I been doing to you?"

The mood of the room changed, the tension trickling away like blown sand. Tavia, feeling Kor's sudden pain and defenselessness, could no longer bear to add to it. She took a few slow paces toward the bed and stood looking down at his lowered head. She asked plaintively, "Why have you kept yourself so distant from me, if you want me back?"

"I keep myself distant from everyone," he answered quietly.

"A matter of rank, a matter of political persona. . . I have placed myself on a high mountain over valleys. There has been no

one to whom I can talk. My family is too small; most of the children are off chasing their own desires. I want you back because you're the only one to whom I can talk. I want you back because you will make me share even if I occasionally forget how."

He raised his head and met her gaze. "I've shown only a small part of myself to you," he continued awkwardly. "I didn't even realize that until today, Maraku help me. You did--obviously, you did. That's why you. . . confronted me. . . earlier this afternoon. And, until a few moments ago, I didn't realize that my 'armor' was about to cost me what I most wanted: having you with me in the *Ormene1*."

There was a silence, during which Tavia wrestled with the change in Kor. "I'm sorry for some of the things I yelled at you," she said, looking at him hesitantly. "They were deliberately intended to infuriate you."

"You succeeded very well," replied Kor. "I did not know what to do. I have never been in such a fight, to stand defenseless while your opponent flays away your skin. You've bested the *Ormen* in a battle, do you realize that? A high honor."

"That's a good sign; your sense of humor's returning," she commented, attempting a light tone.

"My sarcasm's returning because I'm starting to feel my flaws," he said, his biting tone directed at himself. "My arrogance, my blindness. And folly." He grimaced. "Recognizing them doesn't mean they will disappear, I hope you know."

"I'm willing to take that risk," said Tavia. "I took a risk earlier in needling you. It seemed a chance worth taking, if you were still--somewhere--the man I used to know. Obviously you are. It's a little disconcerting to know how strong the barriers were and how hard I had to fight to knock them down."

"You care that much?" asked Kor gently, rising from the bed to face her. "You could have thrown me out. It would have cost you much less pain."

"I care that much," she agreed. She came forward and put her hands on his chest.

Kor grasped her hands and held them tightly. He let go after a moment and looked into Tavia's eyes. "And for Roan, do you care that much?"

Her expression changed suddenly to one of surprised anger. She drew back and slapped him in the face. Kor's head jerked back; he raised a hand in automatic protection. His reflexive anger slowly turned to wary astonishment.

"Why did you do that?" he asked defensively.

"I've wanted to do that several times already," she said vehemently, "but that's the first one you've really earned. I thought killing you were reared not to be jealous."

"I'm not," Kor protested, gingerly feeling his face with his fingers. "I just want to know where you stand."

"Roan and I are friends," said Tavia. "We used to be lovers."

Circumstances--in the form of you and your war--prevented our relations from becoming too serious. Now, many years later, the passions have dissipated or changed. I hadn't seen Roan for six years until he showed up with you. How close could Roan and I still be?"

"I didn't know." His answer was grave. "I knew that I was responsible for coming between you two. I feared some lingering resentment or repressed desire."

"No, I don't have that problem. Resentment is a useless luxury for a person in prison. Besides, as Roan himself pointed out to me earlier today, I'm much more in love with you than I ever was with him."

"Thank you," said Kor, looking surprised. He added sarcastically, "But then, I should have surmised that when you hit me."

"I have to admit it felt good," remarked Tavia, her expression complacent. "Though I don't blame you for bringing up Roan. Do you realize it's been twenty years since you, Roan, and I were in one place at one time? The three of us make a truly spectacular triangle, whether in love or anger."

"It's also a matter of my still unresolved guilt," said Kor. "So much that's happened to Kirin--excuse me, to Roan--throughout his life has been my doing, and the results have been ill. Finding you was one of the things that had turned out well for Roan. I feel--I feel somewhat selfish, in taking you for myself."

Tavia looked at him. Her smile was shaded by reflective sorrow. "Well," she said, thinking out loud, "you said that you'd resolved your feud with Roan. End-of-Challenge means that the trouble is over. Resolved, if not yet forgotten. And both Roan and I are comfortable with our friendship now. He would tell you the same."

He gave her a wry smile, raising his hands to clasp her shoulders loosely. He bent his head and looked directly into her face. "A killing learns jealousy when he learns to be selfish and possessive. I learned to love you too well. A dangerous love, one that destroys and perverts. I have been blinded by it." His fleeting grin was lopsided. "On the whole, I'd rather deal with anger. It's a much easier emotion to control."

Her brow furrowed in thought. "How about a weekly fight?" she suggested. "That'll keep us in line."

"An excellent idea," said Kor, highly amused. "Choice of weapons to the loser of the previous week's fight. The loser must also give a complete *chakai*-oil massage and finger stimulation to the winner."

"You're on," she said appreciatively.

"On what?" he asked puzzledly, and then ducked his head as she raised her fist threateningly. He pulled her against him, wrapping his arms around her back and burying his face against her hair. "Violent woman," he murmured. "What a Klingon you are. I love you, Katlena."

"That's 'kiling,' you know," she said reprovingly.

Kor raised his head and looked at her in outrage; then a smile crept onto his face and grew into a grin. "What a fool I've

been," he said ruefully. "Now that I know we're going back to the *Ormene1* together, all my anger and troubles are gone. And yet they shouldn't be. I've hardly begun to atone for being so remote, hurting you unintentionally."

"You've paid," she said. "By undergoing holdups, irritating dinner parties, obstreperous relatives, incipient alcoholism. . ."

"I always said the Federation was degenerate," he muttered. More firmly, he added, "And glad I'll be, I don't mind admitting to you, to leave it."

"For me, leaving the Federation is freedom," she said. "This time, I get to make my own choice: Federation or *Ormene1*? And I choose the *Ormene1*."

They drew together again, the touch conveying as much comfort as their words. After a moment, Tavia murmured, "You know, if Star Fleet Intelligence still has this room bugged, in about half an hour I'm going to be locked away for treason again."

His reaction was instinctive: he pulled away from her, his brows lowering into a frown as he looked around in wary inquiry.

Tavia was forced to laugh at the sight of him. "Just keep your sword handy," she teased.

He scowled at her. "Speaking of that, why did I find my sword--an expertly wrought, priceless blade--in your closet, leaning in a corner between a ruler and an umbrella?"

She shifted guiltily and gave him a placating grin. "It was a safe spot," she ventured. "But look, if you really want to, you can pound a couple of nails in the wall and hang it over the bed. . . ." She yawned. "I shouldn't have said bed. Maraku, I'm tired."

"My own thought exactly." Their gazes met. After a pause, Kor said slowly, "I apologize for what I did--or didn't do--last night. My failure came as a revelation. I finally began to realize that I had not been admitting to my emotions or dealing with them honestly."

"What happened to you last night gave me the gall to confront you today," said Tavia. She regarded him, a dangerous gleam in her eye. "We'll make up for it tonight."


"My pleasure," he said, and reached for her again.

AUGUST 13

SUNDAY MORNING

Kor and Tavia lay snugly and contentedly intertwined in Tavia's bed. They woke at the same time, stretching sinuously and opening their eyes to look at each other.

Tavia let her gaze rest on Kor's face. He was sleepy, his eyes only half-open. His hair, unruly at the best of times, was falling in his eyes and spreading in all directions over the pillow. His



beard had wisps sticking out as if they'd been teased out by invitation.

Under her scrutiny, a smile slowly appeared on Kor's face and moved to his eyes. "What are you looking for?"

"Well, I was just thinking that if I like what you look like in the mornings, I must really be hooked," answered Tavia.

He reached out a hand and brushed some of her hair forward into her face. "A charming picture," he said. As she chortled, he grinned. "It is so good to have the laughter and the joy come back."

Tavia looked at him warmly. "It sure is." She paused and commented, "Poor Roan."

Kor gave her an eyebrow-lifted glance. "Poor Halvorsen," he countered.

"What d'you mean, 'poor Halvorsen'? He's the only one who hasn't been on the giving or receiving end of any fights."

"That's. . . not exactly true," Kor said, and proceeded to tell her how he'd menaced Halvorsen in his own home the night before. "Add to that the fact that I am once again stealing you away," he finished.

"Poor Dad," agreed Tavia, hoping she didn't sound flippant. "He's my one regret in leaving."

"I sympathize," said Kor. "I like and admire your father tremendously." He had an unbidden thought: how ironic it was that he should be unhappy to leave Tavia's father behind, when he had never regretted leaving his own.

Tavia went on, "I almost wish. . . no. I really don't think he'd want to come to the *Ormenel* with us, even though he is retired and doesn't care for most of our extended family."

"I have already asked him," said Kor. "He said he would not."

Tavia sat upright suddenly. "You what?" she asked incredulously. "When was this?"

"The day I arrived, I believe."

"The day you arrived," echoed Tavia. "That was eight days ago! You asked my father to come to the *Ormenel*, Roan to come to the *Ormenel*--everyone but me."


"I was afraid," Kor mumbled, looking ridiculously sheepish.


"Yeah. A great, big, Klingon coward, that's what you are." She sobered. "I'll talk to my father," she said. "We're here for only twelve more days."

"Thirteen, actually."

"Not much time left," she said. "We've only a week now to the wedding."

Kor looked taken aback as Tavia purposefully got out of bed and moved to her closet to get out some clothes. "You mean we aren't staying in bed today?" he asked mournfully. He ducked as one of his tunics from the closet came sailing at him and landed on the bed. "All right, I'll get up," he said, obeying meekly.





"A lot needs to be done," declared Tavia, pulling on pants. "Mandelbaum's open on Sundays, of course. . . you can get fitted for your tuxedo. And maybe I'll get to do something about a wedding dress."

Tavia stopped short, realizing that she was letting her mouth run ahead of her thoughts. "Umm. . . I guess I shouldn't be making assumptions," she remarked wryly. A wistful look came into her eyes. "Kor. . . we are going ahead with the plans for the wedding, aren't we?"

He looked surprised, and then amused. "I would be hurt if we did not," he replied. "You have improved my outlook on your culture no end."

"Seriously?" queried Tavia.

"Don't I look serious?" He eyed her speculatively. "Actually, it occurs to me that I asked Halvorsen's permission, but not yours." He paused, gazing beyond her and frowning in concentration. "How should I put it? Tavia Nelson, would you do me the inordinate honor and pleasure of marrying me?"

Tavia, who'd been looking mystified, stared at him. Then her mouth twitched. "You forget to go down on bended knee," she said gravely.

Kor pulled himself up to his full height, the picture of affronted pride. "You're kidding."

"You can kiss my foot, too."

"You can find someone else to marry," he retorted. He gave her a look of haughty command. "Katlena Alkarin Tertemisar, if you don't respond 'yes' momentarily, I'll---"

"You'll what?"

"--I'll tell your father you're pregnant and he'll force you to marry me!"


Tavia could control her laughter no longer; it bubbled out of her and stole all her strength. She sat down rather suddenly on the bed. "That's all this wedding needs--a pregnant bride." She held her hands out toward Kor in surrender and invitation. "I will marry you, Kor Alkarin. It'll be a spectacle that the Federation will never forget."

He came and sat down on her right, putting his arm around her shoulders and drawing her against him. With a grin, he murmured, "One of your relatives, Stephanie Spero, said that you only liked me for my money and my title."


"Nah, I'm only marrying you for your body."


His response to that was a lascivious scrutiny and a slow caress. Tavia caught his roving right hand and held it. "That was not an invitation," she said firmly. She looked down at his hand, where the silver ring of Domain Kothir lay next to the onyx-inlaid silver ring of Domain Tertemisar. "A ring," she murmured, half to herself.

Kor pulled his hand away anxiously. "What's wrong with my rings?" he asked, examining them.



"Nothing at all," Tavia replied, holding out her own bare left hand. "I just realized that we have to do something about a





ring for me. It's a very important part of the ceremony for the man to bestow a ring on the woman."

"If I had known," observed Kor, "I would have had another domain-ring crafted." He looked down at his hand and slowly drew off the ring of Domain Tertemisar from his middle finger. It felt to him as though he were disarming himself: he had accepted that ring, along with the sword of the *Ormenel*, almost twenty years ago. He had not removed it since. Yet it was also the most intimate way he could think of to show his need to share. He extended the ring to her willingly.

Tavia drew her breath in sharply and made no move to touch the silver circlet. "The *Krasaia* Tertemisar ring doesn't belong to me," she said, her voice unsteady. She had some idea of what it was costing him to proffer it to her. His new vulnerability was as hard to accept as his cold aloofness had been.

"Doesn't it?" he countered. "You are my *karushir*. And now that the war is over, and I have learned some humility, I can publicly and formally acknowledge the fact of your status. As my life-sharer, you are a member of the domain and are entitled to all its symbols and rank. Please, take this for the wedding ceremony."

Tavia took the gleaming object and slid it onto her ringfinger. It was too big, of course, but by curling her finger slightly, she managed to make the ring stay on. Knowing that there was a foolish smile on her face, she looked down at the ring. "I would be honored to wear this," she said in a small voice. She added, as an afterthought, "Besides, that way you save yourself a wad of credits. Very clever."

He smiled. "Don't try to change the subject. When we get back to the *Ormenel*---" He paused in mid-sentence. "We," he repeated lovingly. "When we get back to the *Ormenel*, I'll go to the Street of the Silversmiths in the *Torshir* Orthonik and have a new ring made to your finger's size."


Tavia rubbed the ring on her left hand and then reluctantly took it off. "You'd better keep this until next Saturday," she said. "You know, I have to say that that ring means a thousand times more to me than the biggest, gaudiest diamond ring ever could. Thank you, Kor."

"I'll make you earn it," he replied lightly. "One reason I want you back is that I'm tired of seeing Federation visitors and trying to understand Federation customs." He snorted. "I recently got a request from a Terran corporation. They wanted to know if I would be interested in partaking in the profits of a combination safari and casino resort they would like to build on the east shore of *Khilkirien* on the *Kilingarlan*. Tourism!"


She laughed. "Why don't you tell them that it's open hunting season on humans on the *Kilingarlan*? Sure, you can put me in charge of Federation liaison--you can make me a Plenipotentiary without Portfolio, or something. I'd love to do that kind of work."

"Excellent." Kor stood up. "Breakfast?"

"Why not?" she said, and followed him out the door.



Kor paused in the hallway at the top of the stairs. He looked down them, his expression uncomfortable.





"What's the matter?" said Tavia, noticing his hesitation.

"Coming up last night wasn't nearly as difficult as going back down this morning," he replied lugubriously, and sighed. "This visit has certainly taught me not to overconfident of victory."

She looked at him, a pensive smile touching the corners of her mouth. "Don't worry. My father is actually a pussycat."

"From what I know of the beasts, they do come equipped with sharp teeth and claws."

Tavia's smile widened into a grin. "Kor, you sound just like a child about to face a spanking."

"That's what I feel like," he retorted, and then started down the staircase.

As they turned from the landing into the downstairs hall, they were met by Roan. He was wearing a bathrobe too short and too loose for him--it looked like one of Halvorsen's.

Roan stopped, his expression flickering from dismay to careful neutrality. "Uh, good morning," he said, uneasily. "It was kind of late last night. And I really didn't feel like going back and facing Karras. Your father kindly offered me the use of the living room couch."

"That's okay," said Tavia. "You don't have to get my approval."

"Kirin," said Kor quietly.

Roan, startled, met Kor's gaze. What he saw there seemed to reassure him, for he smiled faintly and said ruefully, "That's not fair, using my *ki-lingaven* name. It always puts me in a weak spot."

"I use it when I'm looking for understanding," said Kor frankly. "It makes me feel better to have some small advantage by using that name. What I want to do is apologize."

Roan was astounded; he looked from Kor to Tavia, searching for non-verbal cues. "You're a very different Kor from the one who came storming upstairs last night."

"Why do you put up with me?" said Kor, not answering Roan's comment. "For as long as I've known you--now almost forty years--I've always caused you trouble. Why do you tolerate it?"


Roan saw that, although Kor's words were ironic, his intent was serious. He said honestly, "Perhaps because I'm still your little brother, in a way. Often I look at you and see not the imposing *Ormen*, but the rebellious, reckless Kor Kothir that I looked up to as a child. It's very easy to understand and forgive that Kor." Kor looked startled, and then thoughtful.

"But that's as much psychology as you're going to get out of me at this hour," Roan continued. He looked at both of them. "I can see that all is well--or is even better--between you two. That's all that matters to me."



Kor looked searchingly at Roan, almost tempted to ask if he was sure of that. But the confidence Kor saw in Roan, his brother's





lack of resentment and calm friendliness were reassurance enough. "How anticlimactic," Kor said dourly. "I come down here expecting a fight, or a rebuff or worse. Instead you become noble and sentimental."

Roan grinned at Kor's tone of grudging respect. "The sentimentality comes from seeing you two. You're just standing there together, not even touching, but you're so intimate it's almost indecent." He paused and added virtuously, "The nobility is an ingrained characteristic."

"Gah," said Kor in disgust.

Roan ignored him, turning an appraising gaze on Tavia instead. "You're looking very well, Tavia. Ah, tell me: should I warn the Executive Officer and the Quartermaster to expect an extra passenger aboard the *Defiant*?"

"How charmingly obscure you are, Roan," said Tavia. "Yes, I'm going with Kor. Do you think Star Fleet will mind?"

"I'm sure Star Fleet could care less," responded Roan. "After all, given SFI's surveillance over you, they must know exactly what's going on here, and they haven't done anything to stop you. Once they realize you're leaving the Federation completely, they'll probably breathe one huge collective sigh of relief."

"I hadn't thought about it that way. You're probably right," agreed Tavia. "I'm an expensive embarrassment to Star Fleet. They'll be so glad to see the last of me that they'll give us a parade at the Border."


"I'm very glad to hear that," interposed Kor. "I didn't know how difficult or easy it would be to get you out of the Federation, Katlena, but I was prepared to use--ah--some diplomatic force. I suppose, instead, that Star Fleet will congratulate me for removing you. Excellent. I shall use their gratitude as a negotiating lever at some point."

Roan and Tavia looked at each other and nodded thoughtfully. "A thoroughly devious, unprincipled, merciless politician," remarked Tavia, with a gesture at Kor. "Say, why don't we invite some of my SFI shadows to the wedding? That ought to shake them up. They might even have to bring us a wedding present."


"A 'Klingon, Go Home' banner, stitched in red and purple on gold," said Roan promptly.


"I do not understand this tendency, for every conversation to degenerate into a free-for-all for poor puns and jests," said Kor in an aggrieved tone. "I wonder if I know what I'm letting myself in for, keeping company with these sharp-tongued humans? Kirin, will you make me doubly happy and come to the *Ormenel* too?"

Roan, taken off guard, retreated a step. Warily, he glanced at Tavia, but saw that she hadn't had anything to do with the sudden request. "I told you already that I can't," he answered flatly. Listening to himself and feeling the response too harsh, he added, "Someone's got to stay and look after Karras."



There was silence for a moment, as Kor regarded Roan with a





discomfiting scrutiny. He surrendered, his gaze dropping from Roan's. "True enough," he agreed wryly. "Speaking of being looked after, have you seen Jyo and Heri?"

"They're still asleep," Roan answered. He avoided Kor's gaze. "All of us--Halvorsen, me, and your guards--stayed up pretty late last night. They were, ah, worried about you. Halvorsen and I thought they should sleep in this morning."

"They worry too much," said Kor, trying not to show his guilt. "Still, I'm glad they have a chance to rest."

"Let's go see what's for breakfast," commented Tavia, shifting to a more welcome topic.

Tavia, Kor, and Roan paraded into the kitchen. "Good morning, all," said Halvorsen amiably, putting a covered tray into the warming oven. "Your timing is excellent. Breakfast is ready." He glanced at the threesome, and a smile appeared on his face as he saw Tavia and Kor together.

"Thanks for doing all the work, Dad," said Tavia. She peeked under the lid of a baking tray. "Sticky buns! How nice. Kor, why don't you take these to the table?"

Kor accepted the tray, but gazed past her to Halvorsen. He had wanted to apologize to Tavia's father before breakfast, if possible. "Tavia, I really---"

"Breakfast first," she declared, and made a gesture in the direction of the dining room. Kor gave her a wondering look, but went.


Since no one followed him into the dining room, Kor set down the plate and went back into the kitchen. Halvorsen and Roan were dishing up food onto four plates; Tavia was taking sausages out of the oven. Kor moved to pick up a plate.

Halvorsen gave Kor a friendly grin and a measuring glance as Kor approached him. Before Kor could take his food, Tavia's father said calmly, "*Ormen* Alkarin, would you turn around, please?"


Kor automatically obeyed, but asked "Why?" It was too late. He yelped in surprised pain as something struck his *derrière*. He whirled back around, outraged and incredulous.


Halvorsen, trying to look stern, held up the wooden spoon that he'd picked up from the counter. He shook it menacingly. "You've been punished," he said. "So let's forget what sins you've committed."

Kor was dumbfounded, and yet felt a helpless desire to laugh. He glanced at Tavia, whom he suspected had provided more than a little inspiration for Halvorsen's deed. She raised one eyebrow at him, as if daring him to protest. His gaze went on to Roan, whose face was white with astonishment and a trace of fear.



Kor's gaze came back to Halvorsen's wary expression and the implement in his right hand. Kor gave into the amusement lurking inside him at the absurdity of the situation. Deciding to shock them all, he respectfully inclined his head toward Halvorsen and said, "I





thank you, *Har* Nelson. Next time, allow me to lend you a belt so that you may carry out the discipline more properly."

Halvorsen opened his mouth and closed it again. Obviously taken aback, he muttered, "I've never hit an Emperor before." To recover his composure, he went on quickly, "Say, let's get breakfast on the table and eat before the food starts growing icicles."

They took the plates to the dining room table and sat down. The food-- eggs, sausage, sticky buns, drange juice, coffee and tea--was hot and excellent.

"It's a good thing Jyo and Heri aren't up yet," commented Tavia, reaching for another sticky bun. "They might have misinterpreted your gesture, Dad. We'd be in a mess of trouble then."

"For a moment there, I thought we were in a mess of trouble," interjected Roan, sounding as though he was having trouble getting over his alarm. He stared at Kor and said quickly, "I've never seen anyone hit you and not get hit back!"

Kor grinned, suddenly hearing his little brother talking. He realized ruefully that the token punishment had felt oddly comforting: a gesture of acceptance, a gesture of the concern Halvorsen would show for a son. But now Halvorsen was looking concerned, obviously worried about having overstepped the bounds of friendship. Kor moved in quickly to reassure him. "I'm not nearly so vengeful as Roan would believe, at least not anymore. I admire you wholly, Halvorsen, and I deserved your punishment. Besides, you should know by now that I would allow you to do almost anything. Especially when I have imposed on your hospitality and friendship as I did last night."

"Stow it, son," said Halvorsen firmly, but looked vastly pleased at the compliment. "Last night you were tired and frustrated, and only too willing to do battle with anyone who stood in your way."


"You can put it more strongly than that. I was arrogant and impetuous," said Kor readily, conscious of a certain pleasure in opening up and admitting to his faults. "Roan told me a little while ago that I was merely being my usual rebellious self--a problem I've had since childhood."

"That calls to mind what you said to me the night Roderick went overboard," said Halvorsen musingly. "You said you believed in corporal punishment--which is the only reason I dared take that spoon to you. Didn't your father ever spank you for being so 'arrogant and impetuous'?"


Kor stiffened, and closed his eyes--and his mind--to the words. Halvorsen, startled, stopped eating and glanced at Tavia, who was looking horrified.


"Oh Dad, do you ever have a knack for asking the wrong question," she breathed.

Roan shook his head unhappily as Halvorsen looked from Tavia to him. He bit his lip, staring at Kor and wondering worriedly which would come first, an explosion of anger or withdrawal. The sight of Kor's pain stirred his deepest memories of his boyhood and his and Kor's troubles with their father, Kesan Kothir.



"Just forget I asked the question," said Halvorsen, glancing





anxiously at Kor.

Kor drew in a deep breath, for the moment furiously resenting the situation that had so vividly brought back his father's ghost. He also, fleetingly, resented Halvorsen's comfortable self-confidence, and felt envy that Tavia should have such a father. What could the two of them know of his family's troubles? How could any of them--even Roan--know how much he still feared and hated his father, and how deep his doubts were at being himself the head of a family?

He resolutely pushed down the lump of anger and pain that had risen in his chest. *It's not Halvorsen's fault; he doesn't know; you can't still be so angry. . .* He made an effort to verbalize his racing thoughts. "It's no blame to you that you touch on my most vulnerable memories," he said, his voice tight and restrained. "And I should not still be so sensitive to ancient history. The fact is, Halvorsen, that my father. . . spanked me. . . for all of the wrong reasons. I have hated him all my life."

After a moment, Tavia said cautiously, "When you let your defenses down, Kor, they all go down, don't they?"

Roan cast Tavia a puzzled glance, not understanding what had prompted her comment. He felt like reaching across the table to touch Kor, to reassure himself that the killing was real. He ventured, "Kor, how is it you can speak of Kesan now? I mean, you never--I---" He floundered and stopped, wishing he'd stayed silent. He had never resolved his own feelings about Kesan Kothir and was, himself, still unable to bring the subject out into the open.

Kor pushed aside his plate and looked across at Roan. He all too well understood the pain in Roan's voice when his brother had tried to mention their father. He said bitterly, "The dead hand of Kesan Kothir. . . You still feel it too, don't you, Kirin? I'm sorry for that. I'm sorry that his death didn't make him go away."



Roan's astonished gaze flew to Kor, an expression of fear returning to his face. "Why can't you just leave it alone?"


For an instant, Kor wanted nothing more than to do just that. But then, a flame grew in him, a spark of self-contempt at the fact that he was again hiding from his distant past. "It needs to be made clear," he said deliberately. "I have ignored it, tried to forget it for years. That doesn't work." Kor clenched his hand into a fist, feeling determination grow into an angry need to act.

Tavia, sitting on Kor's right, could feel the tension rising in him. Her gaze riveted on his face, she said very softly, "Let it out, Kor."

He turned his head. Tavia was reminded of last night. Even though he'd broken his shields and had vowed not to let them rise up again so strongly, they were too much a part of his persona to disappear completely so soon. She could feel Kor fighting, and, with a silent plea in her eyes, encouraged him to win.

Kor made his decision abruptly. His gaze went to the silent, watchful human at the head of the table. "Halvorsen, I think I should tell you what Roan and Tavia already know: I killed my



father. He was the one who had me convicted of treason and banished to prison." Halvorsen's eyes widened; he put his coffee cup down very slowly and then put his hands flat on the table, focusing his entire attention on the killing's expression and words.

"But the shadow of my father continues to follow me," said Kor, aware of how full the listening silence was. "It makes me rebel, it makes me arrogant and reckless, it makes me self-centered and remote. His shadow has also sent me looking all over--all my life--for a way to be free of it."

He looked around at the three of them, his face vulnerable. "My family," he said. "My life-sharer, my brother, and my--Halvorsen, I would have to call you cousin or uncle. I have found a family here, far away from my heritage and race. With you, I can name the shadow. I can call forth the image of my father Kesan--I can see him now, but he has no power over me here. He is dead. Here, among you, I feel welcome and at home." He breathed deeply and added quietly, "I am sorry. That was a very disjointed speech. I'm just discovering it all now, and can't put it any better than that."

Silence followed his words. He looked hesitantly from Tavia's face to Roan's and then to Halvorsen's. Tavia's eyes were full of pride and love; Kor was glad he had spoken, if only to see her reaction. Roan's face was averted, and Kor couldn't see his expression well enough to judge it. As for Halvorsen, he was staring at Kor with a rich mixture of emotions on his face, ranging from amazement to revulsion to embarrassed pleasure.

Roan was the first to speak. "You make me feel ashamed, Kor," he said, his face and voice lowered. "I admire the way you can speak out. I wish I could do the same. I am running from Kesan. You know the effects it's had on my family. My nonexistent family. I've never let my human father get too close to me." He grimaced, still trying to get over his shyness at talking. He finally looked at Kor. "I've even been afraid of calling you brother again."

Kor was silent for a moment, studying Roan. He commented gently, "I'm willing to take you on whatever terms you wish."


In Halvorsen's features now there was only compassion and an alert interest in whatever Kor said or showed. He cleared his throat and said, "Maybe I should be the one asking you to come stay in my household. There's always room for one more, in this family."

Kor's mouth twitched despite himself. "Your ability to answer well--in any situation--continues to amaze me. Thank you, Halvorsen, but I regret not."

Tavia felt that it was time to move the topic onto safer territory. "I certainly appreciate your inclusion of us in your family, Kor. I wonder, will your children approve of all these humans you're taking in?"

Kor smiled at her. "My children," he said deliberately, "are so spoiled and traditional that an influx of different blood would do them good. It has always been a disappointment to me that none of my children wants to be a revolutionary."

"What about Karras?" interjected Roan, surprised. He answered his own question almost immediately. "No, you're right. Karras is perfectly respectable--except for his strong streak of devious





 humor."

"If you're adopting the Nelson clan," said Halvorsen sardonically, "will you do me a favor and take Roddy away for a little while? I'm sure that some time spent under your influence would benefit him enormously."

"I'll make you a trade," said Kor with relish. "I'll take your son and send you back your grandson Kirdan, who at fifteen is spoiled, overcurious, overwhelmed by his own intelligence, and as slippery as a Federation politician."

Halvorsen returned Kor's grin. "I'd love to meet my grandson. Send him for a visit anytime. I guarantee you'll get him back in worse shape than when you sent him."

"I may accept your offer of hospitality," replied Kor. He leaned back in his chair, feeling oddly contented. Speaking about his father and his past had brought him an exhilarating release. *Akra, you left me a legacy far richer than you intended or that I ever recognized, he thought, briefly summoning up an image of his father. Along with the self-destructive hatred and sorrow, I learned independence and inventiveness. I learned to pick my own way and follow it at any cost. And it's somehow fitting that I should find a solution here in the Federation, so far from my world and ways.*

By common consent they started clearing the table. With the four of them working together, the table and the kitchen were soon clean.

"I think I'd better get dressed and back to my ship," declared Roan, as he finished stacking the breakfast dishes. "Halvorsen, thanks very much for the couch and the meal."

"Anytime." Halvorsen grinned. "Thanks for keeping me company last night while I was waiting to see if the upstairs floor was going to explode."

Roan approached Kor, looking at him with embarrassed gratitude. "Thank you for what you said earlier, Raksha. You made certain things come clear in my mind." He noticed how pleased Kor was to be called by his former nickname, 'Wolf.' "I'm very pleased that you feel free of Kesan's shadow now. As for me, his image is suddenly a lot less substantial."

Kor reached out to touch Roan's arm, a now-rare gesture of closeness between the two former brothers. "I'm glad that I spoke of him. I think my memories of our father have little power to affect me now. Will you tell Kar-ras of what happened here? He will be interested."


"To put it mildly," agreed Roan. He gazed quizzically at the killing. "I'll congratulate you again on your forthcoming wedding, Kor. It's a tremendous way to commemorate a new family beginning."

Kor smiled gently. "I'm aware of that--now."


"You have plans for today?" said Halvorsen to Tavia.

"Yeah, we've got a bunch of errands to run in Newmerica. I have to help Kor talk Mottl the tailor into fitting a dagger sheath into the neck of the tuxedo jacket. . . Don't wait up for us; we'll be home late."





AUGUST 14
MONDAY MORNING



When the alarm clock went off at seven-thirty in the morning, Tavia reached over, slammed her hand down on top of the clock, and groaned.

Dim sunlight was just beginning to crawl in sluggishly through the windows. Tavia glared at Kor, who was so soundly asleep that the alarm had had no effect on him whatsoever. "I don't want to go to work," she mumbled. "I really don't."

She swung her legs over the side of the bed and sat up. As usual, the impact of the cold floor on the soles of her feet brought her to instant wakefulness. She sat there for a moment. "Work," she repeated, in the tone of voice usually reserved for obscenities. "Come to think of it, why should I go to work?" Inspired to action, she got up, pulled on a robe and slippers, and padded purposefully downstairs.

Fifteen minutes later she returned to her bedroom. Whistling off-key, she pulled open the curtains of all three windows and peered out. The sky was clear and blue. "Funny, I thought it was murky today," she remarked aloud. "Mondays always are."

She went over to the bed and prodded the form hidden under the blanket. "Time to get up, Kor."

The blanket moved and the top of Kor's head and one eye emerged. The eye was open and regarding her with sleepy balefulness. "You may have to go to work, but I don't," he said. "I'm on vacation."


"I don't have to go to work either," she said exuberantly. "How about an early morning swim? You were all for those the first few days after you got here."

The head turned. Now Tavia could see both eyes and a nose. "What do you mean you 'don't have to go to work either'?" he asked with growing interest.


"I just quit," she said, sitting down on the edge of the bed and crossing her legs under her. "Don't you occasionally wish you could do the same?"


He sat up, the blanket and sheet falling away from him. He grabbed the blanket and pulled it against himself, not out of any excess of modesty but because it was cold. "Certainly not," he retorted.

"Lucky man," she said. "As far as I'm concerned, quitting just made the last six months of that job worthwhile. I rang up the company, got ahold of my boss--he doesn't approve of me because I'm an ex-con and an unscrupulous female. I said to him cheerily, 'Good morning, Mr. Rikert. You won't be seeing me today. In fact, you won't be seeing me tomorrow either. I quit. I'm getting married in a week and then I'm running back to the Empire to practice being a token alien again. Please, save your congratulations; just send my termination check. You can take my two weeks' notice period out of my vacation pay. Have a nice day, Mr. Rikert.'" Tavia finished relaying the conversation and grinned at Kor. "And then I switched off. Nice, huh?"



"You are sure of yourself," he said. "I recall hearing





something once about the burning of bridges. . ."

"Right now I'm thumbing my nose at everything and everybody," Tavia said happily. "That's what our wedding's going to be, you know? One grand gesture of 'damn you all and good-bye forever.'"

"You show a desire for vengeance that is matched only by that of a killing."

"Yeah, my father thinks it's deplorable. However, he himself is thoroughly enjoying my family's consternation over this affair. We're in the papers again today; the wedding announcement came out. Half-a-page spread."

Kor grunted his lack of appreciation. "What will they do for news once we are gone?"

"Invent some, I suppose." Tavia reached forward and pried the blanket away from Kor. "Come on, lazy one, get up. Today we have to get the marriage license. A mere formality--just a few forms to be filled out."

"Bureaucracy," said Kor disgustedly. "Forms to sanction a bonding. How plebeian."

"Stop being a Klingon snob and get up."

He did so, slowly and without any particular enthusiasm. "Some vacation this is," he grumbled.

Their long wait at the Town Hall offices was rewarded with two minutes of red tape. The clerk looked up, took their names, gave them five forms to fill out, and told them to come back with a doctor's certificate, proof of identification, and proof of age.

They walked slowly away from the window. Tavia didn't like the look on Kor's face as he skimmed the forms. "What's the matter?"

"Emperors aren't supposed to have to undergo this kind of treatment," said Kor blankly. "Why me?"

Tavia chortled. "Ah, but this is a democracy, Lord Alkarin. Equal aggravation for every person." She took the forms from him and looked at them briefly before folding them up. "You're especially unlucky. As an unregistered alien, you---"



"A what?"


She began to walk toward the exit; Kor followed along. She continued, "As an unregistered alien, you have to fill out Green Form 131-Q-ZHZ-3Z and submit your visa, passport, proof of citizenship, working papers, and an affidavit of integrity signed by a Federation official."

Kor shut his eyes briefly and uttered a pitiful moan. Seeing that this had no effect on her whatsoever, he announced flatly, "No."


"What d'you mean, 'no'? Without these forms, you don't exist."

Kor gritted his teeth. "I am going to declare war," he said, finding the words a familiar, pleasant litany. "Then the Federation will discover how much I don't exist."



"It's all that soft living in the *Ormenel*," commented Tavia. "You can't even conquer a piece of paper." She watched Kor grimace and was pleased to see his shoulders sag in submission.



"Why am I doing this?" He raised his eyes skyward and sighed fatalistically. "By the way, Katlena, what was that about a doctor's certificate?"

"That's where we're going next," said Tavia cheerfully. "Complete physicals, blood tests, etc., etc., to prove our 'medical compatibility.'" She looked at him, eyes gleaming.

"'Medical compatibility'?" he repeated incredulously. "But I am a---"

"I know," Tavia interrupted. "And my family doctor is just going to love you. I don't think he's ever had a kiling to play with--er, examine before."

"How can he examine me if he's never seen a kiling before?" Kor asked reasonably. "Look, Katlena, I'm tired. Let's go tomorrow."

"Nuh-uh. Stop trying to chicken out. Besides, tomorrow's Tuesday. My doctor always goes fishing on Tuesdays. I came in once on a Wednesday morning and found him gutting a tuna on his operating table."

"That does it. I refuse to go to a doctor who carves fish with his scalpel." Kor stared upward again. "Why do I put up with this woman? She does nothing but torment me."

Tavia tucked her hand into his and pulled him onward. "Come on, Kor," she said. "Actually, you're making all of this much easier for me. I'm having so much fun listening to you bitch that the preparations seem painless."

Some time later, Tavia and Kor returned to Town Hall and took places on line at the County Clerk's window again. Tavia glanced at Kor sidelong and shook her head.


"You had me absolutely appalled when you started telling those lies to the doctor," she said in a low voice. "Inventing that impossible, lurid tale about secret fertility rites. And casually mentioning that you had over a hundred children."

"I probably do. I also took great pleasure in answering the doctor's question about my amazingly good health," said Kor complacently. He mimicked his previous response: "'Due entirely, Doctor, to eating nothing but raw meat, drinking a lot, and letting out work tensions through bar brawls and occasional berserk murdering fits.'"

"Poor Doc. It's a good thing I won't have to see him again; I probably wouldn't have the never to walk into his office."


"If I have one fault, it's that my sense of humor tends to take over in trying times," said Kor. "Do you think the doctor believed my explanation of the residual scar left over from the tattoo on my thigh?"

"No, he didn't believe it--even though that was the one story that was true," said Tavia, grinning widely. "Honestly, Kor. Do you have any idea what kind of reputation you're acquiring here?"




"A thoroughly despicable one, I hope."





Tavia groaned. "Well, at least we got the proper medical forms. Another hour and we'll be through this rigmarole."



Kor sighed. "I sincerely hope so. Even my patience has its limits."

Twenty minutes later, they were facing the same clerk. "Your forms?" he asked in a dead tone of voice.

Tavia handed over both sets. The clerk started reading, his head moving as he went from line to line. "These are all in order," he commented after fifteen minutes. He glanced briefly at Tavia and made sure that she was, in fact, the same person as in the photograph clipped to the top page. Then, methodically, he moved on to the second set of forms, a sheaf of papers considerably thicker than Tavia's.

A few minutes of silence. Then the clerk looked up. "Where are the working papers that are supposed to be with this?" His eyes widened as he realized he was addressing a Klingon.

"I don't have any," said Kor, his tone dangerously polite.

"Don't you work? What's your current occupation?"

Beside Kor, Tavia let out a quickly repressed giggle. Kor scowled at her, looked haughtily at the clerk and answered frostily, "Emperor."

This was an answer not covered in the books. The man swallowed hard, and feebly said, "Oh." Needing reassurance, he returned to the comforting familiarity of looking through the forms. He looked up again momentarily, his face a mixture of truculence and dismay. "But there's no visa form or affidavit of integrity here either!"

"I was told that, having diplomatic immunity, I didn't need a visa," said Kor, wondering where this nonsense would end. He continued acidly, "As for your 'affidavit of integrity,' you may take it and stuff it in your---"

"Kor," interrupted Tavia hastily, "don't invite trouble."

The clerk looked at Kor, nonplussed. He collected the forms together, clipped them neatly, and put his hand down on top of them. "I can't approve these forms," he said flatly. If the applicant was going to be difficult by not filling out the forms properly, he would be just as difficult in return.

"Can't?" said Kor, his tone becoming hostile.

"Won't," answered the man.


Kor felt a tug at his sleeve. He looked down, and saw that Tavia was trying to pass him a 20-credit note. He took it from her puzzledly. "What's this for?" he asked, bringing it into full view.

"Heavens to hatchefish!" muttered Tavia irritably, and snatched the bill back. She passed it surreptitiously over the counter to the clerk and gave him a fierce-eyed look. "That should make everything complete," she announced pleasantly through clenched teeth. "Now can we have the license, please?"



The clerk's fingers reached for the credit note. Without a flicker of expression, he pocketed the money, and stamped a red





'Approved' across the fronts of both sets of forms. He filled out a white card marked 'Form RF-TA-1: Marriage License' and handed it across to Tavia. "Here you are," he said. "Next, please!"

Tavia and Kor moved out of the way of the advancing line. Kor said, frowning, "Katlena, why did you---"

"*Astlamash, Ormen* Alkarin!" she hissed. She strode quickly out of the office building and onto the sidewalk outside. Kor followed, heeding the command to shut up, but bore a mystified, angry expression.

Outside, she turned to him, looking exasperated. "Now look, you great, big, innocent, honest politician, I just gave that man a bribe. As far as I'm concerned, twenty credits is little enough to pay. This license is my freedom. Now nothing can stop us."

"I wasn't going to allow myself to be stopped," he interjected, his brows furrowed in a frown. "But to give money---"

"What were you going to do, menace him with your sword until he approved the forms?" inquired Tavia sardonically. "Kor, haven't you ever been in the Federation before?"

The derisive tone of this inquiry made Kor look affronted. "Of course I have."

"How long ago?"

"Six years ago when the war ended---"

"You only got as far as Land's End. That's on the Federation border. And before that?"

He thought back, his face slowly losing its look of assurance. "I suppose going to Ashkaris doesn't count, since that was also on the Border," he said slowly. "I guess I haven't been in the Federation since the Organia trouble."

Tavia shook her head and laughed. Making a quick count, she said, "That was twenty-nine years ago. No wonder you don't know anything about how the Federation works." She patted his arm. "Don't worry, Kor. Soon enough we'll be back in the *Ormenel*--and abiding by your customs."


Kor was looking taken aback by this turn of affairs. After a moment, he bowed. "It's true that I know too little about the Federation. For the rest of my stay here, I place myself under your command."

"Good," she said, and started walking on again. "First thing I command is that you fill my stomach. I'm starved."


Kor matched his stride to hers. "Where do you suggest we go?"


"Well, I know a place on the way home that has not very good, but real food. Let's go celebrate."

"If it's to be a celebration, I want the food to be worthy of the name," replied Kor. "And although I know my desire is heresy on this fishy world, I would like a steak. I am willing to pay."




"Who am I to argue with such a statement?" Tavia took a left onto a branching street. "Follow me."





Their steps took them into an area of small shops on narrow, winding streets. Tavia and Kor slowed, glancing in the windows they passed.



"This reminds me of one of the artisans' sections of the Torshir Orthonik," commented Tavia, pointing at a store advertising hand-fired pottery. "I'd be a lot happier if we were already in your capital city. . . I know that going to Terra should be a real treat, especially on your expense account, but I can't see it as anything more than a wasteful delay. I dreamed about the Kilingarlan last night, Kor."

He gave her a sidelong look and an appreciative nod. "So did I," he replied. "I usually do. But last night, for the first time, you were there with me. Both of us back home again."

"I can't wait," she said. "I can't wait for those searing summers and your quaint custom of not believing in air-conditioning. . . I can't wait for the doctor to look at me pityingly after you've had your spring. . ."


Tavia cast a glance at Kor, to see how he was taking the teasing, and became aware that his attention was elsewhere. Even as she turned to Kor, he left her side and paced over to a store window as if drawn to it.

It was an antiques store. Tavia noticed that among other items hanging haphazardly on one wall were a few old swords and a rusty spear. She laughed. "Oh, come on now, Kor; stop indulging in your fetishes." She joined him at the windowfront, and then realized that he had no interest whatsoever in the weapons. His gaze was fixed on a statue standing on a table in the window. Kor was frowning abstractedly, lost in reverie.


Tavia looked at the sculpture and drew in a breath of surprise and admiration. Amid the junk and mediocre antiques, this one piece glowed. It was a carved block of stone, about a third of a meter high. The sculpture was of a man and a woman standing together, her left arm linked in his right. The man was turned partly away from the woman; his left arm was outstretched and he was looking off into the distance. There was a bow over his shoulder; Tavia saw the figure as a wandering hunter, torn by conflicts. His bearded face bore an expression of gentle desire for the woman at his side, matched, Tavia thought, by a fierce unfulfilled yearning to roam, to find another battle. Tavia looked at the killing at her side, then back at the stone image, and smiled as she realized that she, too, was drawn to the piece--and why.


Tavia marveled at the choice of stone and how it had been shaped: the hunter's flesh was dappled red marble, the red giving way to pearl and cream as it reached the woman's figure. The woman's hair fell around her shoulders like a mane; her pose suggested that she was some rare woods-animal compelled to the hunter's side. Her face, only partly visible from the outside window, was up-raised in entreaty to the hunter. There was mystery and allure in the work, a sense of a strange, tenuous bridge between disparate worlds, a coalescence of fulfillment and yearning.

"That's beautiful," Tavia said wonderingly.



Kor's expression firmed into lines of decisive desire. "I am going to buy that piece," he said, stepping forward and placing his hand on the door-latch. "Tell me, Katlena: what is a craft of





such kilingaven values and skill doing on Proalfalfa?"

Tavia shrugged, amazed to hear him so excited. Deciding not to mention all her qualms--like the price--she followed Kor inside.

Kor took three paces into the store and stopped, unable to move because of the chaos of furniture, lamps, and bric-a-brac surrounding him and covering every available bit of space. Tavia sidled between two particularly repulsive-looking hairy footstools and stood alongside Kor.

From out of the depths of the maze appeared a tall man, so thin and loose-limbed he seemed to levitate around angles and through pieces of furniture. His gaze noted Kor's face and details of dress and came up with a price tag. "Houghton Winslett, specializing in fine antiques," he said smoothly. "How can I help you?"

"I'd like to buy the statue in the window," said Kor, ever-direct.

Tavia winced. Not only did Kor not understand the use of bribes, but he didn't know how to bargain either.

The storekeeper's face assumed some of the same avaricious qualities as a leering, primitive mask on a nearby wall. "That's a very lovely piece," he said warmly. "It came into my hands some time ago. I would have a hard time letting it go."

"I'm prepared to lessen the pain of separation," said Kor dryly.

Winslett beamed; he hadn't had such a windfall in weeks. "Well, because of its value and the high quality of the marble--and, of course, the exquisite craftsmanship---" He pursed his lips and looked Kor directly in the eye. "Thirty-five hundred credits."

"No."

As fast as Winslett's opening thrust came Kor's quiet riposte. Tavia had been about to expostulate at the wild price, but she quickly shut up and started to place her bets on Kor.

Winslett was offended. "My dear sir---"

"I am not your dear sir. Nor am I merely a rich, ignorant tourist whom you can rob. I wish to buy the statue of the two hunters standing together. I am aware of its beauty and craft, and I am also aware that you must make a profit. However, you would do yourself and me great dishonor if you asked a price too much higher than its current market value."


There was a silence after Kor's level, commanding speech. Tavia felt like applauding, but wanted to see what the antiques dealer would do.

Winslett seemed stunned. Then he blinked his eyes rapidly and came forward through the hodge-podge of antiques, extending his hand to Kor. Kor, after a startled pause, grasped it briefly.

"It's such a pleasure to deal with a discerning customer," said Winslett. "I will be happy to sell you the sculpture for two thousand, sir. I believe you will appreciate the piece as it should be."

Kor relaxed. "I do. And I will accept your asking price."





Can you tell me something of the object's history?"

Winslett looked faintly embarrassed. "I don't really know much about it. It's no antique, however. I believe it's less than five years old. It was bought as a curiosity piece by the De Andrade family of Vega Six and sold off later in general auction." He pulled out a bulging notebook from an inside pocket of his jacket and started leafing through the thin pages. "Here it is. 'The Far Trail,' artist Leon Guevarra. Since I acquired the piece on a mixed-lot trade with another dealer, I don't have any other details. I'm sorry."

Kor nodded, memorizing the title and the artist's name. From the pouch at his belt he pulled out a money-clip, and extracted four five-hundred credit bills from the sheaf. He handed the money across to Winslett, whose eyes were wide at Kor's nonchalance.

Winslett took the bills, counted them twice, and put them down beside him on the wing of a stone cherub. "I'll write you a receipt," he said.

"Is there a charge for delivery?" interposed Tavia.

Winslett looked at her, and then down at the 2,000 credits. "No, delivery is included," he said, and added hastily, "As long as it isn't going off-planet."

"No. Not yet, anyway." Tavia gave the antiques dealer the address, which he wrote at the top of the receipt.

Kor accepted the copy of the receipt Winslett handed to him. A mutually pleasing decision having been reached, they shook hands. Then Tavia and Kor left the shop.

Kor paused at the window to look at his statue. The same expression of wonder came into his eyes as when he'd first looked at it. "That calls to me as nothing I've seen in years," he murmured.


Kor turned away from the window and gave Tavia a glance of hopeful inquiry that made him look years younger. "You know what I see in that, don't you?" he said, his tone hesitant. "I have no idea what the artist intended, but as far as I'm concerned, that statue is a human and a killing together, separated and yet bound by shared conflicts and differences." He smiled wryly. "I don't often put myself in another's creation, but that hunter is me." His eyes rested on Tavia's face. "The hunter tamed by the very prey he sought."


Tavia put her arm around Kor. "And the prey the willing companion of the hunter. You're a very good hunter, Kor. You have a way of never returning home empty-handed."

"I generally get what I want," said Kor. "And I wanted that piece of art." It struck Kor that Tavia was talking about far more than the statue. "Will you forgive me, Katlena, for babbling like this?"


She smiled warmly. "Keep on babbling; I like it. What you just acquired is beyond price."

"What we just acquired," he corrected. "It has no meaning without you. You don't need to blush, Katlena. As you say, the artwork's price was nothing, when compared to its impact and significance



for us." He took her hand and together they began to walk along the sidewalk again. "How do you think it would look in the master dining hall of the Rasethi?"



"Someplace where you can show it off?" she queried. He nodded, grinning. She added, "That's fine by me."

"A tangible symbol of what I have done to change my life," he observed softly. He cast her a sidelong glance as a thought occurred to him. In a tone of pleased excitement, he said, "It's also a wedding gift. My present to you."

From the warmth of her face, Tavia had the feeling she was blushing again. "Now, how am I ever going to top such a present?"

Kor's smile was disturbingly provocative. "You have already. You're coming back to the *Ormenei* with me, which is more than gift enough."

AUGUST 19

SATURDAY MORNING

Kor was awakened on Saturday morning by Halvorsen. The killing groaned, wondering why he'd slept so badly. Then he remembered that Halvorsen, insisting separate rooms for him and Tavia on the night before the wedding, had put him in the spare bedroom. The bed had been lumpy. And lonely.

Halvorsen was already dressed in black pants and ruffled shirt. "Breakfast is ready whenever you want it," he announced. "If you need help getting yourself put together, just yell."

Kor went into the bathroom and splashed cold water over his face. It helped slightly, but not much. "Kor Ariki, you're too old for drinking contests," he observed to his reflection in the mirror. "Especially on the night before a formal ceremony." Getting no reaction from his reflection other than a yawn, he shrugged and went to put on Terran dress.

Just as he was fastening his shirt-sleeves with small ornate clasps, Jyo and Heri came in. Kor glanced up, and then glared: his armsmen were neatly, elegantly attired in their formal *sulokir* uniforms. "What are you trying to do, make me look like a fool?" he asked bitterly.


They exchanged uneasy glances. "Of course not, my lord," answered Jyo.

"What do you think I look like in this get-up then?" demanded Kor.


After a pause, Heri answered hesitantly, "It is better than some of the clothing you were forced to wear during the revolution."


Kor uttered a short laugh. "Yes, at least it has no holes or patches, and fits reasonably well." He looked from one to the other. "Well. What do you two think of what I'm doing?"

Jyo shifted in his stance and looked down. "I don't understand it, sir," he answered, frankly but reluctantly.



Kor considered the armman for a moment, and then his questioning gaze went on to Heri's face. The other killing responded





immediately, "I feel the same, my lord. I admire the way you are able to fit into and enjoy these people's customs, but I don't understand it, either."

Kor smiled faintly. He stood up from the bed, picking up the cummerbund and wrapping it around his waist. His gaze was warmly affectionate as he regarded his two personal attendants. "Both of you come from a large domain and have your own families. You keep traditions; the seasons keep their circle-dance." He paused, grimacing. "I will not ask you to contemplate existence without order or traditions. An existence that lets you slip effortlessly from one culture into another, because you keep no cultural heritage of your own." Jyo and Heri looked uneasy, troubled by thought of what seemed to them to be an orderless, chaotic life.

Kor grinned reassuringly. "I end up picking up customs the way a Keori acquires wealth. One night I live as a Kendari, the next as an Agau. What I'm doing today is adding a new, human tradition to my motley collection. Share the ceremony with me, both of you. Tavia Nelson--Katlena Alkarin Tertemisar--is my *karushir*."

Both bowed. "Joy and ardor to your joining," said Jyo courteously. The well-wishing was a traditional one, and Kor laughed--in spite of the perplexity on his armsmen's faces.

Halvorsen was alone in the kitchen. He was fully dressed and was affixing a flower to his lapel as Kor and his armsmen walked in.

The human cast an appreciative glance at Kor's raiment. "Not bad. Not bad at all."

Kor, ignoring this, asked, "Where's Tavia?"

"She's at the church, of course. My brother's wife is helping her to get ready. You didn't expect to see her before the ceremony, did you? That's not allowed."



"Why not?" inquired Kor.


Halvorsen looked startled. "How the devil should I know? Maybe people used to worry that the bride and groom wouldn't be able to keep their hands off each other. Here, have a flower. Then you'd better hurry up and eat. We've got to get going."

Kor accepted the yellow rose with dubious gratitude. He served himself some ham and cheese toast and sat down, being careful of his clothing. Jyo and Heri also served themselves some food. Kor asked, "Everyone will gather at the church?"


"Yeah. Then we come back here for a party." Halvorsen cast an anxious glance out the window. "I keep expecting to see rainclouds collecting. Backyard receptions always get rained on." He grimaced. "That reminds me; I've got to call up the caterers again and make sure they show up early enough."

"Halvorsen," said Kor. As the human turned toward him, Kor said calmly, "Relax."



Halvorsen laughed. "Is it that bad? I'm sorry. I should be the one needing to calm you down, not the reverse."



"I have not been nervous at a public ceremony since the day of my imperial investiture," said Kor. "Before any public event, I merely recall how terrified I was then--and I am instantly shamed and amused out of my minor anxieties."

"This'll be simple for you," said Halvorsen. "The bride has to do most of the work on the day of the wedding; all the groom has to do is stand and look confident."

"I'll do my best to remember all the procedures," commented Kor. "I'm looking forward to this. It is an excellent exchange of goodwill and a way for Tavia and me to join publicly." He paused. "I want the Federation to know that--that I like to flaunt my human lifemate."

"Everyone else I know would shudder at the thought of the politics of this wedding," observed Halvorsen. "You, on the other hand, appear to revel in it. You'll forgive me for asking--do you personally look forward to this? Does it have meaning beyond the political gain?"

"Of course," said Kor readily. The rest of his reply came out more slowly, in an abashed tone unusual for him. "You'll recall that Tavia and I had a fight the other night. . . I'll leave you to conjecture what it dealt with. Considering how perceptive you've proven yourself, I'm sure you have some good guesses." He grinned deprecatingly. "The wedding is one way for me to make up to Tavia. It is a positive end to our troubles. It gives me great pleasure, to wed her in the Federation first before taking her back to the *Ormenel*."

"Thank you," said Halvorsen, looking surprised at the extent of Kor's reply. "I'd hate to take you all the way through this if you weren't enjoying it."

Kor nodded, amused. "It started out as a joke between you and Tavia. But it has become something very much richer."

"Yeah," said Halvorsen, smiling proudly, his thoughts obviously on his daughter's day of success. "Well, let's bask in glory after it's all over. Come on, son. I've got to get you to the church on time."



The foursome of Halvorsen, Kor, and the two armsmen were met at the side of the church by Roan and Karras. "Good morning," said Roan. "Halvorsen, I got a message that Tavia wants to see you right away. She's downstairs."

"Right," said Halvorsen. He glanced at his watch. "Kor, I'll leave you in their care. Good luck."

Kor gave him a quick grin. "Tell Tavia I'm waiting eagerly to see her."

Karras's gaze was frankly admiring as he came forward and put his hand out to touch his father's tuxedo. "You wear that remarkably well, *Akra*, even if it is magenta." He indicated his own formal black tuxedo.

"Me, I feel like a dummy. A store-window dummy, that is."



"It is not 'magenta,'" said Kor indignantly. "The tailor said it is burgundy."



"Come on, you two," said Roan. "I feel a certain responsibility to get you into the right places, since neither of you knows what you're doing. If we go in the side here, we'll be right near the altar."

"Lead on," said Kor.

They went inside the cool, dimly lit church. Kor looked around, finding the lines of the interior simple but pleasing. He felt a sense of intrusion, as of a stranger trespassing. He followed Roan to a position on the right of the center aisle. Karras came to stand next to his father.

"I've got to go sit down," said Roan, glancing around and seeing that the church was already filling with people. "Jyo, Heri, you're in the first bench here, since you're the closest to groom's relatives that we have." Kor nodded for them to sit down where Roan indicated.

Roan raised his head and met Kor's gaze directly. He smiled. "Honor and luck to you, *Ormen Alkarin*."

Kor inclined his head. "Thank you." He watched Roan go to a bench halfway up the aisle. Kor began watching the front doors of the church, feeling his amusement and excitement beginning to grow.

Kor's eyes widened at sight of the group of people just entering the church. He felt like going to greet them, but didn't think he was allowed to leave his place. Kelantan Tarolorin, Ambassador to the Federation and Kor's dear friend, accompanied by half of the *Ormenel* Embassy's staff, had managed to make it for the ceremony. *Allies*, thought Kor exultantly, and executed a formal bow of welcome as Kelantan looked toward him.


He began recognizing individual faces among the crowd. Seated far in the back was a minor Federation Council official--the Minister for Exocultural Affairs, he recalled. A token gesture of diplomacy from the Council, Kor surmised. And there was Steven Manning, multistellar billionaire, much of whose wealth had come from export-import business with the *Ormenel*. And Kor briefly caught sight of a vaguely familiar face in full Admiral's Star Fleet dress uniform; he frowned until he remembered the incident on the planet Organia, years ago. And, of course, reporters everywhere he looked.

Kor was pleased by the tribute and the formality. The privacy of the life-sharers' *karumkath* ceremony in the *Ormenel* was an intensely intimate affair, but it couldn't match this occasion for pomp and ostentatious ritual. Kor liked ritual. He guiltily remembered that Tavia didn't, and wondered how she was faring.

Tavia entered the church on her father's arm. It seemed to her that the room was impossibly hot. Apparently the whole population of Proalfalfa had showed up for this one--*maybe they're here to throw tomatoes*, she thought.

She looked toward the front of the church. The simple altar was completely hidden by flowers. Slightly to the right stood Kor, facing partway toward her, his bearing a nice mixture of diplomatic poise and smiling anticipation. Next to him stood Karras, whose expression was positively devilish.





Tavia and Halvorsen had paused at the bottom of the aisle, and now they started to pace forward. Tavia was caught between irritation at the slow-moving scenario and light-headed pride at joining the two Klingons standing at the altar.

She found herself studying Kor, and couldn't help doing a double-take. If there was a better way to prove Kor an alien, than to put him in this human ceremony and dress him according to ancient Terran custom, she couldn't imagine it. *But with his poise, he could carry it off standing there naked, she told herself inwardly and then amended, he might well be happier standing there naked.* She glanced down at her own attire. She had refused to make a fool of herself in white lace; her cream and gold gown matched Kor's cream-colored, ruffled shirt, and her bouquet of wine-red roses were the color of Kor's tuxedo. *And probably also my face,* she thought.

Her polite smile widened as she passed by the benches where members of her family sat. They had all made it to the wedding, even Roddy. With pleasant vengefulness, she hoped that Roddy and her other disagreeable kin would have a thoroughly rotten time. That thought made her feel better, and she was able to proceed to the altar without further hesitation.


Taking her position on Kor's left, Tavia raised his eyebrows at him and grinned. He, in return, raised one eyebrow at her, looking so ostentatiously Klingon and grandiloquent that she had to repress a laugh. They turned toward the somber-faced minister and the service began.


Kor found the ceremony itself simple, efficient, and dull. The words were a standard affirmation of love and honor vowed in the presence of family and friends. Not like the kilingaven *karumkath* ceremony, which required each of the two involved to make a personal statement of commitment and feeling. As Kor calmly answered, "I will," to the minister's questions, he reflected that he'd come a long way since the day he'd sworn that humans and kilingau could never become friends. *I wonder how many of my people will hear of this Federation ceremony, and what they will think of it,* he mused to himself.

For Tavia, the words were the only part of the service she truly enjoyed. As she spoke her part and then accepted the ring of *Krasaia Tertemisar*, she felt a sudden desire to turn around and wave it at all those gathered. *I'm going away with Kor, she exulted inwardly. And anyone in the Federation who's here or who sees the news will know that Kor and I publicly demonstrated that we love each other. Let them sneer at me all they want now.*

Tavia felt a slight let-down when the minister pronounced them married. *So that's it, huh?* she thought. She shared a glance with Kor and saw that he felt exactly the same. That was where the real pleasure of this day lay for her: the sneaking, secret grins she shared with Kor, their emotional kinship.

Tavia closed her left hand tightly, reassuring herself of the ring's existence, as she raised her head for the groom's kiss. Their gazes met briefly; Tavia saw that Kor's expression was both rueful and embarrassed. *He doesn't like to kiss,* she thought gleefully. The touch of his lips was feather-light, formal. Kor straightened, his delighted grin inspired more by the fulfillment of his obligation than by his pleasure in the proceedings.



Tavia took Kor's hand as they turned to leave. His grasp was comforting, a physical link, and Tavia put on her most defiant smile as they paraded down the aisle together.

Kor was proud to have Tavia walking beside him. He was aware that a number of the looks they received were half-disbelieving, half-envious. *A marriage made across cultures and across races, he thought. His eyes scanned the crowd. How many of you condemn us for daring to flout custom? How many of you wish--however fleetingly--that you had the independence and courage to weave such a different pattern?*

They went out into the daylight and were immediately ambushed by reporters. Equipment clicked and buzzed; a medley of voices asked a dozen intertangled questions. Kor determinedly pushed through the cloud of wasps, glaring at anyone who came too close and saying nothing at all. Kor was aware that Halvorsen and Karras were following; he was glad when they came forward to act as sideguards and escort.

"We're getting you two back home in style," announced Halvorsen. He pointed at the aircar hovering a few meters above the church's front lawn. "Rented special for the occasion; I refrained from hanging streamers from it or writing 'Just Married' on the front visor."

Tavia grinned at him. "You're getting the most out of this, aren't you? Did we do okay, Dad?"


"You did just fine," he said warmly. They were almost to the aircar. "Stop a minute." Tavia obediently halted, and Halvorsen put his hands on her shoulders. "You're beautiful," he said, and kissed her. "Congratulations," he added, and embraced her again. He glanced at her husband. "Father's rights," he explained.

"Dad, you're turning me into a cliché," protested Tavia. "You're embar--"
"Behold the blushing bride," said Halvorsen, and chortled.


Karras, who'd been watching all of this with a grin, now came forward and took Tavia's right hand. "May I?" he asked. Without waiting for a reply, he lifted her hand up and kissed it with chivalrous flair. Then he made a bow. "Your servant," he announced dramatically. "Allow me to lay this piteous offering at your feet, Lady Katlena." And he removed the flower from his lapel, sniffed at it disdainfully, and flung it down in front of her.

Tavia looked down at it and then glanced sidelong at a wide-eyed Kor. "My secret lover," she stage-whispered, inclining her head at Karras. "In a rage of jealousy, you will now challenge him to a duel. Both of you will be killed, and the grieving widow will go back home to live with her aging father and her Unborn Child."

"En garde!" exclaimed Karras enthusiastically, waving an imaginary sword. He was obviously quite recovered from the injury to his leg. "I've been watching two hundred years' worth of Terran movies from the ship's library. They're wonderful!"



Kor looked from his son to Tavia in speechless disbelief. His only comment was, "I think we'd better get into the aircar. The church seems to be emptying."





"Right," said Halvorsen, recovering from his amused astonishment and once again taking action. He signalled the aircar's driver to lower the craft. "Karras, you're sitting up front with me. In the back, you two--you've just been granted ten minutes of semi-privacy."

Tavia and Kor stepped in and sat down on the rear couch. The force field enclosed the craft, and it climbed steeply and smoothly into the air.

Tavia glanced at Kor, who was sitting next to her but was most improperly staring out at the view. "Not even one little kiss?" she asked shamelessly.

He brought his attention back inside the aircar and gazed at her in a provoking, lofty manner. "Once was enough," he said. "You're requesting the wrong commodity." And he reached for her, a proprietary, inquisitive gleam in his eyes.

Tavia drew back. "We've only got a few minutes," she chided. "You'll just have to wait for tonight."

Kor sighed and settled back against the cushions. "Then I will continue admiring the view," he said, turning his gaze outward.

"Whadidja do on your honeymoon, Tavia?" she muttered sarcastically. "Oh, well--we looked at the scenery, did a few crossword puzzles. That sort of thing."

Moments later, the aircar landed on the street in front of the Nelson house. They got out. Halvorsen preceded them to the door and held it open.

Before Tavia could do or say anything in protest, Kor swung her up into his arms--not without considerable effort--and carried her into the house. This produced an inarticulate groan of disbelief and a helpless giggle from Tavia. Kor put her down as soon as he crossed the threshold. He glanced back at Halvorsen in triumph.

"Bravo," said Halvorsen gleefully.

Tavia turned and glared at her father. "You put Kor up to that, didn't you?"

"Perpetuating an old Terran custom," he replied happily. "Besides, I did it to your mother, and wanted to see it carried on by at least one of my children."

Tavia looked back at Kor. "I knew it wouldn't be long before the two of you started ganging up on me," she declared. "Why don't you try that little trick when we get back to your palace on the Kilingarlan, Kor?"

"Can you imagine what my retainers and any visitors would say if I did?" retorted Kor. He gave her the unabashed grin of a ten-year-old. "For now, I'm having fun."


It was then that they finally noticed the decor of the house. The caterers had done their work well, even going to the extent of hanging frilly streamers in doorways and along walls. Kor's attention was caught by a cluster of white balloons hanging in the archway to the living room, and he stepped forward to get a better look inside.

A long table had been set up at the far end of the room. To





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one side were a dozen or so bottles of champagne; to the other was a white excrescence that Kor tentatively identified as the wedding cake. He went toward it, repelled and yet fascinated by the multi-layered, flower- and curl-festooned comestible. He scowled as he noticed that the top was adorned by two tiny figures representing the married couple. The two figures were obviously human, disgracefully fair-complexioned.

The other three had followed him into the living room. Karras picked up a bottle of champagne and started reading the label, looking pleased.

"Most of the food is outside, in the backyard," said Halvorsen. "If you'll excuse me, I'm gonna go check and make sure everything's okay. . . we'll be getting company momentarily, you know."

Tavia, at Kor's side, smiled at sight of the cake. "A work of art, isn't it?" she commented. "I'll warn you now, that thing holds enough sugar to make you stagger around high."

"I suppose I'm required to eat some of it," he said glumly.

"That's right."

"And drink a great deal of champagne?"

"Right," replied Tavia.

He said philosophically, "When I get back home, and my ministers ask why I have turned into an alcoholic, overweight incompetent, I will point to my tour of the Federation. And then my ministers will ask me to declare war."

"That's the fifth or sixth time you've threatened that," said Tavia, wholly unimpressed. "If you declare war and you win, can I be Empress of the Federation?"

He looked at her sourly. "No. I'm planning to make Halvorsen my Ruling Regent."


Tavia winced. "Ouch. Your round, *Ormen* Alkarin; I've got to stop this verbal swordfighting until I get better at it."


The doorbell rang. "I'll get it," volunteered Karras at a look from his father.

"Thank you," said Kor. When he glanced at Tavia, his eyebrows were raised in a look of mock chagrin. He smoothed his jacket and straightened. "Time to be diplomatic and pleasant. Maraku, how I hate this sometimes."

Tavia drew close to his side and automatically affixed a smile to her face as the first wave of guests started coming in. "This is our chance to show off," she said. "We'll be alone soon enough."

The beauty of an informal reception was that people could come and go, and Tavia and Kor felt absolutely no compunction to speak to everyone. And go they did: the token Federation dignitaries stayed just long enough to get their pictures in the local papers. Many of the Nelson clan loitered briefly, to take advantage of the free food and drink. The Klingon delegation lingered for a while, joining in a traditional toast of fealty and congratulation, forming a circle around Tavia and Kor, their knives upraised





in salute. The Ambassador informed the Emperor that the Embassy would be honored to celebrate Kor and Tavia's good fortune while the two were visiting Terra.

And then came present-opening time. The gifts had all been heaped on a table out in the yard under a tree, and Kor and Tavia were occasionally encouraged to go over and open something to the accompaniment of jokes and helpful comments. Prominent amid the pile was the gift that Jyo and Heri had painstakingly crafted in Halvorsen's basement--a cradle. The armsmen assured Kor that they would be happy to look after his next child, and Kor gravely thanked them for their wishful thinking. Also noteworthy was the gift from Karras, a hardbound, illustrated edition of The Joys of Alien Sex, an item that raised a bawdy cheer from the nearby guests and made Kor privately vow revenge on his son. There were a few duplicate presents, as usual, such as the two meat-carving sets--what does one give the Klingon Emperor, anyway?

Once the presents had all been opened, Kor, as silent as a stalking hunter, threaded his way through the crowd, making for the blonde-haired man standing alone by the liquor table. He came up behind the man and declared with suave courtesy, "I wanted to thank you personally for your gift to Tavia and me. . . Roderick."

Tavia's brother jumped and whirled around. His face paled when he realized who had cornered him. "I didn't give you any present," he replied, eyeing Kor warily.

"That's why I'm thanking you," said Kor. At Roddy's frown, he added, "Forgive my subtlety. Shall I put it so that you can understand it? Getting no present from you is far preferable than having to open some insult from you."

Roddy's face flushed unbecomingly. "I was trying to insult you by not giving you anything. If you were on fire, I don't think I'd even spit on you! The only reason I came to this stupid wedding is because my wife insisted." He sidled along the edge of the table, trying to make an escape.


Kor's hand shot out and rested lightly, fingers spread, against Roddy's chest. It was so clearly a prelude to violence that Roddy froze.

"I am tired of tolerating your 'attempts' to insult me, Tavia, and Halvorsen," said Kor, a wrathful flame in his eyes. "Your bigotry, your lack of manners, and your lack of consideration for anyone other than yourself are unpardonable. You should thank whatever you hold dear--your skin, probably--that I am not living here permanently. I would quickly and painfully teach you to close your mouth and learn some courtesy!"

"You'd better believe I'm glad you're leaving," snapped Roddy, his angry fear making him tremble. "You're no part of my family! You can't say things like that to me!"

Kor's retort was swift: "I most certainly am a member of your family. Not two hours ago, I was formally made your brother-in-law. How does it feel . . . Brother?"

Roddy's color went from red to white. Kor, looking at him, was glad his darker skin didn't reveal weaknesses so easily.





Roddy tried to back away, but bumped against the liquor table. "Leave me alone," he said sulkily.



"Only when you show some civility and respect. And when you apologize first to me and to Tavia, and then to Halvorsen--for your behavior at Halvorsen's dinner party, for being so rude to Tavia the next day, and for the way you've acted here. Come." Kor took Roddy by the arm; the human came with him without any protest.

Tavia was standing under a tree, talking to Karras. They were both laughing; Karras reached for her and embraced her as his father approached with Roddy in tow.

"Unhand my life-sharer, greedy whelp," said Kor pleasantly to his son's back. "She's too good to waste on you."

Tavia and Karras separated. Karras turned and looked at his father, his expression one of mock outrage. One eyebrow lifted as he saw Roddy, but he only commented, "Cultural exchange, *Akra*. Don't be so selfish."

Kor ignored the teasing. He pulled Roddy forward, making him face his sister. Tavia looked from one man to the other appraisingly. Kor's grip tightened on Roddy's upper arm, and he prompted, "You had something you wanted to say to us both, I believe?"

Both Tavia and Karras were surprised to hear the icy threat in Kor's voice. Tavia's brother flinched. "I'm sorry I was drunk and acted badly at your dinner party last week," Roderick muttered, staring down at his feet. Making a great effort, he added, "I hope you had a nice wedding, Tavia."

"One of the best," she commented, her expression dumbfounded. "Uh. . . thank you, Roddy."

Her brother couldn't bring himself to look into her face. "You're welcome. Sorry I didn't bring a present."

"That's. . . quite all right."

Kor, who didn't think Roddy's civility was either lasting or sincere, was still pleased enough by his capitulation to let him go. Roddy rubbed his arm and glanced resentfully at Kor. Kor's fierce stare made him lower his head again and walk rapidly away.

Karras was quicker to react than Tavia. He stepped forward, a broad grin on his face. "Congratulations, *Akra*. I knew you wouldn't let him get away with it much longer."

"I have never seen my brother so chastened," said Tavia. "Kor, you're amazing. What did you do to him?"

"Given my father's usual methods, I can guess," Karras interrupted snidely. "Although, come to think of it, he wasn't bleeding."

"I merely took advantage of our new kinship," replied Kor, with a sour glance at his son. "I felt it time to have a talk with my new brother-in-law. Your uncle, Karras."



Karras choked. "Maraku help me," he murmured.





Tavia gazed in the direction Roddy had gone. "An apology from my brother. . . That's quite a wedding present. I'm sure that in a week I'd be back to fighting with Roddy as usual, but I won't be here in a week."

"It was a duty I had to fulfill before we left," said Kor. He smiled musingly. "I wonder if Roderick will actually apologize to Halvorsen as I told him to?"

Tavia's eyes widened, and then she chuckled. "After the visit of Kor Alkarin, the Nelson clan--and all of Proalfalfa--will never be the same again," she said prophetically.

Inevitably, the liquor began to run low. Halvorsen, noticing this, suggested that the bride and groom cut the wedding cake and accept a farewell toast. Kor was invited to show off his swordplay in cutting the cake, but the killing made it clear that he would not demean his sword by sugar-coating it. Small pieces of gooey cake were passed, champagne poured for all, and a salute made to Tavia and Kor's continued health, happiness, prosperity, and, of course, fertility. Then the guests went their separate ways, leaving behind a small group consisting of the newlyweds, Halvorsen, Roan, Karras, Jyo and Heri, and a handful of caterers.

As the general clean-up began, Kor grasped Tavia's arm with one hand and steered her into the house and into Halvorsen's den. Mystified, she went with him obediently.

"I want to speak to you--alone," he said to her questioning look. "I have had to be remote and courteous, out there with the guests. And soon we are going aboard the *Defiant* and travelling on to Terra. I see very little opportunity for privacy until we get back to the *Ormenel*."

"I hope we'll be too busy sightseeing and politicizing to miss it," said Tavia. "But I thank you for sharing your thoughts."


"I want to say more than that." Kor drew Tavia farther into the room, stopping by the fireplace. He looked at her intently and spoke in a low, rapid voice. "Katlena, I want to tell you how glad I am that I came here to see you. I want to apologize once and for all for my cowardice and selfishness in not sharing my feelings with you before. You are part of me, and today we celebrated that. With you back in the *Ormenel*, I think my family needs and rebellious yearnings will finally be fulfilled."

She put her hand out to touch him, fingering the breast of his jacket, reassuring herself with the physical fact of his existence. "Kor, you've apologized more than enough, by undergoing all the torment we've put you through and emerging with elegance and grace. It's funny. When you weren't talking, I felt frustrated, and now that you're talking, I frequently feel inadequate. I don't express myself very well when talking about my own feelings."


"Stop trying to wriggle away from it," he told her. "You--and I--know that's only an excuse."

She smiled. "You're right." She caressed his face with her scrutiny. How different he seemed from that first day of his arrival! His features, a stranger's then, were now so dear to her





that she noticed the minutest of changes in his expression.



"You come first," she said finally. "That's how I know how much I need you. When I get up in the morning, I think of you before anything else; I wonder about your reactions sometimes before I've considered my own. It's an extra sense, and a novel one, that selflessness--having an ear for your slightest sound, an eye for your every movement, and a constant awareness of your closeness. That's why I'm going baci to the *Ormenel* with you, even though that means giving up my father and this familiar existence and going to a world that will be alien to me throughout my lifetime."

Abruptly, Kor grasped her shoulders and held her tightly. "I wish I could be making so great a sacrifice for you," he said, his voice tight and husky.

"But you are," she answered calmly. "As much as affairs are better between humans and kilingau, it's basically only a relationship of tolerant civility. You're solitary enough, since you're the *Ormen*, and since you feel so few ties to your traditions. In accepting me, you forsake your birthright, your legacy, and your culture. How many of your people, your friends will accept or even comprehend what you're doing? You have removed yourself from your home as far as I'm about to remove myself from here."

They drew close to each other, their embrace coming as naturally as their intimate speech. Kor said quietly, "You make it very easy for me to love you."

"No more easy than it is to love you." They were wordless for a long moment as they held each other. Then Tavia asked wryly, "Now why couldn't we have said that two weeks ago?"

"Did either of us really know that two weeks ago?" he countered. Tavia looked at him and then shook her head slowly.

There was a discreet knock at the door. Halvorsen poked his head in, then came in quietly and pushed the door shut behind him. "I thought I saw you two head in here," he said. "Ah--Kor--before I forget, thank you for whatever you did to my son. He didn't do it graciously, or with any love, but he did apologize to me. Said it was your doing." Halvorsen smiled quizzically at the killing. "I knew you'd be a good influence on Roddy."

Kor and Tavia stood side by side, their arms linked. "My pleasure," replied Kor. "Do you need us to help you clean up? I know we've shirked our duties."


Halvorsen waved his hand in dismissal. "That's mostly the caterers' job. If I were you, I'd be doing exactly what you and Tavia were just doing."

"We weren't doing anything," protested Tavia.


"No, of course not," said Halvorsen with exaggerated disbelief.

"Jealous," she teased. "What can we do for you, Dad?"

Halvorsen paused, seeming uncertain of himself. "I came to tell you I've decided to spoil your honeymoon. If the invitation's still open, *Ormen* Alkarin, I'd like to come along and visit the *Ormenel*."



"Dad, that's fantastic! Now we won't have to kidnap you!"





"Of course the invitation stands, Halvorsen. I'd be delighted to have you with us."



Halvorsen looked from one to the other, somewhat embarrassed at their obvious pleasure. "I know that having a chaperone along on a honeymoon can be a little bit dampening," he commented. "You sure you don't mind?"

"Don't be an idiot, Dad," said his daughter lovingly. "What made you change your mind?"

"Well, after hearing so much about my fifteen-year-old grandson, I can't wait to meet him. Or my other in-laws." Halvorsen made a deprecating gesture and went on slowly, "Also, I was watching the wedding today, realizing that you two are leaving soon. The house'll be awfully empty with you gone, Tavia, and without assorted Klingons tromping in and out all day."

Tavia sobered quickly as Halvorsen spoke of the house. She came forward and took both her father's hands in hers. "I kept worrying about you, after I made my decision to go with Kor. But now I won't have to say good-bye yet-- which I dreaded doing."

"Me too," he agreed, smiling at her warmly. "That also helped to influence my decision."

"You also deserve a vacation," remarked Kor. "Now you may come and relax in our hospitality. I would very much like to repay some of my obligation to you for all you've done the past two weeks. How long will you be able to stay?"

Halvorsen was hesitant. "A month, maybe six weeks?"

Kor grinned his approval. "The longer you stay, the more we'll be able to share with you. My one concern, Halvorsen, is whether Star Fleet will give you any trouble."

"No problem, I'm retired now." Halvorsen chuckled. "As a matter of fact, I was just talking to Roan and Karras about that. You'll forgive me for asking Captain Morgan first if he had an extra cubbyhole for me on his ship. He was pleased--says he's going to go into the ferry service for passengers to and from the *Ormenel*. Karras said that he felt left out--everyone was going to the *Ormenel* but him." Halvorsen paused and gave Kor an inquisitive, frowning look. "Karras also said he'd give his inheritance to see me ask you, Kor, for a fish dinner in your domain."

Kor and Tavia looked at each other and laughed helplessly. Kor took pity on Halvorsen's puzzlement. "If that son of mine doesn't stop making uncalled-for remarks, I'll take his inheritance from him," he growled. "The fact is, Halvorsen. . . fish has been banished from the Rasethi's dining hall for many years." He made a face and said sheepishly, "I don't like fish."

Halvorsen looked at him incredulously, no doubt thinking of all the fish Kor had consumed while on Proalfalfa. "No fish dinners? But that ruins everything! Don't you realize why I'm coming with you?"

Kor and Tavia gaped at Halvorsen. Tavia's father spread his hands wide, and said, with a snide grin, "It's just for the halibut!"



TAVITA



ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A CINEMA SOMEWHERE ON TERRA

An audience is watching an old video show, an episode of a serial called Star Trek, entitled "Errand of Mercy." The soundtrack dialogue is in old Terran English (somewhat different from Modern System). Suddenly the film grinds to a halt. The people in the cinema begin to protest but are silenced by an announcement:

THE VOICE OF
THE FEDERATION MINISTER OF
PUBLIC INFORMATION

It is the sad duty of the Ministry of Public Information to inform the people of the United Federation of Planets that Terra, the last stronghold against the Klingon invasion, has fallen. The Ormen Alkarin has proclaimed his wife, the former Tavia Nelson of Proalfalfa and Star Fleet, Empress of the Federation.

SCENE TWO

HAIL TO TAVITA/OH WHAT A CIRCUS

KOR and TAVIA's coronation. ROAN is the only non-participant. He moves through the celebrants, as though unseen.

CROWD

Salve regina ama Tavita
salve regina
Tavita! Tavita!

ROAN

Oh what a circus! Oh what a show!
The Federation has gone to town
over the taking of Terra
by Alkarin's mob.
They've all gone crazy,
cheering the conquering forces that ride
through every borough and town
with brandished swords at their sides.
Oh what an entrance! What a sight!
The Ormen and Ormenek both
are moving into the UFP Council Hall now.
It's quite a moment,
and good for the Feds in a devious way:
the red tape's been cut forever for us today

But who is this ama Tavita?
Why all the smiles at the occupation?
How did she do it, convince the public?
How will she keep them cheering tomorrow?

She has her moments, she has some style.
The best show of all is the way
she tells the story of Ormenek Tavia Nelson.
But that's all over,
now that the Klingons are finally here;
we're all going to see how she buried
our fears.

CROWD

Salve regina, welcome to Terra, our new
queen.
Thank you for bringing us the Klingons;
salve salve regina.
You've brought us changes, thrown out
the bureaucrats, Tavia.
You've ended the feud over borders and
joined us
instead with the Empire.

ROAN

You snowballed your people, Tavita.
They swallowed every last word you ut-
tered.
They wanted order;
that's what you gave them;
but not quite in the way they expected.
Sing, you fools! But you got it wrong!
Enjoy your parade because you haven't
got long.
The queen is here, the king's here too;
they'll expect a lot from you.
Show business kept us all amazed
from the earliest of her spying days;
but the spy's returned, the Klingons
are in;
that's a pretty bad way for peace to
begin.
Instead of a war we had parades;
instead of phasers they used verbal gre-
nades;
instead of anger she mellowed the crowd;
she said a lot and she said it loud.
And who am I who dares to say
this should have gone the other way?
Why the exception to the rule?
Opportunist? Traitor? Fool?

Or just a man who knew them when she was just in school and he not Ormen, who knows the best on either side, who knows that honor here has died!

Sing, you fools! But you got it wrong! Enjoy your parade because you haven't got long.

The queen is here, the king's here too; they'll expect a lot from you!

CROWD

Salve regina, welcome to Terra, our new queen.

Thank you for bringing us the Klingons; salve regina Tavia Nelson.

You've brought us changes, thrown out the bureaucrats, Tavia.

You've ended the feud over borders and joined us instead with the Empire.

An elegantly dressed TAVIA moves through the pageantry of the ceremony.

TAVIA

Don't cry to me, Federation.

For I am only a human woman and undeserving of such attention unless you give it to your new Ormen.

Ride on my train, o my people, and when it's your turn to rise you'll remember

the Klingons came here and brought new order--

not just for Tavia, for the UFP; not just for Tavia, for everybody; so share my glory, share in the Empire. So share my glory, share in the Empire.

ROAN

He's our Ormen now, too. . .

SCENE THREE

JOIN THE FIGHT/TAVIA AND THE ADMIRAL/
TAVIA BEWARE OF THE KLINGONS

Flashback to Star Fleet Academy graduation, Tavia's class. Tavia is twenty. The speeches are nearly over. Star Fleet Intelligence Admiral Magaldi is speaking with great vigor.

ROAN

Now, Tavia Nelson had every advantage you need if you're going to succeed. Money and class, a father who's in Star Fleet--but her career was nowhere at the age of twenty, as this admiral found out.

An Intelligence recruiter. Admiral Magaldi--who has the distinction of being the first man to be of aid to Tavia Nelson.

ADMIRAL MAGALDI

Join the fight in the thousand stars; let us take you to the Empire's door where the secrets of security leak forever more.

In Intelligence work you'll find excitement, danger, and hazard pay. Join the fight against tyranny; we'll show you the way.

I never dreamed that one post could be better than most;

now I know that it can.

I used to wander around with my feet on the ground;

I was a desk-bound man.

But all my grief disappeared and all the boredom I feared

wasn't there anymore;

on that magical day SFI came my way--spies galore.

Join the fight--

join the fight--

join the fight in the thousand stars; let us take you to the Empire's door where the secrets of security leak forever more!

TAVIA

To think that SFI, as clever as they are, could want a poor little nothing like me!

ADMIRAL

The cadets in this class are quite uninspired.

ROAN

Listen chum, face the fact: they don't like your act.

ADMIRAL

But there's got to be one, who wants to be an agent of Star Fleet Intelligence. I don't dare go back to my boss empty-handed--he'll tear me apart!

ROAN

I understand his feelings.

TAVIA

I want to see if I can be in SFI--Star Fleet Intelligence!

CLASS

She wants to see if she can be in SFI--Star Fleet Intelligence!

ROAN

Just listen to that! This little blonde female! I'd take my chance with your boss!

TAVIA

It's happened at last--I'm starting to get started--I'm moving out of this class.

ADMIRAL

Now Tavia, don't get carried away.

TAVIA

Monotony past--desk job departed--you don't get any meat as a woman in 'Fleet.

ADMIRAL

Don't hear promises I cannot make.

TAVIA

What's that? You'd turn down a hot recruit?

ADMIRAL

A hot recruit? Hot about what, I wonder?

TAVIA

I'm your only hope of all these new en-signs. I'll give you all I've got; I might even save your neck. You should be quite relieved I haven't signed up elsewhere till now.

I want to see if I can be in SFI--Star Fleet Intelligence.

Would I have said what I did if I hadn't thought, if I hadn't known, you would make it happen?

ROAN

Seems to me there's no point in resisting; she's made up her mind; you've no choice. Why don't you be the man who discovered her? You'll never be sent back to field work.

ADMIRAL

Intelligence can be paradise for those who have the brains, the brawn, and the conniving--what you need to make a spy. The likes of you get swept out of the airlock with the trash--if you were a big, strapping man---

TAVIA

Screw the men in Star Fleet! I will never yield to them! And they will never deny me anything again! My women friends in Star Fleet at the Academy and I are kept in the back, hidden from view at graduation! If these are the people of Intelligence, I welcome the chance to shine in their company!

ROAN

Do all your new recruits give you this trouble?

ADMIRAL

Tavia, beware of the Klingons! They're nasty and vile, and vicious and evil and cruel. Spies who are caught are swallowed up whole, and spies who are good become what they should not become--mean--in short they go bad.

TAVIA

Bad is good for me--I'm bored, so clean, and so ignored; I've only been predictable--respectable! Men rise out of here, so why oh why oh why the hell can't I; I only want variety--notoriety! I want to see if I can be in SFI--Star Fleet Intelligence!

CLASS

She wants to see if she can be in SFI--Star Fleet Intelligence.

ADMIRAL

Five years from now, maybe longer; you'll be ready to move, you'll have background to prove you can spy; but you'll look at me with a lieutenant's eye and say that I'm crazy

that you have grown lazy
that you no more want SFI.

TAVIA

All you've said to me--was that a dream
or fantasy?
I'll play your agents' games alright,
I'll show you!
I already know what cooks, how to win
over creeps and crooks;
stay with me tonight; I'll show you!
You're going to see that I can be in
SFI--Star Fleet Intelligence!

CLASS

You're going to see that she can be in
SFI--Star Fleet Intelligence!

ADMIRAL

Tavia, beware your ambition;
it's hungry and cold, can't be controlled,
will run wild.
This in a man is a danger enough,
but you are a woman, not
even a woman, not
very much more than a child and what-
ever you say,
I'll not steal you away!

SCENE FOUR

ALL YOU KLINGONS

TAVIA arrives at the border.

TAVIA

What's new, all you Klingons?
I'm new--I want to say I'm gonna stick
to you;
I'll be on like glue!
I get out here with you Klingons;
stand back--you ought to know what'cha
gonna get in me:
just a little touch of spy quality!
Hear me give all the news; I'm a flashy
new System reporter.
At least that's what you'll think as I
get you on my tape recorder.
Don't hold back; I will make you known
afar;
tell the embassy this is where I'm staying.
Hello, all you Klingons!
Get this--just look at me dressed for
my evening show;

ah, but where that show goes!

Take me in, let me see, let me hear,
let me ask, I'm disarming;
and you won't even know that my notes
are in code, I'm so charming.
All I want is a whole lot of success;
tell that Admiral this is where I'm
playing.

Stand back, all you Klingons!
Because you ought to know what'cha gonna
get in me:
just a little touch of spy quality!

And if ever I go too far,
ask you too much about a star
base or two, it's because
I'm just trying to get a scoop;
throw my public for a loop--
my commander, too--that Admiral.

ROAN

On Stardate 2239.5 near the border, a
'skirmish' between a fleet of Star Fleet's
finest and the colonists of Kebnek. The
governor of Kebnek said he had never
seen a sneak attack quite like it. Even
by the standards of Star Fleet Intelli-
gence the bombardment in the towns was
overzealous. The result of the raid?
Star Fleet overran the planet--and its
dilithium mine--but, as the governor of
Kebnek pointed out, Star Fleet hadn't
heard the last of this.

TAVIA

You are dangerous, devious, difficult,
dastardly, deadly;
but you're active, adventurous, alien,
alive--oh I love you.
Put me down for a lifetime of success;
give me credits; they're my way of paying.
Kebnek, Shiemisk, Merethrond, Inirth,
Ursha, and of course the Kilingarlan;
all I want to know!
Stand back, all you Klingons!
Because you oughta know what'cha gonna
get in me:
just a little touch of
just a little touch of
just a little touch of spy quality!

SCENE FIVE

GOODNIGHT AND THANK YOU

ROAN

to ADMIRAL MAGALDI

Goodnight and thank you, Magaldi.
 You've completed your task, what more
 could we ask
 of you now?
 Sign the report on your way back to
 'Fleet;
 that will be all;
 if we need you we'll call,
 but I don't think that's likely somehow.

TAVIA

Oh, but it's sad when a love affair dies;
 the parting--I'm off on my own;
 I must be honest, I'm having a ball.

ROAN

Which means your cover's blown.

ROAN AND ADMIRAL

There is no one, no one at all,
 never has been and never will be an agent,
 male or female,
 who hasn't an eye on,
 in fact they rely on,
 tricks they can try on
 their partner;
 they're hoping their rival will help
 them or keep them,
 support them, promote them;
 don't blame them;
 you're the same.

ROAN

to 1st KLINGON OFFICER

Goodnight and thank you, whoever.
 She's gotten the facts, how your squad-
 ron reacts
 in a fight.
 We don't like to rush, but your case has
 been packed;
 if we've 'missed' anything,
 you could give us a ring;
 but we're not often home at night.

TAVIA

Oh, but it's sad when a love affair dies;
 but now that I'm hot I must run;
 don't bother trying to find me again.

ROAN

You might find her gun.

ROAN, TAVIA,
ADMIRAL AND 1ST KLINGON

There is no one, no one at all,
 never has been and never will be an agent,
 male or female,
 who hasn't an eye on,
 in fact they rely on,
 tricks they can try on
 their partner;
 they're hoping their rival will help
 them or keep them,
 support them, promote them;
 don't blame them;
 you're the same.

ROAN

to 2nd KLINGON OFFICER

Goodnight and thank you, whoever.
 We are grateful you named the location
 of famed
 Outpost Nine.
 We'll think of you when it is blown from
 the sky;
 we'd love you to stay,
 but you'd be in the way;
 so your codebook will do us just fine.

TAVIA

Oh, but it's sad when a love affair dies;
 the decline into silence and doubt;
 I think that he may have caught on to
 my act.

ROAN

For God's sake get out!

*By now a fairly long line of TAVIA's
 REJECTED Klingons and others has formed.*

REJECTS

Oh, but this line's an embarrassing
 sight;
 someone has made us look fools;
 Klingons should call the Intelligence
 shots;
 someone has altered the rules.

ROAN

Getting the info back to your home team
 is all very well, if you haven't a dream.
 Tavia needs a life she can grow into more,
 with every day something new to be in store.

REJECTS

Oh, but we think we have heard this before.

SCENE SIX

THE ART OF THE PREDATOR

Five military LEADERS of five warlike races--A Romulan, an Orion, a Tellarite, a Gorn, and (of course) a Klingon, the Ormen KOR Alkarin, are seen moving slowly back and forth in rocking chairs. During the sequence, every time the music stops, the LEADERS rise and one chair is removed.

LEADERS

We'll try to pick
the easy fight.
We'll arm our ships
with beams of light.
We'll run day and night.
Practicing the art of the predator.

The Orion drops out.

We'll cost the Feds
a heavy price.

We can't attack
the same way twice.

That damn cloaking device.

It's part of the art of the predator.

The Romulan drops out.

While the LEADERS continue their game of political musical chairs, TAVIA appears, script in hand, at a microphone.

TAVIA

I'm a news reporter who handles both
sides on my show,
and speaking as one of those Feds, I
want you to know
that compared to what we've got now
a new order walking in now
would be welcomed by a people willing to
serve.

LEADERS

We'll try to stop
them in advance.
We know they like
to take a chance.
Don't fight with stone or lance.
Strategy--the art of the predator.

The Gorn drops out.

We'll try to hit
them from within.
With smaller planets
we'll begin.
At councils we can't win.
Strategy--the art of the predator.

The Tellarite drops out.

VOICES

Alkarin! Alkarin! Alkarin!

SCENE SEVEN

CHARITY CONCERT/I'LL BE SURPRISINGLY GOOD TO YOU

Backstage at Warrior's Memorial Stadium.

TAVIA, by now a well-known reporter, and KOR, the Ormen, are both present. ADMIRAL MAGALDI is on stage, trying to convince the Ormenel that the Federation doesn't want war.

ADMIRAL

A mistake. . .

ROAN

Warrior's Memorial Stadium, the Kiling-
arlan, Stardate 2240.2.

ADMIRAL

A mistake. . .

ROAN

A sword-masters' tournament to aid the
victims of the raid that devastated
Kebnek.

ADMIRAL

A mistake in the thousand stars
somehow took us to Kebnek's door.
We did not mean to cross the line
or to start a war!

ROAN

Noble friends! That was Admiral Magaldi!
Any minute now, the man of the hour!

*The ADMIRAL comes off stage and runs
into TAVIA.*

TAVIA

Your act hasn't changed much.

ADMIRAL

Neither has yours.

The ADMIRAL leaves. The crowd begins to call for KOR. KOR is escorted onto the stage.

CROWD

Warlord! Warlord! Warlord!

KOR

Tonight I'm proud to be the people's Ormen! You've given help to those who've lost their beds--but more than that, aggressively said that the Ormenel must take a stand on the Feds! Make sure their leaders understand our anger!

CROWD

Warlord! Warlord! Warlord!

KOR leaves the stage and finds himself face-to-face with TAVIA.

TAVIA

Ormen Alkarin?

KOR

Tavia Nelson?

TAVIA

I've wanted so to meet you!
I'm amazed, for I should be your enemy--
one of the Feds you hate,
only a voice in the wind.

KOR

I've wanted so to meet you!
I'm amazed, for I should be your enemy--
lord of the kilingau,
defending the Empire he rules.

TAVIA

But when you speak, the things you say
are honorable.

KOR

But when you speak, you don't hide the
wrong in the Federation's actions. Are
you here on your own?

TAVIA

Yes.

KOR

So am I. What a fortunate coincidence.
Maybe you're one sane mind in the human
mob that's here.

TAVIA

It seems crazy, but you must believe;
there's nothing calculated, nothing
planned.

Though my people want me to deceive;
I would never try to take your land;
you must understand--
I'll be good to you.

I don't usually talk this way--
I'm supposed to be in SFI--
telling Klingons I would like to stay;
I don't really understand just why
I do want to try
to be good to you--
I'll be surprisingly good to you.

I won't go on, if it troubles you,
but do you understand my point of view;
do you buy what you hear, what you see,
and could you be
good to me too?

I'm not talking of a single night,
a frantic tumble then a quick good-bye.
Swapping stories in the firelight;
that's not the reason that I caught
your eye,
which has to imply--
I'll be good to you;
I'll be surprisingly good to you.

KOR

Please go on--you intrigue me!
I can understand you perfectly,
and I like what I hear, what I see, and
knowing me--
I could be good to you, too.

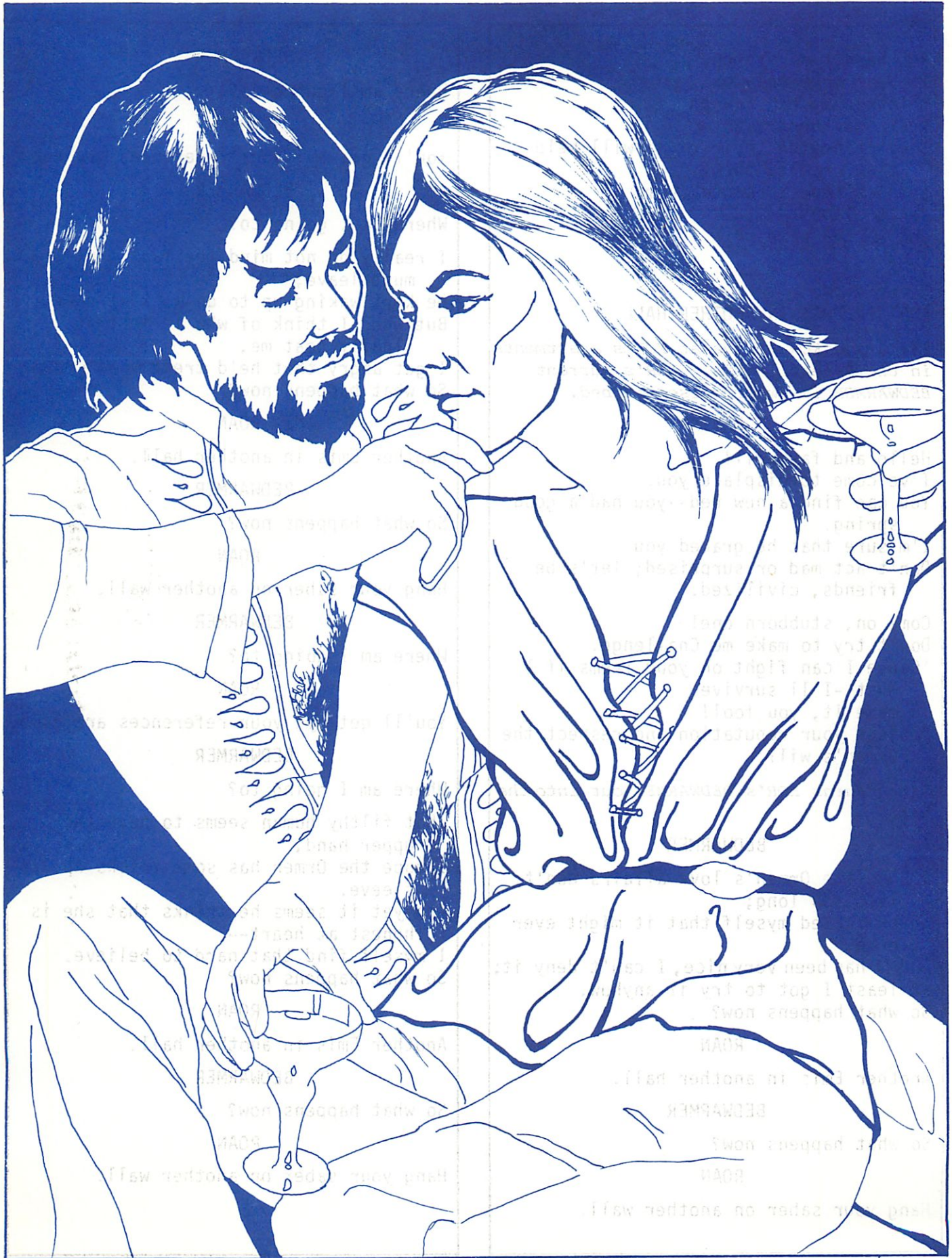
TAVIA

I'm not talking of a single night,
a frantic tumble then a quick good-bye.
Swapping stories in the firelight;
that's not the reason that I caught
your eye,
which has to imply--
I'll be good to you;
I'll be surprisingly good to you.

TAVIA AND KOR

*But neither seems aware
that the other is singing*

There is no one, no one at all,
never has been and never will be an agent,
male or female,



C. WALSKE

who hasn't an eye on,
 in fact they rely on,
 tricks they can try on
 their partner;
 they're hoping their rival will help
 them or keep them,
 support them, promote them;
 don't blame them;
 you're the same.

SCENE EIGHT

ANOTHER EMIS IN ANOTHER HALL

*TAVIA and KOR arrive at KOR's apartments
 in the Rasethi Sarin. KOR's current
 BEDWARMER is--where else--in bed.*

TAVIA

Hello and farewell!
 I've come to displace you.
 You can find a new bed--you had a good
 spring.
 I'm sure that he graced you.
 Don't act mad or surprised; let's be
 friends, civilized.

Come on, stubborn one!
 Don't try to make me Challenge.
 'Cause I can fight on your terms if I
 must--I'll survive.
 So move it, you fool!
 Protect your reputation and respect the
 Ormen's will.

*TAVIA turns KOR's BEDWARMER out into the
 hall.*

BEDWARMER

I know the Ormen's love affairs don't
 last too long;
 never fooled myself that it might ever
 grow.
 And it has been very nice, I can't deny it;
 at least I got to try it anyhow.
 So what happens now?

ROAN

Another Emis in another hall.

BEDWARMER

So what happens now?

ROAN

Hang your saber on another wall.

BEDWARMER

Where am I going to?

ROAN

You'll get by; your references are good.

BEDWARMER

Where am I going to?

I really do not mind the fact that I
 must leave;
 he kept waking up to do work at dawn.
 But when I think of who it is that
 finally beat me,
 I get angry that he'd treat me as a pawn.
 So what happens now?

ROAN

Another Emis in another hall.

BEDWARMER

So what happens now?

ROAN

Hang your saber on another wall.

BEDWARMER

Where am I going to?

ROAN

You'll get by; your references are good.

BEDWARMER

Where am I going to?

That filthy human seems to have the
 upper hand;
 I hope the Ormen has some tricks up his
 sleeve.
 And yet it seems he thinks that she is
 honest at heart--
 I myself find that hard to believe.
 So what happens now?

ROAN

Another Emis in another hall.

BEDWARMER

So what happens now?

ROAN

Hang your saber on another wall.

BEDWARMER

Where am I going to?

ROAN

You'll get by; your references are good.

BEDWARMER

Where am I going to?

ROAN

Don't ask anymore.

SCENE NINE

THE ORMEN'S NEW FLAME

ROAN

In the conference halls down at SFI,
they are raising an angry cry---

SFI BRASS

Precisely!

ROAN

Over Tavia's ploy.

SFI BRASS

You'd better believe it!

ROAN

After all the times she bailed them out--

SFI BRASS

We gave her a chance. . .

ROAN

There isn't a single lout
who wishes her joy.

SFI BRASS

She played us for fools.

What a pain, she's started
living with the Ormen.

Will we ever find a way
to bring her to account?

How we'd love to know
whatever made her do it.
But we'd settle for a way
to wipe her out.

ROAN

Could there be in the Ormen's crew
A certain resistance to---

KLINGON OFFICERS

Exactly!

ROAN

The Ormen's new flame?

KLINGON OFFICERS

Don't you know it!

ROAN

They'd like to get her out of the way,
especially because they
can't pronounce her name.

KLINGON OFFICERS

That isn't funny!

Kor must be blind if he can't even find
a new bedwarmer who's one of his own kind.
She's a human! The last straw.
Her only good point is she keeps him
amused,
but we think he's becoming awfully con-
fused
about the fact that we're at war.

The evidence suggests
she has other interests.
If she's really using him,
her life expectancy is dim.
Spy! Dangerous breed!

SFI BRASS

We have allowed ourselves to slip.
We let her wriggle from our grip.
We have completely lost our pride--
agents are joining the other side.

KLINGON OFFICERS

The Ormen can generally do as he'd please,
as long as he's discreet and nobody sees
that he's taking a big chance.
But he's taken in someone from the
wrong side,
and let her advise him where she's not
qualified,
in the name of a romance.

This could become very bad.
It looks like the Ormen's mad.
She's already moved in.
When will disaster begin?
Spy! Dangerous breed!

TAVIA, the Ormen's lady, enters, flanked by KLINGON GUARDS.

ROAN

in the guise of a UFP reporter

I see that you've left our team, Ms. Nelson.

Your new life must be a dream, Ms. Nelson.

Is this an easier role to play?
Whom did you sleep--chat with yesterday?

TAVIA

I wonder who inspired your interest in me?

It shows how stupid SFI can be.

ROAN

Can we assume then that you've quit?
Is this behind your association with Ormen Alkarin?

KLINGON GUARDS

Goodnight and thank you.

They push ROAN aside and TAVIA out.

KLINGON OFFICERS

She won't be kept happy by her nights on the tiles.

She says it's his body, but she's after his files.

So get back to SFI!

She must never be allowed to get the Ormen really cowed.

She might someday get to see just how strong we all can be.

The evidence suggests she has other interests.
If it's her who's using him, her life expectancy is dim.

SFI BRASS

She has made a pretty mess, when both sides are made to guess, whom she is really working for; there are surprises now in store.

SCENE TEN

A NEW FEDERATION

KOR

Fleets are forming; the swords are out. Would-be warlords are taking heart.

I don't say they mean harm, but they'd each give an arm--
to see the humans blown apart.

TAVIA

I have to tell you that the time is right.

The Terran leaders are a feeble crew. You could walk right in without a fight; provided that you had an agent who was working for you.

All you have to do is sit and wait; they'll be begging for a new command. We'll--you'll be handed power on a plate, when the people rise up and demand the bureaucrats downed, you can most graciously agree to be crowned.

KOR

There again, it could be foolish not to quit while we're ahead.

We have taken twenty planets in just one day.

For now, I'm a barbarian; more important, I'm still here. I don't want to go to live on Terra anyway.

TAVIA

This is crazy lazy warrior's talk. Why commit galactic suicide? There's no risk; there's a call for any action at all--
you'll have the people on your side.

FEDERATION CITIZENS

Alkarin! Alkarin!

ROAN

A new Federation!
The chains of red tape now untied.
A new Federation!
The voice of the people cannot be denied!

TAVIA

There is only one man who can lead a
united regime.
He's lived with your problems; he'll
solve them; it's not just a dream.
He supports you, for he knows you, un-
derstands you, will work for you.
If not--how could he love me?

FEDERATION CITIZENS

A new Federation!
The people's battle song!
A new Federation!
The idiots in Star Fleet will not rule
for long!

TAVIA

Now I am a Fed and I've suffered the
way that you do.
I've been shoved by Star Fleet, I've
served, and I've hated it too.
But I found my salvation in the Ormen
and the Klingons.
Let him save you as he saved me.

ROAN

A new Federation!
A new age about to begin!

ROAN AND KLINGON GUARDS

A new Federation!
We face the dawn together and no dissent
within.

GUARDS lay into ROAN.

FEDERATION CITIZENS
OF DIFFERENT SPECIES

A realignment of the planet rights that
the Council now controls!
Participation by all species in the
government.
Lower taxes to the humans. Fewer Star
Fleet brass on top.
More open books and accounting for each
credit spent.

KOR

It's annoying, I would rather fight real
battles for our cause.
What inconvenience--trying to get public
sympathy.

If all these methods of persuasion fail
to win us applause,
there are better ways of establishing
authority.

KLINGON GUARDS

We have ways of making you welcome us,
or at least of making you obey.

TAVIA

The Ormen has joined with the people
and you will soon see--
the UFP standard means nothing but
hypocrisy.
He supports you, for he knows you, un-
derstands you, will work for you.
If not--how could he love me?

ALL

A new Federation!
The chains of red tape now untied!
A new Federation!
The voice of the people cannot be, and
will not be, and must not be denied!

KOR

There again, it could be foolish
not to quit while we're ahead.
We've already moved the border
two light-years.
All this talking's getting boring;
I should polish my sword,
go back home to the Kilingarlan
amid cheers.

TAVIA

Don't think I don't think like you, I
often get those nightmares too;
they always take some swallowing.
Sometimes it's very difficult to keep
momentum if
it's you that you are following.
Don't forget
to have your fleet set
because we've not yet
taken Terra.
But would I have done what I did
if I hadn't thought, if I hadn't known--
we would make it all ours?

ALL

A new Federation!
The chains of red tape now untied!

A new Federation!
The voice of the people cannot be, and
will not be, and must not be denied!

ACT TWO

SCENE ELEVEN

ON THE PORCH OF THE NELSON HOME/DON'T
CRY TO ME FEDERATION

*The Klingons have made their way to Pro-
alfalfa, TAVIA's (and ROAN's) home
planet. They are speaking from the
porch of TAVIA's father's house. A
CROWD has gathered in the garden below.*

ROAN

People of Proalfalfa! Your hope for the
future--Kor Alkarin!

*The CROWD begins to chant "Alkarin!
Alkarin!"*

KOR

Proalfalfans! Proalfalfans! We are all
beardless now!

Fighting against our common enemies--
bureaucracy, social injustice, Star

Fleet domination of your colonies!

Reaching for our common goals--
for understanding, for dignity, for
pride!

Let the Council know that a great Chal-
lenge is now being raised,
and that its heart beats in the humble
bodies of Kor

Alkarin and his wife, a daughter of Pro-
alfalfa--

Tavia Kathleen Nelson!

ROAN

As a mere observer of this tasteless
phenomenon,
one has to admire the stage management--

GUARDS move in on ROAN.

There again, perhaps. I'm more than a
mere observer.

Listen to my enthusiasm, gentlemen!

Alkarin! Alkarin! Alkarin!

Look, if I grow a beard, will you. . .

GUARDS bundle ROAN away.

*The CROWD by now is beginning to chant
"Tavita! Tavita!"*

TAVIA

It won't be easy, you'll think it strange,
when I try to explain how I feel,
that I still want to help after all
that I've done.

You won't believe me;
all you will see is the spy you once knew,
standing here with Klingon guards;
but I swear that it's true.

I had to make it happen, I had to change;
now the time's come for you to change,
too,
climb above all the mockery, reach for
the sun.

They call this freedom;
ten thousand forms for a mere sack of
grain,
and not even good grain at that,
when all is said and done.

Don't cry to me, Federation:
the truth is I never loved you,
all through my spy days,
that mad existence,
they broke their promise--
I kept my distance.

And as for Star Fleet and SFI,
they never welcomed me in;
though it seemed to the world they were
all I admired.

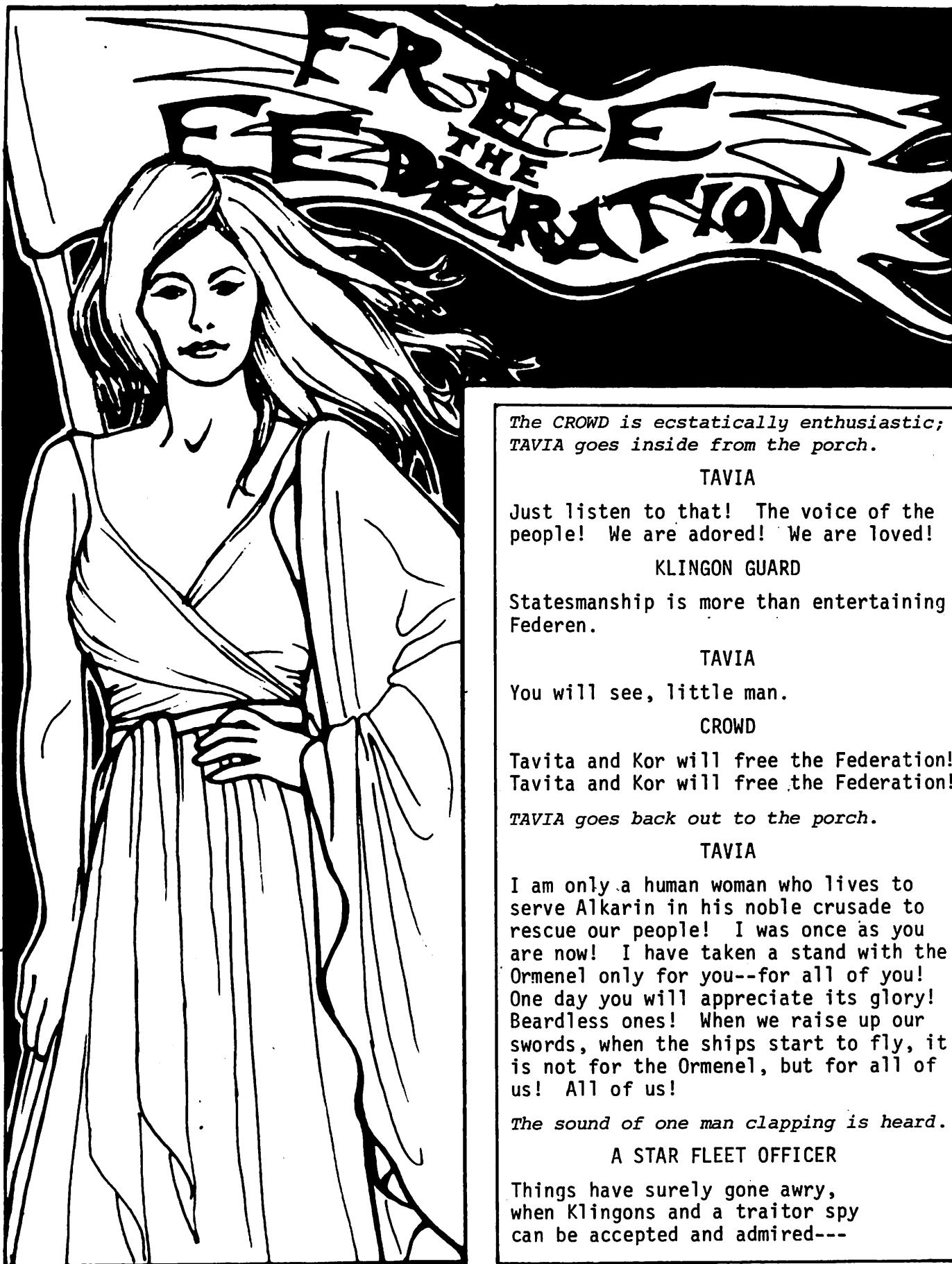
They breed illusions,
and not the solutions they promised to be;
the answer grows plainer each day--
they'll use you just as they used me.
Don't cry to me, Federation. . .

*TAVIA breaks down; the CROWD takes up
her tune.*

TAVIA

Don't cry to me, Federation:
The truth is I never loved you,
all through my spy days,
that mad existence,
they broke their promise--
I kept my distance.

Have I said enough? There are a thou-
sand things I can say to you.
But all you have to do is look at me to
know that every word is true!



The CROWD is ecstatically enthusiastic; TAVIA goes inside from the porch.

TAVIA

Just listen to that! The voice of the people! We are adored! We are loved!

KLINGON GUARD

Statesmanship is more than entertaining Federen.

TAVIA

You will see, little man.

CROWD

Tavita and Kor will free the Federation!
Tavita and Kor will free the Federation!

TAVIA goes back out to the porch.

TAVIA

I am only a human woman who lives to serve Alkarin in his noble crusade to rescue our people! I was once as you are now! I have taken a stand with the Ormenel only for you--for all of you! One day you will appreciate its glory! Beardless ones! When we raise up our swords, when the ships start to fly, it is not for the Ormenel, but for all of us! All of us!

The sound of one man clapping is heard.

A STAR FLEET OFFICER

Things have surely gone awry, when Klingons and a traitor spy can be accepted and admired---

TAVIA

Now your insufferable rule is dead!
Look who they are calling for now!

SCENE TWELVE

HIGH SPYING DEPLORED

ROAN

High spying, deplored; so soon, the
Ormen's agent--
a sure-fire machine, his secret weapon,
his human regent.
Trying to conquer, you divide--
saying you're just a human who
offers a better way
with Klingons here to stay.

High spying, deplored; do you believe,
in your wildest dreams--
all this will be yours, that you'll be-
come the lady of us all?
Has the Ormen told you that it will all
come true?
Or don't you care if we're blown up
and there is no one left at all?
You may be a very lonely queen.

High spying, deplored; you can't believe
we'll just let it happen--
you've made your big mistake, you crossed
the border, you're not so safe.
As soon as they can they'll tie you up;
it's just a matter of time;
they'll put a stop to you;
they'll put a lock on you.

High spying, deplored; I hope you're
ready to face defeat--
even if the Ormen wins, you won't be
here to share his glory--NO!
SFI's made up its mind to be rid of you;
they have got the best reason:
you'll be tried for treason;
every double agent will be found.

TAVIA

High spying, deplored; they're only
words: they cannot harm me.
The people will be my key, they will
support me, and anyway I know
when the Ormen is with me, I can speak
at will.
Diplomatic immunity
will always protect me;
let Star Fleet just try and touch me now.

SCENE THIRTEEN
RAINBOW SPY

TAVIA

I don't really want to hear
the reasons why I need to fear;
I'm on my way!
Let's get this show on the road;
let's make it obvious
the Klingons are advancing.

TAVIA'S KLINGON ENTOURAGE

Blue! Green! Brown! Orange!
Andor! Earth! Vulcan!
Pigs! Bears! Apes! Lizards!
Mud! Ice! Grass! Desert!

TAVIA

We'll start at the border
and move in toward Terra;
there's no room for error;
each step must be right.
I'll change with each venue;
I'm everyone's Rainbow Spy!
Each stop will be different--
and so will I.

ENTOURAGE

Blue! Green! Brown! Orange!
Andor! Earth! Vulcan!

TAVIA

I'm an agent;
I've got to be faceless;
though it may be tasteless,
I've got to look right.
I'll paint myself yellow;
I'm everyone's Rainbow Spy!
Each species looks different--
and so must I.

ENTOURAGE

Blue! Green! Brown! Orange!
Andor! Earth! Vulcan!
Pigs! Bears! Apes! Lizards!
Mud! Ice! Grass! Desert!

TAVIA

All the beardless ones think they're the
only ones here in the galaxy--the uni-
verse. I must always humor them!

I'm a Tellarite!
 A bright green Orion!
 A Gorn or a Troyian;
 anything goes--
 to carry Kor's message,
 I'm everyone's Rainbow Spy!
 I'm having a great time--
 I'm not masquerading for fun--it's my
 neck on the line,
 but I am convinced that we'll win--it'll
 all turn out fine!

Next stop, the Federation!
 The Rainbow's gonna tour--
 dressed up ready to go,
 I'll put on a show!

Look out, Federation!
 Because you oughta know what'cha gonna
 get in me:
 just a little touch of
 just a little touch of
 Tavia Nelson's brand of
 spy quality!

SCENE FOURTEEN
BRAINWASH TOUR

KOR and some of his GUARDS reflect on TAVIA's Federation progress. ROAN takes over many of the GUARDS' lines during this sequence and also adds various comments of his own.

KOR

Federation citizens! I send you the
 Rainbow of the Ormenel!

ROAN AND GUARDS

Andor's fallen to the charms of Tavia.
 She can say what she likes--they eat up
 every word;
 she's a sky-blue ambassador and have
 you heard--
 she conned them into pulling their
 troops out of Star Fleet;
 for once she wiggled those mushroom an-
 tennae,
 'twasn't hard.

Andor's place in Council isn't a small
 one;
 so you've just acquired an ally who
 can sway other planets to go with you.

More important, you've a new trick to
 call on;
 your bedwarmer is now an asset,
 your trump card.

KOR AND GUARDS

Let's hear it for the Brainwash Tour;
 it's been an incredible success;
 we weren't quite sure, we had a few
 doubts---

ROAN

Would Tavia come through?

KOR AND GUARDS

But the answer is yes!

TAVIA
on Andor

There you are, I told you so;
 makes no difference where I go;
 the Federation will be mine;
 it just will take a little time.
 But who will underestimate the human now?

KOR

I'm not underestimating you--just do the
 same thing elsewhere please.

ROAN AND GUARDS

Now, I'm not trying to make the Ormen
 worry,
 but she was shouted down by the Argelians,
 and lost the Triskelians and Rigelians,
 and the Vegans aren't impressed with
 Tavia's story;
 they say the Ormen is a Tyrant--
 can't think why.

TAVIA
on Deneb

Did you hear that?
 They called me a whore!
 They actually called me a whore!

A DENEBIAN SLIMEDEVIL

But Ambassador Nelson,
 it's an easy mistake:
 I'm still called a slimedevil,
 though I gave up the swamps long ago.

ROAN AND GUARDS

Things aren't all that bad, the Melkot agrees;
The Caitians and Iotians have a kindly word;
she even got a medal from a big yellow bird.
Though the Ormenel's move into power won't be a breeze,
she still made a fabulous impact--
caught the eye.

KOR AND GUARDS

Let's hear it for the Brainwash Tour;
it's been an incredible success;
we weren't quite sure, we had a few doubts---

ROAN

Would Tavita come through?

KOR AND GUARDS

But the answer is---

ROAN

A qualified---

KOR AND GUARDS

Yes!

ROAN AND GUARDS

Tavia started well, no question, on Terra;
she left her disguises behind her here,
a beautiful reminder of human cheer.
She thought she'd wow them, that's where she made her error;
she forgot about the SFI warning;
she got stalled.

KOR AND GUARDS

Stalled? Tavia stalled?

ROAN.

Face the facts, the Rainbow needs her warpaint;
I don't think she'll make it to Vulcan now.

KOR

It wasn't on the schedule anyhow.

ROAN

You'd better get out the wine and fix up her bed:
She's gonna need a little vacation;
she's worked hard.

KOR AND GUARDS

Let's hear it for the Brainwash Tour;
it's been an incredible success;
we weren't quite sure, we had a few doubts--
would Tavita come through?

ROAN

And the answer is---

KOR AND GUARDS

Yes---

ROAN

And no!

KOR AND GUARDS

And yes---

ROAN

And no!

KOR AND GUARDS

And yes. . . and no.
Let's hear it for the Brainwash Tour;
it's been an incredible success. . .

TAVIA

back at the border

Who the hell does T'Pau of Vulcan think she is?
Tea with some tinpot ambassador of hers--what kind of invitation is that?
The Ormen's First Lady deserves T'Pau of Vulcan!
If Vulcan can do without me,
then the Klingons can do without Vulcan!

SCENE FIFTEEN

THE HUMAN HASN'T GIVEN UP

KLINGON OFFICERS

Thus all double agents flop;
only a human wouldn't stop,
when she could say she was ahead;
she's lucky she's alive--not dead.

My how the men in SFI
sure perked up fast when she went by.
My how the men in SFI
sure perked up fast when she went by.

TAVIA

The human hasn't given up, as you have
done;
she won't go into hiding to save her
own skin, to be protected,
by not making speeches and traveling to
the Federation.

She won't be stopped by some SFI nitwits
who are after her--
even if they should get close to her--
and they should not get close to her.

The human hasn't given up, as you have
done;
she won't turn away, she won't run and
hide;
she won't sit around and wait for war-
ships or inventions;
she will make her own conventions,
till she's won.

ROAN

to OFFICERS

Forgive my intrusion, but out at the
border I've heard
that sentiment's changing, the people
are passing her word.
I think you had better climb back into
your ships today;
the people and UFP planets are turning
your way.

TAVIA

All that I've done will start paying
off in the invasion.

SCENE SIXTEEN

AND THE PLANETS KEEP ROLLING IN

ROAN

*and FEDERATION CITIZENS
on choruses*

And the planets keep rolling in from
every star!
Tavia's convincing words were heard
afar.
That doesn't mean that she stayed home
and let things run their course--
that's not her way, my friends.

When the planets start rolling in, you
start to play,
feeling like a queen you practice it
every day;

Tavia knows the people need a leader
for their cause--
never been a symbol like the agent
Tavia Nelson!

Rolling, rolling, rolling,
rolling on in.

The opinion of the public is a help to
an invasion,
but the holding of a planet takes a
little more persuasion;
Tavia and the Klingon troops will watch
your every move;
and that's just the start, my friends.
When the troops start rolling out, you
can't turn back;
you will never be rid of the uniforms,
gold and black;
and if you're stopped by one of them,
you're gonna have to prove
that you're loyal to the Ormen and his
Tavia Nelson.

Rolling, rolling, rolling,
rolling on out.

So the troops keep rolling out in all
directions;
taking all kinds of planets and people
of all complexions;
now cynics claim that leaders have a
way of disappearing;
but that's not the point, my friends.
If the people say they're happy, don't
complain, just follow us;
Tavia says that the Ormen's one man you
can trust;
so raise a cheer and lend a hand, the
rubble still needs clearing;
build a new pavilion in the name of
Tavia Nelson!

Rolling, rolling, rolling,
rolling on out.

If the planets keep rolling in, you
welcome them,
and hope the little ones bring the big
ones after them;
Tavia visits every one and sways them
with her speeches;
but don't try to leave, my friends.

Once your planet's been absorbed you'll
never find your way out;
and the radio won't tell you what the
fight is all about.
All you'll hear are marching songs and
Klingon language teachers;
somehow they all sound just like our
lady Tavia Nelson!

GUARDS lay into ROAN--again.

Rolling, rolling, rolling,
rolling on in.

SCENE SEVENTEEN
EMPRESS TAVITA

COLONISTS
of a small colony

Please, Empress Tavia, will you take
our colony?
For we love you--tell the Ormen we're
doing our best;
we're betting on him, 'cause we know
his troops are the best.
Please, Empress Tavia, will you look
upon us as your own?
Make us special, tell the Ormen, we
know that he is wonderful, perfect
and true,
and we'll honor him the same as you do.
Please, Empress Tavia, will you take
our colony?
For we love you. . .

ROAN

Con them with your words, Tavita. Con
them with false hopes.

COLONISTS

Tell the Ormen we're doing our best;
we're betting on him, 'cause we know
his troops are the best.

FEDERATION CITIZENS

Empress, Empress Tavita,
symbol of our liberation,
of all our aspirations,
an Ormenel vacation,
a Klingon occupation
of the Federation.

ROAN

Why bother with an invasion when you
are invited in?

SCENE EIGHTEEN
WALTZ FOR TAVIA AND ROAN

*TAVIA has been detained by Star Fleet
Intelligence and is awaiting questioning.*

ROAN

Tell me before I turn you into Star
Fleet,
before SFI's men take aim--
it's now a rhetorical question,
but how long did you think you could
keep up this game?

Tell me before you are hauled off and
locked up;
there's one thing you never made clear--
how can you claim Kor's our savior,
when those who oppose him
are stepped on, or cut up, or simply
disappear?

TAVIA

Tell me before you get righteous and
proud,
before serving me up to the spies;
how can one person like me play
such an important role in the Fed's
demise?

Tell me before you commit me to prison,
just what you plan for an encore;
will you hear any words that I say,
or will you just listen to Star Fleet
and shut out all my followers--
beardless ones, Klingons and more.

ROAN AND TAVIA

There is treason, ever around, funda-
mental;
naming the culprits is quite incidental.

TAVIA

But when it's so bad, it
seems everyone's had it
up till here;
better arrange
for an Ormenel change
and you know people will cheer.

ROAN

Go on and preach, you have just time
enough,
before you're packed away on a shelf;
but you can't tell me you're shortsighted,

and never looked farther than Alkarin's
bedroom
and not wanted power yourself.

TAVIA

I wondered how long you could hold in
your anger,
before you'd bring up that affair;
what we shared was nothing compared to
what Kor and I share both in
love and ideas;
you'd never allow me
to be what I could be,
even if I'd stayed for one hundred years.

ROAN AND TAVIA

There is treason, ever around, funda-
mental;
naming the culprits is quite incidental.

TAVIA

So shut up, you jealous
and quite overzealous
informer.

Throw 'way the key;
I will still be free;
I've no fear, dear;
is that clear, dear?

Oh, what I'd give for a cozy bed,
with a Klingon to stroke my head;
I love him so--o my Ormen!
All that I'll miss in this stupid cell
is the body I know so well
and it's almost spring--he'll miss me,
also.

SCENE NINETEEN
SHE IS A PRISONER

KLINGON OFFICERS

It's all very well, to a certain extent;
at least this time we know where the
hell she went;

we've got her out of our hair.
But let's not be blind to the drift of
events;

we've now got a foul-tempered Alkarin;
he's taking it as a dare.

He is polishing his sword,
preparing to be the warlord;
he wants us all to raise a shout,
so that the Feds will let her out.

ROAN

What's new, Federation? Your Council,
which a few years ago had total control
of the member worlds, is a shambles!
A union which grew out of a desire for
justice is squandering it! The Klingons,
our traditional enemy and symbol of re-
pression in the galaxy, are nearing
Terra on their conquest of all Federa-
tion territories! I'll tell you what's
new Federation!

KOR

to OFFICERS; ROAN has gone

But you must recognize, we need her help;
she's their symbol of a better way of
life, and without
her voice--we're gonna face a lot of
strife.

And when you think about it, have you
addressed
how they will react to Tavia's arrest?

She's not a bauble you can brush aside;
she's been out drumming up support for
our cause--example--
conned the humans into changing all of
the laws
that would prohibit Klingons coming to
live
on worlds covered by their Prime Di-
rective.

Besides it won't look well, if she's
found guilty;
it might get people thinking that she's
wrong or something;
anyway, it's here with me that she be-
longs;
after all she's done at least we owe
her this;
she's kept things from ever going amiss.

KLINGON OFFICERS

She's the one who got you into this.

SCENE TWENTY
TAPES ARE ROLLING

*TAVIA is granted a prisoner's one sub-
space radio call--to KOR*

KOR

Tapes are rolling, cameras are out;
admirals listening in every nook;
and as far as they can--overweight to
a man--
they have that lean and hungry look.

TAVIA

But we still have the magic that we
have built! The beardless ones, they
all still worship me--we have triumphed
thanks to them and screw the rest; to
hell with the admirals--a clutch of
stuffed cuckoos!

KOR

It's not a question of a public show;
trials can be secret, manipulated---

TAVIA

You're wrong--the people, my people---

KOR

The people don't count for Star Fleet!
They're civilians, can be ignored as
children, have no say. However much
they love you now, it matters more that
as far as those stuffed cuckoos are con-
cerned, they don't politically exist.

TAVIA

So they don't exist! So they count for
nothing! Try saying that on Antares,
Izar or Babel. The people will triumph.
Most of those admirals couldn't be
elected garbage collectors! But they
will hear the people when you're pro-
claimed the Emperor!

KOR

That might work. . . but it will have
to come shortly. They've got you shut
away--you'd never overcome them with a
hundred rallies and even if you did---

TAVIA

Yes?

KOR

It's safer if we show a little strength:
a thousand warriors marching might im-
press them somewhat,
threatening their courtroom, spreading
planet-wide

will show them that we're a force to
reckon with;
we will prove that a Klingon presence
is no myth.

TAVIA

It's not that bad--it could be worse,
they could hide me;
as long as there is a trial, and you're
beside me;
we will have a forum,
all pomp and decorum,
and even a quorum
of Councillors.
We'll take a stand,
and we'll show up those
admirals and commodores;
and if I am killed--that could even be
to your advantage.

KOR

Advantage? This all has no point if
you are not with me.

This talk of death is chilling--of
course you're not going to die.

TAVIA

Then I will see you made Emperor!

They will see how the people will come
here

to speak out against the old regime,
in thousands from planets and asteroids,
emptying the colonies and moons,
from every sun, star base or space
station

for a new Federation's creation.

And I will also be made Empress!

*TAVIA is surrounded by guards who pull
her away from the viewscreen.*

KOR

So what happens now?
So what happens now?

TAVIA

Where am I going to?

KOR

Don't ask anymore.

SCENE TWENTY-ONE
TAVIA'S TRIAL

ROAN

Forgive my intrusion, Tavita, I just came to see how you admit you have lost--a brand-new experience.

It's started at last! The trial of the century!
We'll see who'll come out on top!

TAVIA

I'll never stop defending what I think is right;
I'm sad for my people,
sad that they must witness this crude fiasco.

Acting in her own defense, TAVIA steps forward to make her opening statement.

I want to tell the people of the Federation regardless of how this trial ends; they should never forget what brought me here today;
I'll be contented if I only live on, as the woman who brought her people to the heart of the Ormen!

Don't cry for me, Federation;
the truth is I never left you;
I simply found a new way of living;
I'll share it with you,
if you're forgiving.

Have I said enough? There are a thousand things I can say to you.
But all you have to do is look at me to know that every word is true.

SCENE TWENTY-TWO
MONTAGE

As the trial progresses, people from TAVIA's past come to testify; KOR arrives, with his warriors; a crowd of FEDERATION CITIZENS enter.

ROAN

She had her moments in SFI;
when we thought she'd do well for us all,

but then she turned to the Klingons and sold us all out;
the rest is history. . .

ADMIRAL MAGALDI

Tavia, beware your ambition. . .

TAVIA

Damn Star Fleet Intelligence! I could never believe them and they will never deceive my people ever again. My father was in Star Fleet and now even he can see all the good the Klingons bring. . .

It seems crazy, but you must believe--there's nothing calculated, nothing planned,
but there are benefits you will receive, if the Ormenel can rule your land,
so please understand. . .

FEDERATION CITIZENS

A new Federation!
The chains of red tape now untied!
A new Federation!
The voice of the people cannot be and will not be and must not be. . .

KOR

High flying, adored; they've come to cheer her onward;
a rich, beautiful thing--to watch the people go rushing toward the Ormenel's domination of their worlds. . .

FEDERATION CITIZENS

Empress, Empress Tavita,
symbol of our liberation,
of all our aspirations,
an Ormenel vacation. . .

ROAN

Sing you fools, but you've got it wrong;
enjoy your parade because you haven't got long;
a Klingon rule will not be fun;
you'll regret what you have done.

FEDERATION CITIZENS

. . .A Klingon occupation of the Federation.

SCENE TWENTY-THREE
 CLOSING STATEMENT

Order is restored in the courtroom, and TAVIA again comes forward.

TAVIA

The choice was mine, and mine completely;
 I could live any life that I desired;
 I could burn with the splendor of the
 Ormen's fire;
 or else, I could come here and fight.

Remember, I was never timid,
 so I chose to return and to impress
 the honor, justice, and the Klingon way
 on all my people so oppressed.

And I worked hard! And they heard!
 And how soon they believed each word!

O my people! You have won!
 Now judge all that I have done.

FEDERATION CITIZENS

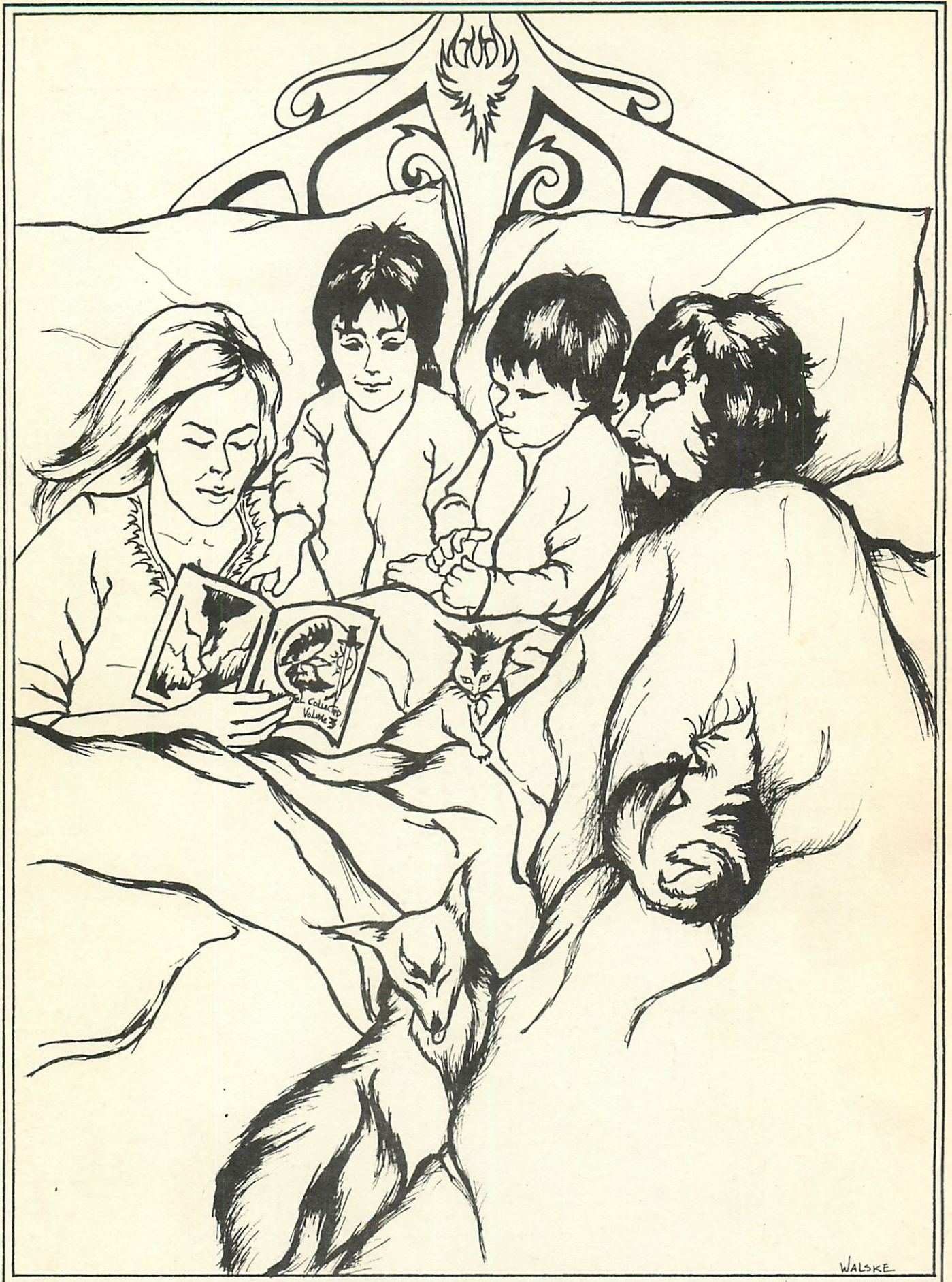
She speaks for the people
 whom she truly serves;
 we now demand her freedom
 no less than she deserves.

*The people in the crowd lift TAVIA and
 KOR to their shoulders and carry them
 out.*

ALL

A new Federation!
 A new age about to begin!
 A new Federation!
 The voice of the people hails the
 Klingons, and the Ormen, and Tavia
 Nelson!

THE END



WALSKE