

2565 A.D.!

A TALE OF ADVENTURE IN THE SECOND DARK AGE OF MAN

By Jerome B. Bigge

Book Two

Chapter One

"Bring her up into the wind!" I snapped to the man at the Squala's wheel, watching the wooded shoreline spin around as he spun the wheel, the sails flapping as men scurried to obey my nervous commands. Lady Tirana smiling as she stood there at my side watching everything. "Drop the anchor!" I cried to the men there at the forecastle, a sudden splash making me jump a bit as they followed my orders. The peaceful tree shaded shoreline now enclosing us on three sides. The sun glittering off the rippling waters of the cove, a slave girl standing there on the dock, blonde, beautiful, a gleaming collar locked around her neck, watching us. A dark haired girl of perhaps five or so there at her side, clinging to the woman's right hand. The blonde slave's white cotton shift leaving no doubt that she was indeed truly a delight, her face and figure through the telescope even reminding me something of those of her Imperial Royal Highness, Darlanis Marden of California! And that was dear little Mara standing there at her side in a red cotton dress just as cute as could be! Ready to greet her new foster mother, Lorraine Duval, a woman of the 20th Century. A woman of an era now mostly myth and legend!!

Turning, I watched the Seahawk dip her flag in salute before going on, saw Lara standing there waving at me next to her husband. Her neck chain glittering in the bright sunlight. Marking her for all to see as being "his woman". I like the 26th Century custom of "neck-chaining" women. It is very lovely on a woman, and tends to accent her beauty and her womanhood. Leaving no doubt that she is indeed a desirable female who some man found attractive enough to place a "claim" on. I suppose a 20th Century feminist would object furiously to such a practice as being "degrading" to the woman, but as I am myself now "neck-chained", I can assure you that I find it quite delightful, especially since it is also securely riveted on so that I cannot remove it!

The night before I had made my good-byes to Sharon and the others. I felt it best to do it then. I was entering a new life, a new world of my own. Sharon was now the Imperial Princess. She would always have a place in my heart, but she was no longer mine, but Darlanis'. I felt it best to make a clean break of things. No last teary farewells with Darlanis standing there smirking to herself. I had told her to be a "good girl" and do what Darlanis told her to. Telling her as I affectionately tousled her golden hair for the last time that if she didn't behave herself Darlanis would put her over her knee and give her another spanking! Now Sarnian Lady waited further out to take off the dozen or so men that had sailed the Squala to my estates, the ship now mine to do with as I saw fit. Darlanis having suggested that I establish a coastal trade with the vessel, offering more rapid and safer transport as the three masted Squala had the speed to outrun almost anything! Pirates being a serious danger due to the practice of both sides in

this stupid war to commission anyone with a ship as a privateer. A number of which quickly turned to a life of piracy as they found it more "profitable"!

"By the command of her Imperial Majesty Darlanis Marden, I, the Lady Lorraine of Trelandar, do take possession of these estates deeded to me by the decree of the Imperial Senate as of August 8th, in the year 518 A.W." I lowered the decree, regarding the men and women gathered before me. Many were gazing at me curiously. Lady Tirana at my side, clad in the black of the Warriress, a sword at her hip. Her attractive features were now veiled as proper. My own tossed back so that they could see me. We were both brunettes, tall, slim, dark eyed. Like "sisters". My extra clothing fitted her well, I noticed thoughtfully then. I had given orders that the rest of the free women aboard the Squala be given clothing and shelter until they could set out on their long journeys to their homes. Hopefully all of them would make it back to their homes, although some planned to travel to Trella and take passage on ships rather than now travel overland.

"You served Lady Lana well. I will ask no more for myself." I added, regarding them. The men and women at arms who guarded my lands, the dozens of peasants who tilled it. The slaves, both male and female now down on their knees before me. The sun shining down upon us, the great manor towering up behind them all. I felt the breeze on my cheek, warmed from the sun, heard the soft rustle of the leaves in the surrounding trees that gave us shade. Thought how nice it would be to have a nice cool bath. I had, however, another task to do first as I looked down at those soft dark eyes beside me, looked into that cute little face of Mara's as she held the hand of the kneeling slave she called "Maris Marn". The woman obviously a "pampered pet" allowed freedoms not usually allowed to slaves. Maris having been allowed to shave her pubes, and wear nipple clips and a crotch strap just like a free woman! This having been all told me by Mrs. Sanda Talen, my major domo, whose attitude was that "things had gone 'too far'"! * * Sanda and I had a good laugh recently when I reminded her of my first impressions here, as Maris Marn has ended up as the Queen of Dularn after the suicide-death of Queen Tulis just recently!

"Mara," I said, squatting down, opening my arms to Mara, seeing the fear there in Maris' emerald eyes as they looked into mine, Maris obviously well aware that her new "mistress" might not allow her all the freedoms and privileges that Lana had done. She was also of the Warriresses, which I didn't too much care for, as such a woman can be quite dangerous if "provoked" enough!

"You not pretty as Mommy, but I like you anyway," Mara said to me in her little girl voice, coming then into my open arms. I had lost my "golden girl" to Darlanis, but this one was "MINE"!

"Your mother was a beautiful and brave woman," I told Mara. She was dark haired like me, not a natural blonde like Sharon or Maris Marn, whose light eyebrows left no doubt as to her "color".

"Would' you like me to show you 'everything'?" Mara asked in her soft little voice. I found the idea pleasing, telling Lady Tirana to watch Mara's beautiful slave girl, who had immediately attempted to follow us like Mara was her own private possession!

The former Daris estates covered quite a considerable area, Mara's hand warm in mine as we walked together in the sun, my heart filled with love for the little dark haired girl now there at my side. Yvette following us at a discrete distance, Lady Tirana close behind. I had gladly welcomed her help, her offer of assistance in getting "settled in". Her husband had been brutally killed in the attack on her estate. Her children now grown and gone to live lives of their own, she had no one left to welcome her when she returned back to her own estates but those still left who yet still faithfully served despite her absence.

"Do you like Maris Marn?" Mara asked me as the woman knelt there before us, the sun glinting off her golden hair. She was from Dularn, from a place called Sanawhich is on the south-western tip of the island

about sixty miles or so north of the capital city of Arsana. Sanais a small village of perhaps six or seven hundred souls who make their living cutting lumber and making various handicrafts to sell to the people of places like Arsana. She was, I understood, the oldest daughter of the mayor of the place and said to be very good with a sword, having been almost a match for Lana herself, who had allowed the woman privileges that are not normally given to slaves. Maris for example being allowed to refuse the advances of free men and wear something beneath her brief cotton shift, which was rather unusual. Now that Lana was dead, my major domo was just "itching" to "lay the lash" on the beauty and teach her what slavery was all about!

"She is very beautiful," I observed, Maris being the sort of a woman who could have been Darlanis' own sister from her looks! She was not the sort of a woman I would have picked to be the constant companion of a five year girl, I supposed, but no doubt Lana had her own reasons for having used Maris as her daughter's "personal companion". The woman was, I noted, very "protective" of Mara, which may have been why Lana made the choice she did.

"She is my own slave girl," Mara said, adding, "Mrs. Talen (the major domo) wanted to whip her today, but I told her that I didn't want'ta to," Mara informed me with a trusting smile as if she was now sharing some great secret with me! I watched an ant several inches long crawl along the ground and thought of another, now far away on another world millions of miles from Earth.

"I am yours to command, mistress," the wench said to me, her knees demurely closed beneath the hem of her brief cotton shift. I sensed the hostility, the suppressed anger in the Dularnian. I guessed her at 5'8", perhaps a hundred and thirty five pounds. I noticed the muscles in her arms, her legs. She was a Warriress.

"Why does Mrs. Talen wish to punish you?" I asked her, standing there before her, Yvette and the Lady Tirana looking on. We were standing out in the fields among the rows of vegetables. The sun was hot, the sky nearly cloudless, a typical August day.

"Her husband put his hand underneath my dress and she says that I provoked him into doing it," Maris Marn breathed back in low tones. She was a "provocative" woman, one who might well be the sort that would make any wife worry about her husband's own marital faithfulness, although I suspected that there was more than that to the matter. Especially since Maris was very lovely.

"Are you given to free men?" I asked, wishing Mara was somewhere else just then. Maris nodded in the negative. No doubt she would have been extremely "popular" among the warriors. Hot and sweaty, arching helplessly beneath the body of a strong man!

"You have needs, desires?" I ventured, Lady Tirana having taken the hint to take Mara a few steps away while I questioned the slave girl. Maris nodded, blushing a bit. She was Dularnian. They are more sexually repressed than those of California.

"What is the fate of a slave girl who refuses the touch of a free man?" I asked the golden haired beauty kneeling before me. A fly buzzing around my face annoying me, making me swat at it. Maris' eyes, much like those of Darlanis', glowed up into mine.

"She is punished," Maris answered softly. I wondered if Maris had ever been "raped" out here in these very same fields we were now in. She was lovely enough that any man might want to!

"In the 20th Century we would call that a 'Catch-22' situation," I smiled, seeing her head suddenly lift up at my words!

"That is a situation where there is no escape," Maris answered with a soft smile. I wondered where she had learned that. How much she actually knew about the 20th Century. I recalled meeting others who had known a considerable deal about my time.

"There will be no whipping of slave girls without my own authorization," I informed her, looking down into those green eyes. I would speak with Mrs. Sanda Talen. And explain things to her.

"Why did your mother give you Maris?" I asked Mara as we sat later on there on her bed and talked. Her room bringing back memories far in my own past. The setting was much like that of southern France except for the differences in technology. Lace curtains on the windows, flowered wallpaper, the sounds of nature, of the soft breeze rustling the leaves in the trees. Even the bed much like mine with its brass posts. Only the slave chains there set in the floor speaking of the realities of 2565.

"Because she was too pretty for my dad," Mara smiled back. "And because she's real nice and good and wouldn't ever hurt me." I wondered how much Mara understood of life. Lana had been the sort of a mother who tried to "protect" her children from "life". Obviously Mara's father had bought Maris and Lana had then later on taken the slave girl away from him and given her to Mara instead. The action speaking volumes about things Lana never told! Obviously there had been serious troubles in their marriage that Lana had never spoken of. I could understand why. She had been a proud woman. One not given to seeking the sympathy of others.

"Wouldn't you like a girl more your own age to share things with?" I asked. There were sometimes older children for sale. A girl of about fifteen or sixteen might be better for little Mara.

"You don't like Maris, don't you?" Mara replied, looking up into my eyes. "She's too beautiful for you," she added in her little girl voice, perhaps understanding more than I did just then. I don't say that she actually talked that way, but I have translated her words into terms that will be easier for the reader to understand. Perhaps she "understood" what I did not then.

"I have nothing against her, but I think you'd be happier with a girl more your own age that you could play with," I answered, trying to take her into my arms and knowing I was already losing this "battle" even before it started. Good old Lorraine Duval making a "fool" out of herself once again, I thought to myself furiously! Her own tongue worse than any sword she's faced!

"I don't want another slave girl!" Mara cried, pulling away and throwing herself on the bed sobbing bitterly to herself as my own eyes filled with tears at the thought of how I had hurt her! I certainly wasn't doing very well as a "substitute mother" for little Mara. Maybe Lady Tirana could give me some hints on what to do, I mused to myself, standing up, creeping silently from the room where little Mara sobbed bitterly to herself on her own bed!

"What should I do?" I asked Lady Tirana as she sat there on the shaded cool porch that overlooked the sunbaked fields of my estate. A slave girl kneeling beside her, ready to be commanded.

"Give it time," Lady Tirana smiled, sipping at her cool drink, her veil lifted to one side as she sat there at her ease. The setting reminded me much of the pre-Civil War South of the Nineteenth Century. The slaves working in the fields, the aristocrats sitting there sipping cool drinks and watching them work.

"Lana shouldn't have given her a woman like that," I said, taking a glass from the slave girl, sitting down, my sword in its metal scabbard jutting out in front of me. The blade a gift from Darlanis. The drink I noticed being some sort of a mixed drink that I found delicious. Fruity, but yet tart, and mixed with

something like rum. Maris Marn was no fitting slave girl for a little girl like Mara. She needed a younger girl, one perhaps just entering puberty. Not a Warriress like Maris Marn, I explained to Lady Tirana as we sat there side by side and sipped our drinks, a pair of 26th Century aristocrats now at their ease.

"Perhaps Lana had her reasons," Lady Tirana smiled back.

Chapter Two

"A slave girl has escaped!" Sanda Talen said as she awoke me early the next morning, an oil lamp glowing in her hand, a robe hastily drawn about her tousled, disheveled self. I did not consider the event of such "grave importance" that she should awaken me from a sound sleep to tell me the dire news. Especially when it was also quite obvious that she had awakened Lady Tirana too, who came into my room just then, her appearance that of a woman just woke up from a sound well deserved sleep. I informed Sanda Talen of the fact that I was not very delighted with things, or with her for that matter! Since I owned a couple dozen of the sluts, the loss of one of them wasn't anything overly serious in my opinion! Poor Mrs. Talen nodding, her own appearance indicating that she had done little but get out of bed herself to inform me of the news. So far she hadn't been doing too well by me, and no doubt by now she was somewhat concerned whether or not I would be letting her stay on here at the estate. Not being in the mood just then to inform her of my opinions of the matter, I told her to "get the hell out" before I took the flat of my sword to her curvy firm rump there beneath that robe! She was a good looking woman, an attractive brunette, although no "competition" for a wench like Maris Marn, who looked somewhat like another Darlanis!

"I'll have to remember to be sure that I am armed before I ever awake you from a sound sleep," Lady Tirana laughed as Sanda quickly beat a hasty retreat. I would apologize to her later on, but right now I was in no mood to be "trifled with" by anyone! I reflected upon the amazing fact that when someone woke me out of a sound sleep here in this crazy era that it was usually some sort of "emergency" that I always had to take care of personally!

"I do believe it was that wench of Mara's and I also believe she stole your boat," Lady Tirana delighted in telling me then. The vessel in question being a small sailing craft rigged fore and aft around twenty feet in length. It could be sailed by one person and with adequate supplies, could make fairly long voyages if you were brave enough to entrust yourself to the sea in such a craft! Maris Marn, unlike the other slave girls, being allowed to sleep unshackled there in Mara's room, and even in her bed if Mara wished it so as she did whenever there was a thunderstorm. Apparently Mara aroused Maris' own maternal instincts, which is why she behaved towards her much like some cat with one kitten!

"God Dammit!" I snarled in sudden fury, sitting up in bed, even Lady Tirana stepping back a pace, concern showing on her attractive features. The covers falling away, revealing the fact I had slept in the nude but for my clips and a brief silken strap that concealed little. Reaching for the robe there beside the bed as Lady Tirana then took her own leave of me to get dressed.

"I'm doing everything that I can to find out how she escaped!" Sanda Talen pleaded, a quiver of fear in her voice. Men and women running here and there like an anthill that has been disturbed by a curious boy with a stick. The woman obviously terrified of me, as were those in the room with her. I had forgotten the awesome powers that a "LADY" possessed over those who served her. Here I was an absolute dictator with powers of "life and death". Perhaps she feared that I would have her whipped! I have heard of such

things being done. No doubt she had cause for fear. Tara, when she was Queen of Sarn before Darlanis, once had a slave girl executed for merely spilling some hot coffee on her!

"I think I know," I smiled, touching her shoulder. Letting her know that my "bark was worse than my bite". "It's my fault for not knowing any better." I thought of Mara, of how she felt. The sun was just coming up over the eastern horizon now, the air cool with promise of a lovely day to come. Maris would have good sailing. The little yacht, while not fast, was of sturdy design.

"I'll see if we can round up some men who know something about ships," Lady Tirana interjected, putting in an appearance. I told her that it would be useless. It would take days to outfit a crew for the Squala. I might be in possession of the fastest ship in California, but I didn't have anyone who knew how to sail her! It took half a dozen men to even haul the sails up a mast, and while the Squala was a beautiful sailing ship, the finest ship that ever came down the ramp at a Dularnian shipyard, it still took sailors to sail her! Not a bunch of "clod-hoppers" and "rough-necks" like all I had around the place! Maris was an intelligent woman. She would not be easy to catch even if I had a ship available to go in pursuit of her. And if I did catch her, what would I do with her? The penalty for escape is strict. Often the girl is hamstrung, making her useless for much of anything but lying beneath a man or doing some version of handiwork. And if I only gave Maris a good whipping, what would Mara think of me? Perhaps it would be best if the wench drowned out at sea!

"It would make more sense to increase the security on the other girls before we have any more of them trying to sail to Dularn," I smiled back, feeling I was well rid of a potential problem with Mara and her puzzling feelings for the beautiful golden haired Dularnian. Doubtlessly Maris would be picked up and kept if she didn't drown at sea. In any case she was gone and that was that. At least Sanda Talen wouldn't have to worry about her husband putting his hand up underneath Maris' shift any more! I had no doubt he had been just teasing the slave girl a little! He was of the Warriors, and they have a tradition of such things! Little did I suspect then the true "realities" of this situation!

"I've already seen to that," Sanda answered, the gold of her neck chain gleaming against her well tanned skin. She was dark haired, well built, and wore a sword, as do some free women if they are physically able to use one effectively. Lana had thought highly of her. I suspected that I would soon do the same too as soon as I had some breakfast and got my nerves settled!

"You have a son on the Dularnian front?" I asked Sanda as she shared breakfast with Lady Tirana and me there in the kitchen, one of the slave girls serving us as needed. She nodded, her dark eyes showing the concern that she felt. I thought of other wars, senseless futile wars fought in other eras. And for what? Doubtlessly Raspa was right about us. We were nothing more than warlike barbarians who loved nothing better than fighting wars!

"Darlanis has been promising us a victory for years, and we are still fighting," Sanda answered, the tone of her voice telling me much of how she felt about it. Darlanis might be extremely popular with the people of California, but this war was not doing either her or California any good! Mara quiet as she ate, no doubt well aware of the conclusions I had reached as to how Maris Marn, even "favored" as she had been, had managed to get together the necessary supplies for a voyage to distant Dularn some two thousand miles away! Obviously she had some help!

"What we need is someone to take command and do something 'effective' about the matter," Lady Tirana added, regarding me. I had little doubt who she was referring to. Darlanis had wanted me to do the same thing. I had refused. After being "touched" by SHE, I could no longer bring myself to take human life except in self-defense. The affair on the Squala, I had promised myself, was going to be the last time I would draw my sword except to practice the art of fencing or to defend those whom I loved!

"What we need," I replied, "Is someone to do something about these pirates that prowl the coasts of both countries." That, I thought to myself, made far more sense than this senseless war! Piracy having now become a serious problem thanks to the war between the Empire and Dularn, it being all too easy for a pirate to get a "privateering commission" from one side or the other!

"Well, Mara, it looks like I'm going to have to get you another slave girl after all," I said to my little foster daughter as we finished up our breakfast and the others took their leave of us. Finishing my second cup of coffee, such being a true luxury that only the rich like myself could afford to drink, the beans being imported from Talon, the land of the great birds.

"Yes, Lady Lorraine," Mara answered, looking down at her plate, the bacon and scrambled eggs more played with than eaten. Yvette now at my side, licking my fingers as I fed her from my plate the scraps and such that I had saved for her. It was perhaps "humiliating" for her to behave so, but she enjoyed doing it, such was her affection and love for me. She would not make a good girl for Mara, as Yvette was far too "female" to be able to control herself around men, the wench being a true "bred" slave. Yvette wore a brief red shift, a gold collar to signify that she was not an ordinary common slave girl, and simple sandals to protect her tender feet from sharp stones and such stuff. She would laugh and squeal delightedly in French when some man put his hand beneath her brief shift, which was quite frequent, I had noticed! The day before she had come strolling back to me with leaves and dirt in her hair, a "contented" look on her face, sweaty and damp from love-making, doubtlessly delighted that here there were lots of strong lusty men to "appreciate" a sexual delight like Yvette!

"Are there any slave girls here you would like to have?" I ventured. Any of the women would be delighted to become Mara's, although I had my reservations about most of them as being anywhere near suitable for the task. Slavery tends to bring out in a woman her most innate feminine qualities, and most of the slaves simply were not suitable for being the companion of a little girl unless I wanted Mara to get a real quick "sex-education" in what happened to slave girls in the arms of my men at arms!

"No, Lady Lorraine," Mara answered, picking at her food. A slave girl peeking through the doors at us, her tanned skin damp with sweat from her labors. She was naked but for a strip of red cloth around her hips. The kitchen master enjoys the sight of a briefly clad curvy female body, especially if it is safely locked in a slave girl's collar and must instantly obey his every wish!

"You let Maris 'go', didn't you?" I suddenly said to her. "Gave her food, water, everything she would need to get to Dularn." Mara suddenly starting to cry, the tears rolling down her cheeks as she sobbed out the story of how she had helped her beloved slave girl escape. Even giving her some of her own late mother's clothing so that she might better disguise herself as a free woman on the long dangerous voyage back to her own country as well as removing her collar so she could appear as being free!

Mara went on to tell me as I took her into my arms how Maris refused to take her with her on the voyage to Dularn, telling her that it was better that she stayed with me. Maris no doubt well aware that while I might allow her to escape, had she taken Mara I would have turned out the full forces of the Empire itself to get my little girl back! Yvette kneeling there at my side, her hand gently stroking the girl's hair as I held her, the slave girl's dark eyes glowing up into my own. For a brief moment I thought of giving Yvette to Mara despite everything, although I still hated to do it knowing the sort of a woman that Yvette was!

"Would you like Yvette?" I asked Mara as I held her in my arms, my own eyes now wet with tears as I held her to me. Yvette kneeling there beside me, looking up into my eyes, gently shaking her head in the negative. I suspect she feared what I might do to her. Sometimes a slave girl is locked in a chastity belt to

better control her. Such would be "torment" for one like Yvette!

"She's nice, but I'd rather have another like Maris," Mara answered, looking up into my face. "Maybe a bit younger though," Mara agreed, "More like Mrs. Talen's daughter." The girl in question being in her early teens. "Maybe you could 'buy' her."

"We'll get you a new girl," I promised, wondering how much Mara understood of the differences between slaves and employees!

Chapter Three

"It's pretty early to be doing that," I warned Lady Tirana as I watched her slave girl pouring her another glassful of wine from the bottle there on the table. The morning was still cool, delightful, although I knew it would be another hot August day after the Sun got a few hours chance to work on things. My footsteps on the heavy carpeting having been perhaps unnoticed. The woman sitting there unveiled on the shaded open porch overlooking the fields and the surrounding forest with her own personal slave girl kneeling there on a cushion beside her. I knew that her own estate had suffered considerably from the Dularnian raiders when she had been captured a couple weeks before. Stripped naked, she had been chained with her own slave girls there on the Squala before her eventual rescue by the fighting forces from the Seahawk!

Her home destroyed, her husband killed before her eyes, such might drive any woman to start drinking in the morning! She was a friend, and I suffered for her, knowing how she felt. Most of her slaves had been recovered, but there was nothing that could be done about her memories unless she visited one of the Priestesses of Lys and asked for the forgetfulness that only they could grant. She needed something to keep her mind occupied. Something to keep her from thinking about the past. The buildings we could replace, but the lives that had been lost were gone forever. She was not a young woman, and remarriage not that likely.

"It eases the 'pain', LadyLorraine," Tirana answered me. I found her name fascinating, although she thought the same of mine too. Her last name was Greyson, although like most titled widows she now referred to herself only by her own title of "Lady Tirana". I did the same now, being "LadyLorraine" to all but my closest friends. Jack Duval having been dead for six centuries.

"But yet doesn't solve any problems," I answered, taking the glass from her hand and handing it to the slave girl kneeling there beside her. The wench a dark haired beauty, nicely curved. Four of the slave girls on the Squala had been her own girls. I had also given her one of the Dularnian "ship's girls", keeping the other five for my own uses. Many Californians believing that a Dularnian woman, once collared, makes love better than women of their own countries do. Whether or not there is anything to this I don't know as the Dularnians claim the same for our own women!

"I suppose you're right, Lorraine," she smiled, getting up from the chair, smoothing down her dress, adjusting her harness, picking up her veil and tucking it away where it would be handy. I usually don't bother veiling myself on my own estate any more, although I do wear it whenever I go into town or meet strangers. The source of the tradition of "veiling" is lost in history now.

"We'll get Sanda and Mara and go into town for another slave girl," I suggested, feeling that it would be

good for Lady Tirana to get out and away from the estate. Away from my wine cellar and slave girls who were ever so willing to get her a "bottle"!

"I think we'd better wait!" I whispered to Lady Tirana, seeing Sanda in the arms of her husband, a handsome older Warrior. Neither of them aware of us, Sanda's black leather skirt drawn up over her hips as he caressed her naked body there beneath it. Bending the blue clad Scribe down over her desk, her mouth like a leech upon his! Her booted high heels digging into the carpet!

"No better than a slave girl!" she answered back, pulling me away from the doorway. The heavy carpet having concealed the sound of our footsteps although the couple just then weren't in a condition to notice much of anything. Sanda's silken "strap" lying there unnoticed on the carpet at her feet telling its own tale of what was soon to be! Her skirt drawn up, exposing her shaved pubes, his hand now caressing her sex as she clung to him!

"Lys! I could just climb the walls for the touch of a man!" I heard Lady Tirana mutter as we walked back into the large living room, the lace curtains, the beautiful furnishings, all reminding me of another now gone except as she yet lived in memory.

"I could hood a male slave," I suggested with a smile. It had been a long time for me too since I had been with a man. Too long. I knew exactly how Lady Tirana felt. I too envied Sanda.

"We do have our 'reputations' to think about," she smiled.

"I understand that you want to buy a slave girl for Mara," Sanda Talen said as she walked into the living room where we now waited for her with little Mara. She looked "contented", pleased with herself. "Well used"! I thought to myself with a smile. I had sent Yvette, just in case they still might be "together". Yvette being intelligent enough to keep what she saw to herself. Sanda still looked a bit sweaty and "mussed", having obviously enjoyed herself much despite the lack of comfort on her own desk!

"I was told that you have some experience in such things," I answered, giving Lady Tirana a nod, both of us having a hard time to keep from grinning at poor Sanda like a pair of fools! I suppose after everything that had happened that morning Sanda did need a little "relaxation", although I would have to warn her that in the future she should close and lock her door before making love to her husband there in her own office on her own desk!

"Buy Me, Mistress!" the girl breathed, looking up into my eyes beneath the wide brim of my fashionable hat. Peering at my face through the netting of the black veil that concealed the harshness of my features. The sun was hot on my shoulders. I understood now why Lady Tirana carried a large umbrella despite the fact that there was little danger of rain! The sweat was wet on my body beneath my blouse, my thighs damp beneath my fashionable clinging soft black leather riding skirt that matched Sanda's. Mara clinging to my hand, the girl kneeling naked there before us. A few men, low castes, standing around watching us. There is considerable "underemployment" in this era compared to my own, although on the other hand living standards are considerably "lower" and people are "content" with far less now a days...

The blonde slave girl was a lovely teenage delight that reminded me a lot of Sharon, even having just about the same amount of fine golden pubic hair as Sharon used to have before she shaved it off as upper caste girls do here in the 26th Century.

"She's the best I've got," the slaver announced, holding her by the hair, his whip on its thong just brushing her naked shoulder. He was asking sixty gold crowns for her, an outrageous price even for a

small town like Thistle! The girl worth no more than forty at the best! "She's a beauty," he added, giving me a leer that disgusted me. "She'll please you much if that is your wish." His eyes burning through my veil in a way that left no doubt what he was thinking! The girl was badly in need of a bath, her odor offensive to my nostrils as I stood there thinking he'd do "better" in his business if his wenches didn't stink so!

"She is too old for my purposes," I answered, annoyed by the way he looked at me. Lady Tirana's shadowed face unreadable beneath her veil. Sanda's unveiled features were hard to read, although I suspected she preferred that I picked a girl less good looking than this one. This girl was too much like Maris Marn!

"I 'want' her!" Mara suddenly spoke up from beside me. "I want her! She's pretty like Maris was!" little Mara begged. The slaver smiling to himself, no doubt already counting his gold! I thought I might have a surprise in store for him as I tossed back my veil so that he could see my features that had until now been hidden. The stern hardness of my face now no longer concealed.

"I am the Lady Lorraine, of whom you may have heard," I said to him in a cold chilling voice, the man shuddering as he realized who I was. That I controlled this entire area with an absolute power that any 20th Century dictator would have "envied". Darlanis herself had often complained to me long and bitterly about such things. About the incredible power that the "Lords" and "Ladies" of the Empire had over those who lived beneath their dominion. I had the power of Life and Death over everyone who lived within the hundreds of square miles that I controlled. Here I was "Queen", absolute ruler of thousands of people. I had not really understood such things until Lady Tirana had explained them to me. It was quite understandable now why Sanda had been so terrified of me! Why she behaved towards me more like a slave girl towards her own mistress than an employee to her employer!

"The girl is yours, my great Lady," the man shuddered, almost going down to his knees before me! "Take her as a gift of my gratitude." No Merchant within my lands could buy or sell without a license from me. No Peasant could farm his lands without my permission. Even Hitler, Stalin and Mao didn't have such awesome powers as I possessed! There was no recourse from my decrees except to Darlanis or the Imperial Senate, neither of who was very likely to override any of my decisions! I also held a permanent seat in the Imperial Senate, which meant that I had a vote in the affairs of the Empire itself! It was almost like as if I had my very own "country" that I could rule as I so pleased!

"She is worth forty crowns," I answered, handing him the money. I did not wish to cheat him. Such is not in the Codes.

"I will praise your great generosity before all!" he answered, knowing it was a fair price for the girl, whose azure eyes reminded me so much of my beloved Sharon, my "golden girl" I had lost to Darlanis. The wench seemed pleased with being purchased, I noticed, seeing the smile on her face as she knelt there before me, her hands clasped over her naked buttocks, the youthful jut of her teenage breasts leaving no doubt that she would be a true beauty when she grew up. I wished, however, that she didn't look quite so much like Sharon, as I might have trouble disciplining her. Of course I could always give the task to Sanda, who would not have any such troubles, Sanda being the sort of a free woman whom my hot blooded and sexy slave girls often had good cause to fear! The slave whip always there in her hand!

"I would suggest that instead of praising me that you take some time and see that your girls have baths and clean bedding," I smiled back, my words striking him like a blow as he stood there. "This girl here," indicating the delight before me, "Is in dire need of a bath, and has a sore on her ankle from your shackles that should have been treated." Slaves come under the "humane treatment" laws like all domestic animals, and there is supposed to be someone to inspect for such things, although he obviously had not been doing his job. I would have to see that he was replaced with one that would! The duties of a "Lady"

are often time-consuming and some times take her to places that otherwise such "a well-bred and delicate high-born creature" would never think of going! I suspected that Lana herself had been a bit "lax" in seeing that such inspections were performed. It is too easy to neglect such things. The sun is hot, and you are often on your feet for a long period of time. It is easier to sit on a shady porch beneath the towering trees and sip cool drinks.

"How long has it been since you had a good bath?" I asked the teenage blonde delight as she knelt before me on the dirt, the sun on her golden hair beautiful. She kept her knees well together, concealing as she could the triangle of her pubes, her hands clasped over her buttocks, her heels together beneath her. I could see the little golden earring posts that still pierced her pink nipples, the wench having been old enough to have worn "clips" when free. She was doubtless somewhat embarrassed too.

"Over a month, mistress," she answered me. Her eyes, voice, were much like those of Sharon. She was a Dularnian girl, and thus had an accent more like that of a woman of the 20th Century.

"What was your name when you were free?" I asked her, standing there before her, my hands on my hips, my veil now once again covering my features. There are reasons why women like me wear a veil. They have to do with the inability of others to "read" our faces and know what we are thinking. Such things are matters of dominance and submission. The veiled "Lady" you face can often "read" your face, but being veiled, you cannot "read" hers in return. That gives her certain "advantages" over you. She understands that. She utilizes that for her own advantage over you.

"Gayle," the girl breathed softly. "Gayle Marn of Sana."

"Sanda, the whip," I snapped, ordering the slave girl to assume "whipping position" before me. Her head down, her hands in front of her, her back exposed to the lash. Three times I struck her, once on the shoulders, again across the small of her back, and the third time on her buttocks. The girl gasping beneath the heavy blows, sobbing as the whip raised livid welts on her skin!

"You have a sister, Maris?" I snapped, regarding the shuddering girl as she knelt in terror before me. Her eyes, now wet with tears, looked pleadingly up into mine. I needed to know the truth. I knew that Gayle, having felt the whip, would speak it!

"My older sister," Gayle breathed. "Do you know of her?" Slaves do not ask questions of their mistresses without permission. I permitted Sanda to strike her twice for her stupidity!

"Mistress!" Gayle sobbed. "Please do not strike me again!"

"You will be struck again as it pleases me," I snapped back, determined to be "strong" with this girl who reminded me too much of my beloved Sharon. Sometimes I am not a nice person. No doubt I will have several incarnations more to go before I reach that level of moral perfection where I can merge with SHE.

Sobbing, Gayle quickly told me that Maris had always loved sailing and the sea, which indicated to me that she had no doubt looked upon my little sailboat differently than say I would. As events were to turn out, she did make it to Dularn, where she received the glory of a great national hero for her amazing voyage! Ending up marrying Darl Jord and becoming the Queen of Dularn!

Chapter Four

"Interesting 'place' this," I said to Sanda Talen as we searched for a place to wash off our new purchase. A few of the idly curious following us, more due to my reputation than anything else, I suppose. The town of Thistle being quite attractive in its way, reminding me somewhat of similar towns in my own native France. This part of Trelandar well known for its fine wines, I might note. My vineyards are not large, but the product is quite good. Mara was walking with Lady Tirana, the girl angry at me now for having whipped Gayle as I had. I had considered it necessary to find out the truth, and I had done so. I would make it up to Mara later on, although I had no intentions of letting Mara start another "relationship" with Gayle as she had with her sister. I had every intention of allowing Gayle a great deal of freedom, but on the other hand she would remain a slave girl, not a collared "free woman" like her sister had been! "That" I promised myself as she walked behind us on a rawhide leash, her hands bound behind her back, a dirty strip of blue cloth around her hips her only attire. Public nudity, even that of slaves, being frowned upon. As it was, Gayle attracted ample attention from the young men, who delighted in running up and slapping her curvy bottom as she walked along behind us, Gayle taking such treatment with the sexual insolence of the female slave who knows her power over men. I considered the idea of fitting her with a chastity belt. The 26th Century has some very interesting types too here!

"I suppose so," Sanda smiled, "Although being born here, I suppose I've never really noticed it." Thistle was old, there being a number of old ruins that dated back to the 21st Century before The War changed everything. I suppose it had a different name back then, but no one I've met seems to know what it was, so I guess "Thistle" will have to do for now! There was an era after The War when there was a general reversion to barbarism, and most structures that survived The War (The Lorr did not destroy small towns) were put to the torch or otherwise destroyed in what appears to have been a sudden violent burst of senseless destruction! Where Man showed his worst side to his own fellow man! There having been "race war" that followed The War, I note here. Proof that Janet didn't follow my own advice here on the matter, I having pointed out to Janet that "racial equality" is something that you have to "earn", not something governments "give" to you.

I watched three young Warriresses, proud in their black, swords at their hips, cadets from the Academy, strolling on by. While the Academy is on my estates, it is not under my domain, but comes under Darlanis', being on what is called "crown lands". Those parts of Trelandar that belong to the Empire itself. Sharon would be coming to the Academy in another two years. It would be easy to visit her as it was but a few hours ride. I wondered if Darlanis had realized that. We might again establish the sort of relationship that we once had before Darlanis took her from me. Once again I might have my beloved "golden girl" back again!

Gayle looked at herself in the mirror. Smoothing the silk down against the feminine curves of her body. Many women are excited by its feel against their soft skin. I noted that she even resembled my Sharon more now that she had something to cover herself. I hated myself for having whipped her as I had, although I suppose that it was just as well, since it proved to the wench I was the sort of a mistress that she would have to obey without the slightest hesitation! There is a great deal to be said for the old Biblical saying about "sparing the rod and spoiling the child." It is as true now as it was back in the 20th Century when Dr. Spock and his ilk preached the foolishness of never spanking or disciplining your children. The results were a crime rate that went up sky-high at the end of the century before Janet Rogers finally restored "social discipline" as best she could!

I had allowed Gayle to wear clips and a strap, and to shave her pubes. I had warned her that she was not to seek the company of men. That she was to "behave herself like a lady" and in no way ever let Mara see what little girls should not be seeing! I had purchased for her a lovely golden collar to match

Yvette's. Purchased her earrings, slim circles of gold to wear in her ears. Sandals to protect her feet from the sharp rocks. Some lipstick and cosmetics. Perfume, all the things a young teenage girl has to have to look her best. She was, after-all, Mara's slave girl.

"Thank you, mistress, for all you have done," she breathed, going to her knees before me, dropping her head demurely, knees together as was proper before her mistress. The hem of her blue silk shift high on her thighs as was proper for a collared wench. Sanda frowning a bit to herself, having approved of none of this!

"You understand, Gayle," I said to her, "That your future behavior will determine if you retain the privileges of being Mara's slave girl or not." Otherwise I would use her as any other wench on the estate. What I had done for her would give her considerable "incentive" to remain in my "good graces", I hoped!

"I understand, mistress," she answered. Adding, "I will not disappoint you." I did not think that she would. I liked this girl. I fear more than a mistress should. She was not like her sister. She didn't have that barely veiled "arrogance" that Maris had towards me before she escaped. Her attitude was better. She was a nice girl, well bred, not a slut like many slave girls.

Gayle Marn regarded me from beneath lovely lashes, squinting against the sun off the ocean, her face and figure reminding me much of Sharon's. I thought her golden collar was lovely there snug around her slim neck. It appeared more like "jewelry" than a "badge of bondage". The wisp of blue silk over her shaved pubes was quite provocative as were the lovely golden disks that covered her pierced nipples. The men in my employ had been warned the first day that I got her that she was "off-limits"! Sanda had been "pleased" by that, especially since Gayle was a golden haired beauty whose body was already starting to blossom out into glorious womanhood! She was perhaps 5'7", and 35-25-36. She didn't have the "regal" features like her sister had, but on the other hand I liked her face better than I had Maris', having seen "enough" of Darlanis' features to last me for some time to come! Gayle was so much like Sharon that I feared for the feelings she aroused in me. I wanted to take her in my arms, stroke her hair, hold her close. I wanted to give her things, see her smile, let her know that she had nothing to fear from me. I wanted to "mother" her! To make another "Sharon" out of her!

I myself wore only clips and a strap, a brief bit of black silk fitted to my body, the scars from Sisa's attack now fading. The afternoon sun was hot and bright to the west, a cool breeze off the ocean soothing as we laid side by side on the big beach blanket. Mara played contentedly in the wet sand near our feet, naked as the day she was born. It is not the usual practice here in the 26th Century to dress small children in bathing attire.

"You are quite different from what I first expected you to be, mistress," Gayle ventured, looking at me there on the blanket beside her, regarding me from those lovely azure eyes of hers. My hard muscular body well tanned, the scars I bore telling much.

"And what did you expect me to be?" I asked her. Raising up on an elbow to face her. I thought of her older sister. Of Mara's delight in gaining a girl better than the one she had let go. Gayle in any case being more suitable for Mara than Maris had been in my opinion at least. Gayle was more "playful", less "serious" than Maris had been. There was nine years difference in their ages. Gayle being sixteen to Maris' twenty five.

"Not kind and understanding like you are, mistress," Gayle answered. She hadn't held the whipping I had given against me. I was glad of that, although you aren't supposed to ask the forgiveness of a slave girl for anything you do to her. You are the mistress, she is but the slave girl whose only choice is to

obey!

I saw no reason to abuse her or mistreat her. I do not get perverted enjoyment out of such things. I kissed her cheek. She was much like my Sharon in so many ways. I feared I would not be able to discipline her properly if the need ever did arise. No doubt Sanda would be able to, Gayle being a beautiful Dularnian. Sanda having little love for Dularnians of either sex. I suppose having one's only son fighting against them does that to you.

"I happen to believe that I can get more out of you with love and understanding than with whips and chains," I told her with a smile. I wondered if her older sister would have been as responsive. I rather doubted it. I did not think that Gayle would fail me in the trust that I had placed in her. She had felt the lash, the weight of the chain. A girl learns swiftly.

I had carefully explained to her how I wanted her to respond to Mara's questions about life. Unlike most 20th Century girls, Mara had seen animals mate and the resulting kittens, puppies, calves, foals, and so forth. She knew that women gave birth to babies, and that these babies grew up to be little boys and girls like her. I do not believe that children in most cases should be shielded from the truth. From the realities of life as it is. I will admit that when Sharon had admitted to me a few months ago that she had lost her virginity it shook me up just a bit, but that's to be expected, I suppose. We all have our "illusions".

"Do you think my sister will make it to Dularn?" Gayle asked. It had been almost a week now since she had stolen the little sailboat and set out on her voyage to distant Dularn. I admired her courage, if not her intelligence. She was a Warriress. We are sometimes noted for not being too cautious about such things. It is sometimes said of us that we are the sort who venture where more wiser people often fear to tread. I suspect that it is true. I know of several examples of such incidents.

I did not answer for a minute. She had not used my title of "mistress", which spoke much of her feelings. Despite whatever I thought of Maris Marn myself, she was still Gayle's older sister.

"I hope so for her sake," I answered her. Gayle's eyes held mine. She understood. I had explained to Mara that her new girl would be kept shackled at night and that I would hold the key. I prayed that Maris would make it to Dularn safely if only for Gayle's sake. I didn't want Gayle thinking that I had driven her sister to take reckless risks that resulted in her death at sea!

"Mistress, may a slave ask a question?" Gayle ventured a few seconds later. Looking down into my eyes as she propped herself on an elbow. She is a very beautiful girl. A very nice one too!

"Of course," I answered her with an encouraging smile, the sun hot on my nearly completely naked body, Gayle having oiled it against the burning rays of the sun. The touch of her hands had been pleasant. A bit too "pleasant" for my own liking, I found!

"If my sister is recaptured and returned to you, what will you do to her?" I sensed in her the fear that she felt. I had the power to do with Maris as I felt fit, including the maiming or killing her in any way that I wished. I was still her owner.

"Legally, I believe that she was let go," I answered. There was a question as to "whose" property she had been. Mine or Mara's? Lady Lana had been the legal owner, but since the wench had been Mara's, the question was a valid one I thought. Mara had told her to go home, and since a slave girl must obey, it is quite possible that Maris had been merely obeying the orders given her by her mistress. I pointed this all out to Gayle, who seemed quite interested in my thought processes on the subject.

"How did you become a slave here in California?" I asked my young slave girl as she soaked up the sun, her body oiled to keep her skin soft and feminine. Cancer of all sorts being as easy to cure as the common cold. There is something to be said for such technology that makes such things possible, even if it is "Lorr"!

"There was an attack by an Imperial raider upon the ship transporting me to Arsana," she told me. The Empire, like the Dularnians, having a number of privateers commissioned as commerce raiders, although the term "pirate" is probably more proper considering the nature of many of them. There is a regrettable tendency on both sides to "commission" anyone with a ship capable of long sea voyages. The trouble is that many of these are just out to make a "pile of gold" any way that they can. Often by kidnaping women and selling them as slaves. There is sometimes very little difference between a "pirate" and some "privateer"!

"And so you ended up here," I said. Her sister had been captured as a spy posing as a prostitute in Sam. Maris had made the mistake of forgetting about Lara Warsan's Prostitute Guild! While spies are usually beheaded, Maris had been worth too much on a slave block for anyone in their right minds to "waste" such beauty as hers, so she eventually ended up as I have stated as little Mara's own personal slave girl after Lana found out that her husband had grown perhaps a bit overly fond of the Dularnian!

"I was sold in Trella to a slave broker, who in turn sold me to the slaver from whom you got me," Gayle told me, looking out over the sea. We were about half a mile from the cove where the Squala was being worked on, being repainted. On a little beach that I knew from what Sanda had told me Lana had often used when she had wished to sunbath herself in private. I found the curves of Gayle's young firm breasts beautiful when she sat like that. I admire beauty in all its forms, both male and female.

"Are you homesick?" I asked her, touching her shoulder with my hand, seeing her eyes look into mine. She had suffered much before becoming Mara's. She was after all only sixteen, the age when many young girls her age are just discovering themselves.

"Yes, mistress," she told me in a soft voice, her eyes wet and liquid. "I miss my home very much." I took her in my arms then and let her sob on my shoulder, holding her, stroking her hair as I have done with my Sharonor my beloved little Mara.

"If you wish, I will see to it that your father learns you are safe with me," I said to her. She was no longer a slave girl just then to me. Just a lost waif far from her beloved home.

"Lady Lorraine, look at the big kitty up there looking at us," Mara interrupted, pointing with her hand to a spot above us where the forest started. Her words striking terror to my heart!

A cold chill going over me, I turned and looked, gasping in horror at the creature there, a creature from a time now only a bit of forgotten history. Its famous fangs having given it its name: SABER TOOTH TIGER! One of the terrors of the 26th Century!

Chapter Five

"Gayle! Can you swim?" I hissed, reaching for my sword, the blonde slave girl nodding, her eyes riveted upon the mutated fanged and striped terror slinking slowly towards us. The eyes were like green pools of

horror looking straight down into ours.

"Take Mara and swim out into the ocean with her," I snapped, my sword gleaming there in my hand. Knowing it to be nearly as worthless as some child's wooden toy against a Tigon as they are called here in the 26th Century. I remembered Lana's son and the dire wolf. I thought fondly of a double barreled elephant rifle. Better yet a Lorr blaster firing those deadly explosive slugs!

Both the saber-tooth tiger and the dire wolf are creatures that once lived upon the Earth at the time of the last true Ice Age about twelve thousand years ago. They are, I believe from information that I was able to obtain on Mars just recently, the results of genetic cloning done by the civilization of the 21st Century before The War upon the frozen remains of such creatures. I have no information as regarding the "Garth", which resembles no terrestrial animal that I am familiar with except for some of the dinosaurs which have been extinct for sixty million years. I suspect however that the Tarl is the result both of radiation and genetic technology. The metabolic systems of these birds is awesome, as is their respiratory systems. The blood also being "different" in its ability to carry oxygen and carry away metabolic wastes. Their system of double hearts is also something that makes me feel that they are creatures "invented by Man", not by natural evolution. Although doubtless the breeders of Talon have had something to do with things as Tarls in the "wild" are not nearly capable of carrying the weight that Talon's birds are.

"LadyLorraine!" Gayle cried as I stood there, the blade in my hand, facing the approaching saber-tooth. The slave girl having gathered up Mara and carried her to the water's edge as I ordered. I would have rather faced half a dozen men than this!

"Into the water with you!" I snapped, backing away, my point level with the approaching monster's face. Thirty inches of fine 21st Century stainless steel against the most feared creature of the 26th Century. The blade had been Darlanis'. She had given it to me once as a gift. A symbol of her deep affection for me.

"Can they swim?" Gayle asked as we backed into the waves, my Mara in her arms, the creature almost unknown in her own country.

"Tigers usually can," I told her in a level voice. I did not feel very confident just then. I prayed my voice did not betray my feelings. Mara's young life depended upon Gayle keeping her head and not giving way to the terror that must have filled the girl's thoughts. I hoped she was like Sharon in more than just appearance. Sharon had "proved" herself there on the Ronda!

With the water up to our hips we watched the Tigon sniff at our things, pawing at them, then stop to regard us there in the water, seven hundred pounds of death staring us in the face!

The Tigon is larger than the lions and tigers of my era, a full grown one going as much as seven hundred pounds and standing four feet at the shoulder. The coloring is a bright orange with pitch black strips, the fangs being as much as a foot in length. There is no weapon known here in the 26th Century except for perhaps heavy ballistae that can stop one in its tracks. Fortunately they are rather rare, although the one we faced seemed adequate enough to end all our adventures here in the 26th Century.

"Get out deeper!" I ordered, the Tigon moving to the water's edge, pacing restlessly back and forth. The beast perhaps wondering whether or not we were really "worth" getting wet for.

"LadyLorraine!" Gayle cried as the Tigon stepped into the surf, butting through the breakers with effortless ease. We were nearly up to our necks now, Gayle a few inches shorter than me, Mara on her shoulders, her arms around Gayle's collared throat.

"Swim for it!" I snapped, seeing the Tigon approach, its head high, its swimming style clumsy and awkward. They are not good swimmers, I understand now. I did not think, however, that we could escape it for long despite its poor swimming abilities.

With Mara clinging to her neck Gayle set out with a good strong stroke, heading for perhaps China or Japan. Countries now nothing but legend thanks to the Lorr. The Squala with its workmen perhaps half a mile away around the bend in the cove. There was little likelihood we could swim that far ahead of the Tigon.

Surging forward to take me for its prey, the Tigon reached for me with its forepaws, but I was no longer there. Taking a deep breath, I submerged before it reached me, my keen point reaching out for its body. I felt the swimming legs brush by me, then I thrust up into its great body as it passed just to one side of me. Feeling my point grate against its ribs, the striped form a moving blur rippling there in the clear water before me.

There was blood in the water now as I surfaced behind the wounded monster, the Tigon then spotting me and turning once again to attack, its vicious snarls horrible to hear. Once more I took a deep breath and dove, driving my point deep into its soft belly as it paddled on past me. In the water I was its master! Its terrible claws and fangs useless against my keen blade!

"Lorraine! A Shark!" Gayle cried, the dorsal fin coming swiftly towards me, the Tigon splashing behind me, its cries of fury terrifying to hear. I cursed my luck. It certainly wasn't my day! Visions of a certain 20th Century movie going through my mind. While my sword was an excellent defense against the Tigon, it would be considerably less effective against a great white!

Holding my sword before me, I dove deep, seeking the sand of the bottom, the shape of the shark suddenly there before me! Instinctively I thrust out my keen blade, the point grating across the shark's skin and doing little more than to just irritate it!

Surfacing, I saw that the Tigon had troubles of his own, the shark busy worrying him, a red stain in the water, the great white as deadly as the Tigon himself here in the water!

It was then that I saw something that filled my heart with true terror, for behind Gayle and Mara there arose a great dorsal fin towering ten feet in the air like the conning tower of a submarine! A SQUALA! The most fearsome and awesome creature that swims the seas of 26th Century Earth! They run up to seventy feet in length and have been known to take down fishing boats!

"SWIM FOR SHALLOW WATER!" I screamed, my voice high pitched with terror. The most dreaded mutated monster of the seas now approaching behind them! The great body like a 20th Century atomic submarine running just beneath the surface! Sixty feet or more of terrifying marine predator! Their usual prey are whales!

"A Squala!" Gayle cried, her eyes wide with terror. To her credit she didn't freeze as another might have, but swam with everything she had towards the shore! Mara clinging like a remora to her neck. I felt totally helpless, my sword only a toothpick!

I saw the Squala slowly approach, the great bulk now visible like some living submarine there beneath the water. The swinging tail foaming up the water like a great propeller behind it. They are relatives to the great whites, but three times as large, running up possibly seventy feet or bit more in length. This was a full size one, probably going about sixty five feet or so, or about half the length of my own ship, the Squala, which is named after the monsters. It made the great white still worrying the Tigon look like some

harmless little minnow there beside it!

The great white suddenly became aware of the danger to itself and quickly departed the area. The weakly struggling Tigon suddenly engulfed by monster jaws that opened so wide that you could have walked into that horrible maw with room to spare!

Then the Tigon was gone as if it had never existed, the Squala foaming up the water, the sand from the bottom as it backed out into deeper water, only a growing blood stain in the water telling of the fate of the saber-tooth tiger! On land it had been truly "King of Beasts", but here in the water there was no doubt who was truly the "King of all Predators"! The SQUALA!

"You asked to speak to me, mistress?" Gayle asked in a soft voice as she knelt down before us, the hem of her dark blue silken shift high on her lovely thighs. The rich gold of her slave collar gleaming there in the shaded light of the living room, Sanda Talen sitting at my side. I had given the matter much thought before making my decision. Sanda had advised me against it, but I thought after the affair with the Tigon and the Squala a few days ago, it was the best thing that I could do for Gayle.

"Are you happy here?" I asked the teenage blonde. I thought of Sharon. They were so much alike they could have been sisters. I liked Gayle. Perhaps too much. Sanda certainly thought so!

"Yes, mistress," the girl answered me. "Very much so." I thought she spoke the truth. She did not avert her eyes from mine. I had done what I could to see that she was not mistreated. She was a well-bred, well behaved girl. Much like Sharon.

"Do you like your work?" I then asked. Sanda regarding me from beneath her lashes, looking down at her hands clasped over her leather skirt. She was not a Warriress, but often wore attire that reminded me of one. She was good with a sword too as I had learned the time that I had fenced with her. For a Scribe she was a rather surprising woman in some respects. Well educated, intelligent, she had become more than just an employee to me. We had spoken of much, of the various political philosophies. I knew she had little love for Darlanis, or for her Empire either!!

"Yes, mistress," Gayle answered in reply. I knew Mara loved her like an older sister. They had become very close in the short time that I had owned the golden haired Dularnian maiden.

"Would you like to be free?" I asked. Gayle's reaction was something to see! She looked first at me and then at Sanda. The shocked disbelief in her eyes fading as she saw us both nod in the affirmative. The look of joy on her lovely face one that left no doubts in my mind that I had done the right thing in freeing her despite Sanda's reservations about the entire affair!

"As a free woman you will receive wages of a gold crown a month plus your own room and board here in return for being my foster daughter's companion," I said before Gayle could answer.* * As this calculates out to being about \$300 a month, it should be noted here that the differences in living standards made it worth considerably more than that in the California of 2565 A.D. Lorraine was quite obviously paying the girl more than what an ordinary "companion" would have been paid. Imperial California having an actual standard of living similar to that found in some South American countries here in the 20th Century. (author)

"Oh, mistress Lorraine, how can I ever thank you!" the girl sobbed there before us, the wet tears of emotion openly trickling down her cheeks. Sanda silently getting up then and leaving the room, knowing I wished to be alone with Gayle just then. I had little doubt I had done the right thing even if she didn't

agree.

"There, now that looks nice on you," I said, adjusting her dress, the black leather belt and long dagger at her hip going well with the blue silk of her dress. She was, I thought, a nice girl, if just a bit too beautiful for her own good as she stood before me. Her collar and slave shift now put away for another.

"Thank you, LadyLorraine," Gayle answered, dabbing at her eyes, the shock of being freed having effected her deeply. I thought I had found me another "Sharon" to replace the one that Darlanis had taken away from me. It helped a bit to soothe me.

"Now I want you to sit down and write your father," I told her, indicating my desk. Gayle nodded, seating herself behind it as I left the room. There is no actual true mail service betweenCaliforniaand Dularn, but I had "connections" in certain high places that would get that letter to its proper destination!

"You are too soft hearted," Sanda said to me as I joined her on the front porch overlooking the sun baked fields. I smiled and nodded in reply as I seated myself beside her on the swing. A number of our slaves working the fields, both male and female.

"Mara is better off with a free woman than a slave girl," I pointed out to my major domo. Yvette there at my side setting down a glass for me on the little table beside the porch swing. The gold of her collar gleaming against the deep tan of her skin. The weather had been dry. We needed a good soaking rain, especially for the grape vines. A certain amount of hand-watering could be done by the slaves and farm-hands, but it wasn't enough.

"Would you free Yvette?" Sanda Talen asked, sipping at her wine, one of our products that made our estate what it was. I also raise herds of unicorns and refine oil for lamps. Crops are grown for our own consumption. I employed over a hundred people, both free and slave. Yvette had gone inside the house for the moment to fetch some snacks for us to eat. It is easy to get "lazy", to do little. To let others "take care of things" for you. It was a constant temptation that I had to keep fighting. I fenced daily with whoever I could get to do it to keep myself fit, it being something of pride to my men that I was better with a foil than any of them. Sanda's husband Carl was the best of the lot. Word had gotten around that my skill with a sword was legendary! People spoke of me like I was some "gunfighter" from the 1800's. I once fenced with Darlanis. She had been the best I had met so far here in the 26th Century! I had bested her too, two out of three times, although it had been close. She was strong, but I was "quick". Her endurance exceeded mine, I found.

"Would you free Yvette?" I asked back with a smile, meeting her eyes. I knew her daughter Sara, a teenage delight much like Gayle was. She didn't look upon slave girls like her mother did. Didn't look down upon them as being some sort of female "animal".

"Yvette `belongs' in a collar," Sanda smiled, sipping at her wine. I had to agree with her opinion. Yvette is a true born slave. I watched one of our wenches watering the male slaves working out in the hot sun. If they worked well I would give them a wench or two to enjoy during the evening hours after dinner. Men who become overly sexually frustrated become dangerous. I was "sexually frustrated" myself, and masturbation only eased the physical tension, not the emotional needs that preyed at me!

"Your husband is coming home soon, isn't he?" I said to her, changing the subject. The gold of her neck chain was beautiful against her tanned skin. It is a delightful custom. One deep with symbolic meaning. No woman who wears such and understands its true meaning can doubt that she is beautifully marked as what she truly is. All women, deep in our hearts, want to be owned by those we love. What a woman truly desires in the depths of her heart can be found perhaps only in her dreams, not in the words she

speaks with her tongue. Truth is not often easily spoken of.

"I'd like a few days off, if it wouldn't be any trouble for you," Sanda answered, giving me a smile that told much. I knew she had just been to see the Priestesses and had been told that she would be allowed to have a second daughter by her husband. I had no doubt that she would soon be swelling with child, having been given a drug by the Priestess that would both increase her chances of rapidly becoming pregnant and would also insure that the child was of the proper sex. The technology is well beyond that of my own era, but seems to work reasonably well. The Priestesses of Lys maintain the Earth's population at about half a billion or so, with the sex ratio being 1.1 to 1, with women being favored. However if the child was of the wrong sex or defective, it would be destroyed and Sanda would have try again. I should mention here that to Sanda, this was just the way "life" worked and she didn't think anything more of it than a person of my own era would in paying their income taxes or being drafted into the military services. You might not like it, but there wasn't really anything much that you could "do" about it either!

"How do you plan to greet him when he gets off the ship?" I asked, her husband having gone to Trella, which is about a hundred miles from my estates, to recruit some sailors for the Squala. Most travelers here in the 26th Century travel by water if possible, land travel being difficult and slow in comparison. I might note that the former "slave girls" off the Squala had for the most part used some sort of water transportation to get home. A ship will travel a hundred to perhaps a hundred and fifty miles a day or more. On land you're lucky to "do" thirty a day here...

"Oh, I think perhaps just with a strip of red silk around my hips," she answered, matching my smile with one of her own. He would use her well. Perhaps impregnating her that very night!

"No wine or dancing girls?" I teased her. Some of my wenches could dance fairly well, although Yvette was the best of them all when it came to such "talents". Yvette had told me of the questions Sanda had asked her. It is the duty of a slave girl to be "useful" to both her mistress and those over her in any way that she can. Yvette is a very "useful" wench to me in more ways than you would think. Darlanis uses her girls much the same way.

"I don't think they will be necessary," Sanda answered me. Her smile was a delight to see. I did not think so either. He had been away from her for almost a week. "I am not without certain skills," Sanda added with a smile, then setting down her glass and going into the house. She was some Scribe, I thought!

Chapter Six

"We are always delighted to have a 'Lady' of your caliber visiting us," the Headmistress of the Warriress Academy smiled as she got up and walked from behind her desk to greet me, taking my hand in hers. Her use of the word "caliber" making me smile just a bit beneath my veil. There are differences in the language, words that have changed over the centuries. She was, like me, wearing the black of the Warriress. Tunic and hose instead of the silken dress that I wore. The eagles of a Colonel of Warriresses gleaming there on her broad shoulders. Darlanis had spoken highly of her. Her name was Hara Eslund. Once, many centuries ago, her distant ancestors had traveled in the holds of slave ships from distant Africato some southern state of the USA. Now Africawas but another legendary land favored by certain fiction novelists. A place that I am quite sure is not really all that different from anywhere else

save for some of its animal life. They have elephants, we have the "Garth", which is a dinosaur-like creature perhaps caused by radiation or more likely as I have speculated recently in my other writings, the consequence of 21st Century experimental genetic technology.* * It appears likely to me here that the unicorn is another animal that was produced by such means. While the unicorn has been widely known in mythology as a fantastic creature that usually only virgins can ride, the actual animal here in the 26th Century is so much like a horse that I have no doubt of its true origins.

"I have a stepdaughter who will be coming to you in another couple years," I smiled in reply. "I thought it might be a good idea to see just what you do here." A platoon of young women in black tunics and hose out there parading in the heat of the sun reminding me of another time now six centuries in the past when I had served in the Army as a medical officer. Basic training has never changed over all the centuries. They still have drill instructors. They still do close order drill. I wondered if the young women out there sweating in the hot August sun knew that doubtlessly Roman legionnaires under the reign of Julius Caesar had probably undergone pretty much the very same basic training.

"And you want to see what she will face?" Hara smiled. I liked her. She looked "capable", "competent". Hara was a big broad shouldered woman who looked the part of being a Warriress. She was said to be a "Princess of Swords". She had once fenced against Darlanis twenty some years ago there in the arena. Lost to her by a small margin. Now she was a Headmistress of the Warriress Academy and Darlanis was the Empress of California.

"I'm interested in seeing what she will learn. Whether or not it will be relevant to what she needs to know both as a member of the Warriress caste and as Imperial Princess," I smiled. The office was well furnished, but in a masculine taste. Shields and pikes hung on the walls. There was the head of a Tigon glaring down at us. It had been but days ago that I had faced such a creature with nothing but my keen blade between it and me! That story was already spreading over my domain. That Lady Lorraine had actually faced a Tigon with a sword and survived doing it! I saw the monster head of a Garth on another wall. They stand ten feet tall and remind me a great deal of drawings of Tyrannous Rex that I saw back in the 20th Century. I wondered what sort of a weapon Hara had used to kill such a creature? A crew served ballistae? Sanda had told me that her husband once killed one, but that it took spears to do it, along with a dozen arrows that did nothing more but seem to irritate the horrid reptilian monster!

"It can be done with a heavy spear if you are brave and quick on your feet," Hara smiled, seeing my glance. I recalled that African natives sometimes killed elephants with spears. I supposed it could be done. I am brave, but not quite that brave! I nodded, having considerably more respect for Col. Hara Eslund!

"You do it more than `once'?" I smiled. She smiled back. I had suspected that it had been more of an "accident" than anything else. No sane person hunts Garths except from a tree. It is possible to kill one with a heavy crossbow using steel bolts.

"This is one of our classrooms," Hara said to me, opening the door. I knew that it took more than just skill with weapons to be a Warriress. There are many skills that come into play. I do not pretend to be an expert of them all. There are a good number of Warriresses who are better archers than me. Better at tracking, woodcraft. Better shots with a crossbow. Able to toss a spear and hit something with it. But none better with a sword.

The young women were studying military tactics. Not those of the 20th Century or such, but those of the Romans, the Greeks. It makes no sense to consider "air cover" when you don't have any aircraft. There is no "artillery" but for catapults and ballistae. The longest ranged weapons are steam catapults used for the defense of harbors and some other fixed installations. They have a range of about six to

seven hundred yards and hurl twenty to thirty pound rocks. Tending them is dangerous as there is always the danger of sudden boiler explosions scalding everyone nearby!

I saw a lovely garden of feminine faces glance up at me, the instructor nodding to her superior officer. Thought of the waste of these young lives on a senseless, futile and winless conflict. Saw in my mind's eye these lovely young women lying dead, crossbow bolts jutting from their bodies. Never again to know love, or the caress of a lover. Others would spend the rest of their lives as collared slave girls, forced to serve their master's own sexual pleasures. They perhaps would be the "lucky ones" in this senseless and futile war. I thought of Raspa and the Starfire. Perhaps if Arsana and Sarn were melted down into molten puddles of bubbling lava by its energy beams then peace might just come!

"I wonder if the day will ever come that we will stop learning 'war' any more and decide to live in peace with ourselves," I spoke to Hara as she closed the door behind herself. The hallway dimly lit by niches set in the vault of the ceiling overhead. I felt muchly depressed by the thought of all these young lives now being thrown away upon the altar of Mars for Darlanis' vanities! Why did we fight when we already knew the stupidities of warfare!

"If you wish peace, prepare for war," Hara smiled back. It was the motto there over the entrance to the Academy. The motto sounded familiar to me, but I could not quite place the exact era. It sounded like something some 20th Century general had dreamed up. Actually it dates back to the time of the Romans. I suppose there really isn't anything that "new" when it comes to such things. The only real difference between us and the Romans is that we now use women in combat whereas they didn't. Whether or not that is really an "improvement" is something I'll leave to others to decide. It doesn't really alter warfare that much so far as I've been able to determine except that the "enemy" might be blonde and beautiful. (And just as deadly as any man too!)

"Are you in favor of the war?" I asked, catching up with her as she walked down the hallway to another classroom. She was my height, but probably outweighed me by thirty pounds or so. Hara Eslund was built like a brick. Square, muscular, and very solid!

"I am not in favor of surrender to pirates and outlaws," she answered in level tones. "I am not in favor of having our young women ending up as collared slave girls in Dularn." Darlanis had said somewhat the same, although in somewhat milder terms to me.

"Is there a WarrioreessAcademyin Dularn?" I asked her as she paused and nodded before another classroom door. "Would not the Headmistress of that say the same about us?" I knew that Queen Tulis had issued privateering commissions to pirates and cutthroats as well as to more "honest" privateer captains. Except for Jon Richards and the Janis, everyone else operating off the coasts of the two warring countries was for the most part much more interested in making a profit off the war than actually doing anything to end it! I wonder how many "wars" in Mankind's history have dragged on and on year after year because it was "profitable" to fight such wars! I have often wondered about Vietnam. Why we went into there. Lost so many lives for nothing.

"We have a mandatory course taught by an 'advocate' of the 'other side'," Hara smiled. "It teaches our cadets that things are not often what they first appear to be. Perhaps you would like to sit in on it. We may fight with crossbows and swords instead of atomic bombs and poison gas as your people did, but that does not mean that we are not uncivilized," Hara smiled, pushing open the door. I nodded, well aware of having been "hoist by my own petard"! Obviously Hara Eslund was not a "muscle-bound sword swinger" as some people tend to think of our two military castes.

I hunched down in the seat at the back of the room and listened to the woman speaking there in front of

the class. She was a brunette, no doubt of Dularnian ancestry. Tall, rather attractive. The cadets, about thirty of them in their black tunics and hose, shifting in their seats as they listened to her. Perhaps hearing things they didn't like to hear. They were learning that there were two sides to every question. That there are few really "cut and dried" answers in life. That the "other side" just might be "right" and your side "wrong". They were being told that "aggression" and "defense" are merely terms people use. That not all "aggression" is done by military means. The thirty young lovelies there were getting a good dose of "reality" shoved right down their throats. I don't think they liked it too much!

"May I add a few comments?" I ventured, standing up. I had been introduced by Hara. They all knew that I was Lorraine Duval, the "warrior woman" from the 20th Century. That I was now the Lady Lorraine who owned the territory all around the Academy.

"I'm sure they'll be worth hearing," the teacher smiled, nodding to chocolate skinned Hara as she stood there at my side.

Propping my hip on the edge of the desk (how little classrooms have changed since I was a girl) I said, "What you have been told is the truth. There is truth and justice on both sides of this war. Many of the Dularnians your caste sisters now are fighting are merely only people wishing to be left alone. I know you have been told that our "cause" is just, and that is, I believe, true, but that does not alter the realities of things. Or does it alter the fact that Humanity has fought wars since the dawn of history without ever accomplishing very much too of anything." Pausing for breath, I then added, "Here in this room is the first time I have seen any proof that there may someday be an end to the ceaseless warfare that has plagued Mankind since the dawn of recorded history. Here in this room I have listened to something I would never have believed possible. I want you all to understand that while evil men and women exist, and lurk no doubt just off our shores, the 'other side' is composed of men and women just like yourselves, not devils with horns and tails."

"I never thought of you as being anything more than just some 'sword-swinging superwoman'," Hara smiled as she poured me a glass of wine that evening. I had been mobbed by the cadets, all of whom wanted to ask me questions about my philosophy of life. Of the fact that I had been instrumental in establishing the World Federation of the 21st Century. That short-lived "Utopia" that Janet Rogers attempted to impose upon the human race and failed to make permanent thanks to the "military minds" who could think of nothing but "destruction" when they first saw the Lorr. On the other hand had the Lorr respected us "more" I don't think there would have been a War between us. Many Lorr look upon us as people back in my time looked upon those of a different color.

"I had an 'experience' on Mars that has changed much of my own thinking," I answered, taking the glass from her. I would stay the night, talk to the cadets, explain to them that life was not simple. That good and evil were not what they always seemed.

"There is 'something' in us that makes us what we are," Hara answered, sitting down in the easy chair across from me. "We have a history of violence. Of fighting, of warfare that goes back beyond the dawn of history. Man fought before he could even write. Perhaps even before he could speak as we do now." I had the feeling that she was probably right. We are a violent race. The Lorr have records of battles between Neanderthal tribes too.

"I think that is why we explore and take risks like we do," I answered, sipping at the wine. "The Lorr are a stagnant race despite their awesome technology. They care little but for the 'practical' and the 'useful'. That is why most of their advances in technology have come from their human servants," I told Hara.

"Who are all women, judging from what I have heard," she smiled back. I remembered An'na. The Starfire. Her dreams of exploring the solar system. Perhaps someday setting out for the stars in a better, faster ship yet. Perhaps it would yet happen.

"They don't make war upon each other either," I pointed out.

"Would you want to 'live' in such a society?" Hara asked. There was no answer that I could give her then, nor is there now. The women of Mars are in some ways much like children. There is friendship, affection, but no true "love" as we know it. Most of them are lesbians. I wondered if Aurora, An'na had their lovers? I fought down the thought that they might be each other's lovers!

"I am, I fear, not the sort of a woman for that kind of a life," I smiled back. Hara nodded, her dark eyes meeting mine.

I have written what I have not just to express my own views, but to ask the reader to think a bit. We of the human race are violent. We do make war upon each other either as individuals or as societies. We probably have done so since the days of Homo Erectus. Young boys in the 20th Century played with cap-guns. Those of the 26th play with bows and arrows, swords, etc. Most scientific advances have been made by men, not women, who by their natures tend to be less violent. The Lorr, a peaceful race, are also scientifically stagnant. Their only great period of scientific advancement occurred when they had to flee their own world. Perhaps there is something to all this. I invite you to think about these things! Perhaps if we want the stars we had better be prepared to pay the human "costs" of getting out there!

Chapter Seven

Our foils came together with a sharp ring, Hara driving forward as I stepped back, letting her take the offensive. Letting her use herself up against my impenetrable defense. Waiting for her to make the momentary mistake that I could exploit in return! The watching cadets silent, their eyes riveted on the scene before them. I doubted that any of them had seen such swordplay except at the yearly Royal Games held there in Sarn to the north. Someone once offered me a hundred gold crowns to see a match between me and Darlanis. I wisely turned the offer down, not for my own sake, but because Darlanis is my friend as well as being the Empress of California. We have fenced. She is not my equal.

Hara feinted, attempting to draw me out. I did not accept the offer. She was stronger than me, but her strength did her little good against my quick footwork. Darlanis once said to me that I danced around like a ballerina when I fought. I suppose it is true. I rely a great deal on my "footwork". In "not being there" when my opponent makes his or her move. Part of my skill consists of keeping my opponent "off balance". Not letting them get a chance to think about what they are going to try next. I let Hara thrust at me. She was slightly "off balance". My foil struck swiftly, a blur to those watching. In a real fight I would have gone for the throat, which is my favorite "kill spot"!

"ByLys, I've never seen such wizardry with a sword like yours!" Hara gasped as she stepped back, lowering her foil. She had given me a good fight, although she had been even from the first obviously outclassed by my own abilities with the foil. The gathered cadets had doubtlessly seen something I hoped would remain in their memories. Hara had been better than any of the Academy's instructors, but the outcome had been just the same regardless. I sometimes feel that the woman hasn't yet been born who can face me and win. Only Darlanis really comes close to matching me. She has a fighting style much like

mine, although I feel that her "footwork" needs a bit of working on. She tends to depend too much upon her shoulder and arm muscles, upon her size.

"I've been doing this most of my life," I smiled. "I should be good at it by now." I was wet with sweat, the silken tunic I wore plastered to my body. I was glad Hara had quit when she had. There is a limit to my endurance and I was approaching it!

I was thankful that I had done the fencing that I had back on my estate. While my skill with a sword surpasses that of any Warriress that I know, still, I do have my own physical limits. It requires daily exercise, work-outs to keep me up at my "peak".

"How do you justify your martial skills with your beliefs?" one of the cadets asked me as I stood there before them on the stage in the brightly lit auditorium. They were intelligent young women, the best Californiahad. The flower of 26th Century womanhood. To me there was no conflict between my skills and my beliefs, I explained to them. I believe in the right of "selfdefense", that there are times that it is necessary to fight a war to avoid a greater disaster later. There is a difference between a "just" war and an "unjust" one. World War Two is a good example. Vietnam on the other hand is still extremely "iffy". I saw many young lives being wasted there. The war with Dularn is another. The era, the causes are utterly different, but otherwise there are far too many uncomfortable "similarities" for me!

"Being a Warriress is not a matter of physical skills," I answered one. My Scribe, Sanda Talen, was as good as many of the black caste with a sword. She could even stand against me for a few seconds at least. More if I didn't try to win right away. I look upon the Caste Codes as a guide to proper living. There are evil people in the world. Someone must stand up for the "good", a sword in hand, and tell the forces of evil "this far, no more".

"Would you die for Darlanis?" I had one ask me. It was, I suspected, more than just a rhetorical question. Twice now I have fought for her life at the risk of my own, and I think I can answer that today just as I did that day at the Warriress Academy. "My life is less important to Californiathan hers." I don't have any better way of putting it. She is, I think, a symbol of something good, something "decent". Something to defend!

"You might be interested in this," Hara said to me with a smile, handing me the weapon. The design leaving no doubt in my mind that it was of the 21st Century. The cylindrical magazine mounted in the upper half of the interior of the stock allowed a magazine capacity considerably greater than anything that I knew about in the 20th Century. It would have held a hundred rounds, Hara told me. The design was similar to the Lorr auto-rifle, although this weapon did not fire the explosive bullets of the Lorr weapon. The sights were telescopic, the fit of the weapon perfect. It had been manufactured only a few short years before The War. It was the best "killing machine" Man had ever developed for killing his own kind in large numbers by one single human being. The metal was a dark stainless steel of some sort. The stock made of fiberglass. It was in amazingly good condition considering its age. Given ammunition, I have no doubt that it would function just as well as it did back in the 21st Century!

"Perhaps it wasn't the 'Utopia' that we thought it was," Hara said as I handed the military rifle back to her. I nodded. Janet Rogers had attempted to impose "order" upon Mankind. She had no doubt been forced to use military force to do so. It had been all in vain. Her civilization had not survived her by more than a couple years. I wondered what would happen to California once Darlanis was gone. Would that too collapse into anarchy? I knew of the "independence" movements in Orgon and Trelandar that wanted an end to the Empire. I had already been "approached" by those who mistakenly believed that I might be the one to overthrow Darlanis. To establish a "new social order" based upon the mythologies of the past. What Janet Rogers did can never be done again. Perhaps it is just as well now. It is too easy to misuse

such power. The Priestesses of Lys are still yet our best hope.

"Maybe it's best we carry these instead of that," I smiled in reply, tapping the hilt of my sword where it hung at my hip.

"At least it's face to face, not just a figure at three hundred yards," Hara answered, closing the glass case over the 21st Century military rifle. There is something to be said for the sword. It is, I feel, the weapon of he or she who takes pride in their skills. Who is willing to practice day after day with it.

"I think I understand now a little more of what it means to be a Warriress," I said to Hara as I saddled my unicorn for the ride back home. "And I think some of my own doubts have been answered," I added, drawing the girth up tight and waiting until my big stallion let out his breath before tightening the girth further. My horned mount having a "delightful habit" of taking in a deep breath and then holding it until you tightened the girth up. Thus insuring that the saddle was "comfortably loose". Of course you might just find it slipping too, and ending up walking home!

"And I don't think anyone here will ever forget you either," Hara smiled as I hoisted myself up into the saddle, my skirt riding up my legs to the middle of my thighs. My mount shifting beneath me, restless. The ivory horn jutting out there before it.

I listened to the birds now chirping in the trees as I rode along, saw a herd of deer race off into the forest as I came up on them. Saw the little harmless squirrels and rabbits run off. The sun hot there in the sky before me, it being late afternoon.

Suddenly something whizzed just before my eyes a few inches from my face! A blurred missile that thunked into a nearby tree! A CROSSBOW BOLT! SOMEONE HAD TAKEN A SHOT AT ME FROM THE WOODS!

A wiser Warriress would have laid spurs to her mount and crouching low over its back, put distance between herself and that hidden crossbowman! However, I am sometimes not as "wise" as I should be. Like Darlanis, I sometimes do "stupid things"!

Leaping from the back of my prancing unicorn, I ran swiftly towards to the woods, keeping low, running in a zigzag pattern between the scattered trees, my drawn sword shining there in my hand! My fury at being so shot at so great I did not stop to consider the possible dire consequences of my reckless actions!

Suddenly there came a painful slap to my thigh, and I fell rolling between some rocks, clutching at my bleeding left leg! This hidden crossbowman was a true master of his deadly weapon!

"Damn!" I muttered to myself, suddenly aware of how foolish I had been. I had only a sword and dagger against his crossbow! The blood staining my fingers as I clutched at my painful flesh wound. The bolt having cut my flesh much like a sword cut as it had ripped into my thigh. I hoped it wasn't poisoned, or I was a dead woman whatever I did! Poison is against all the Codes, but is sometimes used by hired assassins just to make really "SURE"!

I could see my unicorn perhaps fifty yards away, grazing now at the grasses that grew between the scattered trees. With no missile weapon of my own I had little chance of defeating the hidden crossbowman. He only had to wait for me to make the next move and aim carefully. Writing "finis" to all my adventures! I thought of Sharon, of Gayle, of Mara, and of Darlanis, whose bravery I had always so admired. What would she do in my place?

Slipping off my hat and veil, I slipped the point of my sword into the crown of my hat and carefully gently raised it just over the edge of the rocks behind which I now laid. Wondering if he would actually take a shot at it like those Western movies I'd seen as a young girl back in France! That would give me about twenty seconds to act before he could recock, reload his deadly weapon. Twenty seconds to find him, kill him with my keen blade! That was, of course, assuming that there was only one!

"Come on, you bastard, shoot!" I muttered to myself, gently moving the hat and its veil up a bit higher and to one side of the rock as if I was fearfully peering out around the edge!

The bolt was only a blurred streak as it zipped through my hat, flinging it to one side off the tip of my sword as I jumped to my feet and dashed madly towards the spot where I knew now he had to be! The man, clad in green, short, swarthy, madly yanking back his bowstring and slipping another bolt on the track just as I came charging up to him! Raising, lifting his weapon to fire as I leaped towards him, my sword outthrust there before me! "HE CAN'T MISS AT THIS RANGE!" I remember thinking to myself as he then fired right at my charging form from only a few feet away!

There was a sharp stinging pain across my upper right chest as his bolt ripped through my dress and scraped across my ribs just beneath my armpit, his terrified aim having just off by the fraction necessary to save my life! The man flinging up his crossbow to parry my thrust as we collided and went down in a thrashing heap, my nails clawing at his face, my knee smashing into his groin as he felt the full anger of the infuriated Lady Lorraine! Striking his face with that momentarily paralyzing blow Hara had shown me only that morning, that blow with the heel of the cupped hand that is so effective when delivered to the base of the nose! Practically jumping up and down on him in my fury, the blood running from my torn body, staining my lovely fitted black silk dress now torn and ripped from what I had gone through in the last few seconds! The blood running from his face and mouth as he tried helplessly to defend himself from my fury!

"WHO PAID YOU TO KILL ME? TELL ME OR BY GOD I'LL DRAG THE INFORMATION OUT OF YOU WITH THE REST OF YOUR STINKING GUTS!" I snarled, straddling his chest, striking his face again and again! The man only whimpering and sobbing, crying like some big baby!!!

Chapter Eight

"What Happened To You?" Lady Tirana gasped as I dragged the stumbling crossbowman in on the end of a rope tied to my saddle, his weapon now cradled cocked and loaded in my arms. I had not been gentle with the assassin. Half my dress now served as bandages for my wounds. I looked perhaps little better than I felt! I had lost considerable blood. My ribs hurt, and my thigh still bled a bit! It was dark now, the stars gleaming in the clear sky above. A faint glow in the west the last only hint of twilight. The mosquitoes buzzing around my head now in the still calm air.

"He tried to kill me and came damm close to doing it!" I answered with a grim smile there in the light from her lamp, a number of her men at arms surrounding her, swords and bows close at hand. It is usually wise to be careful approaching any estate after dark. Sometimes the trigger pull on crossbows is awfully light! One never is too sure. Caution is often the best policy.

I had not wished to return to my own estates for fear that I might be greeted by another crossbow bolt

out of the darkness! I had no doubt that whoever had paid this man to kill me had also known of my movements, and the fact that I would return to my own estate early that evening just before dark. I did not think that they would be watching Lady Tirana's. There were also questions I wanted "answers" to. Answers that I had every intention of obtaining from the naked assassin now following with my rope around his neck. I had of course taken the precaution of stripping him, of tying his hands with a long strip cut from my dress, silk being a strong fiber that also makes an excellent bondage material.

"Take him to the blacksmith's shed and secure him well to the ceiling rafters by his wrists and see that his legs are well spread," Lady Tirana snapped, her voice icy cold. "And inform the blacksmith that I wish irons to be heated as of right now!" The tone of her voice making me shudder. Her men nodding, regarding their mistress with perhaps a bit of awe. I saw her eyes glitter into my own. We would obtain the information we desired even if there wasn't anything left afterwards to enslave or kill!

"Here," Lady Tirana said to me, handing me the bottle of brandy there in the lamp lit room, her fingers deft, sure as she checked my bandages, my wounds. Applying that wonderful healing compound of the 26th Century. My fine fitted silk dress that I had paid nearly a gold crown for now but bloody rags fit for only being used as a cleaning cloth! I would have to wear one of hers or ride back home in the morning in nothing but some bloody rags!

"You're a fool, Lorraine, just a damn lucky fool that you're still alive," Tirana smiled as I handed her back the bottle, the brandy burning its way down inside me. A lovely black silken dress ready for me, a sly eyed slave girl ready to assist me in dressing. A gleaming collar snug around her neck. Lady Tirana smiling to herself as she stood there, shaking her head as if she could not believe that any Warrioress would be stupid enough to try what I had done. I had been awful lucky. That was for sure!

"I thought of that afterwards," I smiled, half in the dress as I slipped it over my head. "Learned the meaning of fear too." I had learned from Hara that Lady Tirana was a former "Warlady" of Sam! That she had been Warlady under Thar Marden, the King! She had been dismissed from her post by the newly widowed Queen. Darlanis had been looking for a "scapegoat" for the King's death in battle against the Nevadas. And Tirana had been her "victim".

"If Darlanis had a hundred like you I think she could conquer the world," the attractive retired Warlady smiled in reply as I emerged from the dress like a turtle from its shell. I took only a minute to buckle my weapons back around my waist, Lady Tirana handing me the brandy bottle, telling me to drink deep. I did not look forward to what we were going to do to the assassin.

I felt the sweat drip down my body as the man screamed like a woman in agony. Lady Tirana holding the flaming torch between his legs, burning his genitals. We had not obtained the information I wished. Only that he had been paid fifty gold crowns by a woman in black, heavily veiled, to kill me. She had worn a sword and dagger. Had on long gloves so that one could not see the caste mark. Had worn a broad brimmed hat that concealed what her veil had not. Her hair had been black like mine or Tirana's. It could have been any woman. Her trappings had been those of a "Lady", but that bit of information was hardly helpful to us now.

"We aren't going to get anything more out of him," Lady Tirana said to me in the same tones that she would have used had she said that she hoped it would rain. The man hung, gasping, sobbing, a thing of horror that sickened me. Tirana had used fire, hot irons. I would not have had the "stomach" for what she had done. What had been necessary to learn even what we had.

"What will we do with him now?" I asked, sickened by what I had seen. Sickened by what I had allowed Lady Tirana to do. She was of the 26th Century. Hardened to such things as I never will be. She

took another swig from the near empty bottle of brandy. I could see the sweat there on her face, the look in her dark eyes as they looked into mine. It had taken much to do what we had. The memories of this night would not be soon forgotten by either one of us. I felt sick to my stomach, disgusted by what we had done! What I had seen Lady Tirana do to him! The tortured screams of agony as she had held red hot irons to his flesh! The stink of his seared flesh made the gorge rise in my throat. He was a horrible sight, something out of a nightmare!

"Turn your back, Lorraine," Lady Tirana said in level tones, drawing her sword from its sheath. I did so, sickened. I heard the man scream "NO! NO!" Then there was a sudden strangled gurgle and I heard the sound of a body thrashing against the ropes that held it in place there behind me! I felt the gorge rise in my throat, and bending over, vomited on the dirt floor there before me! Retching and retching as my stomach emptied itself!

"This will bring momentary forgetfulness," Lady Tirana said, pouring the dark straw colored liquid into the glass and handing it to me. A slave girl kneeling, watching, her eyes dark, wide. I could smell Lady Tirana's sweat, my own soaking my dress. The body of the crossbowman would be buried in an unmarked grave out in the woods where it was likely no one would ever find it. I had killed before, but this was utterly different. We were in the little house she lived in until her manor could be rebuilt. The Dularnians having burned it when they captured her and killed her husband. She had seen him die before her eyes. I suppose she had good reason for seeking the release that alcohol gives.

"But why would anyone want to kill me?" I muttered, the whiskey burning my throat as I sipped it. It was "rotgut" she distilled herself. About a hundred proof. The half bottle of brandy I had drunk had hardly "touched" me during the "interrogation" of the assassin. I doubted if Tirana's whiskey would be much more effective. Why had someone paid fifty gold crowns for my life? I couldn't think of any enemies I had here in this era.

"You are 'upsetting things' a bit around here with your insistence upon proper government and humane treatment of slaves," Lady Tirana commented, sipping at her whiskey. Her eyes dark, glowing into mine. She had "more guts" than I did, that was for sure. I had always considered myself "hard", but Tirana was like iron. The sort of a woman who could walk into Hell with a sword in her hand to face the Devil himself! A Warriress' Warriress!

"That's not enough for anyone to want to kill me!" I protested. I might have "annoyed" a few people, but I certainly hadn't done anything that someone was willing to pay fifty gold crowns for to have me killed! That made utterly no sense at all!

"I'm going to give you 'Samson' and 'Delilah'," Lady Tirana smiled in reply, nodding to her slave girl, who went out quietly on bare feet to fetch whoever or whatever Samson and Delilah were! The wench shivering in terror as she closed the door behind her! Obviously 'Samson' and 'Delilah' were fearsome beasts!

"Lys!" I gasped, shrinking back, my hand going instinctively to the hilt of my sword at the sight of what stood beside the slim slave girl as Lady Tirana opened the door for her. The great gray furry bodies, the eyes, bringing back memories! Lady Tirana smiling, taking the leashes from the terrified slave girl!

"Lady Lorraine," Lady Tirana smiled, "Samson and Delilah."

"Those are dire wolves!" I breathed, feeling the fear sweat. A pack of them can pull down even a Garth, that great dinosaurlike carnivore that prowls the darkness of the deepest forests.

"I am breeding them," Tirana smiled. "I believe that they will someday be quite valuable as 'guardians' for young innocent Warrioreses like you who don't know any better than to stay out of trouble." I am neither "young" or "innocent", but I tended to agree completely with that last final part of her statement! It had been a stupid action on my part to try to capture the crossbowman. I had come very close to paying for it with my own life!

Before I could say any more I heard voices, heard footsteps there on the little veranda, the sound of booted feet. Samson and Delilah snarling horribly, their great fangs bared, their eyes like greenish hellfire! Whatever was going to come through that door was in for one great big sudden surprise!

"Lorr----!" Sanda Talen gasped, her hand going to the hilt of her sword, her husband flinging her practically off her feet as he thrust her back and whipped out his sword at the sight of the two dire wolves standing there only feet away from them both!

"Sheath your weapons," Lady Tirana spoke in level tones, her hands grasping the heavy leather collars both animals wore as they surged forward dragging her with them. Had they not been so beautifully trained neither Carl or Sanda would have stood a chance against the two four hundred pound predatory beasts my friend now controlled with only the actual power of her voice!

"Whew!" Carl smiled, his wife's dark eyes glowing into mine. I remembered how he had tried to protect her knowing that no man, not even the greatest warrior, could face two dire wolves and live! I once faced one as I have related. It was enough for me!

"I took the liberty of informing them of your whereabouts," Lady Tirana smiled as she then invited the couple in. Samson and Delilah at her command lying down in a corner of the room like a pair of gigantic dogs. "Dogs" four feet at the shoulder and going nearly four hundred pounds! I felt very well "protected".

"Suzi! Drinks for our guests!" Lady Tirana snapped to her slave girl, who carefully skirted the two monsters sharing the room with us. Carl's arm possessively around his wife's body. I had no doubts that he would have died for her had it become necessary. Obviously she didn't need to "worry" about slave girls!

"Gave us a bit of a 'scare' there," Carl smiled, Sanda at his side. The gold of her neck chain gleaming in the lamp light. He was a handsome fellow, tall, dark haired, well built. No doubt Sanda was quite capable of keeping him "happy" and "content". I recalled the time I had accidentally seen them together. He wore the black leather of the Warrior, she the blue silken blouse and soft flowing black leather riding skirt that she usually wears. I saw the rapid rise and fall of her bosom underneath the silk. Smiled at his comment in reply. I knew exactly how they felt. Suzi then returning with drinks, pouring, and keeping a watchful eye on Tirana's two fearsome dire wolves!

Chapter Nine

"You're in no condition to ride," Lady Tirana warned as Sanda helped me get back up on the back of my big white unicorn. The animal the same one that I first saw that day now so long ago when I met Lady Lana there in the ruins of the Simmons' home.....

"I'll take care of her," Sanda laughed, swinging up behind me, taking the reins from my bemused fingers.

I had drunk deep of Lady Tirana's rotgut whiskey. Lady Tirana would bring over the two dire wolves in the morning. I had suggested that she wait until fairly late, say about "noon"! I didn't think that I would be rising very early. Not after everything that had happened. Not after everything I had seen. Had allowed to occur...

"You're good friend," I muttered, the alcohol taking effect. "The best any 'Lady' could have," I told Sanda, holding her hand where she held me against herself. Her husband only a darker shadow there in the darkness of the night. Our mounts from time to time shied at unseen things that leaped away into the brush. Three of Lady Tirana's own men at arms were also riding with us.

"You're very brave," Sanda said. "I wouldn't have had the guts to do 'half' the things that you have." She knew much about me. About my adventures here in the 26th Century from the time I had flown through the "Gateway" until now. I had few secrets from her. She had few from me. We had become very close over the weeks that I had now lived on the estate. I supposed it was natural as she was the only well educated woman in my own employ. I had even ventured to once discuss with her the "advantages" of a "syndicalist" society over a "capitalist" one, I'll note here. This having been one of my latest "ideas" for "improving" things as we sat out on the veranda watching the Moon come up one night!

"You'll find it's more a matter of doing what you have to do at the time and then later on realizing just how dangerous it was to 'do' it," I mumbled in reply, glad for the saddle horn. My horned mount seemingly not as steady on his own feet as usual! My own thoughts blurred, confused. My memories all jumbled together, those of the 20th Century mingled in with those of now. * * I have edited all my conversations with Sanda here so that they will make more sense to the reader. My own speech at this point being blurred and confused at times from what Sanda informs me.

"I'd never be able to do what you have," Sanda spoke softly.

"You'd find that when you've been told that your own daughter is going to be sold as a slave girl that you can do more than you believed you could," I answered, remembering the fight there on the Ronda. That "epic" battle that still yet amazed everyone! I knew she had a daughter a couple years younger than Sharon or Gayle, a Scribe like herself. Sanda having refused to let her daughter Sara become a member of the Warriress caste as her husband had wanted for fear that she would end up like her son there fighting and risking his life on the Dularnian front! Sanda having a low opinion of Darlanis and her ambitions to bring Dularn in as part of the Empire. She was also a member of the "Free Trelandar" political organization, which I feared would someday might get her into serious trouble with the Empire of California!

I had once privately discussed the matter with her husband Carl, who said that he understood his wife's feelings even if he didn't agree with them. His concern was for her, fearing that I might discharge her from her position for her opinions about the issue. I had told him at the time that I shared to a certain extent her own feelings about the war with Dularn, although I didn't think that Darlanis was an evil person or a "waster of life"!

"I think I understand," Sanda answered in a soft voice, giving me an affectionate hug. "I would die for my Sara." I was well aware of the fact that I didn't smell very "Lady-like" just then, and that I wasn't anything but some drunken stinking bitch who had just seen something that would never leave her memories!

"I'm going to pay you three crowns a month instead of two," I told her. She was worth it to me. I needed a "friend". She was. She put up with my "moods", my short temper, all the defects in my character that make me not the easiest person in the world to live with. I'm no "saint" either. I suspect it

will be quite a number of reincarnations before I reach the purity of soul, the "goodness" to be allowed to finally "merge" with SHE.

"Lorraine!" Gayle cried, leaping up from the chair where she had been sitting reading. She was of high caste and literate. I supposed she had learned something of what had happened to me.

"It's a long time past your bedtime," I tried to smile, feeling love for this golden haired Dularnian who meant so much to me. I was tired, drunk, stinking from my dried sweat. Filled with memories that wouldn't go away. Disgusted with the world!

"Yvette, pour a bath for your mistress and see that it is warm," Sanda ordered, Yvette hurrying to obey. Sanda had once whipped her. Yvette had a "healthy respect" for Mrs. Talen! Her husband had gone to check on our security. The men now posted.

"They said that someone tried to kill you!" Gayle said, moving into my arms as I held her to myself. I hoped she was holding her breath as I stunk like a skunk just then. Little Mara asleep in her bed, fortunately having slept through the "fuss"!

"I'm a tough old bitch," I smiled back. "It'll take more than one crossbowman to do me in," I told her in drunken tones. I did look "old", haggard from everything I had gone through. I appear like a woman near a century old by 26th Century standards. It does confuse people at times until they realize just what the anti-aging serums have done for us. Keeping us looking "young" almost to the end of our hundred and thirty year life spans!

"How many of our people can read and write?" I asked Sanda as we shared a late breakfast the next morning. I looked like something "ridden hard and put away wet" as the Warriors say! I looked forward to seeing Lady Tirana and her two awesome beasts. It had been necessary to leave them with her as our unicorns were almost uncontrollable around the two gray furred giant wolves.

"Those of the upper castes and the Dularnian slave girls," Sanda answered. Nearly all Dularnians are literate. Their own "caste" system is different than ours. Much more "democratic".

"What about the blacksmith, the leather worker?" I asked. Sanda nodded in the negative. They were of low caste. Schools exist only for the wealthy. Those of high caste. In the eyes of the Scribe there was no need for those of low caste to be able to read and write. As a matter of fact I didn't think Darlanis would approve of such an idea anyway. I had mentioned it to her one time. She didn't seem very "interested" in the idea either!

"Is there a law forbidding their education?" I asked, Gayle sitting there watching, keeping her thoughts to herself. She was from a society where literacy was taken almost for granted. One of the things that make Dularnians feel superior to other people.

"You Californians have to keep your people 'ignorant' so they can't rise up and rebel against your repressive social order!" Gayle suddenly burst out beside me, much to my surprise! I had forgotten that to her we were the "aggressors". The ones who had tried to conquer her "peace-loving" country and failed in the attempt! As a free woman she was of course entitled to her own opinions of the issue. I hadn't known she had such "opinions"!

"I hate to say it, but she's probably got a 'point' there," Sanda answered, much to my own surprise. This was turning out to be a day I'd remember! First Gayle, then Sanda had said things you never hear spoken except by "wild-eyed radicals" no one pays any attention to. I was glad Darlanis wasn't around. She

wouldn't have approved of either Gayle's or Sanda's opinions too much!

"Is there a law against a public school open to all?" I said to Sanda, my question still not having been answered one way or another. Sanda was a Scribe, well read. She knew Imperial Law. Yvette refilled my coffee cup. I told her to refill Sanda's too.

"There is a law that requires all schools to be licensed by the Crown," Sanda answered, searching her memories. Obviously I would have to have Darlanis' permission, and that wasn't likely!

"What about the Priestesses of Lys?" Gayle then ventured. Their activities weren't subject to Darlanis' rule although I knew that they generally didn't "meddle" in political matters of any sort. They did hold religious classes in the teachings of Lys. Reading THE BOOK OF LYS to the children sent to them. Such was the duty of all parents. There is no "religious freedom" on the Earth any more although the Priestesses do "tolerate" the few atheists that pop up from time to time denying the realities of the existence of SHE, or "Lys" as SHE is better known to Mankind.

"They usually concern themselves with the state of our `souls', not our intellectual knowledge," Sanda answered Gayle back. There was a hint of arrogance in Sanda's voice. It hadn't been that long ago that Gayle had been a collared slave girl. Gayle had even once been whipped by Sanda. Gayle was also from Dularn. Sanda had no love for Dularnians, even ones like Gayle!

"I think I will pay a visit to the temple in Thistle," I interjected, not having cared that much for how Sanda had answered Gayle. I would see Lady Tirana first, get her opinion on the issue. Perhaps the Priestesses would be willing to run a system of public schools. It would be a good chance for them to teach the children of California and perhaps elsewhere the beautiful moral code that SHE had once tried to teach Humanity some twenty six hundred years ago. The moral code that had been so perverted by the Roman Catholic Church and Christianity in general in Her Name. Perhaps this time we might do just a bit better with it!

Chapter Ten

My thigh was still a bit painful as we trotted along, Lady Tirana beside me, Carl Talen taking the lead, Samson and Delilah trotting alongside, their tongues hanging out from the heat of the day. Carl was armed with a bow, me with the crossbow I had "won" the day before at such cost to my own hide, and Tirana with a long lance that she said brought back memories of another time. Riding behind Lady Tirana and I came Gayle and Sanda, both being armed with bows. All of us but for Gayle also armed with swords.

"A bit sore?" Tirana Grayson asked, giving me a smile from behind her veil. There are limits even to the healing compounds of the 26th Century. You don't put a crossbow bolt through your thigh one day and go out riding the next without some discomfort!

"I'm getting well aware that this unicorn has a leg on each corner," I smiled back from behind my own veil, bouncing in the saddle as we rode along at the trot. The heat of the sun making me sweat. I thought fondly of something like a 20th Century string bikini. Like the sort I used to once wear around our pool. I suppose the good people of Thistle would have been horrified to see their "Lady Lorraine" so attired riding into town! I thought of Darlanis, of her exotic golden costume. There might be "something" to that.

She didn't wear a veil or a hat. I supposed gold mesh wouldn't be that comfortable to wear, but just suppose I had something made...., I mused to myself, thinking of costumes I'm sure a fine well bred "Lady" like my upright companion wouldn't consider fit for a slave girl to wear, and certainly not for a "Lady" like myself! Tirana being a bit "strait-laced"!

"I don't think the Priestesses will go along with your suggestion," Tirana had said when I had ventured it to her to find out what her reaction was. She was of the same social class as I was. Held the same attitudes towards those of lower castes that most of the high born Californian aristocrats had here. Surprisingly, however, she was not opposed to public schools as long as they were controlled and run by the Priestesses of Lys, saying that it would be "good for the people" to get some "proper education". I had to smile, however, at some of her other comments, Lady Tirana being much like some people I've met back in the 20th Century. I have no doubt that a "moral education" would be of benefit to all, but I do doubt that it would really make that much of a difference! In Tirana's eyes the major benefit of "public schools" was what could be taught about "proper behavior" and such things, my friend being the sort who worried considerably about the shortness of the skirts worn by the young ladies of "today" and their "behavior"! I guess some things never change!

After some "discussion" it was agreed that I would take "Delilah" and leave Lady Tirana "Samson", Delilah being a bit more "tame" than Samson and less likely to attack me or my own people! While Delilah did behave much like a well trained dog, I still had my "reservations" about her, knowing the sort of creature she was and what she was capable of. Surprisingly enough, however, I had found that she had taken instantly to Mara and vice versa! Even to allowing Mara to get on her back and ride her around like a pony! Mara giggling with delight, clinging to Delilah's fur while I sweated "bullets" and clung to the hilt of my sword in terror at what Delilah might do even with Lady Tirana right there! Tirana having suggested that perhaps the wolf might sleep in Mara's room, thus insuring the girl's safety from kidnapers, which was now my fear after the attempt on my own life!

"We'd better dismount and lead our mounts in," Lady Tirana suggested as we halted and dismounted on the outskirts of Thistle, leashing Samson as I did the same with Delilah. Well aware that the dire wolf outweighed me by nearly a factor of three, Delilah going a bit over three hundred and sixty pounds while Samson ran close to four hundred! If I couldn't control her with my voice, the chain-leash wouldn't do much good either if she decided to go charging off after some luckless human or animal! A choke collar might do some good, but we didn't have any of those!

"We could be in a lot of `trouble' if one of those...." Carl spoke, regarding me as he flipped the reins over his unicorn's horn, taking the reins from mine. The animals a bit fractious due to the closeness of the gigantic wolves. Sanda nodding to Gayle, the two having been chatting back and forth ever since we had left the estate a couple hours before. What would have taken me fifteen minutes to drive or less in the 20th Century now took two hours of steady riding on a beast that looked like something out of a fairy tale! I thought fondly a moment of Black Lady, my beloved airplane. How nice it would be to have that! I could fly all over California, visiting here and there. Of course gasoline would be a problem, although I supposed it would be possible to convert the engine to run on alcohol, of which Tirana's still could produce in adequate amounts without any difficulty!

"Samson's a good boy," Tirana smiled, crouching down, rubbing her face against Samson's. The dire wolf licking her face. I tossed back my veil and found to my pleasure that Delilah would do the same with me, her great tongue slurping across my cheek!

I saw the woman cringe back, her little girl clinging to her in terror, the woman's hand on her dagger as she half drew it. I saw the fear, the terror in her eyes. Dire wolves are much feared. Delilah walking at my side like some gigantic German Shepherd, which she rather resembled in a way. I felt very safe just then.

As "safe" as if I had my .357 Magnum there on my hip!

"We do get a certain amount of `respect'," Gayle observed, leading her unicorn as she walked behind me and Lady Tirana. I was about to agree with her when I saw the sheriff of Thistle and half a dozen men, armed with bows and crossbows, approaching us!

"Good afternoon, sheriff," I said. He knew of course who I was. Knew of the "power" that I held as the "LadyLorraine". I don't think he was very happy in having to say what he said next.

"I'll have to ask you to keep those tied up," he spoke. Delilah growled softly at him, just showing her teeth. I saw him step back, go for his sword. That was not a very smart move! I didn't even have time to warn him that Delilah was trained to attack anyone who drew a weapon against me! Tirana having warned me to tell my people never to draw a sword in Delilah's presence when she was with me! Suddenly I had a three hundred and sixty odd pound dire wolf surging forward on the other end of my leash!

"Delilah! NO!" I snapped, throwing all my weight against the leash as Delilah surged forward, my high heels digging into the dirt of the street. Carl and Sanda grabbing on to the leash, helping me hold that awesome fearsome snarling fang-barring gigantic wolf there on the other end of it! Tirana and Gayle holding Samson as he joined in, his vicious snarls terrifying as we fought to hold Delilah from tearing out the sheriff's throat! It was obvious that these wolves of ours needed a lot more training!

"They do need a `little work'," Lady Tirana admitted as we securely tied our two dire wolves in one of the stable's stalls where our unicorns would be kept until we needed them for the ride back home. I had apologized to the sweating sheriff of Thistle, who no doubt had a few years scared out of him by facing a snarling Delilah! She was quite obviously "good protection"!

"I wouldn't mind having one of Delilah's pups when you breed her to Samson," Gayle smiled, putting her hand on Tirana's arm. That had been how Tirana had trained the beasts, starting with them as puppies when they could be taught to obey their mistress or master whichever the case might be. Darlanis is interested in trying to use such animals in warfare, but Tirana says that she doubts that she will have any success, as the beasts do not have the intelligence to tell "friend" from "foe" and are more likely to dangerously "revert" once they taste the blood of human beings! On the other hand I have had enough experience with Delilah to have a pretty good idea of what she would do under such conditions, and think that domesticated dire wolves might "work out" if given the proper training. After all, how do the girls of Talon ever manage to handle their great vicious gigantic Tarls? And a dire wolf is a lot "smarter" than some dumb bird!!!

"Want to see what they're finding?" Sanda asked Gayle as we walked through Thistle, a group of men under the command of one of the caste of the Builders digging out the foundations of some old 21st Century ruins. The caste of the Builders being one of the three high castes of California, the others being Physicians and the Warriors and Warriresses, which are two subdivisions of the same basic caste. Warriors and Warriresses providing both the officers for the military forces and also the police forces.

"Nice girl, well bred," Carl observed as the two strolled over to where the work was being done, the workmen sweating in the hot sun. It was dry, the fields burning up. We needed some rain and badly or otherwise the crops would be nearly ruined. I knew the Peasants had organized a mass prayer to beseechLysfor rain, although I doubted it would do any good. SHE does not interfere much in the affairs of Mankind. We have to do the best that we can. That is all that SHE really expects of any of us.

"Better than Phara Holt?" That was the blacksmith's daughter. A pretty girl, a bit "ripe" in the figure.

Dark haired. I knew his son had been engaged to her before being called up for service there on the Dularnian front. He and his wife had been more than just a bit upset that their son, high caste, wished to marry a low caste girl like the daughter of a common blacksmith!

"You are not really of this world, my Lady, or you would understand how it feels to see your son with a girl like that!" I nodded, glad my veil partially at least concealed my features. I saw nothing wrong in Phara Holt. She was a nice girl. Totally illiterate like nearly all low caste girls, but she would make him a good wife. Be a good mother to his children. She was a busty wench, wide hipped, no doubt the sort that could much "please" a man. I had spoken to her a few times, but otherwise I knew little about the girl except for what Sanda and Carl had told me about her! And that had not been very flattering either!

"Gayle is too young to become anyone's wife," I answered. She was in my eyes at least, although Peasant girls are often married off at the age of sixteen and become mothers at nineteen when they then swap their silver neck chains for those of gold.

"I wish to speak to the High Priestess when she is available," I said to the Priestess who greeted me there at the door. The temple in Thistle is small, nothing like the one in Sarn, but yet there was the same "peace", the same "quietness" I had found there. The same golden ankh with its candles flickering before it. The paintings on the walls were a familiar sight to me now. The pews, the places where one might kneel before Lysand ask her forgiveness for your "sins" reminding me of Catholic churches. I thought I could use a bit of forgiveness. I had not been leading a very good life lately. Especially not after everything here...

"I will inform her of your presence," the Priestess smiled, the silver of her ankh gleaming against the whiteness of her gown. Priestesses are celibate and are usually considered to be virgins, although that is not necessarily true as older women do sometimes get the "call" and become Priestesses later on in life.

"I'm afraid you're probably pretty disappointed in me," I prayed, kneeling down there before the ankh, the haughty Lady of Thistle and the surrounding area. I had removed my hat, my veil. One prays bareheaded, unveiled. I had not been a good Lorraine. I had not lived the sort of life that SHE wished me to lead. I had been guilty of the sin of "arrogance", of feeling myself superior to those of this era because of my 20th Century knowledge. Of treating those around me like ignorant barbarians just because I knew things they didn't. I had not been nice to those who now served me. Who treated me with a respect that I hardly deserved!

"And I know what you think about what I `allowed' to happen last night," I whispered, the memories flooding back into my mind as I knelt there before the ankh. The flickering candlelight that reflected off its polished surface was pleasing to the eye. That was a crime that would now "mark" my soul forever, I feared.

"You are heavily burdened, Lorraine," I heard a calm sweet voice say to me, felt a hand touch me on the shoulder as I knelt there before the ankh. There were several women of the Peasant Caste there in the temple, whispering their prayers to Lys. They believed in Lys, believed that she would help them. I knew that SHE did not interfere in things as a rule. Yet, for their sakes I too hoped that it would soon rain. That the life-giving waters would fall from the sky. There are no electric pumps in the 26th Century. No awesome systems of irrigation. Man lives closer to "Nature" now than he ever did in the last fifteen hundred years!

"I have `sinned'," I answered, my eyes wet with tears as I looked up, kneeling there, seeing her nod. The golden ankh there on her white robed breast leaving no doubt as to who she was. I wanted to kneel down before her, kiss her hand. I knew that she was different than me. Better. This was her last

incarnation before she would merge her soul with the glory, the radiance of SHE. There was something of SHE in her, although she did not look like the vision I once had of SHE. SHE is of course what we make of HER. To the Jews of the Old Testament SHE was JEHOVAH. To others "GOD". They call her "LYS" now. But SHE is still SHE.

Chapter Eleven

"I permitted something horrible to happen," I told the High Priestess of Thistle's temple of Lys as we sat together there in a small windowless room off the main open portion of the temple. "I allowed another to torture a man almost to death, and then permitted her to kill him when we were finished with him!" Telling her the story of how there had been an attempt on my life and what Lady Tirana and I had done later on to the crossbowman. The Priestess nodding, regarding me, her face fixed, unreadable. I wondered how many such "confessions" she had heard in her life. She was not young, the signs of age were much upon her, which meant that she was nearing the end of her own hundred and thirty years. Yet in a way she was still young. Her mind was still sharp, her thoughts still yet clear. I needed to unburden myself. To seek a forgiveness that I knew could never be given me.

"I will not remove the memories from your mind, or even consider removing their emotional impact upon you, Lorraine," she said to me in level tones. She seemed neither approving or disapproving. "You will be judged by another when the time comes," she told me. I did not need to ask 'who' or when that would be. We must all eventually answer to SHE for our actions. I would have to face HER, feel HER displeasure. Atone for my sins through perhaps yet another reincarnation. Such is the fate of souls such as mine. Such had been communicated to me on Mars.

"And Lady Tirana?" I asked. I knew she too would someday stand before SHE. Be judged as I would be. We had done evil. I knew that only SHE can forgive. A Priestess can only advise you.

"Has her own 'burden' to bear," the Priestess answered. I recalled what SHE had once told me. Of the fact that HER own messenger to us had been crucified at the urgings of the Jewish priests who feared what SHE had to tell us! The Christian Bible is partly accurate, although many of the teachings SHE gave us are badly distorted as if evil men did not wish the TRUTH to be known. Perhaps it wasn't "profitable" to teach HER words to Man! I strongly suspect that some of those Popes that I've heard about got a real surprise when they stood before HER and found out how displeased SHE was with them for preaching against birth control. Irresponsible breeding is one of the worst "sins" you can commit.

"You are aware that in Dularn all children go to school from the ages of six to twelve regardless of their castes?" I asked the Priestess, changing the subject. Having almost forgotten what I had originally come here to Thistle for. I knew from my readings in The Book of Lys that I would have to seek my forgiveness elsewhere for my own sins. That only Lys, or SHE as I knew HER, could forgive such! And SHE was a strict judge of souls!

"It is common knowledge," the Priestess answered. She was old, there were streaks of gray in the blackness of her hair. A sign that the anti-aging serums had reached their limits and that her death was not far off. In the final years you age swiftly.

"Could it be 'done' here in Thistle?" I asked, hoping she would "pick up" on what I wanted the Priestesses of Lys to do. I knew better than to ask Darlanis. She was quite content with things as they

were. A revolution would be the last thing she would want to see happen. Those who can read often can overthrow governments. I recalled Gayle's exact words to that very effect.

"That is up to the Empress," she smiled in reply, "We do not interfere in political matters except where human welfare is at stake." I noticed a touch of stiffness in her movements as she rose from the chair she had sat in. I knew it would not be long now before she stood before SHE to be judged worthy of eternal union with SHE herself. I wished she was younger, more understanding of what the future might be to the people of California. I got to my own feet, seeing the ankh there on the wall before me. The symbol of Lys, of SHE as She is known now to Mankind. Like the Christian Cross of my own era symbolizing Christ.

"I am asking for a school system run by the Priestesses of Lys. One where the teachings of Lys can be taught along with the basics of reading, writing and simple arithmetic. The four 'R's' that would make so much of a change here in the 26th Century!" I said, taking her hands in mine. "Live long enough to do this for me," I begged, knowing that she had but a few more years to live.

"There are books, things that must be purchased," she said to me. "The people are poor. They will not be able to pay for much of what will be 'needed'." I nodded, understanding. Lady Lorraine would pay for such things out of her own income. It was only right and proper. Perhaps a new day was dawning for Mankind. Perhaps I was indeed the second "Janet Rogers" that all of Mankind sought. We knew the mistakes of the past. With books, the ability to read, you can learn not to repeat them again! I thought it might make up a bit for the sins that I had committed.

"What's all the excitement about?" I asked, smiling, seeing Sanda and the man of the Builders crouching over something on the ground before them. Some sort of metal case, stained with age. The workmen standing around, Gayle and Carl among them. Lady Tirana leaning over the two, just as excited by the find as the rest of them. Even the sheriff was there, along with several of the town's Scribes and another Builder, this one a woman, veiled.

"It's Lorraine!" Gayle cried, jumping up and down. "She'll know all about it. She's from that time! She knows computers!" Everyone regarding said Lady with somewhat the same awe they would have greeted Darlanis herself had she come strolling down the street in all her royal regalia. It being obvious to me that someone had found the ruins of a 21st Century personal computer. The thing no doubt by now just a piece of rusted worthless junk!

"Lorraine," Sanda breathed, opening the case as if it was something precious, revealing inside much to my shock and surprise an apparently perfectly intact portable computer not really much different than those that I had seen back in the 20th Century before I flew through the time-warp into this fantastic era!

"It says 'Apple-Duval' on it," Gayle breathed, looking at me. Apparently Duval Computer had been purchased by Apple in the time between 1988 when I had left the 20th Century and The War of 2047. It was, I thought, a good merger, as we both had used the same type of microprocessors, the Motorola 68000 series. The Duval Computer series, however, was "multi-tasking", whereas the Apple had not been. Duval having purchased an operating system called OS9-68K which allowed our computers to be both multi-tasking and also "multi-user" at the same time. I thought of Janet Rogers. She was one of the finest "programmers" that we had. I wished they hadn't found the machine. They expected so much from their Lady Lorraine. I could see their eyes as I tapped the keyboard. The keys responding as normal much to my surprise after some five hundred years of being buried in an airtight case ten feet beneath the surface of the Earth! The power switch did nothing, as I had expected, the battery no doubt hopelessly dead!

"Could you?" the man of the Builders asked. He was almost like a child with a broken toy. Could the

wonderful fantastic LadyLorrainemake it work again? I turned the computer over in my hands. There was no hope of ever generating 120 volts AC in this era without a lot of help. I was a bit nervous about the Lorr too. This was "technology" of an era forbidden to Mankind.

I stood there in the sun, holding the computer in my hands. On the back I studied the places where you plugged things in. I saw much to my surprise a jack for TWELVE VOLTS DC! Apparently the computer was designed to run on either AC, internal battery, or off the cigarette lighter in an automobile! While I couldn't generate 120 AC, and recharging the battery was out of the question without it, I COULD GENERATE TWELVE VOLTS DC WITH WET CELLS!

"We are going to have to go to Trella," I announced. I required the help of the Caste of the Builders for this. I recalled that wet cell batteries required lead and sulfuric acid. I did not believe the computer would work after all these years, but this was not the time to dash their hopes that it might work!

"Good night, Sanda," I said, retiring for the night, leaving her to sit there fascinated by that useless computer she was already dreaming of someday soon using! The credit-card sized memory cards speaking of a technology beyond anything I had known back in my own time. The machine had been manufactured in the year 2046 according to the label still on the bottom of the case. Sanda had bombarded me with question after question, asking me this and that, not understanding that I was from the 20th Century, not the 21st! I didn't understand the memory cards either! That they plugged into the side of the computer was obvious, but as to how they worked, I was at as much of a loss as Sanda was! * * The memory card system was recently invented by Canon of Japan. The capacity is two megabytes per card. The principle is similar to that of CD-ROM systems now coming into use on computers. One assumes that a second type similar to floppy disks was used to record data generated by the computer. The technology, while yet a bit beyond what we have now, is certainly not beyond that of say the year 2000 or so. Whether or not any electronic device would survive for five hundred years, even buried in an airtight case, is questionable. However a CD-ROM disk, I am informed, does have a life measured in centuries at the very least! (JBB)

I awoke from a tossing nightmare filled sleep to the sound of a muffled cry, the sound of something thrashing, the horrible sound of a dire wolf's snarls! The sounds coming from Mara's room! Delilah! I had let the dire wolf sleep with little Mara!

With my heart filled with terror and my sword naked in my hand, that not being the only naked thing as I had been sleeping in nothing but clips and strap due to the heat of these late August nights, I dashed to Mara's room, and threw open the door!

"Delilah saved me!" little Mara cried, her arms around the dire wolf's neck. The horrible jaws dark with blood! The still form on the floor, the blood yet running from its torn throat that of a woman clad in black. In some sort of form fitting black outfit like a 20th Century jumpsuit. A dagger laid on the floor, the blade gleaming in the light of the lamp behind me. I had no doubt of what had happened. They hadn't expected Delilah!

"Easy, Delilah!" I spoke softly, laying down my sword, knowing that the dire wolf was "programmed" to attack upon seeing a drawn sword. I suspected that the woman had climbed in through a window, which wouldn't have been that difficult. I wondered what had happened to the guard that patrolled the grounds? I hugged my little girl and the great wonderful beast that had saved her!

"The man on duty is dead, his throat cut from ear to ear," Carl Talen announced, his wife nodding as she searched the dead woman for any identification. I did not expect that she would find any. They had struck at my little Mara this time. They would have taken her but for Delilah. I let the dire wolf lick my

cheek, smelled the blood there on her breath. Tirana had worried what would happen if one tasted human blood. Delilah behaved no differently now than she had been. She was, I thought to myself, a true "Guardian". I wished I had a dozen like her!

I watched Delilah devouring the thick beefsteak she had well earned by her defense of Mara. Sanda sitting there at the table with a cup of coffee in her hand. We didn't seem to be getting much sleep lately around the place. Gayle sat quietly, well aware that she might be the next "target", although I doubted it. Few knew that Gayle was anything more to me than just Mara's own "companion". I worried about Sharon, although Darlanis' security was probably far superior to my own. She had the Imperial Guard to protect her. The Empress also had her own Royal Guard. The best fighting women in the Empire. It wasn't too likely that I needed to worry about things on that score, I thought to myself.

"I don't `understand' all this," Sanda muttered, her husband walking in, the black leather of his attire leaving no doubt that he was of the Warriors. I had enough men at arms, but obviously they weren't the answer. I wouldn't get much done if I had to surround myself with an army just so I could sleep at night without worrying about who these unknown enemies of mine would go after next? The whole pattern reminded me somewhat of 20th Century terrorism, but that was ridiculous here in the 26th Century! I had "enemies", it was true, but no one really hated me that much!

"Well, we aren't going to get any answers from her," I said in reply, sipping at my coffee, referring to the dead woman whose identity we had not been able to determine. I had sent for the sheriff of Thistle. Perhaps he could shed some light on all this, although I rather doubted it from what he had told me the day before when I had mentioned the attack by the crossbowman. I had lied and told him that I had killed him with my sword, not wishing him to know what Lady Tirana and I had done to the man!

"Hoist the anchor!" I yelled to the men there on the capstan, others drawing the sails up the three masts. I was taking the Squala out to sea. Going to Trella to see if those of the caste of Builders could figure out how to build a twelve volt wet cell battery. Something that could be used to power the 21st Century computer that had been dug up two days before in Thistle.

"I hope these `sailors' of yours you got in Trella can sail this ship," I heard Sanda say to her husband in low tones. They did look more like a bunch of pirates in their colorful attire. I had enough of my own people aboard however that I didn't worry too much about whether or not they were actually loyal to me. I had gotten so I didn't really trust anyone, especially not after the other night when there had been the attempted kidnaping of Mara! Fortunately Delilah had been right there to protect her!

"If not I'll `draft' these clod-hoppers and rough-necks of yours and make sailors out of them," I laughed back, taking the wheel, letting the Squala fall off for a moment before then feeling her come alive beneath me as she took the wind! This was a new experience for me, but one that I enjoyed despite my tendency towards sea sickness. What had amazed me was my instinctive understanding of the forces at play on a fore and aft rigged schooner. The way that the wind worked with the great sails, how the keel beneath us served to guide the ship there through the water. All these things seemed to be so "easy" to me now! It was as if my mind in some secret part of it took control and told me what to do. How to trim the sails for the best speed that the Squala could give. This was my second time at the wheel, my first having been only a short voyage a few miles out to sea from my estates. This time I would be sailing all the way to Trella!

Chapter Twelve

"I'm glad I'm alive now," Sanda said to me as I stood there on the quarterdeck of my beautiful Squala, the black hull and the black flag with its double-barred cross flapping overhead making it all "mine". I felt "alive" again. In "control" of things. With a full crew I could take on nearly anything afloat and win. I could outrun anything I couldn't outfight. Even those big new Dularnian three masted schooners that were now starting to show up off our coast. One called the "North Wind" having given the honest merchants of California considerable trouble. Then there were the pirates of which I have already written. There was no lack of "prey" for the mighty Squala. I had painted the features of the giant shark on the ship. Making my superstitious crew mutter to themselves at sailing beneath the command of a "madwoman" like me! All I needed was a privateering commission from Darlanis and I could go into "business" for myself. Driving the pirates from the seas and then perhaps teaching the Dularnians a few things about what it was like to have a ship like the Squala lurking off their own shores! It would be an excellent lesson!

"Why's that?" I asked, giving her a smile. I could think of several nicer, more pleasant eras to live in than this one, although it did have its own "charms" once you got used to it. It did have Darlanis, and any era with her was certainly "special"! On the other hand there was a certain "lack" of "law and order"!

"I think because you are here," Sanda smiled. "You're like no one I've ever met before." I supposed that it was possible. I am rather "unusual" in a lot of ways. My skill with a sword for one. I didn't see, however, why Sanda so admired me. I am not an easy person to live with. I make a fairly good wife, but the same can be said of a lot of women. I'm not "good looking", and even Jon has to admit that it is best that I do wear a veil.

Lady Tirana came strolling up to me from below, giving me a smile as she leaned back against the rail. I smelled brandy on her breath. I wondered how long it would be before she became an alcoholic. She generally didn't drink enough to get really drunk, but she did drink on a pretty "regular" basis. She was my friend. We had shared our thoughts, our feelings with one another. Committed a horrible sin together that both of us would pay for in our own ways. I recalled the words of the High Priestess of Thistle. About the "cross" that she would have to "bear". I wondered if I would someday end up like her, with a bottle for a companion. I myself was drinking more than I ever did back in the 20th Century. I was still having nightmares about the crossbowman. What I had watched Lady Tirana do to him. I wondered why we had bothered. We had not learned anything of any value!

"This is fun!" Gayle exclaimed, jumping down from the rigging. Her skirt was "mini" length in the latest fashion, and when she climbed around overhead in the rigging one could see "more" than I liked having men see of a teenage delight like her!

With her was Sara, Sanda's daughter, a pretty slender girl, dark haired, with deep dark eyes and a lovely mouth. She was fourteen, her body already showing the hint of glorious womanhood to come. Sanda had taken her into Thistle a few days ago and had her nipples pierced for clips, such being the feminine "rites of passage" here in the 26th Century. The dividing line between girlhood and womanhood. Bought her a razor and introduced her to the pleasures of "shaving" as we of the female sex often call it.

"I bet we could sail to China in this!" little Mara added as she came running up, tugging at the hem of my dress. Delilah sitting there on the deck, not all at ease with so many people running about, although the crew very carefully gave her a very wide berth! "What's China like, Lorraine?" Mara asked, slurring my name a bit as she often did. It is pronounced "Lorr-rain", but it is spelled like it would be pronounced "Lorr-rain-e".

"We'd have to get permission from the Lorr," I explained. Whether or not the Squala was capable of such a voyage was another question, although Yvette's original French master had crossed the Atlantic in a vessel not dissimilar to a ship like the Ronda.

"You, you up there on the mainmast with the fancy knife!" I snapped through my brass trumpet. "Buckle your safety strap!" I was always amazed at the risks some men took. The masts of the Squala tower up far up into the sky. Any fall from them is fatal. The man in question clipping the safety strap to his harness and waving down to me. I was running the crew through drills to perfect their knowledge of the ship. I had only a dozen men. Enough to sail the Squala, although I could not fight. The Squala perhaps looked "vicious" enough, but she was "toothless" until I got a proper crew. One that I could trust not to mutiny and try to take over the ship. That had already happened to one unlucky Californian privateer, whose ship now roamed our own coastlines flying the evil skull and crossbones of a pirate!

"They're not the best, but prime seamen are hard to get," Carl Talen commented as I watched the men at work. I could use his "rough-necks" and clod-hoppers for pulling on ropes and such. A great deal of work on a sailing ship like the Squala is of that sort. The sails always need adjustment with the slightest change in the wind. You take in and let out sail, or ease the yards if you don't want to alter the amount of canvas you are carrying. I understood such things almost as if I had been sailing for years. It was a lot like the first I flew. The airplane and me seemed to be "one" with each other. The forces that held it up in the sky, allowed it to change course, all seemed so "simple" to me! I know of another with the same flying abilities. Abilities that saved my life when "The Princess of Darkness" tried to kill me!

The reader will object here that I didn't seem to have my amazing ability working when I first came aboard the Ronda. That then I seemed pretty "incompetent" about sailing the Ronda. The Ronda however was lateen rigged, and tended to confuse me. Also, I spent considerable time on the Squala just walking the decks. Seeing the design of the yards, visualizing how everything worked together. I "understood" the Squala before I ever took her out! I also had the opportunity to watch Jers Bisan there on the Seahawk and captain Stone on Sarnian Lady. Janis earlier on the Ronda. I also learned a few things from others and did some reading in books that Sanda got me from the library in Thistle.

"Sail Ho!" the man in the crow's nest on top of the mainmast called down to me. His dizzy perch nearly ninety feet from the deck. Even I felt a bit "nervous" when I climbed up that high!

"Where at?" I yelled up to him. The captain of a sailing ship needs good lungs. There is always the flap of sails, the splash of the waves against the hull, the creak of the rigging.

"Straight Ahead!" he yelled down to me, Carl silently regarding me. There were pirates in these waters. There is a big gap between my estates and Trella. Only a few fishing villages.

"I'm going up," I said to Sanda, who nodded, her arm around her daughter. We couldn't fight off anything more than a longboat filled with men. Only our speed protected us. Those three tall towering masts with their creamy sails that took the wind so nicely our only means of protection. Like a deer, we had nothing but our speed to protect us. While we were "faster" than most anything now afloat, the big new Dularnian "North" class schooners were as fast as the Squala, and they carried full crews too!

"Nice view up here," I said to the man, trying to keep my voice from showing the nervousness I felt from being so high up!

"She's Dularnian," the man smiled, pointing with his telescope as I climbed up beside him. "One of their new ones." The topsails were quite visible from up here. The North Wind! One of Dularn's newest. Her captain, "Miles", was said to be one of the best. Another like Jon Richards. I nodded, thinking. I am of

the Warriresses. We hate running away from foes. Anytime!

"If I wasn't married to Sanda here, I know whom I'd come courting!" Carl laughed as I told him my plans. Sanda smiling to herself. She was considerably more attractive than I am, although Jon says that I do have certain very desirable qualities!

"Get those topsails set!" I yelled up to the sweating men now some sixty feet overhead. The tips of the Squala's masts reach up a full ninety feet into the sky. I had hoisted three smaller versions of the same flag that flew overhead. No harm in letting everyone know just who I was. That I was the Lady Lorraine of Trelandar. I would also hoist the stunsails and staysails. The wind was light enough that Squala could carry all that canvas without harm. North Wind was now almost hull up over the horizon ahead. I wondered what her captain was thinking now. I thought briefly of the terrible weapon below that we carried. Only as a last resort would I ever use THAT! I had little desire to introduce the 26th Century to NAPALM bombs! To new horrors!

"Sail Ho!" the look-out called down. "Another Bastard!" I had no doubt where his "sympathies" laid! That made a big difference! I might "throw a scare" into the North Wind, but the second Dularnian would be sitting there waiting for me! And I had no chance in a ship to ship fight. Not with my tiny crew and Carl's half dozen land lubbering rough-necks! It was true that all of us were able to use weapons of some sort or another, but it really didn't alter things any. I had no doubt now that there was but one choice left open to me! To turn tail and run for it!

"Dammit!" I snarled. "I'm not running!" The fury building in my body as I watched the North Wind come up over the horizon!

Sanda looked justifiably nervous as she lifted the clay sphere from its padding, the contents the deadly NAPALM I had been able to manufacture using my now rusty knowledge of chemistry. There was a small plug where the wick would go. Each sphere weighed close to thirty pounds. The range was not long. Ship's catapults are not designed for such heavy missiles, but I knew they would carry a hundred yards or so. I had fired one as a test from anchor, firing the thing from the ship to shore. The burned patch nearly thirty feet across had left few doubts as to their effectiveness. It was a terrible weapon. One against which there was no known defense for wooden ships. With better catapults one ship, either Californian or Dularnian, could burn the navies of every nation on the western coast of the entire Pacific! It was the "ATOMIC BOMB" of the 26th Century! Darlanis would have no doubt been delighted with it, but I was the only one who knew the secret, and not even Sanda or Carl knew the exact chemical processes necessary for the manufacture of NAPALM!

"Those violate the Caste Codes," Carl warned as he saw Sanda and me each carry one of the bright red spheres up on deck. He had watched me fire the one I had shot off as a test. Saw what it could do. One direct hit and any wooden ship would be doomed!

"I'll let Lysbe the judge of that," I answered, carefully setting the thing down next to a catapult. I had no intention of using the weapon except as a last resort. Sanda standing up, her eyes smiling into mine. She was of the Scribes, not the Warriresses. Her Caste Codes were different. I saw Lady Tirana frown as she regarded me. She was of the Warriresses. The use of fire at sea is generally forbidden by our Caste Codes. I did not think that such ideals, as good as they might be, really made any sense. War should be as terrible as possible. Only in that way can there be true peace. That was proven back in the 20th Century with our own thermonuclear weapons. Make the weapons "bad" enough, and then maybe people will resolve their differences without resorting to weapons. Of course they once said that about the crossbow and the first guns, but I do think it is true.

"The Second Enemy Has Square Sails!" the lookout called down. "Oh God! The Janis!" I muttered to myself. I could see in my own instant nightmare the Janis in flames, the burning hot liquid searing, burning as it ran down among the oarsmen. A galley is terribly vulnerable to a weapon like mine. Even more so than a fully decked schooner. There would be no chance for them!

I glanced up at the sails, the Squala tearing through the water now like an enraged beast. I thought of the face of the great shark painted there across her bows. To those of the North Wind she must have been a terrible sight, especially through a telescope where one could see the painted jaws, the teeth clear!

"We're committed now," I answered in level tones. "MayLyshave mercy upon us all." Gayle nodded as her eyes met mine. Why had I taken her on this voyage? I saw Carl put his arm around his wife. She was a lovely woman. Too young to die like this!

Chapter Thirteen

(Jon's version of things)

"Signal Miles to veer off and hold his fire!" I snapped to the disbelieving midshipman, the icy frigid eyes of my Lieutenant of Warriories burning into mine as she shook her head in the negative. The gold of her hair beneath her gleaming crested helmet glowing there in the bright rays of the sunlight as I lowered my telescope. The Squala now once again like a little toy ship there against the blue-green of the sea as I thought once again of those deep dark eyes, of a face that was both plain and yet in its way so attractive. One who understood much. The woman who had made me forget about that "gold-digging" bitch Maris Marn who I had once loved and had even begged upon my knees to become my wife! Once again I saw Lorraine Duval as I yet remembered her.

"YOU ARE A FOOL!" Lt. Sentis Santa snarled, her hand on the hilt of her sword. I heard the muttering, seen the looks in the eyes of my men as they looked up at me from the deck below. Only the steel discipline of the Royal Dularnian Navy kept them still submissive to my commands! "You are betraying the North Wind to HER!" the tall armored blonde snarled! "YOU LYS-DAMMED BASTARD!" The sun glinting off her chain mail as she stood there. Her women gathered there on the quarterdeck were muttering among themselves. I could see the fear and terror in their eyes. They too knew about Lorraine's terrible new weapon. What it could do to any wooden ship! It would take but the slightest incident now to set off a bloody mutiny that would leave the Janis' lovely polished decks red with blood! Betray the memory of our Princess!

"If Squala attacks the North Wind, run me through with your sword," I snapped back, looking her straight in the eye. "Then sell your services as outlaws and pirates to that 'LADY' we met last night if any of you survive!" I snapped in tones loud enough that they could be heard from one end of the ship to the other. The "Lady" in question had been veiled so heavily that nothing could be made of her features. She had worn the black of the Warriorress, although her hands and wrists had been concealed in heavy black leather gloves that concealed any caste mark. I had noticed that she also favored her right hand, having apparently hurt it sometime earlier. Just being there in her presence made my skin "crawl", there was something so "evil" about the woman! * * This was of course the notorious Princess Tara of Baja. I have little doubt of that now from what Jon has told me. She admitted everything to me the time that she had

me staked out to die! (LR)

I thought again of Lorraine Duval. A woman like no other. Of her lips pressed up to my own. Of the love we had shared. We were torn apart by this damnable war! A war that could drag on and on forever between my own hate filled Queen and that incredibly beautiful ambitious daughter of hers who wanted to rule the entire world! The woman that was now holding Sharon! Darlanis had been no fool. She knew what a woman like Lorraine could do. What weapons she could build. What better way to control Lorraine Duval than by keeping her own daughter captive! I knew that Darlanis had tried to "cover things over" by giving Lorraine the estates of the Lady Lana Daris, but that didn't mean that Lorraine was free to "do" as she wished. To support our cause against the Empire. I hated Darlanis for the bitch I knew she was. For what she had done to my beloved dear Lorraine! Lorraine had been too "trusting", unfamiliar with such things. Lost in a time as alien to her as hers would have been to one of us! * * The reader will note that Jon's view of things differs from mine. He is no admirer of Darlanis, considering her in the same light as a lot of Dularnians, that is as being a woman who lets nothing stand in her way of getting what she wants. (Lorraine)

My first love had been a tall slender dark haired Physician. About her slender throat I had locked the chain of marriage, her soft liquid eyes glowing up into mine. Later her body had swelled with our first child. We had hoped for much. I had been on a voyage against the northern pirates when the Imperials came to our peaceful little island off the southern coast of Dularn. Those they had not taken for slaves had been put to the sword. My beloved Alexis had been among those they had left behind for the beasts. A woman eight months pregnant was of little value! * * By the "order" of Princess Tara, I might mention! Darlanis having used Tara like a rabid dog to "sic" on her enemies. (LR)

My second love had been the older daughter of the mayor of Sana, the lovely beautiful young Maris Marn. We had shared together our love of the sea, of the ships that sailed them. I had lost her a year later to Darl Jord, that coarse, gross brute of a Prince when she had become a "competitor" in the Great Games of Sport held in Arsana. Maris had been "greedy", lusting for gold, too "trusting" of a Prince who "used" women as mere "playthings" and then "disposed" of them like discarded "toys"! The lovely Dularnian maiden having been sent later as a "spy" to Sarn where she was too quickly captured by the Imperials for there to be any doubt as to what Darl Jord had then planned for the lovely Maris!

Then I met you, my dear beloved Lorraine, you who were so much like my beloved viciously murdered Alexis, but yet you were so utterly different from any woman I had ever known before. In your arms I found peace, love, the feeling that once again there was someone in the world who cared for me. You were like a lost waif, far from her home. I wanted so much to keep you, hold you close, but Darlanis had your daughter and you said that you would have to go back to Her. To that golden Empress of the Imperials!

"Miles won't have a chance if she rakes his stern!" Sentis Santa breathed, seeing the North Wind start to turn in response to my orders. I admired Miles. He was one of Dularn's finest. I had heard from the old fisherman the story about Lorraine's new weapon. He had gotten the tale from one of her men at arms. Along with the surprising story of how Maris Marn had stole Lorraine's little sailboat a couple weeks ago and had supposedly set sail for Dularn. I wished the bitch luck! Maris was the sort that belonged in a slave collar kneeling at the feet of men. A greedy gold-digging slut who could think of nothing more than how to become rich, how to become a Princess of Dularn! She deserved Darl Jord and he her. They make a really good pair, I suspect!

"We won't either against that weapon," I assured Lt. Santa.

"Look!" I heard an officer cry. "The Squala's just passing by the North Wind without firing a shot!" My

confidence in Lorraine Duval had just been vindicated! I saw Lt. Sentis Santa's eyes meet mine. Without a word she handed me her sword and knelt there on the quarterdeck before me, her head bowed, her body now curved exposing the back of her neck. Waiting for the stroke. For the cut that would smash through the back of her neck. Through the spinal column. Her own life the price that she would pay for her earlier words. Such is naval discipline on Dularnian vessels. Such is the steel discipline beneath we of Dulam live!

"What is often spoken in haste may be repented in leisure," I spoke, reaching down, drawing the woman to her feet, giving her back her sword. I saw the tears glistening in her eyes. It had been the correct thing to do. Lorraine would not have approved of my killing her. I knew her far too well for that! I told Lt. Santa that. She nodded, understanding why I had permitted her to live when our naval discipline now required her immediate death!

I watched the Squala heave to, saw the pitiful numbers there on her deck. Understood much. Understood Lorraine's "bluff". I was very proud of her then. There is not another like her anywhere. She is truly unique. I am a very fortunate man. As I write this my neck chain graces that fine aristocratic throat. I am pleased to call her "my wife". Pleased that she calls me "her husband". There are of course more beautiful women than her, but when it comes time to walk the valley of Shadows, I will be delighted to have her at my side. She is not perfect, no woman is, but in her I have learned much of what life is about. Much that once I did not so clearly understand. I know now that TRUTH and JUSTICE are not true absolutes. That Darlanis is but a woman who "means well" as my delightful 20th Century wife often puts it. I am a "Prince" now, I suppose, but Lorraine's crown has never done anything but make her smile. She is a Queen now, the Queen of Trelandar as everyone knows, but she is still the same as ever!

"Lys! Look At That!" I heard a midshipman mutter to one of his companions. Delilah is pretty awesome. Watched Lorraine as she stroked the great gray furred beast squatting there on the bottom of the boat before her. Saw those dark eyes meet my own as the boat hooked on to the base of the Janis' boarding ladder. It had been a long time since I had held her in my arms. Tasted of those fine patrician lips. She is truly of the aristocracy.

"Easy!" I snapped to my men, to my warrioresses gathered up behind me. Worried how much control even Lorraine had over that terrible beast as it almost dragged her up to our deck. Saw my love give me a smile that told much without words. I did not fear to step towards her despite the awesome beast beside her. I took her in my arms as Delilah stood silently watching. Kissed her before everyone. The taste of her mouth on mine as I turned to my crew. To my warrioresses. Lorraine was unveiled beside me. She had wished to let everyone see her. To see her features as she stood there with a hand on Delilah's collar. The great dire wolf sitting on the deck, its head nearly to her shoulder!

(comment by Lorraine Duval)

My husband gets a little carried away at times when he writes of me. I am not a "sterling character" as you have already seen in this story. I do have flaws. I have done things that I am not proud of having done. The fact that he loves me as he does despite my defects is proof indeed that "love is blind".

Chapter Fourteen

"That was `Jon Richards'?" Gayle asked me as I stepped back aboard the Squala, the Janis now

hoisting her sails, the North Wind setting her jib as she rolled there in the waves ahead of the heavy galley. Doubtless Gayle had seen much through a telescope. I thought of what could have happened had Jon not sent the orders that he had to the North Wind. The flames, the burning. The horrors of 20th Century military technology transported to a more simpler and more innocent time. I had much to think about. Jon's comments about this mysterious "Lady" he had met concerned me. Especially his description of how she favored her right hand. There was only one I knew who had such an injury!!!

"Yes," I answered, my voice curt. I saw the hurt in Gayle's eyes. Felt ashamed of myself. There was no reason to take my feelings out on innocent young Gayle. Upon the girl who in my heart now had won her own place. "It is not a time for talk," I said to her, "But later on I will share with you my own secrets."

"I don't think anyone but you could have pulled something like this off!" Lady Tirana smiled, petting Delilah as she stood at my side. Carl Talen nodded, his arm around his lovely Scribe.

"We can see the lights of Trella!" Sanda announced as she stepped into the captain's cabin where I was talking to Gayle. I had not made that fast a voyage, but I had been "delayed" a bit!

"Signal for a galley to tow us in," I smiled back. I had no wish to try to sail the Squala into Trella's busy harbor in the darkness! It was one thing to sail the Squala out in the open sea, another entirely to handle the ship in the close quarters of a busy crowded harbor, especially at night with only the harbor lights of the other ships at anchor to guide you around them!

"I am the Lady Lorraine of Trelandar," I spoke to the man who had come aboard for inspection. "I verify that there is no sickness or disease aboard and that I am not carrying anything of a nature prohibited by Imperial Law." The man nodding, regarding me there in the lamp light, studying my features beneath my veil.

"You're lucky to get through," he answered. "There's a report that the Dularnians have two warships in this area." I nodded and gave him a smile. I had warned everyone to keep their mouths shut about our meeting with the North Wind and the Janis!

"I did meet them, but my ship was fast enough to outrun them both," I smiled back. That was true, since the Squala had the "edge" on the North Wind and the Janis is slow like all galleys. It is no faster than Sarnian Lady, and even the Ronda outsailed "that" until the wind died and left us helpless before Darlanis!

"You are very lucky, my Lady," he answered, "Or there might be a slave collar around your neck right now." I wondered if Jon would like having me collared, kneeling there before him naked. I supposed that he might find the sight enjoyable. All men, if they are truly "men", desire total submission from their women.

"I have been made aware of that in the past," I answered.

"If they ever learn..." Gayle breathed as we settled down for the night. I saw no reason to go ashore when we had more comfortable accommodations aboard the Squala. Trella like most of the cities of the 26th Century is malodorous. There is a serious lack of "public sanitation" by 20th Century standards. A horse or unicorn makes somewhere around twenty pounds of droppings a day. There are slaves (male convicts) who clean the streets, but it is a futile hopeless effort, and only after a good drenching rain is the city actually clean and fairly odorfree. I once mentioned all this to Darlanis, who didn't consider it a serious matter. She like I is of course unable to do anything about it as it would be necessary to outlaw the use of such animals inside cities, which is of course totally impractical as she very carefully explained to me one time. One could construct a system of sewers, but most 26th Century cities lack such items

with the exception of Arsana, the well known capitol of Dularn!

"We were under a flag of truce and one is allowed to 'negotiate' with the enemy," I pointed out. I really didn't give a damn just then what Darlanis thought about it, and no body else had enough authority over a High Lady like me to "do" anything!

"Darlanis could get 'nasty' about it if she knew about your firebombs," Gayle pointed out, slipping off her dress, the gold of her nipple clips shining against the creamy smoothness of her young breasts. The brief dark blue triangle of silk that covered her pubes and crotch reminding me of a 20th Century "G-string".

"As she probably 'will' soon enough thanks to wagging tongues," I smiled back, Jon having told me that he knew already of the devices. Apparently my security precautions had been lacking although there had not been that many people there when I fired off the one shot just to test the devices to see if they would work or not. In any case I didn't think Darlanis would be able to use the things effectively since the range of ship's catapults firing such things was only a bit over a hundred yards. It was an idea that I was already regretting, it being obvious to me that introducing 20th Century weapons technology into this era did little but make things worse, not better. Good old Lorraine Duval was "putting her foot into it" once again just like before!

Trella was beautiful in the sunlight. Most 26th Century cities I've seen are. It is only when you get up close that you smell the stinks, the odors of life in a low technology society. After a while you do get used to them, although living out in the "country" like I do, I am more used to fresh air and the smell of green growing things than say someone like Darlanis, for example. That is why I don't live all the time in my palace here at Trella. Not that I have anything against Trella, but it is "stinky".

As the capital of Trelandar, it is the largest city in the country, with perhaps a hundred thousand people living inside its walls. The location is just to the south of the ruins of Los Angeles, which are generally avoided due to a superstitious dread of such areas. The radioactivity caused by its destruction having disappeared several centuries ago. Such ruins tend to be the topic of "ghost" stories, preferably told around a campfire near the ruins where one obtains the best "effect" from the tales. I tend to take such tales with the proverbial "grain of salt", although Darlanis tells me that she isn't so sure if there isn't something to some of the myths told about such places. There is considerable evidence that some people survived The War, but with their genes altered in such a way that they were no longer human! I once encountered such a creature, a scaly horned humanoid eight feet tall, which was like nothing I've ever seen before or again!

"Is it possible to build what I want?" I asked the man of the caste of the Builders. Such are the engineers and scientists of the 26th Century. I was explaining the concept of a wet cell battery that would generate twelve volts DC. A veiled woman regarding me, perhaps his wife or assistant. Outside the open windows I could hear the sound of traffic. Of iron banded wagon wheels rattling over the dusty cobblestoned streets of Trella.

"Perhaps, but it will require the 'help' of many of our caste," he answered, regarding me curiously. I had not explained what I wanted the battery for. I felt it best for the time being at least to keep it a secret that I possessed a 21st Century lap-top computer that just might possibly still yet be usable!

"Do so," I smiled in reply. Sanda standing there, watching, thinking what thoughts I knew not. I suspected she had little actual idea of what a computer "did". Perhaps like some people back in my own era she believed it was some sort of a "magical" machine that could give you answers to any problem you put to it!

"Could you build an airplane, Lorraine?" Gayle asked me as we stood looking out over the harbor, the Squala riding there at anchor perhaps a quarter of a mile out from shore. There were two heavy galleys at anchor, "48's" from the look of them. They had come to escort a group of merchantmen from Trella to Sarn. I suspected that word of the Janis and the North Wind had gotten to Darlanis by now. She was somewhere to the south of us visiting a number of places, doing her best to keep them "loyal" to her. I supposed Sharon was with her, no doubt enjoying the "sights" while Darlanis "campaigned" like some 20th Century politician!

"Some sort of glider, perhaps," I mused. An actual airplane was far beyond the Empire's technology, even if the Lorr didn't do anything about the violation of their EDICT! There really wasn't that much difference between Darlanis' Empire and that of Julius Caesar's back twenty five hundred years ago. There was a very "Roman" quality to the Empire of California, and the political system really wasn't all that much different either, I knew!

"What was holovision like?" Gayle asked, winning for herself a puzzled look as I had no idea what she was actually talking about. I suspected that she was referring to some form of TV, but obviously based upon a holographic technology unknown to me.

"Wrong century," I smiled back, leaning back against a piling. A fisherman watching us both, his bobber riding the swell. "I'm from the 20th Century, not the 21st," I smiled back at her.

"You are aware that you could possibly be in violation of the EDICT," the man of the Builders told me as I gave him the six gold crowns for the device I had ordered constructed. It had taken them three days. There were handles mounted to transport it. The acid was in the clay jars. I had hired men to transport it out to the Squala. There I could test the computer and determine if it still functioned or not. Sanda looked like a child waiting and hoping for Santa Claus to come sliding down the chimney. I had warned her not to get her hopes up. It had been almost five hundred years since the computer had been last used.

"Now we find out if I got anything for my money," I said to Sanda as I clicked the computer's switch to "on". I did not expect anything to happen. Sanda expected the opposite. Much to my surprise and perhaps hers the LCD screen began to glow! I saw the screen display some sort of menu, although it looked like nothing I was familiar with back in my own time. The display read to my utter surprise in brightly colored printed lettering:

"68090-100mhz, 64 megabytes RAM. 780 Megabytes available on hard drive. 580 Megabytes available on WORM drive. Internal battery now recharging." A colorful menu then appearing on the screen, giving me a list of every program stored in the computer!

"It works, Sanda, it works," I said to her, my vision seemingly strangely blurred. After nearly five hundred years it still worked! Apple-Duval Inc. deserved an A-1! Gayle, peering over my shoulder, let out a "war-hoop" that I swear they could have heard in Trella! Lorraine Duval had "come through" again!!!

Chapter Fifteen

"And how are your slaves doing today?" I asked, the sun hot on my shoulders as we stood before his

slave shed. The man regarding me with a mixture of distaste and also considerable surprise, few "Ladies" ever dressing the way that I was now! Sanda having found a picture of a woman of the 21st Century dressed in the highest of fashions. I had copied the attire in Trella while waiting for my "battery" to be constructed. It was distinctive, and even more importantly, was also quite attractive even on me!

The skirt was short, slit on both sides, and made of soft black leather. I wore a matching midriff baring half blouse of black silk cut deep to show off a teasing bit of my bosom. My legs were encased in 21st Century "strap-boots" made of soft black leather. That had taken a bit of doing, and some trial and error before the fit was right. The black leather straps crisscrossing my legs did do nice things for my legs. I also wore a leather harness with lots of silver trappings, my only concession to 26th Century fashions being my broad brimmed stylish hat and the black net veil that concealed the harshness of my features.

"They're O.K.," he growled, regarding me. "I don't mistreat my animals." Slaves being legally domestic animals like unicorns and cows and pigs. He was a minor property owner that owed fealty to me as his "Lady". The relationship is similar to that found during the Middle Ages. I was doing slave inspection, having "fired" the government inspector for failure to do his job properly. It being obvious that he had been often "paid off" to "look the other way" when slaves had been obviously mistreated. The man had threatened to go to Darlanis. I told him to do so.

"Then you wouldn't mind showing them to me, would you?" I smiled back from behind my veil. Lady Tirana standing back, holding a large umbrella against the rays of the sun. Most high caste women do not like getting suntanned, it being considered to be proof of one's high birth if your skin is "lily white"! I am rather well tanned most of the time, which makes some people look down at me as being not quite properly the Lady that I should be! I also do a number of things that Ladies aren't supposed to "do"!

With me too were Carl Talen of the Warriors, Sanda's husband and three of his men. I had little desire to repeat the earlier terrifying experience of being shot at by some hidden crossbowman firing from the woods. The bolt having missed me by inches! I suspected now that Princess Tara of Baja had something to do with the matter, but had no way that I could ever prove such a charge!

"A fine well-bred Lady like you doesn't want to look at a bunch of naked stinking slaves now, does she?" the man suggested, making me even more suspicious that he had been mistreating his slaves! My smile fortunately for his sake hidden by my veil! I could see the sweat there on his forehead, the look in his eyes.

"You have a well and they can 'pump' the water," I pointed out. "There is no reason why they should stink." That comment had been a mistake on his part. I've seen enough nude slaves it didn't bother me anymore, although the first time a male got an erection while I was inspecting him did make me blush just a bit!

"Is this all your slaves?" I asked, checking the naked men and women. Some of the males sexually responding to my closeness which indicated that they were not allowed women very often. It is a foolish practice, as you get more work out of a male slave if he has a woman now and then than you do keeping him sexually deprived. At least that has been my own experience with my own!

"Yes, my Lady," the man growled, regarding me. I had Delilah with me. She is a comfort to have around. Her senses are considerably keener than any human being's. One of his slave girls was a copper skinned wench who had been just recently whipped. Her back still crisscrossed by the livid welts left by the slave whip. She was naked, her dark eyes glowing into mine.

"Where did you get this wench?" I asked her master. She was obviously an American Indian. They live

across the mountains on the plains much like their distant forefathers once did, although they are racially mixed with whites and somewhat more perhaps resemble the nomadic tribes found in northern Asia fifteen hundred years ago. The most well known group is the "Nevadas", who often stage raids upon Imperial settlements for women and other items they consider of value. For this reason the Empire, while "long", is very "narrow", being only a hundred miles or so deep! The Imperial Legions, while awesome, were almost "useless" against the sort of mounted raiders that the Nevadas were now...

"She's a Nevadaslut," the man answered. "Worthless too!" The woman had a nice figure, high firm breasts, and a neat trim triangle of pubic hair there at the junction of her thighs. Her nipples were unpierced, the practice of piercing the woman's nipples being practiced only by the "civilized" nations of the 26th Century. Her hair was very dark, and quite long. She was pretty, although her coloring was a dead "give-away" as to her race.

"Stand," I said to the wench. She did so, her eyes never leaving mine. "Why were you beaten?" I asked her, curious. She merely nodded, her dark eyes filled with fear. Obviously she had been recently beaten. Severely whipped from the marks that went from the nape of her neck all the way down her back to almost her knees. Such a whipping in my eyes constitutes "abuse". There are other means of disciplining slaves both male and female than using the whip until the blood oozes from their beaten hides! I wondered how long she had been a slave. Why she had been whipped so severely. She did not have the ordinary "submissiveness" of the female slave either, but merely seemed terrified at what had been done to her. Why did she fear to answer my question? Why?

"Come with me," I ordered the girl, who had no choice but to obey, although the terror in her dark eyes increased even further as she followed me trembling in terror. Delilah following at my side, giving the slave girl little attention. I did not think my fearsome companion was, however, the cause of her obvious terror!

"I 'am' the Lady Lorraine of Trelandar, High Lady of this area," I said to the girl, lifting aside my veil so that she was able to see my face. "I have the power, the authority to take you from your master if he has been abusing you in violation of the 'humane treatment' laws." I wondered if she understood me.

"You 'good Lady'," she said in broken English. "I hear of you. You not like others. You friend. I tell truth. You protect Sa-she-ra and me girl." She was obviously a mother of a girl, no doubt also enslaved, who I didn't know anything about! "Me girl just whipped by bad man pale-face." Her master being a "bad man", although I wouldn't have called him a "pale-face" as he was rather well tanned as many men of this era are. It being only now the high born women of California who consider it actually culturally desirable to have milky white pale complexions.

"I want to see her daughter," I snapped, the mother kneeling there at my side. My hand on Delilah's collar as she stood at my side. Lady Tirana had Samson with her. Carl Talen and his men were well armed. I had power, the legal authority necessary too.

"The brat's a little savage," the man snapped back. "More like an animal than a human being." I noticed that his hand was bandaged. I hadn't really paid him too much attention before. I suspected that there were the marks of teeth beneath the bandage!

The girl hung from one of the ceiling rafters by her wrists. Weights had been tied to her ankles to increase her torment. She was nude, her young body crisscrossed with the marks of the whip. She was, I thought to myself, perhaps eleven or twelve years old. I felt a red haze of fury go before my eyes as I saw the sight!

"Why you dammed dirty filthy bastard!" Carl Talen snapped, seizing the man and shaking him much like a terrier with a rat as I stood on a chair and cut the girl free with my dagger, her eyes like those of some tormented animal as they looked into mine. I considered the delights of a duel to the death. HIS! I saw the eyes of Sa-she-ra meet mine. Saw the hate burning deep in them!

"I am charging you with slave abuse," I said to the man in a cold level voice as Sa-she-ra cradled her daughter in her arms. "I am taking these two slaves and fining you thirty gold crowns." I felt like telling him that he was lucky I didn't run him through on the spot, but I suppose that would have been going a bit "far", even for me. The girl needed medical attention too. Gayle was a bit "old" for little Mara. I had no doubt that Mara would like Sa-she-ra's daughter. I saw nothing wrong in having a future "Lady of Trelandar" grow up with an "Indian". They were, after-all, "here" a long time before we "pale-faces" first came!

"Our other sluts won't like being chained at night with one of 'those'," Sanda Talen warned as she regarded Sa-she-ra and her daughter. I had done for the girl what I could. Enough so that she could ride with her mother clinging to her. I had doubled up with Lady Tirana. I didn't think Sanda would like what I had to say next. I had no intention of chaining either Sa-she-ra or her daughter with my other female slaves. Her man was dead, and it was a long ways back to where she came from. Not that she had any desire to return to her former home anymore. Mara needed a younger girl to be her "companion" than Gayle, who was after all sixteen to Mara's five. Not that I would change Gayle's status or anything, but it would be educational to Mara to have someone who was not of her own race, someone from another land, to play with. I thought that lovely young Sa-she-ra might just do! Her mother, once "educated" a bit, would make a good "inspector" for me. I wouldn't have to get out "in the hot sun" quite so much!

"I don't chain my employees with my slave girls," I told Sanda Talen, enjoying the look of shocked surprise on her face!

Chapter Sixteen

Sa-she-ra leaped away from my sudden thrust like some slim dark haired nearly naked ballerina. She was "fast", almost unbelievable so. Her skill with the foil even in the three days she had been with me had reached astounding levels. She had already well surpassed the skill levels of Sanda Talen! She didn't have the strength of the Scribe, who was a larger and taller woman, but she was most definitely "quicker". Fast enough I thought to myself that if she continued to improve as she had the day might come when she would be able to give even ME a good match! She was also surprisingly intelligent, and despite having been born in a barbaric society where she had worn nothing but beads and buckskin and lived in a tepee, she was obviously a very able and capable woman in more ways than one! I had learned much from her about the customs, the culture of her people. They were not the simple barbarians as those of Californiagenerally believed. They had the Priestesses, a written language of their own, and a history and culture that dated back to long before The War. Mara had taken well to Sa-she-ra, who was eleven going on twelve. The girl had been sexually abused by her master, as I had suspected.

"You tired, my Lady?" Sa-she-ra asked, standing there, smiling, the sweat gleaming on her copper skin. She was wearing only clips and a strap like me. I had pierced her nipples myself and fitted her with clips. She understood that such were a necessary part of life here on my wide-spread estate, as was the shaving of the pubic hair and other aspects ofCaliforniaculture. I had no wish to have her be taunted by children for lack of such things.

"You are very 'good'," I smiled. We had become very close.

"This unknown by my people," she smiled, indicating the foil there in her capable hand. They had no concept of Warriresses. I thought it just as well. Darlanis had enough troubles as it was. A few thousand like Sa-she-ra could spread terror throughout the Empire. She was small, light. A unicorn could carry her faster than an heavier armored Californian Warriress. She had skills with a bow to a level that exceeded anyone on my estate. She could track almost as well as Delilah! Delilah followed her around like a friend. Her people live closer to Nature than we do. They believe in the "old gods", although they have a concept of SHE that is surprisingly accurate. Such things and more I had learned in the past three days. Sa-she-ra was no "savage" despite whatever people thought because of the color of her skin!

"Again?" I ventured, touching her foil with mine. She nodded, delighted with this new skill. Once again the clash of steel was heard. She was extremely fast. Hard to corner. I had an surprise coming as I overreached and suddenly I felt her foil touch my side! She was better than I had thought! I would have to be more careful with her in the future if I wanted to continue living up to my awesome "invincible" reputation with the blade!

"O.K.?" Sa-she-ra asked, regarding me, a little concerned.

"Just don't tell anyone about it!" I laughed back. Once again our foils met. I pushed her hard this time, letting all my awesome skills come to play. She gave me a good fight before my foil lightly touched just below her naked breast. She was obviously all ready fighting at a level that many Warriresses couldn't have reached. I might be looking at a new "Queen of Swords"!

"Now you not 'hold back'." Sa-she-ra smiled. She had an incredible "natural talent" for the sword. One much like my own!

"It was like a Garth, but not like a Garth," the man said, his terror still visible as he related the tale to us. He was a Forester, one of my employees. "A 'devil' from the 'ruins'," he added. I knew of the "superstitions" of my people. That people believed that the ruins of Los Angeles some eighty miles to the south were inhabited by "demons" and "devils" and other "things".

"You saw a Garth and your 'imagination' did the rest," Sanda snapped. She didn't believe in such "fairy tales". She was an "educated woman". A Scribe. She could read and write, keep books. Even use a computer! This last only very limitedly! I smiled to myself. I was often guilty too of the very same "sin"!

"Such do exist," Sa-she-ra spoke softly. "They live where 'humans' don't." Her own people had legends of such things. To her there were two forms of life on the Earth, "Hu" and "Mu". I had once showed her a picture of a Lorr. She considered such "hu", but of a different sort of "hu" than human "hu's". She had a more accurate view of life, I thought, than did my own society!

Sanda gave me a look that told much without any words of how she "felt" about such things. How she felt about Sa-she-ra. I tended to believe that such things could possibly exist even if Sanda didn't! Atomic radiation can cause strange things to happen. I did not think that all of the legends of the Nevadas were nonsense as Sanda did. There is often TRUTH behind such tales! The reality of "flying saucers" was denied for years. No doubt the Lorr enjoyed seeing us making fools of ourselves. Not believing the reality of our own eyes. They have a means of making their craft invisible to both our visual sense and their radar sense. I understand from Raspa that they also now generate a field that is protection against the mental powers of the Priestesses of Lys! Perhaps the Lorr "know" more here than we think!!!

"You ever `see' one?" Sanda challenged the Nevadawoman. Delilah came strolling in, Mara and Ta-she-ra with her. They had become close. Sa-she-ra had to admit that she never had. Sanda gave me a look that left no doubt what she thought about the matter. About what she thought of Sa-she-ra and perhaps Ta-she-ra.

"Why Sanda so `dislike' me?" Sa-she-ra asked as she talked with her daughter a bit later. I had permitted Sa-she-ra to wear a sword. I wondered if it was a wise move. A duel between her and my Scribe would have but one outcome. The Nevadawoman was a true mistress of the blade. I would have to talk to Sanda Talen, explain a few things. Warn her not to provoke the Indian woman.

"Where's Gayle?" I asked as we sat down for dinner. She had gone riding off a couple hours ago. No one had seen her since! I recalled the attempt on my life, the attempted kidnaping of my little Mara. WHERE WAS MY GAYLE? The terror rose in my thoughts as everyone glanced at each other. No one could tell me of her!

"My Lady! My Lady!" a man at arms burst in as we stared at each other, fearing the worst. In his hand a note! "It was tied to her saddle!" the man informed me as I tore it from his hand!

The note read in Gayle's handwriting: LORRAINE: I AM BEING HELD BY A WOMAN HERE AT THE RUINS OF THE HOUSE YOU SAID ONCE BELONGED TO SOME FRIENDS OF YOURS. SHE SAYS SHE WILL RELEASE ME IF YOU WILL COME AND TALK TO HER. SHE WILL KILL ME IF ANY COME WITH YOU. SHE HAS MEN WATCHING THE TRAILS." It was signed "Gayle".

"Have my unicorn saddled," I snapped, standing up. My eyes fell upon Sa-she-ra. I knew of her skills. It is always wise to have an "ace in the hole". I wondered if I could trust those around me. This strange woman seemed to know an awful lot about me. About my movements. I knew that I could trust Sa-she-ra. I nodded to the woman, had her rise from the table and follow me.

"My life and Gayle's are in your hands," I said to Sa-she-ra as we halted there at the edge of the woods. It was growing dark. I thought of dire wolves, Tignons, Garths, and that strange creature the Forester had seen. Sa-she-ra nodded. I would ride on ahead, Sa-she-ra, stripped, her body painted, would follow on foot. I thought again of Delilah, but put her out of my mind. I hoped Sa-she-ra was "huntress" enough to follow and not be seen!

"The Lady Lorraine, I trust," the woman said to me, getting to her feet there before the fire. She was veiled, wore the black of the Warriress. I saw Gayle tied to a tree. She was gagged, but otherwise appeared unharmed. It was dark now. The last mile or so I had lead my unicorn, my drawn sword there in my hand. I hoped that Sa-she-ra was somewhere close by. I noted the woman's right hand. There was no doubt now as to her identity! I was face to face with Princess Tara Bisan of Baja! There was a deer, freshly killed, hanging from a tree. Its abdominal cavity hanging open. I suspected that Taraknew little of the risks, the dangers of doing such a thing here deep in the forest.

"Let her go, Tara," I snapped. I saw a man, wearing green, step out of the woods, a dagger in his hand, and stand behind Gayle. I could see the glitter of Tara's eyes behind her veil. I thought of Sa-she-ra's abilities with a bow. She could hit birds on the wing! Not every time, true, but often enough that I had been amazed at her abilities. I didn't feel so badly now.

"You are alone?" Tara asked. I recalled Jon's description of her. How he had sensed something "unclean" about the woman. I sensed the same sensation. I recalled what Tais had said. The warning that SHE had

given me. I sensed the evil, that darkness! The term "demonic possession" going through my mind just then...

"I brought a hundred Warriories," I snapped back. She no doubt knew the truth of the matter so far as her men had informed her. I did not think they knew of Sa-she-ra. Of her bow, the dagger she wore strapped to her thigh. The sword strapped to her back so that it would not interfere with her movements through the brush. I had allowed her to paint herself as she saw fit.

"Remove your clothing, all of it," Taras snapped, her hand on the hilt of her sword as she stood with the fire there between us. The hilt had been modified, her wrist braced with leather. I had no doubt that she was fully able to use her weapon with but little reduction in her awesome fighting abilities. I had seen her fighting Darlanis. I was "better", but not by a great deal.

"Free Gayle first," I retorted. I wondered what "plans" she had for me. I suspected she wanted the secret of NAPALM. Perhaps she knew of my computer. I knew very "little" about Tara.

"You are not in a position to give orders," she snapped. The flickering flames lit up the hump there in the forest that once had been the home of my friends. I saw two other men step out of the forest. They were armed with swords, bows. A couple arrows in my hide wouldn't do Gayle any good. I stripped as she said. Even to my clips and strap. I wondered what Tara wanted!

Chapter Seventeen

"You promised that you'd let Gayle go!" I begged as Tara's men staked me out there next to the fire. I recalled what Lady Tirana had done to the crossbowman. Tara had a reputation for such things that made strong men shudder. I had no doubt that she wanted the secret of NAPALM. Doubtlessly the secrets to all the other weapons of the 20th Century that one could make here in the much more barbaric and primitive 26th Century! Gunpowder, nitroglycerin, dynamite. All the devices Mankind has developed to better kill his fellow man. No doubt Tara wanted them all! I suspected that she would obtain the information that she desired! I remembered the crossbowman. How he had screamed and pleaded!

"I fear it is a promise that I cannot keep unless you `cooperate' with me, `Lady Lorraine'," Tara snapped back, her accent on "co-operate" and "Lady Lorraine" leaving no doubt as to how she planned to obtain the "information" that she wished from me! "Stake her brat out alongside her," the Princess ordered her men!

"Lorraine," Gayle breathed, turning her head. Her lovely lightly tanned body now tightly bound to the four stakes that held her there beside me. Like me she was now completely nude. Tara sat on a log regarding us, her eyes glittering in the firelight, and played with the gleaming dagger she held there in her hand. There was the deer hanging from a nearby tree. Their kill. I wondered if Tara realized the dangers of letting the scent of blood waft off into the air. The Princess was careless.

"She is a beautiful girl, Lorraine," Tara said to me, getting up, standing over us. She wore a black silk dress, leather boots with high heels, the latest Californian "fashion". She was veiled and wore a broad brimmed hat as is now common. Tara is a beautiful woman, but with a beauty that reminds me of some snake! Of something "evil" in a way that that is almost "unearthly" too!

"It would be a crime to destroy that beautiful body, that lovely young face. Burn out those beautiful azure eyes," Taras smiled, looking down at Gayle. Gayle's expression now one of utter terror as she regarded that loathsome horrid Bajan Princess!

"Princess," one of the men muttered, looking sick. I suspected that even the outlaws in her employ were sickened by her! Tarawould enjoy torturing Gayle. Hearing her scream, beg for mercy, even the mercy of death. I had heard stories about Tara.

"And you, my dear Lorraine," Tarasaid, turning. "Have you ever wondered what it feels like to have a fire built down there between your legs?" I felt a shudder go through me at the very thought. I remembered the screams of the crossbowman as Lady Tirana had held the blazing torch between his legs. I felt sick. One does not die swiftly when Princess Tara does the torturing!

I watched one of Tara's men staggering off into the forest. Obviously his stomach had been revolted by her words. The other two smiled to themselves, leering down at Gayle's nakedness there before them. One muttered something to the other that it was a "waste of good pussy". Obviously Gayle wouldn't be "good" for anything after Taragot done with her! I knew I had no "choice".

"I'll tell you what you want to know," I told the Princess.

"I thought you might be `reasonable'," Taras smiled back, her dark eyes now glowing down into mine like dark pools of hellfire.

"Where's Jake?" one of Tara's two remaining men asked, the Princess carefully writing down everything I told her. Gayle was sobbing softly to herself beside me. Tarahad promised me that she would spare her life, but that she would take Gayle with her. I did not think Tarawould allow me to live after she learned what she wanted from me. It didn't matter that much to me now. I wondered what had happened to Sa-she-ra. That puzzled me too.

"Who gives a damm!" Taragrowled, squatting there beside me.

Suddenly there was a blurred streak there in the darkness and one of the men suddenly clutched at an arrow half buried in his chest! Taraleaping to her feet, drawing her sword. Sa-she-ra was here! I heard Taracurse, saw the second man fall!

"Stand and face me!" Tarascreamed, the fear showing in her voice. Her sword gleaming there in the flickering firelight as she stood there. I waited for Sa-she-ra's third arrow to put an end to her evil career! Rid the world of the "Princess of Darkness"! I wondered why Sa-she-ra had held her fire now? I recalled Tais saying that what was to be would be. I wondered too if The Queen of Darkness was already here on Earth, living inside the soul of this evil woman! Waiting for the day that She might be able to pierce the barrier that separated us from HELL! Darlanis had once told me that Tarahad been extremely interested in what is commonly called "witchcraft" here in this era. Could it be possible too that this was why the Priestesses so opposed the practice of hypnosis, anything to do with the "paranormal" here?

"I'm sorry I got `lost' in the darkness," Sa-she-ra spoke to me as she emerged from the woods, tossing towards Tara something bloody and horrible, it being the head of the man called "Jake"! Tarashrinking back from the horrid thing as it rolled across the ground towards her. The eyes horrible there in the fire light!

"No! Sa-she-ra! Don't!" I cried as I saw Sa-she-ra fling aside her bow and draw the sword she had carried on her back. I knew that Princess Tara was a Queen of Swords! Only another like Darlanis or

myself could face her and live! Sa-she-ra was good, but she wasn't a swordswoman in the same "class" as the Princess!

"You're that 'savage' of Lorraine's I've heard about," Tara hissed, her keen blade gleaming there in the firelight. I wondered how much her injured wrist would handicap her swordsmanship. I feared not enough for even my amazing Sa-she-ra's sake!

"Lorraine is my 'blood-sister'," Sa-she-ra answered. We had cut each other. Tasted of each other's blood just before I rode into the darkness of the forest. I wondered about the significance of that. I knew that to Sa-she-ra it meant a great deal.

"You're a fool, you 'painted savage', but your kind usually are," the Bajan snapped back, suddenly engaging Sa-she-ra without any warning. Only Sa-she-ra's incredible "quickness" keeping her from being run through by the Princess' sudden surprise thrust!

"Am I?" Sa-she-ra challenged back, meeting the Princess' attacks, which much to my surprise she managed to stand off with a skill that made me very proud of her. Tara was not up to her old levels of skill, I could tell, watching them fight with a eye to their swordsmanship. Tara outclassed Sa-she-ra a bit, but Sa-she-ra was quicker and had the advantage of being barefoot while Tara, like most high born Californian women, wore high heeled boots. Not the best things to fight a sword duel in! I did not know, however, if Sa-she-ra would be able to continue to hold off Tara. The Princess was bigger, stronger, and more skilled with the sword. Sa-she-ra was not a big woman. She was I would say about 5'3" tall and went perhaps a hundred and fifteen. Tara is a couple inches shorter than me, and goes about one twenty five I would guess. I am five nine and go one thirty.

"Stand still, you damn Injun!" Tara snapped, swinging wildly at the dodging painted figure there before her. Sa-she-ra coming in beneath her guard and pricking the enraged Princess in the hip! This absolutely infuriated Tara, who began actually chasing Sa-she-ra around the clearing, Sa-she-ra muchly enjoying herself!

Suddenly there came a sound, a blood-curdling snarl from the woods and to our collective horror, something like out of the worst nightmare you can imagine stepped out into the fire light!

"Lorraine!" I heard Gayle cry from beside me, even Tara and Sa-she-ra having paused in their battle before this new terror! The thing stood at least eight feet tall, and looked like something out of one of those illustrations I've seen of the DEVIL!

It was green and scaly. Horns grew from its forehead. I suppose if you crossed the genes of a Garth and a man and added a bit from mythology you might come up with something like that! I had no doubt that this was the creature that the Forester had seen. That Sanda Talen had said was just a bit of "imagination"!

Princess Tara decided that "flight" was the better part of "valor"! She was in among the terrified prancing unicorns in a matter of seconds at the most. She took mine, it perhaps being the handiest. The others leaping and rearing up, snapping their tie-reins to follow as she galloped off into the darkness of the night as fast as my big white stallion could run under the conditions! I hoped she would break her neck on a low hanging limb!

The horned scaly horror wasted no time in coming after us. Sa-she-ra jabbed it in the side with her sword, rolling out of the way as it swung a clawed forearm at her. Only her "quickness" saving her from having her head knocked off by the thing!

Sa-she-ra yelled at it in her own language. I know enough of it to insult someone in it, but it is a hard language for a "pale-face" to learn. Many Nevadas do speak "English", however.

The horror snarled and charged her, Sa-she-ra jumping out of the way like a matador facing a charging bull. She jabbed it once again with her point, although apparently it was too heavily armored for her to do it much damage. I wondered if her arrows would be any more effective. Her bow was extremely light, drawing only twenty eight pounds where as I draw one far "heavier" here. On the other hand she was a much better archer than I am. Sa-she-ra like nearly all Nevadas using a "pinch" draw that while it insured a high degree of accuracy, did not allow her to draw a bow of any great power. To her people, however, accuracy is of more importance than power or range. Their hunting style is quite different too, as they usually hunt from an ambush set up around a water hole or set up in a tree overlooking a game trail. To a Nevada there is little value in having a bow that shoots far if you can't "hit" with it because it is too difficult to draw!

Scrambling dangerously close to the horrid mutant, Sa-she-ra grabbed her bow and nocking an arrow, drove it into the creature's neck, making it snarl horribly as it started chasing her!

Then suddenly there was a deeper, more powerful snarl, and out into the fire light stepped a Garth! Sa-she-ra between the two monsters! The mutant wisely backing off, the Garth an even more terrible beast than the horned and scaly mutant! Sa-she-ra wheeling and firing an arrow into the Garth's neck with a motion so swift that I had hardly seen her do it! She was a wonderful fighting woman. I was very proud of her. Of what she became! I must write here that she was killed taking the bullet meant for me when we rescued Queen Darlanis from the pirates and Princess Tara fired a flintlock pistol she had made right straight at me!

As I was once told, one trouble in hunting Garths is that after you kill one you have to wait around for the Garth to get the message that it is dead and that it shouldn't be standing up anymore! They are stupid creatures, and take a lot of "killing"!

I watched the Garth reach up and pull the arrow out of its neck, the blood dark against the green of its scaly body. They do look a lot like a small Tyrannous Rex, and while they appear to move slowly, actually they can run about as fast as a man can!

The infuriated Garth charged Sa-she-ra, who dodged around a tree, the Nevada woman yelling something insulting at the reptile as it tried to keep up with her. I could see the blood running from its wound, although it didn't seem to bother it very much!

"If it sees us..." Gayle whispered, her azure eyes glowing into mine. I merely nodded. I knew what Sa-she-ra was doing. I hoped she would succeed. She shot another arrow into the Garth. Almost into the same wound that the first one had made, I noted!

Sa-she-ra tried for one of its eyes, not in the hope that she might drive an arrow into the brain, for that is impossible given the skull structure of the Garth, but more in the hopes I believe of trying to injure it further. To slow it down a bit! Her arrow merely bouncing harmlessly from its skull. I saw it pause, stop, stare at us! We were easier prey! Sa-she-ra shot it again. The Garth turning back towards her, charging her. I saw it stumble. Regain its feet. Stumble again. Fall! Thrash there on the ground as Sa-she-ra stepped close and with both hands drove her sword to the hilt into its tiny brain through an ear! Leaping back from the twisting thrashing body as it went through its death throes! She had single-handed killed a Garth!

Chapter Eighteen

"I thought Indians weren't supposed to get 'lost'," I teased Sa-she-ra as she freed us, the monster body of the Garth lying there at the edge of the clearing proof of her amazing abilities!

"You won't 'tell' anyone, will you?" Sa-she-ra laughed, cutting the rawhide thongs with her dagger. Her name in her language meant something like "she who sees far" and her daughter's "child of who sees far". Perhaps someday I will see her again, although it won't of course be in this world, but in that other to which we all go after death. What we now call the "astral" world, and her people "the happy hunting grounds". She is my "blood-sister". I do believe in such things even if you won't be able to understand. Once, back in the 20th Century, I considered all such things "NONSENSE". I was proud of my Atheism. Of the fact that I was an "educated woman". A medical doctor. One who specialized in the field of psychiatry. Then I discovered the art of hypnosis. Read a book called "THE SEARCH FOR BRIDLEY MURPHY". Considered it "nonsense" at first. But was curious enough to try hypnotic age regression. Obtained the same results as had Morey Bernstein. Continued my research with the help of the fantastic Janet Rogers. Had to admit even to myself that it was now a proven fact that there was life after death and that we did pass through cycles of reincarnation. Then I flew with Sharon through the Gateway. Spoke to people here who told me that it was a proven fact that reincarnation took place. Even heard the same story from the antennae of the Lorr themselves. Spoke with SHE, who confirmed everything. Now I no longer have any doubts!

"It's going to be a long walk," Gayle commented, dressing herself, looking out into the darkness. Our unicorns were gone. I had no desire to be in the forest at night. This is not the 20th Century. There are things that roam the night-time forest against which my sword or Sa-she-ra's bow would be nearly useless. Garths, Tigons, other "things". I felt it best to stay where we were for the night. Walk back to my estate in the morning. I threw some more wood on the fire. Sa-she-ra's eyes glittered up into mine. I owed her more than I would ever be able to repay her. I noticed that Princess Tara had forgotten her notes.

I watched Jupiter gleam down through the trees, Gayle and Sa-she-ra huddled together against the chill of the night. Gayle was blonde, white-skinned. Came from an "advanced" society. Sa-she-ra was brunette, copper-skinned. Came from a society that most "civilized" people of 2565 A.D. looked down upon. Yet she possessed a "code of honor" that would have made any Warriress proud. She had risked her life to save ours. The body of the dead Garth proof of that as it laid there at the edge of the little clearing. Behind me was the dark mass of the "Earth Home" that had once belonged to my friends from the 20th Century, although to be truthful his wife never really liked me very much!

I looked into the fire and wondered why Carol had always been somewhat "hostile" towards me. There was no sexual competition between us. Carol was a brownette delight, provocative, sensual, the sort of a woman that is totally completely "female". Something like Lara Warsan, although Carol didn't look like her. She was the sort, I smiled to myself, that would go for fifty gold crowns in a slave market. Not because of her "beauty", but because she was so incredibly "female". I doubted that anyone would pay much of anything for me. I am not very attractive. I do only one thing very well, and that is an ability that seems to be leading me to the day that I will finally end up standing before SHE and hearing her judgment for my sins. I wondered why Jon Richards still loved me. Why he had spoken the words to me as he had there less than a week ago there on the Janis. I was rich, wealthy, but I did not think it meant much of anything to him. His love was of the sea. Of ships that sailed upon its bosom. I recalled Maris Marn.

What he had said of her to me. It was perhaps well that she was no longer one of my slave girls. I fear I would have been guilty of "slave abuse".

Suddenly, as I sat there before the fire, there came a great furry form dashing towards me across the clearing, its body pale against the darkness. The terror freezing my heart as I saw that it was a dire wolf! One of the most fearsome beasts of the 26th Century! Its speed so great that I had no more time than to scream a warning and go for my dagger before it was upon me! Gayle and Sa-she-ra crying out in surprise as my face was then slurped by that great wet tongue. It was Delilah! My Delilah!

"When you and mummy didn't come back, I told Delilah to go look for you," Ta-she-ra said as her mother hugged her to herself. Sanda Talen and her husband smiling. It had been a nice walk. I needed the exercise. I seldom get to talk to those I love for as long as I had. My unicorn had come trotting back. I hoped Tarahad blisters. I did. Sa-she-ra had spoken a word in her tongue that I had not understood. She had laughed, pointed at my feet as I sat there at the base of a tree with my boots off. Gayle had been wearing riding boots. Her feet were as blistered as mine. We were both truly a pair of "TENDERFOOTS"!

"I was 'wrong' about you. I saw only what I wanted to see," Sanda Talen said to Sa-she-ra as she cleaned the paint from herself. The paint was not actually the same paint that we used on the estate for painting the manor, sheds, barns, and etc, but more the type of "paint" used by those of the Warriress caste in military operations. What they called "greasepaint" in the 20th Century. "I saw only the beads and buckskin," Sanda added, Sashe-ra nodding. Understanding. Sanda was not referring to Sashe-ra's attire on the estate, but to what a woman of her people would have worn back in their own territory. I suspected that Sanda had learned something important. Something like what I had learned there on Mars. That one must see beneath outward appearances to the "truth" that lies below. I much miss Sa-she-ra. I have done what I can for her daughter. She is legally mine now.

"Now we know," Carl Talen commented as we ate a late breakfast. Gayle nodding. I don't think she ever realized that there were "things" like Princess Tara in the world. That a woman could actually take pleasure in torturing another woman to death just to see her suffer. Tarawas indeed the abode of "THE QUEEN OF DARKNESS"! I had no doubt she was The Evil One's "representative" here on the Earth. SHE had spoken briefly of a "QUEEN OF LIGHT". One so "good" that she would stand for all of Humanity against Evil. I did not think I was that person. I have sinned. My soul is stained. I am not very proud of some of the things I have done. There is, however, another who is free of such sins. She is tall, golden, and very beautiful. Also "good" in a fight.

"Precautions will have to be taken," I said. Security would have to be increased. I would put out a "bounty" on Tara. One large enough that it would at least scare her off. I had asked Sa-she-ra why she hadn't put an arrow through Tara. Sa-she-ra said she didn't really know now that she had time to think about it. I suspect that it is impossible to kill Tara. I tried once. The revolver failed to go off although there was a cartridge below the firing pin. A rational explanation would be defective ammunition. A primer contaminated by WD-40. That is what I keep telling myself. What I told Darlanis, who is, I believe, the "QUEEN OF LIGHT", the one who is free of sin that will someday destroy Tara. Jon does not believe. I can understand. What SHE considers "sin" and what we consider "sin" are two different things. There is a "goodness" to Darlanis, a "decency" to her I sense whenever I am in her presence. She has been "touched" by SHE who is Mistress of All. Darlanis says that I write nonsense. That she is not the "sterling" character that I make her out to be. That while she has never intentionally "harmed" anyone, she is still the woman personally responsible for a war that took thousands of lives. That only "Lys" can be the judge of such things. Darlanis does not believe that I saw SHE. She believes that I was merely under the influence of Raspa's paralyzing venom and that it was all a dream. I believe, however, that someday she will know the Truth. That she is, indeed, the QUEEN OF LIGHT and that her destiny will be to drive

out THE QUEEN OF DARKNESS! Send Her "back" to the plane of existence called Hell from which she came to inhabit the soul of the woman we know as Tara Bisan!!

"How's the computer doing?" I asked Sanda, who was studying "word processing". Fortunately the original owner of the device had done the initial programing for us. The "pen" that one touched the screen with was another example of 21st Century technology. It was far easier to use than a "mouse", the "pointing device" commonly used back in my own era. (No, I realize that none of this means anything to my readers, but I don't really know how to really describe such things in 26th Century terms.)

"I am becoming rapidly aware of how 'stupid' I am," Sanda smiled back. Computers do that to you until you understand them.

"It was 'hard' for me too at first," I smiled back, touching her shoulder. Looking at what she had written on the screen. It displayed in white lettering on a blue background. Much like the Wordstar 5.0 I had used back in the 20th Century before flying through the time warp to this time. The display was SVGA, 800X600. That I had determined from the manual there in the case with the computer. The plastic coated "paper" as good as ever.

"I think I like our time better," Sanda said, shutting off the computer. The life of the battery was limited. "Things are simpler, easier to understand." I nodded in reply, smiled at her words. I thought that they were true. We had worshiped at the "altar of technology". Believed that all the "answers" were determinable by Science. Believed ourselves the masters of our world although we had no answers for those who saw silvery discs.

Chapter Nineteen

(Darlanis' version)

"Do you think it will clear up, Captain Stone?" I asked, the impenetrable fog now like a cold wet invisible hand brushing up against my face there in the night. The dampness chill against my exposed skin. The polished wood of the quarterdeck wet and slippery beneath my high heeled boots. My heavy fur trimmed silk lined cloak a comfort. We were somewhere to the south of Trella, escorting a couple of fat merchantmen and the now famous Ronda. The former slaver on its maiden voyage as a fast passenger coaster. A slaver being ideal for such work, as its burly feminine captain, Shirl, had pointed out to me. I knew of the pirates in these waters, and also of concern was the ramship Janis, of 56 oars. Only Sarnian Lady, my own 54, being a match for such a heavy galley as the Janis. I did not like to think of what such a fight between our two ships would be like in a ship to ship action. I knew a great deal about Jon Richards. Too much to believe that Captain Stone would be his equal if it came to battle. He was an experienced, capable officer, but rather unimaginative.

"I'd like be able to 'see' where we're going, your majesty," my captain growled, unhappy with the state of affairs. Both with the fog and the fact that we might have to battle the Janis, face Jon Richards, the best that Dularn had to offer. The outcome of such a battle was uncertain. Luck would have a great deal to do with it. I trusted captain Stone, but wondered if he was the "equal" of Jon Richards. I doubted it. Captain Stone was competent, able, but somewhat unimaginative. Not the man his Dularnian counterpart was, I

feared. I wished I had Lorraine Duval with me. She was the sort who could see what others could not. Or Jers Bisan, who was perhaps California's best naval officer.

I glanced up at the sails overhead, only blurs in the darkness. I could hear the man at the bow tossing the lead. We were far enough out that there was little danger of grounding on some uncharted rock. That was what had happened to the bireme Isis, a 36, only a week ago. Its bottom had been torn out by some rock. Fortunately there had been no loss of life, the escorted vessels having been able to pick up the officers and men from the rapidly sinking galley, which had been unfortunately a total loss. The captain now faced a naval court martial for his own carelessness.

Beneath my lovely long fur trimmed cloak I wore a beautiful fitted halter and a mid-thigh length skirt, both made of flexible golden threads. Sharon had suggested such as a replacement for the uncomfortable but distinctive golden mesh outfit I had worn. My beloved foster daughter had made my life once again worth living. Her sense of humor, the way that she delighted in playfully teasing me when we were alone together, all made me once again look forward to each day. Savoring the pleasures and delights of life here in the 26th Century as California's famous "golden Empress". I in turn delighted in "mothering" Sharon, teasing her a bit about the 20th Century, of which I knew more than she had first realized. Her nickname for me of "SHE-RA" making me smile!

With Lorraine now gone out of her life Sharon had seemed to "blossom out", to become utterly different than she had been with Lorraine. She also had a delightful grim sense of humor that I had never realized that she had when she had been with Lorraine. Needless to add I now loved her as a daughter just as much as if I'd actually given birth to her! She was very precious to me!

"Brr, it's cold out here," Sharon commented as she joined me there on the quarterdeck, drawing her cloak tightly about herself. "Not a good night for much of anything," she added with a smile, her golden hair already glistening with droplets of moisture from the fog. Her eyes glittering in the light of our running lamps as she smiled, "Let's just hope the Janis doesn't spot us as we're a 'sitting duck' all 'lit up' like this." A sudden chill immediately going through me at her words! She was truly a daughter of Lorraine Duval. She had "seen" what none of us had!

"We'll lose the others in this fog," captain Stone protested as he regarded that lovely Imperial Princess standing beside me.

"Not 'if' you have them sail ahead of you and you follow," Sharon pointed out in the same competent tones that Lorraine herself would have used. "The Dulamians wouldn't risk ramming a merchantman and losing all that 'profit' and in the darkness you could easily run up alongside an enemy and give them 'what for'."

"Signal the escort and inform them of our change of position," I snapped, "And have those lamps put out!" I added, my hand on Sharon's shoulder. I was very proud of my "golden girl"!

"I hear something out there," Sharon breathed, looking out to port. "Splashing like." The terror clutching at my heart as I knew what it must be! The sound of the oars of the Janis!!!

"BATTLE STATIONS! OUT OARS! RIG FOR BATTLE!" I screamed at the top of my lungs. I have a voice that carries well. No man or woman on Sarnian Lady had any doubts either who giving the orders! My sword was already gleaming there in my hand as I flung my cloak off, seeing to my horror a darker shadow there to port!

"Turn to port!" I snapped at the man at the helm, ignoring captain Stone. Aware that the Janis was

racing towards our vulnerable flank. About to smash through our side! I felt Sarnian Lady start to swing, the man at the helm already having the wheel all the way over, but I knew it would not be enough to save us now! I saw men running, a ship's girl dashing below. There was no real safety there, but such flight is perhaps "instinctive".

"Lousy night for a swim," I heard Sharon mutter as the Janis came looming out of the darkness at maximum beat towards us! We were now turning, but it would be too late. I saw the Janis' ram jutting out there before the ship, saw the glow of the waters as they parted, then THE IMPACT CAME! The Janis striking us about three quarters of the way back, our turn having caused the other galley to strike us much further back than what Jon Richards had no doubt planned! The impact nearly throwing me from my feet as I felt Sarnian Lady recoil beneath me, seriously wounded from the strike of the Janis' ram! The Janis backing off, a dark shadow there in the fog, the splash of her oars the only sound she made!

We were badly crippled, almost dead in the water as confused men and women now dashed here and there on our decks. I waited for the Janis to finish us off with another strike as it floated there no more than a hundred feet away now. I could feel Sarnian Lady starting to settle beneath me. Heard the yells, the cries of terror as the water came pouring in below at the waterline. I put my arm around Sharon, my sword gleaming in my hand. I sensed figures moving there on the deck of the Janis. Thought of what a beautiful target I made in my glittering golden attire. It would take but one crossbow bolt to end my life. No doubt Queen Tulis would reward the man or woman who did the deed, I grimly smiled!

"Will we sink?" Sharon asked, her voice soft, but telling of the terror she doubtlessly felt. I told her it wasn't likely unless the Janis rammed us again. Sarnian Lady was constructed with watertight compartments below the waterline. We had suffered severe damage, but we would be able to stay afloat. Not that it did us much good, as we were nearly helpless, but at least we wouldn't drown. I didn't like to think of what it would be like to be paraded through the streets of Arsana as a captive. No doubt my brother would get considerably pleasure out of humiliating me in any way that he could while my "mother" looked on and took pleasure in seeing the degradation of her hated "daughter". I wondered if I could convince Jon Richards to let Sharongo. I did not think he wished to "anger" Lorraine Duval. She is not the sort of a woman that you would want as an enemy. We were not that far from her estates. She could be put ashore from a boat. I would be "trophy" enough now for any Dularnian captain!

Then to my amazement I saw the Janis backing off into the fog, leaving us! Not a shot had been fired at us! It was almost as if Jon Richards had only wished to cripple my ship. Prove to me that he was the better commander. Nothing else made sense! * * I did not realize then that Jon Richards was not concerned about me, but about Sharon, whom he recognized standing there beside me. Jon later on has told me that he has no doubt that had any harm come to Sharon that Dularn would have faced a far more terrible enemy in Lorraine Duval than they ever faced in me! (D)

"See if we can get under way," I snapped at captain Stone, dashing below to see what could be done about the damage. To bring order out of chaos. Leaving Sharon on deck to do what she could. She was surprisingly "competent" for a girl of sixteen!

"There's a slave girl trapped in there," the sailor said, the whites of his eyes gleaming in the light of the lamp. The water was nearly up to the top of the compartment. Sarnian Lady still taking in water, sinking lower. Another minute and she would drown! I could hear her screaming, begging to be rescued!

"Gutless Bastard!" I hissed, stripping off my harness, yanking the knife from his belt and jumping into the compartment, into the darkness. The chill water only inches from the bottom of the deck above! Various stores floating and bumping up against the top of the compartment as I struggled towards the sound of the woman's voice! Hearing the terror in her shrill words! The rising water inches from the top of the

compartment!

"I'm caught!" she whimpered as I touched her in the darkness, the luckless wench having no idea of who I was. No doubt she thought I was one of my warrioresses if she even knew that!

I dove, the knife between my teeth, my hand running down her leg. I felt the rope twisted about her ankle, part of the rope used to secure items against the roll of the ship. I suspected she was the same wench I had seen earlier fleeing below to supposed safety. It had been a stupid act on her part, I thought to myself as I cut at the rope with my knife, aware that Sarnian Lady was sinking further and that the water was no doubt now up to the top of the compartment! We could both drown down here! I had her free now, but I couldn't find my way back out to safety!

Then I heard a splashing sound, a glow in the water, and with the terrified girl clinging to me, her grip choking me in her terror, I swam towards the glow. My lungs bursting from the strain, floating boxes and containers of various sorts adding an additional hazard to our perilous underwater passage to safety!

"It's The EMPRESS!" I heard a voice say, Sharon holding a lamp. She had been slapping the water with her hand to guide me.

Chapter Twenty

(Darlanis' version)

"Like to go visit Lorraine?" I asked Sharon as I watched Sarnian Lady being dragged up into dry dock. We had limped into Trella in the early morning hours, under oars, listing, heavy in the water, an obviously defeated ship. Word was already spread all over Trella of what had happened. Encouraging those who aspired that Trelandar should be free of the Empire I had so carefully built up over the years! That it should even have its own "Queen" once again, Lorraine now being the one usually mentioned. People were sick and tired of this War, of the pirates that grew like weeds off its fertile ground! I supposed my rescue of the slave girl would help a bit in countering some of the hatred directed against me. Tales of that were already spreading as sailors repeated the tale in the various waterfront dives to which they had scattered once Sarnian Lady had made port and there was no further need for them to remain all on board any longer.* * The reader will note that at this point there was already considerable talk of making Lorraine Duval "Queen of Trelandar" even as far as Trella and some points further south. You will note in Lorraine's story that she does not mention hardly anything about this until later on. This is, I suppose, her way of making the story seem more "exciting" or something than if she had admitted at the very beginning that she was now the Queen of Trelandar. I will say for her, however, that as you will see she did not enjoy becoming Trelandar's Queen knowing the effect that it would have on me. We have a very close relationship, and I do think very "highly" of her regardless of how she has been "used" by others.

"We need to talk," Sharon said, drawing me to one side, my warrioresses and men holding back the curious who had collected. There was always the danger of crossbowmen. I had grown used to the thought that at any moment I might feel a crossbow bolt ripping into my body. That I might be able to verify for myself whether what the Priestesses of Lys taught was true or not. The sun was hot upon my back, burning through the silken cape I wore.

"I'm afraid for you," Sharon said to me in soft tones, looking up into my eyes. "You're just too 'good', too 'decent', too 'nice' to know what could happen if you ever 'cross' my stepmother's 'path'." Her words made me smile a bit. I am not the "angel" that Sharon thinks of me. I am a "user", a person who "uses" others to get what she wants out of life. I suspect that Sharon sees only what she wants to see. She does not understand how I use my body, my beauty, my position to get what I want from people. That I wear the clothing I do for a very good reason. I know men. Know their "weaknesses". Know that a man looking up underneath my skirt when I sit on my golden throne before him is a man who can't think of anything but what lies between my legs! That is why the only people who have ever been successful in opposing me have been women. Men can only think of fucking me! Of "lying between my thighs" as we say here in the 26th Century. I dreaded the day when Sharon would learn the truth about me. That "truth" that I suspected Lorraine Duval already well understood!

"Your stepmother is a good 'friend' of mine. We have stood together in battle," I smiled back. Yet I understood what she was referring to. What I dreaded myself to think about. My skill with a sword, while awesome, was not I knew the "match" of hers! I knew too of Lorraine's moods, the shortness of her temper. She was a woman that I admired, but yet in a way feared. I wondered if that was why I had pushed her off onto the former Daris estates as I had. Hoping that she would succumb to a life of ease. Keep out of "politics". It was obvious now she had not! * * I did not of course know about Sanda Talen's role in things...

"You're afraid of her. What she could become," Sharon answered in soft tones. I had heard the stories told. References to "a second Janet Rogers". Lorraine was capable, competent. I feared more so than me. She would not have allowed the Janis to find us there in the darkness. That too had been spoken when they had thought I would not hear. Sarnian Lady was my flagship. To many Jon Richards had won a victory over ME! I was a "defeated" ruler who had come limping into Trella like some whipped cur! I had lost "face" in the eyes of my people. Those whom I ruled. To many people in Trelandar I represented only "oppression", the "rule" of Imperial Lords and Ladies over a once "free" people. I had no doubt that Lorraine might appear to such people as being "the second Janet Rogers" that would free them from all of this!! Her ideas of "economic democracy" were something "revolutionary"! The concept of Syndicalism being something known only to Scribes.

I understood what Sharon feared, but there was little that I could do about it. My sister Janis had once admitted to me before her tragic death that she had hoped Queen Tulis would make Lorraine Duval the Warlady of Dularn. I wondered if I had made a mistake in not doing the same with Lorraine although I still recalled when I had hinted of such things what she had said to me in reply. Saw that hostility in her eyes. Still recalled that quotation from the Bible about being "put in the forefront of the battle" she quoted standing there before me, her hand on the hilt of her sword. Saying that I wanted her killed and out of the way. That she represented too much of a "danger" to me to live!

"I love you so much," Sharon whimpered, her azure eyes glistening now with tears as she moved into my arms. "I'm afraid for you," she sobbed against my shoulder. I held her close, feeling her tremble against me. I wondered what to do about Lorraine. I would have to face her sooner or later. We would go and see her.

"It's no more than a hundred miles, Shirl," I said. I wanted something more than a little sailboat. The Ronda was fast, although pirate schooners were faster yet. With any sort of a breeze we could be off the Lady Lorraine's estates by nightfall. It would be four days by unicorn, skirting the ruins of Los Angeles. It was said to be a den of strange beasts and other "things" never made by Lys. A place where I might ride into to never return. I had seen the terror in the eyes of my women when I had even dared suggest it! Such were the superstitions that unnerved even the bravest of my warrioresses. It made me smile.

"No escort and the Janis is still out there somewhere," the burly ex-slave girl answered, regarding me. Regarding Sharonas she stood there beside me, keeping her thoughts then to herself.

"Twenty gold crowns for a day's trip," I answered, hating myself for what I was doing to the woman. To her own crew, most of whom were former slave girls like herself who now followed the sea. Fearing that they might feel the collar of a slave girl once again locked around their necks should they attempt to make a life for themselves elsewhere. Many of them like Shirl now wore swords. I felt their hostility as she considered my offer.

"I was a slave girl once," Shirl said to me in level tones.

"Sixty gold crowns," I snapped back, raising the "ante" even higher. That is a lot of money here in 2565 A.D. That was all I had with me without returning to Sarnian Lady. A couple years' profits for Shirl. She could give each one of her crew a gold crown and keep the rest for herself and still have enough left to do anything she wanted to fix up the Ronda. Her passengers had gotten off to see the sights of Trella while waiting for another escorting warship to protect them on the rest of their journey.

"It's against my better judgment," Shirl said to me. I hated myself for what I had done to her. She was an honest woman, but poor. Sometimes I am not very proud of the sort of person I am! Of the way I "use" people to gain my own selfish ends!

"Brings back memories?" I asked Sharonas the Ronda took the rolling swell of the sea, the sails taking the wind well. The ship was faster than my Sarnian Lady. No doubt faster than the Janis too. Our only danger was from pirates or the North Wind, a big Dularnian privateer. Its captain would be delighted if he could capture me. The reward would no doubt make him a rich man!

"I'm `scared'," Sharonas answered, her azure eyes looking up into mine. Shirl there at the wheel, capable, competent. A sword there at her hip. She had been taught by Lorraine Duval.

"Shirl says we should be there by nightfall," I assured her. I felt nervous, vulnerable, "exposed". Why do I take such risks? Why do I do the things I do? I have sought Lorraine's "professional advice". She speaks of "complexes", of "inadequacies". I am, according to her, a woman driven by "doubts" about "herself". Always seeking to "prove" herself in the eyes of others. Why do I now put myself "in the forefront of battle"? Dive into flooded compartments to rescue a mere slave girl at the risk of my own life? What "motivates" California's golden Empress? I wish I knew! And why did I take Sharon with me? Expose her to danger!

"My mother never really loved me. I was just `something that happened' when she forgot to put in her diaphragm and my father wouldn't allow her to get an abortion," Sharonas said in a soft voice as I took her in my arms. I knew back in her own time women could get pregnant by accident, or when they wished, not like it is today when you have to go to a Priestess for the drug that allows you to become fertile. That a woman would "abort" a healthy child, take an innocent young life, horrified me, although it happened frequently enough back then. Lorraine says that there is no difference in having an abortion or drowning a bunch of unwanted puppies. She of course can still be a mother. That privilege is no longer possible for me. I still have my beauty, my looks, but I am "hollow" inside. My womanhood gone.* * Darlanis is referring here to her uterus, which I had to remove to save her life. I never said to her that having an abortion was like drowning puppies in the way that she puts it here. (LR)

"We're in `trouble'," Shirl spoke, her telescope in her hand. I saw nothing. I held Sharon in my arms. I was angry at being "disturbed". This moment was very precious to me. I fear that I did not for a moment

realize the seriousness of the matter. "There are three topsail schooners coming out from shore." I had not looked in that direction! Now I could see them too! I felt the terror clutch at my "royal" heart. THEY WERE PIRATES!

"We will fight," Shirl said. I knew it wouldn't make any difference. The odds were far more than just the apparent three to one. More like ten to one or even more! There was no chance!

"You're just making a 'target' of yourself wearing that chain mail and helmet," Sharon said, her voice betraying her as I slipped the helmet over my golden hair. The Tarl of the Empire on my helm. There would be no mistaking me for another. I would die with a sword in my hand. Taking as many of the bastards and sons of bitches that I could with me to stand in judgment before Lys. I hoped she would be merciful to me. I asked for no more.

"When we engage slip out the stern windows and swim for shore," I ordered. Sharon's eyes glowed into mine. I knew that I would never see her again. Never again speak to her. Hold her in my arms. For a few far too brief weeks she had been "mine". I turned my head so that she could not see the tears in my eyes.

Chapter Twenty One

(Darlanis' version)

"We can try to run, to drag things out a bit," Shirl said to me, the three pirate schooners now closing fast. She had removed the Ronda's original armament for more space on deck. I didn't think it really mattered all that much. The pirates "outgunned" us by such a margin that a few small ballistae and a couple little "toy" catapults wouldn't have made any difference! Even Sarnian Lady would have been in serious trouble facing the three topsail schooners that were racing towards us! There could be but one final outcome regardless of what we did. Shirl knew that. So did I. I wondered what Lorraine Duval would do if she was standing in my boots. I knew her well enough to know what her answer would be! She would fight! Sell her life for all it was worth! Make the pirates pay just as high a "price" as possible! Die with a bloody sword in her hand! I could do no less!

"We will ram the center schooner and take as many of the bastards with us as we can," I answered, my bow there in my hand. It was an unusual weapon, expensive, Dularnian. As close a copy of a 21st Century compound as the best members of the caste of Builders of Arsana could make. I had paid several crowns for it. It "peaked" at seventy five pounds, and held at about forty. It could punch through any body armor known in this era. I stand five ten barefooted, go close to one fifty in "fighting trim". I am not like other women. I am muscled almost like a man. I wondered what the judgment of Lys would be. Shirl gave me a smile, put her hand on my shoulder. She was of low caste, I was an Empress. Caste, our positions in life, her poverty, my fantastic wealth, nothing really mattered now. We would stand before Lys as equals when the time came. That was, I thought to myself, the way it should be. We shared much then without speaking a word.

Without a word she slipped her sword from her sheath and handed it to me hilt first. I kissed the blade and gave it back to her. Such is meaningful to those of the Warriorress Caste. It is not something that I can easily explain to those who are not. It is not the same as swearing an oath of loyalty or such things. It is perhaps more similar to the actions of Sa-she-ra when she cut Lorraine's hand and had Lorraine do the same to her and each tasted the blood of the other. It is a "sisterhood of the sword". An acknowledgment

of something only few can understand.

"What?" I gasped, seeing a woman raising my personal flag. Such had been among my things. Sharon gave me a smile as she stepped up beside me. She had a bow, a quiver of arrows over her shoulder. My other sword at her hip. We had done a little fencing. Lorraine had taught her a few things back in the 20th Century, although she lacked the skills or the strength to face men of the sort that we would be facing. She had made her decision.

"I'm afraid of sharks," she said to me. She had once seen a Squala chasing killer whales. It is not a sight you forget very quick. There are "predators" now in the ocean that never lived back in the Age of Civilization as it is sometimes called. Back in that brief and all too short "Golden Age" when all of Mankind lived under the benevolent rule of the incredible Janet Rogers. The thirty six years when Man was "one". An era like no other. * * Janet Rogers became President of the United States in 2008, and Leaderess of the World Federation in 2011. Her "society" was destroyed in The War of 2047 by the Lorr bombardment from space.

"She is still Lorraine Duval's daughter," Shirl said to me. She was wearing a dark blue tunic, matching hose, black boots. I found her attire attractive, fitting. She is truly a "Princess".

"I am the 'daughter' of Darlanis of California," Sharon snapped back, slipping her left arm around me. "Princess of the Empire. Darlanis is legally my mother and don't ever forget it."

"Sorry," Shirl smiled, seeing my wink. My heart singing in my breast despite the sight of death now only a half mile away! Shirl walking to the wheel, taking command of the Ronda's course.

"I guess we're not going to make it to Lorraine's estates," Sharon smiled, looking up into my eyes. I knew the terror she felt, that "hand" that clutches at your heart before you go into battle. It was best that neither of us lived to become captives of the pirates. I had little doubt what they would do to Sharon. She was young, innocent, almost "virginal" although she wasn't a virgin, having lost her virginity back in the 20th Century a few months before she flew with Lorraine Duval through the time warp.

As for me, I planned to die a Warriress' Death. Far better than what such men would do should the Empress of California fall alive into their hands. I still have my memories. I still sometimes awaken wet with sweat, shivering in terror. Sharon strokes me, calms me. I still bear the scar across my lower abdomen from the surgery that Lorraine was forced to perform on me. The surgery that took my womanhood, left me just a beautiful shell with nothing left inside. She has done for me what she can do as have the Priestesses of Lys now. I do not wish to have my mind "reprogrammed". Be made into something "different" than what I am. I have lost much. Too much to ever be as I once was before this.

I walked to the bow of the Ronda, stood there on the forecastle, my golden armor, helmet gleaming in the bright sun. It was warm, the azure sky nearly cloudless. The sun bright nearly overhead in the western part of the sky. I knew I would never see it set. Never see another sunrise, another sunset. Never again! My death now was as sure as that of a felon's condemned to the headman's axe. There was no "appeal" from what faced me. I prayed I would die bravely when the time came. Die as a Warriress should, her sword bloody in her hand. I asked no more of Lys. I would stand before Her this day, and face Her judgment.

I fitted an arrow to my bow, that beautiful weapon I loved so well. I had not carried it before on the Ronda, for reasons I cannot answer. Lorraine had carried hers. I had used my sword. I drew the arrow all the way back, past that "stiffness" where the bow peaked, and back to that "easy" spot where I can hold for almost minutes at a time. I took careful aim, the arrow pointed up into the azure blue vault of the sky.

Sharon stood beside me.

"You missed," Sharon observed. I did not think so. I saw the disturbance on the pirate schooner's deck. Someone had just gotten themselves a good scare! The range was three hundred yards. A good hundred past what any ordinary archer can do! The pirate was getting "nervous" now. The Ronda was solidly built, a heavier ship than his lightweight schooner. I saw his foresail shiver as he started to turn away. I fitted another arrow to my string. Slipped my gloved fingers on the silk whipped bowstring and drew back. Raised another arrow until it pointed up into the sky. Up into that lovely azure blue vault. I recalled the words of the only man I had ever loved. He had called me "azure eyes".

Prince Serak had compared my eyes to the sky over his dusty, dry lands. He had been a barbarian. No fit "consort" for an Empress like myself! I had looked down upon him because he wore buckskin, and knew not books, learning, the history of the past. He was just a Prince of the Nevadas. Unfit to be the husband of a "civilized" woman like myself! I might have to wear beads and buckskin, fix meals, do all those menial little things that their women do. Even stitch and sew clothing! I was an Empress! Not some Nevadas slut that couldn't read or even write her own name!

I could write him, tell him how I feel. But I will not. I cannot give him children. I am beautiful, but barren. Useless. No longer a woman, but just a hollow shell like some suit of armor with nothing inside. I yet live, but no longer as a woman! * * You will argue here that I have "children". There is Anna, who has rejected me for the excitement of travel through space, the challenge of pioneering another world, a better world perhaps than ours. One clean, pure, a world without any history of Man. There is Sharon, whose mother has been dead for six centuries. I suppose you can say that Sharon is "mine". She loves me, but yet she also has a "mother" of her own who loves her too. Lorraine!

I watched the pirate schooner turning now, the captain finally aware of what we were doing. The Ronda coming around as he turned, Shirl aiming squarely at his side! I tried for him, but without any success. I had dropped perhaps half a dozen arrows on his decks. Two had struck human targets. A couple badly aimed almost spent crossbow bolts whizzed harmlessly by me. I told Sharon to seek cover. She asked me WHY? I had no answer for my Princess then! What did it matter anymore? We were just as good as dead. We would both stand together before Lystoday!

"Their aim is improving," Sharon observed. She was much different now than she had been when I had first seen her. More "sure" of herself, more willing to stand up and tell me what she thought of things. I do not have the innate dominant personality that Lorraine has despite whatever you may think of me. I did not "dominate" her life like Lorraine perhaps has without being aware of it. My own teenage years were miserable. I can understand how hard it is for a young girl to grow up. I gave her my love, understanding. For a few blessed weeks she had been "mine". We had grown close. Closer than most mothers and daughters ever become. To me there is Sharon and then everyone else.

We were just coming within bowshot now. Sharon tried for them with her own bow, but I saw her arrow fall short, drop harmlessly into the sea at a hundred and sixty yards. The next one would hit. The schooner was nearly broadside to us now. Their captain was a fool. I found the thought satisfying to my Warrior soul. I recalled what the Janis had done to my own ship!

We were joined by the other women who crewed the Ronda. We fired a volley that reduced his numbers by a few. Made his own return fire less effective. He started firing his ballistae. I saw a woman pierced, the javelin passing through. One hit by my feet. It all seemed like a dream now. I fitted another arrow to my bow. Sharon fired too. Both our arrows hit. Another ballistae bolt whizzed between us, inches away from my hip. A dark blurred streak against the sea. I considered it unimportant now. I was already dead. You can only die once. I prayed that it would swift when it came. That the pain would not

be too great!

Less than a hundred yards now. Two of Shirl's women went down from crossbow bolts. A ballistae bolt took another. Something cut my thigh just below the hem of my chain mail. There was blood on my leg, more oozing from the flesh wound. It was not serious. Not in the time I had left now. I wondered who would take over the Empire when I was gone? Lorraine or Princess Tara? I prayed that it would be Lorraine, not that damn Bajan!

I saw a man shake his fist at me. Saw my arrow pierce him, the man standing behind him. My arrows are designed to pierce armor. They will go completely through a deer and out the other side. Bury themselves to the feathers in the body of a Garth! Sharon cried out, clutched at herself, bleeding under her armpit. A crossbow bolt had just grazed her. A spent arrow just pierced my armor as men fired from another pirate schooner. I yanked it out just as the Ronda struck dead center. Threw my bow aside and whipped out my sword. Leaped to the enemy's deck as the ship's foremast fell, sails and all, going over the other side of the schooner! Heard yelling behind me as the other schooners grappled the Ronda. Shirl's women fighting, dying. Selling their lives as best they could. I am told the pirates lost nearly thirty men. We did give a good account of ourselves for women!

"That's Darlanis!" a man cried. Another thrust at me. My point entered his throat as the ship listed beneath us, taking in water. I parried another thrust. Shirl was at my side now. I saw a man clutch at an arrow in his chest. I had told Sharon to rely on her bow, not the sword she carried. I got my point under another pirate's guard, thrust, slashed another across the face as I recoiled. Felt a sword seeking my vitals as it scraped across my armor. Something struck my head, making everything whirl for a brief second. No doubt a belaying pin! I saw Shirl go down, a pike buried in her guts. Another arrow I believed to be Sharon's whizzed by me to take another life. The pirates were forcing me back against the rail of their listing ship. I knew this was the end for Darlanis Marden of Imperial California! I thrust again, burying my keen blade deep in a man's gut. Something slammed against my head, perhaps the shaft of a big pike. I felt everything spinning around. Saw the blackness before my eyes. Then nothing more. The battle was finally over for me.

"We got her! We got Darlanis!" I heard voices crying out. That did not please me much. I was surprised to be yet alive! I hoped fate had been more merciful to Sharon. That her body laid among the fallen. She was so young, innocent, that I knew Lys would be merciful! It was best that way. Not the way I faced! My head agony, some demon pounding on an anvil there inside it!

"And here's her 'brat', that little bitch with the bow!" I heard another cry as I struggled to get to my feet, everything swimming before me, several pirates holding me down. Swords threatened me. A pike was held to my throat. I saw my sword, my beautiful sword, being examined by some cut-throat. A woman leaping on to the deck of the sinking schooner from the Ronda, a woman in black, heavily veiled. A woman from another schooner! The pirates to my surprise drawing away, stepping back from her! For a horrible moment I thought it was Lorraine Duval, but then even with her veiling, her attempts to conceal herself, I recognized her true identity before she stood before me and slowly lifted her veil to one side. Before me there stood Tara Bisan, the Princess of Baja! The one that Lorraine calls "The Princess of Darkness" with perhaps good reason even if you don't accept all the "supernatural" claims that Lorraine has made about her!

"You fought well, Darlanis," Tara smiled, her eyes icy cold. "But now soon the Empire will be mine as it should have been." I wondered what she planned to do about Lorraine Duval? Unlike me, Lorraine would not spare her life if it ever came to it again!

"Let Sharon go," I answered, regarding her as I laid there, a pike thrust against my throat. "Send her

back to Lorraine and I will sign whatever papers you want giving you the throne of California." I did not think the Senate would accept her, but that was her problem, not mine. I didn't think she would be dumb enough to take me up on the offer, but for Sharon I would do anything in my power to save her, even at the cost of my own life!

"You've always been a fool, Darlanis, an incompetent fool," Tara smiled back. "But I'm not stupid enough to think that Lorraine Duval would just sit there on her estates and drink rum and fruit drinks for the rest of her life with Sharon at her side." I suppose she too had heard of the calls for a "Free Trelandar".

"I can give these men of yours far 'more' than you can," I snapped back. "I am after all the Empress of California." I spoke what I did not for her ears, but for those around her. Sharon's azure eyes looked down into mine as they held her there. They were dry, not filled with tears. She was a Warriorress. I felt the point of the pike momentarily lift just a bit as it left my throat. "I can make every one of them a rich man, give them slave girls, lands, and everything that any man could ever want."

"Kill Her!" Princess Tara snapped. "Kill Them Now!" Obviously Tara was getting "nervous". Doubtless her control over these cut-throats was starting to slip. They were loyal only to gold. No doubt Tara paid them well, but there were limits to even her resources! To those of the Mexican Empire that supported her secretly against me. I had known such things for months!

"No!" a voice snapped, a big burly swarthy man in colorful clothing pushing his way through the crowd that surrounded us. I had no doubt that this was the pirates' commander. "There are those who will pay us good for the Empire Princess stripped and in chains kneeling bare-ass before them." I saw Sharon shudder and then lift her chin high. She was truly my Imperial Princess! "And I've always now sort'a wondered to me self just'a what it would be like to get my prong up in between Darlanis' thighs! To spurt my jism into that royal slit of hers!" the pirate laughed!

Chapter Twenty Two

(We return to Lorraine Duval)

"How are things going?" I asked Gayle as we ate breakfast, the beautiful teenage blonde giving me a warm smile that reminded me much of my Sharon's. The two young women were much alike in many ways both in looks and personalities. Sa-she-ra smiling, her dark eyes glowing into mine. We were "blood-sisters". There is much that you share with your blood-sister. I did with mine. Her skill with a sword had reached a level that amazed me. I do fear, however, that her attempts to teach me archery weren't anywhere near as successful. I am good, but nowhere near the equal of what Sa-she-ra was. On the other hand I can draw a bow up to nearly sixty pounds, while she had trouble with anything over thirty. I did master her "pinch" draw, but find it of little value to me as I do not use the sort of a light bow that she did.

"Just as long as that Princess doesn't come back," Gayle answered, the look in her azure eyes one of concern as they looked into mine. I took her hand in mine, our eyes meeting. Little Mara watching the interplay between us, understanding little of its meaning, its deep implications. She would if she ever became a mother. Had a daughter of her own to love, to raise, to be proud of like I was of Gayle. I loved Gayle very much. Sanda regarding us all, her own daughter Sara sitting there beside her. Sanda's lower lip swollen a bit. Her husband had bitten her the last time they made love. Such is sometimes done

in the heat of lovemaking, although I am more likely usually to do the biting.

"Would you like to go into town and do some 'shopping'?" I asked Gayle then. Darlanis might have my Sharon, but Gayle was mine! Mara was too, but she was still too young to share little secrets with, or discuss those feminine things that women share. Sa-she-ra would of course come, bringing her own daughter, who was now Mara's almost constant companion. I smiled at Sanda, at her daughter, who was only little older than Ta-she-ra. We might as well make it a good outing. Take everyone! Enjoy ourselves!

"I'd love it, but I fear I don't have anything to spend," Gayle answered with a smile, knowing that I'd take care of that! Sa-she-ra smiling, kissing her daughter as she sat beside her. I believe that children are raised in the Nevadaculture with more love and affection than was common back in my own time. The same is true usually of the mothers of California and Dularn as a general rule. Children are considered something "valuable", something "precious" here in this era. It may have something to do with the restrictions on the birthrate imposed upon us by the Priestesses. Perhaps merely a change in the cultural "mores". I merely report it and let the reader draw his or her conclusions.

"When I take you shopping, Gayle, I pay for it!" I told her with a smile. She was to me a daughter, another like my Sharon. I then reached over and tousled Mara's dark hair, giving her an affectionate smile. Telling her that she too was going to come with us shopping there in Thistle with her now famous "Lorraine"!

"Do I have to?" little Mara protested, as cute as any girl could be. Looking up into the dark eyes of her "Lady Lorraine".

"You'll love it!" I laughed, then telling her to hurry up and finish eating her breakfast so that Gayle could dress her for the day's outing. It would be a chance for me to relax, rest from my labors. A chance to enjoy myself with my loved ones! I had done much in the last month to better things here for the people. I feared that I had gone too far now. I had become too "popular" with the people. With the "Free Trelandar" movement! Now there were those calling for a "revolution" against Darlanis!

I had introduced a bit of "democracy" into the lives of the people that I ruled, and what perhaps amazed everyone was that I was "available" to those who might have need of my protection. I had introduced contests in archery and swordsmanship open to both sexes, my intention being to make this part of Trelandar at least safe from pirates and outlaws. Lady Tirana, much to my surprise, had followed me, although the Lords and Ladies further to the north and south seemed to have little love for what I was doing, which didn't surprise me all that much. Sanda on the other hand was delighted, saying that someday Trelandar might be able to declare its independence of the Empire, my major domo having a low opinion of Empress Darlanis, perhaps because her son was still there on the Dularnian front fighting in a totally "winless war"!

"I think I'm 'pregnant'," Sanda said to me as we sat across from each other in the open carriage, Mara at her side, Gayle on mine. Sa-she-ra and Ta-she-ra each on their mounts, Sara on hers. The tall forest on either side peace and quiet. Three of my men at arms riding with us for protection against the outlaws that prowled the depths of the forests. It was early September now, the year 2565 A.D., or 518 A.W. as it is more commonly known. Nine months from now Sanda would hold a little baby girl in her arms. There were already two little "Lorraine"s running around. Named after that tall exotic "Lady" from the "past" that everyone seemed to admire so much! Said "Lady" still a bit puzzled why everyone made such a "fuss" over her like she was some reincarnation of Janet Rogers! People even speaking about a "Queen Lorraine" should Trelandar win its freedom from the Empire! I had done what I could to put a halt to such talk. I had not been very successful. I hoped that Darlanis could do better.

Our driver was a young man who seemed to be seeing a lot of Gayle or so it seemed to me. His name was Stan Holt. He was the son of the blacksmith who worked on the estate. Sanda was a bit hostile towards him since his caste did not compare to that of Gayle's, who was the daughter of high caste parents. He was also the brother of Phara Holt, who was engaged to Sanda's son. That had not improved things any in Sanda's eyes! Gayle herself merely accepting his "attentions" as such, without seeming to be much "interested" herself in the young man. Why he continued to come around puzzled me, although I rather liked him and had spent some time giving him advice in how to court a young lady like my lovely Gayle. He seemed to like me a lot, and asked me a lot of questions about things. What I thought of this, and that, etc.

I was wearing that delightfully exotic attire that had made me so famous, the design dating back to the 21st Century. A design that to those of the 26th Century spoke of another "era"! My legs crisscrossed up to my hips by the leather straps of my "strap-boots", my mini-length short soft black leather skirt slit on both sides to better display my exotically attired legs. My midriff baring blouse was cut low in a "V" neck to better display a teasing glimpse of my firm breasts beneath the black silk. A broad brimmed fashionable hat and black net veil completed my attire. Attire that made me instantly recognizable anywhere now!

"It's hard to believe that only a month ago I was a slave girl praying to be sold," Gayle said as she looked around while I assisted Mara down from the carriage. A crowd gathering as was usual now when word spread that "LadyLorraine" was in town! The sun hot on my body beneath the black silk of my half-blouse, my face shiny beneath my veil, my heavy hair now wet beneath my broad brimmed hat. It was, I thought to myself, at least ninety if not more without even the hint of a breeze. There was even a wet strip around my waist where my wide black leather harness pressed against my body. My three men at arms that had escorted us quickly heading for the welcome coolness of the nearest tavern and the cool beer on tap. I suppose they might even enjoy the pleasures of a sexy prostitute while waiting for their mistress, such women being quite numerous in towns like this where they may be found hanging around in taverns waiting to be "picked up". Open "street-walking" is generally frowned upon as a rule, and although the Prostitute Guild is powerful, the status of prostitutes as such is little higher than it was back in my own era.

"It's hot enough!" I said, a dampness in the air that added to the oppressive unseasonable heat. It had rained a few days ago. Enough to help the peasants save their crops. It would be a good year after-all assuming that a revolution didn't start. I feared that, knowing what Darlanis' reaction would be. I had no wish to see again what I had once seen in another country long ago. I dreaded what the "Free Trelandar" movement seemed to be leading up to. They did not understand that Darlanis would not just sit back and let it "happen". That Darlanis would not let her "dream" die without fighting for it. Perhaps dying for it!

"LadyLorraine, may I help carry your things?" Stan Holt asked, tying the team to the hitching rail. Thistle, like most all the towns I have been in, reminding me something of a western movie set of the 20th Century. Most men bear arms, and daggers are common at women's hips. This is a barbaric and colorful era!

"If you wish to," I answered, smiling beneath my veil. Stan obviously being smart enough to "woo the Lady" for the "maiden". He had been coming around every night, all "fixed up", and showing surprising interest in my affairs, the boy obviously feeling that "wooing" me was the best way to get to Gayle. That was what I thought then anyway. I would shortly learn quite differently!

"Yes, I think this will look quite lovely on you," I said as I held the long silk gown up to Gayle, young Mr. Holt perhaps regretting his offer as he stood there watching us pick out things.

"I'd like to try it on," she suggested, smiling, the silk of her dress beneath the armpits now dark and wet from her sweat.

"Dry yourself off first," I suggested, picking up my hat and veil, fanning myself as Stan regarded me from his dark eyes. He was dark haired, rather on the handsome side, well built if a bit "boyish". The woman storekeeper picking at her things, mopping her brow, her dress plastered to her body by the oppressive heat. I could see the outlines of her nipple clips and the curves of her belly and thighs beneath the material. She wore a dagger like most women of the 26th Century do. She was blonde, a bit on the heavy side. A gold neck-chain was snug around her throat.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" I snapped at Stan, seeing his eyes on me. He seemed to do nothing but stare at me. The oppressive heat was making me bad tempered and ornery. Mara on a chair squirmed restlessly with boredom. Sa-she-ra and her daughter had gone elsewhere with Sanda and Sara. I should have brought Yvette to watch Mara, I thought to myself in a streak of anger. I was in a vile mood, and also very much aware of it too!

"Nothing, my lady," he said, averting his eyes for a moment. I could feel my half-blouse sticking to my body, outlining my breasts. Felt the sweat there beneath my short skirt, there not being a breath of air in the store. Then he was "staring" at me again! His eyes roaming up and down my figure like I was naked!

"Are you observing that your LadyLorrainesweats like any other woman?" I snapped at him, my hands on my hips as I stood there before him. I suppose I smelled too, although I couldn't tell that. I watched the storekeeper mop under her arms. Like most women she was clean shaved. The middle and upper caste women of the 26th Century usually also shave their pubes as well as their armpits as a rule. Why we shave in both places and men don't is something I've never been able to figure out for myself.

"You are a very attractive woman, my lady," he answered me in a tone of voice that told much to one experienced in such things like myself. I have encountered such things before. I am somehow extremely attractive to young men who are not sure of themselves. I suspected that this was the case here with him!

"And would you like me to take you out behind this store and show you exactly what a woman like me can do to a boy like you?" I teased him, Mara all ears, the woman shopkeeper gasping to herself at my words. I was very much aware of her eyes, of my own dominance, of the way that I doubtlessly appeared to him. Women like me often buy young men as slaves for their own sexual pleasures. Such things are quite common in this era, and are often the subject of pornographic tales just as they were in my era. While I can assure that I am not "interested" in teenage boys, unfortunately I also happen to be extremely attractive to them!

"No, LadyLorraine!" he breathed, scared now by the reality of the situation. It was no doubt one thing to "fantasize" about me while secretly masturbating, and another thing entirely different to actually have his own secret sexual fantasies come true! Had I not had a "reputation" to think about, I might have done differently, teaching him a "lesson" that he'd never forget!

"Then don't stand there and look at me like that then," I smiled, regarding him standing there before me. I was in my high heeled boots an inch or so taller than he was, my status infinitely higher. Then with a gentle shove I pushed him down into the chair next to Mara and told him to keep an eye on her while I stepped outside for a quick breath of air while Gayle changed!

"What do you think, Lorraine?" Gayle asked me, turning before me. The gown did excellent things for her. Made her look older than sixteen, although it is not uncommon for girls her age to be married off

among the low castes. Gayle is about 5'7" and goes 35-25-36. A delight to the male eye who knows it too, unfortunately! Her sister is a bit taller and fuller figured. The gown was a pale gray that went well with her eyes and color. The silk sheer enough that one could see her nipple clips and the sensual swell of her belly and thighs beneath the clinging silk.

"It's yours," I told her, paying the shopkeeper, letting Gayle parade herself before Stan Holt. Keeping to myself what had passed between us a few minutes before. Gayle would be much better for him than I would be if things ever got to that point!

"I hope our men are sober enough to ride back," Sanda Talen teased me as we entered the tavern where they had gone, our intention to both have a quick beer before heading back home. A woman leaning against the doorway wearing little giving me a warm smile. I had recently supported the Prostitute Guild in its clash against the town's mayor who should have known better than to try to tax the "hip-swingers" as he had tried. Not that I hadn't secretly thought it a good idea, but the Guild had the ear of Darlanis and it wasn't too wise on my part to irritate the ruler of California any more than I already had with my actions!

Prostitution is legal and common in the Empire, as it is everywhere I know of. The fear of sex that prevailed in my era being now considered quaint and a bit foolish. Such women belong to a powerful Guild that few dare cross if they value their lives. "Hip-swingers", as they are commonly called, now have considerable political power, thanks to Lara Warsan and her long and intimate relationship with Darlanis, who uses them as her "eyes and ears" here in California. Little going on that the Empress quickly doesn't know about. It is her spies and agents who give her much of the power that she has. There is little that I suspect she doesn't know about. She is "steel" beneath "beauty".

The attire of prostitutes is distinctive and attractive, as well as being set by the Guild. The delights are not otherwise marked, and can be, I might note here, of any caste, including the Warriresses. They wear halters and short skirts, a sort of uniform set by Lara to mark her women as what they are. I might also note that as a general rule they are usually quite expert with the short swords that they all wear as members of the Guild.

"There's our men!" Sanda said to me, two of them with briefly skirted wenches on their laps. The other at the bar in conversation with another lovely member of the Guild, it now being late in the afternoon. I didn't like traveling at night, even with guards to protect me on the couple hours' ride back to my estate on the seacoast. It had been only ten days ago that Tara and I had "met". That Sa-she-ra had saved Gayle's and my life.

"Yes," I answered, my eyes scanning the dimly lit interior, then halting as a familiar handsome face came into view. One that didn't belong there or anywhere else in the boundaries of the Empire of California! Captain Jon Richards of the ramship Janis! What was he doing here in Thistle? And what of his ship?

"Sanda, I will be staying the night here in Thistle," I told my major domo. "Have one of the men leave a mount for me at the stable." Sanda's dark eyes glowing into mine as she nodded. She was a dear. Smart enough to know when to keep her mouth shut! And also smart enough to keep some truly awesome secrets from me!

"Jon!" I breathed, seating myself across from him, my hand reaching for his across that drink stained dark oak table. Finding it, my eyes wet with emotion as they looked into his. The rapid rise and fall of my bosom speaking much of my own emotional state. Nothing else mattered just then! Nothing! The others there around us as unnoticed as shadows. I saw only the man that I loved. Nothing else was important just then! Nothing at all!

"Lorraine, my fantastic and so unbelievable Lorraine!" he breathed, brushing aside my veil so that he could look into my face. My eyes glistening with tears as they looked into his. The memories flooding back, my thoughts chaotic. That first night on the Janis yet as clear in my memory as if it was only the night before. He had done more than just use me for our mutual pleasure. He had burned into my very soul a mark that could never be erased. We had briefly spoken there on the Janis when I had pulled my "bluff" against the North Wind, but then there had been far too many ears about for me to speak what my heart held for him! I hoped Sanda had enough sense to tell my men what they saw here in the tavern was to remain secret, although it wouldn't matter that much as no one but I knew Jon's true identity anyway!

"Here's a beer for you," Sanda said, her eyes smiling into mine. I sipped the foamy brew with pleasure as she added, "Have a nice night." She was a woman who knew how to keep her thoughts to herself when it counted. I made a mental note to myself to see that she was properly "rewarded" when I got back home again! Considering the "plans" she had for me, I am often surprised now as I look back now just how much incredible "self control" she had! Making a revolution behind my back, making me into the new Queen of Trelandar! All while assuring me that what I heard was of no importance, just some bunch of "wild-eyed radicals" that no one would ever pay the least bit of attention to! Sanda, you are quite a woman! I'm glad you're on "my side" and not another's!

"A capable, competent woman," Jon observed. "Not 'bad looking' either." That was a pretty good description of Sanda Talen, I thought to myself with a smile, not knowing the TRUTH about Sanda and what she had in mind for all of us! What Jon knew that I didn't. OH, THE SECRETS THAT THEY KEPT FROM ME, ALL OF THEM!!!

The barmaid put in an appearance then, asking if Jon wanted anything more, her eyes glowing into mine. She was a redhead, perhaps bleached, such being done here in this era just as it was done back in my own. Her blouse a low cut thing, her skirt short as a prostitute's. Jon ordered whiskey, giving me a smile as I nodded. I thought I might need something stronger than my beer!

"Nice place you have here," Jon observed, the tavern itself being nothing special I thought, although I suspected that he was referring perhaps to Thistle itself and the changes that had been made since I had become "Lady" of the area. "And I understand that you have had a few more adventures since we last met aboard the Janis." My "meeting" with Princess Tara was well known in certain circles. I supposed there was little that he didn't know about me. That is why I didn't like being in the "public eye" so much. I had no "privacy", no life of my own now!

"It's dangerous for you to be here. Even I couldn't protect you if they found out!" I hissed in low tones. The Empire usually beheads spies. I had no doubt that was why he was here now!

"I see you have 'company'," a feminine voice said as a veiled tall attractive blonde seated herself beside my love, the golden neck chain of a wife of more than three years snug around her neck! She was of the Warriresses and looked like a fighter!

"Jon! You Never ----!" I gasped, looking at her, both angry and shocked at the same time. The emotional turmoil no doubt showing on my features as I looked at her, not believing my eyes!

"She is not what she appears to be," Jon smiled as he raised her veil, the face of his lieutenant of Warriresses Sentis Santa being revealed. "We needed a disguise and lieutenant Santa suggested this," he smiled. The woman nodding. She was quite attractive. Tall, blonde, the "typical Dularnian" as many Californians think of them. Actually most Dularnians are dark haired, no taller than their southern "counterparts" here in California.

"You Imperials look for single individuals, not a married couple," she smiled. Her voice was just a touch unfriendly. I recalled what Jon had told me. About what had happened on the Janis when I had pulled my "bluff" on the North Wind with the Squala. I noticed her accent, such being now quite "betraying" to my ears. Mine is somewhat the same, although different yet, there having been considerable changes in the past six centuries!

"Just as long as you aren't really his wife," I smiled back, the barmaid now bringing more drinks for us, including one for his lovely golden haired companion, who did look the part of being his wife. I considered it an excellent disguise for the pair of them. One does not look for a married couple, only singles, although her accent was such that no one would mistake it for anything else but being "Dularnian". On the other hand there were a number of Dularnians living in California, people who had settled here at one time or another, or who had followed Darlanis. Darlanis having something of a following there in Dularn.

"You seem to be making quite a name for yourself since we first met," Jon said to me, his lieutenant replacing her veil. She wore the black silk dress of a Warriress. I recalled that Jon had once said that she was a "Queen of Swords" of his nation. That meant that she had fenced in competition and won the "gold"! Such yearly contests are highly regarded in both California and Dularn, and the winner, especially the woman, is highly feted and often ends up making quite a "name" for herself. It was by means of such competitions that Darlanis some twenty odd years ago became Queen of Sarn and afterwards later on Empress of California!

"Yes, I have had a few adventures both here and on Mars," I smiled back, remembering. Looking across the table into his eyes as I held his hand in mine. I was, shall we say, ready and willing. I have not been successful in love back in the 20th Century, although I must admit that the 26th has been a bit nicer to me! Perhaps Jon sees things in me that those of the past didn't!

"And you are now making a 'name' for yourself that could just end up getting you into serious trouble with your Empress," Sentis Santa smiled from behind her veil. I supposed she knew a bit of what had been going on here in Thistle and elsewhere. Of the fact that there were many who said that "Lorraine Duval" was the woman who just could lead California out of all its troubles! I was now becoming "a legend in my own time" here in Trelandar! There were those who said that there should be an independent Trelandar and that I should be its new Queen. A second "Janet Rogers"! I had little doubt of what Darlanis would say to that! * * It should be noted here that I had no inkling of what was going to happen to me. I feel the version of this story where I do not warn my readers of what is to occur (unless you "cheat" and look ahead in the book) is more interesting than one where I sit and make my own personal comments upon what happened that night!

The barmaid now serving us, setting our drinks on the table. I handed her a silver Eagle, a coin much like the silver dollars of the 20th Century, there being thirty of these to a gold Crown. Told her to keep the change. I suspected that for a couple more Eagles one might also enjoy her "favors" too if one so wished it. Such "private" prostitution is rather common, if frowned upon by the "professionals" of Lara Warsan's now famous Prostitute Guild.

"I do rather like the way you dress," Jon remarked, changing the subject, having perhaps seen me when I walked in with Sanda Talen. Sanda now having left with my men. My 21st Century style made me "stand out" from other women. I considered it much more attractive too. The strap-boots doing excellent things for my legs, which are on the muscular side and not really all that feminine in appearance. My short leather skirt and half-blouse also doing their parts to make me more attractive than otherwise. I had originally gotten the idea from Darlanis, feeling that if she could do such things, then I could too! On the other hand it did tend to make me a bit overly "conspicuous", and I often dressed in more simple and ordinary attire there on my estate when I didn't have to be in the public eye. I no longer envied Darlanis!

"You do have a rather 'dominant' look about you whereas Darlanis just looks like some sort of a fancy 'hip-swinger' in comparison," Lieutenant Santa added with a grin beneath her veil. I gathered that she didn't like Darlanis too much despite the fact that Darlanis was thought "Dularnian". Her words reminding me of Mr. Stan Holt and the silly "crush" that he had developed on me.

"We had a 'run-in' with Sarnian Lady couple nights ago," Jon Richards said to me, looking into my eyes, holding my hands in a way that I am sure would have irritated his lovely golden haired companion had she actually been his wife. "No one got hurt fortunately," he smiled. "Except perhaps for Darlanis' feelings at getting her flagship rammed there in the fog," he quickly added, very much aware of my concern had anything happened to Sharon! Lt. Santa commenting that it might look better if he wasn't quite "so friendly" with me as long as she was "posing" as his wife!

"Did you know that it was Sarnian Lady?" I asked, a note in my voice that I am sure he "picked up" on. I didn't give a hoot about Darlanis' "feelings", but I was very much concerned about her putting Sharon in danger there on a ship of war that might possibly go into battle at any time! She had other ships. There was no reason why she had to use Sarnian Lady as an escort ship!

"The fog was so thick we could hardly see our hands before our faces," Sentis Santa answered. "We thought it was just another Imperial escort." Jon nodded, his features concerned. I did not feel angry at him. He was, after all, fighting for his country, his people, against an aggressive "Empire". I was more annoyed at Darlanis for having Sharon aboard than anything else!

"We're tired of being allied with pirates, with the sort of scum and riffraff that Queen Tulis is issuing privateering commissions to," Jon spoke. Telling me that Miles of the North Wind had decided to return to Dularn to let the people know the truth.

"And so you've decided its time to change sides," I smiled, finishing my beer. The Empire could well use a ship like the Janis. Additionally the fact that the ship had been turned over to Californiabecause of Queen Tulis' stupid actions would be a true "feather" in Darlanis' "cap"! I was sure that Darlanis would make the most of it too! The hatred between her and her mother ran deep. Too deep for the long term mental welfare of either of them, I knew, recalling my own professional training! I recalled stories I had heard both about Tulis and Darlanis. Both of them had at times shown signs of approaching mental breakdown. Tulis appeared to be effected the worst, although some of Darlanis' recent actions hadn't impressed me as being overly "bright" either!

"No!" Jon hissed. "We will not fight for Darlanis!" I saw Sentis nod in agreement. His eyes meeting mine across the table. "We will burn the Janis and become outlaws first!" Obviously he didn't think too much of Darlanis! I wondered why? Jon was not the sort of a man to hate someone just for their own politics!

"I can give you a privateering commission," I smiled back, taking a sip of my whiskey. Feeling it burn as it went down. I usually don't order anything that strong, but Jon had ordered it. I didn't have the authority to issue them against another country, but I could issue him one against the pirates plaguing us! The Janis

was far too slow for such work, but I did have Squala!

"Against Dularn?" Sentis Santa hissed, shaking her head. "Against our own people?" I hoped she knew enough to keep her voice down as she did have a voice that carried a bit too well! I noticed a prostitute there at the bar staring at us. She was a tall wench, with reddish hair. She had been there earlier, but had left and now had returned. I wondered a bit about her. She didn't look quite "right", but there wasn't nothing unusual about her. The fact she was armed meant nothing, as they usually are.

"I have no 'cause' for conflict with Dularn," I answered. "Your Princess was a dear friend, although even Darlanis would be better than her mother from what I've heard of her," thinking of what Darlanis had told me about her. Sentis Santa smiling a bit.

"And just who would we be fighting?" Jon asked with a smile, ignoring my comparison of Darlanis and her hate filled mother who now sat on the throne of Dularn, a true disaster for her country! I suspected that there was a reason for Queen Tulis' own actions. She was badly in need of "professional help", the sort that only a person in my own former profession or a Priestess could give. I had no doubts that her long repressed "guilt" feelings about "disowning" her own daughter had finally caught up with her! There was also considerable evidence to indicate that Darl Jord had his own "finger" in certain things too without his mother's knowledge. Princess Tara was ambitious, and Darlanis' enemy too! I did not think that Queen Tulis was completely at fault for everything that had happened. No doubt she had trusted her son too much for her own good and that of her country. Such things have happened before in history. There have been other "Darl Jords"!

"There are enough pirates to keep a privateer busy for a long time," I answered him in turn, sitting back, sipping at my drink. The Janis was too slow for such work, but the Squala was something else entirely. So far as I knew, there wasn't any ship faster anywhere on the western coast of North America than mine!

"And you are considering using the Squala?" Sentis asked. She was a bit too "dominant" for my taste, although some men like them that way. I thought of Stan Holt and smiled to myself at the thought of what she might show him! She was more physically attractive than me, both in face and in her figure, but what men find "attractive" in women is not always visible at first glance.

"If you both are willing to serve under my privateering commission," I smiled back. I needed his skills, her leadership. A woman who is a "Queen of Swords" gets plenty of respect from those under her. The crews of privateers are often unruly types.

"And the Janis?" Jon asked with a smile. The heavy galley was unsuitable for little more than ship to ship naval battles.

"I might find it useful until there is peace between Dularn and California," I answered with a smile. I knew Darlanis wanted the throne of Dularn, but she wasn't too likely to get it unless the Dularnian people decided that they wanted her instead of her mother who was becoming rapidly "unstable" now! Flying into fits of rage that now terrified everyone around her! I suspected the cause of Queen Tulis' troubles, but knew that until she was willing at least to "accept" Darlanis again as her "flesh and blood" there was little that anyone could do for her. Darlanis herself was none too "stable" either, I suspected, remembering too much! * * I did not at this time suspect that Queen Tulis was actually dying of a brain tumor. In writing this story I have written it as I lived it. I feel that the story is more "interesting" this way. It also does reveal that none of us suspected the "truth"!

"You at least seem to believe in the same things that we do," Jon's golden haired companion smiled from beneath her veil. * * The reader should note here that they both already knew of Santa's own actions.

That surprisingly enough everyone was able to keep from me the most amazing "secret" in the entire history of Trelandar! So much for my awesome "IQ" I am often credited with. Obviously Sanda proved to be the smarter woman of us two! She had a lot of "help", of course, having built up an organization over the years that still yet impresses me considerably knowing the sort of a woman that she is. I used to "underestimate" Sanda. I don't any more. When she tells me something, I respect her opinions for what they are. She sure did fool Darlanis' own agents who posed as prostitutes. Of course the fact that most members of the "Free Trelandar" movement were women might have had something to do with it too. The female sex throughout history has been able to "get away" with stuff that men never have. There is also Lara Warsan, who had her "role" in things here too.

"It's almost like a little bit of Dularn around here," Jon smiled. Others had said the same thing to me. It wasn't that surprising that I had irritated Darlanis and those who preferred the "status quo". I believed in much the same things as Dularnians do, although I was aware of the flaws in their society too. I had discussed these matters with Sanda frequently, which is perhaps why she did what she did, knowing that I would be the best choice to represent the hopes and aspirations of her people!

"Behind you!" Sentis breathed, her eyes glowing through her veil at something behind me! Jon's eyes widening as he looked! The sheriff of Thistle and half a dozen men at arms there behind him! The redhead there at the bar was now smiling to herself! I had no doubts about her anymore. She was one of Darlanis' women!

"And what can I do for you, sheriff," I said, getting to my feet, feeling no little degree of concern myself at the sight of his armed men and the implications of his presence here! While he was under my own command, he also held his position due to the Empress of California, and I had little doubt that some of her agents might be hanging around! The redheaded prostitute smiling to herself as she regarded me obviously was one of Darlanis' own agents! There was no doubt in my mind that she was responsible for the sheriff being here. She had known who Jon Richards actually was! Now the sheriff was here to arrest them both as Dularnian spies! The odds were "bad", but not too "impossible" I thought to myself. I would have liked Sa-she-ra instead of Sentis Santa at my side, but I thought that if it came to that, the three of us could deal with the sheriff and his half dozen men.

I saw the sheriff smile, and then suddenly he drew his sword and handed it to me hilt first, saying as he did, "Let me be the first to serve the new Queen of Trelandar, your royal highness." The man then kneeling down before me as I once had before Darlanis! His men then lifting their swords to me in a royal salute!

"A FREE TRELANDAR! We salute QueenLorraineof Trelandar!" I heard them cry. I kissed the sheriff's sword and handed it back to him, knowing not else what to do just then. Horrified at what had happened. What it now portended for all of us here! I understood as they did not what the reaction would be! The marching Legions, the deaths by fire and sword, the fury that would glow in Darlanis' azure eyes as she fought for her Empire!

"You Traitors!" the redheaded "prostitute" cried, reaching for her sword. She had "guts" if not too much "upstairs"! Sentis Santa's clenched fist crashed into her jaw, sending her reeling back against the bar, the big blonde drawing her dagger and then grabbing the woman by her hair to finish her off before she could recover from the blow! Or so it seemed to me then! I suppose I should have known better, it being a common practice to put a dagger to the throat of an enemy until they can be bound or shackled. I am, however, not truly of the 26th Century. I sometimes do not understand such things as well as perhaps I should!

"STOP!" I cried, leaping forward, tearing the dagger from the lieutenant's hand, Sentis Santa stepping

back, a puzzled look on her veiled face as I helped the stunned woman to her feet. Her eyes, gray, glowing up into mine, everyone there just standing there staring. Not knowing what to do or say! Turning, I said, "If I am your Queen, then this woman has MY protection!" It being obvious to me that the "Free Trelandar" movement had decided to make its move! But why had they picked ME as their representative? As the "Queen of Trelandar"? The former Queen had died at the point of Darlanis' sword nearly fifteen years ago! I knew she had left no heirs, having been childless. There had been a sister, but her present identity and whereabouts were unknown. Darlanis' agents had been hunting her, I knew. Searching for years for the woman who headed the "Free Trelandar" movement! A woman whose name had been Sanda Harles, I recalled just then too.

"To a Free Trelandar!" I heard cry. "Queen Lorraine!" Then came Sanda Talen and Gayle! Gayle in her new gray gown, a tiara in her golden hair as if she was a Princess! Sanda in a regal blue, dressed as a high born Lady! What was going on here? For a moment I feared that nothing was what it appeared. That something had happened to my mind. That I had indeed gone totally and completely INSANE! That there was no GOLDEN CROWN there on a pillow in Sanda's hands! That Gayle did not carry the SCEPTER I saw there in her hand! THAT I WAS NOT THE "QUEEN OF TRELANDAR"!

Chapter Twenty Four

"It is true, Lorraine," Jon said to me, touching my shoulder, "You are as much a Queen now as Darlanis is." I took his hands in mine, looked into his eyes. Wondered if he had known about all this? Had he kept the "secret" too? What was his "relationship" if any with Sanda Talen, if indeed that was "who" she actually was? The bar room was packed now, men and women, all armed, bows, swords, some with crossbows. I saw Colonel Hara Eslund of the Warriress Academy step up beside Sanda and Gayle. Was she too part of all this? Where did this all end? And there was Lady Tirana too! And Sa-she-ra with her daughter standing there! All my friends, everyone I knew here in the 26th Century!

"Why?" I asked, my voice breaking, the tears flooding my eyes. I knew what they did not. The fury that Darlanis would bring down upon all our heads. The horrors of NAPALM as my own forces responded. I saw ships at sea, aflame! The bodies of brave men and women, scattered, dead. Burned huts, villages. I saw the azure eyes of Darlanis, burning with hatred into mine! I recalled what I had seen there in South Vietnam. They did not understand. They did not understand, know Darlanis' lovely dream they were destroying! The tears rolled down my cheeks as I wept for what could have been! What now would never be! THE FOOLS!!!

"I am she who was the Lady Sanda Harles," Sanda said to me, the beautiful crown of Trelandar there in her hands. "My sister was the Queen that Darlanis killed before my eyes." Sanda was the Head of the Free Trelandar movement! The woman that Queen Darlanis herself had put a price of a hundred gold crowns on! I saw Gayle's eyes meet mine as she nodded. Had she been a part to this plot too! I thought of Sharon. Thanked SHE that Darlanis was honorable, decent, good. Not a betraying bitch like I was!

I felt a fury rise before my eyes like nothing I've ever felt before. The bar room hazing over, the light from the lamps a reddish glow like that I had seen in the tunnels of the Lorr there on Mars. My sword was now in my hand. Gleaming there in the lamplight. I saw Sanda step back, saw the concern there in her eyes. She knew of my moods. She knew what was in my mind as I saw everyone go to their knees before me, only Darlanis' agent and myself still on our feet! I saw her shrink up back against the bar, her gray eyes filling with terror at what she saw in my eyes! Sensed the horrible burning fury that possessed

my body!

"Tell your mistress that what has happened here was not of my doing. Not of my wishes," I sobbed. My point touched the softness of her throat. She shuddered, the terror in her eyes. I had no doubt she would speak the truth of my words. Not that it would make any difference now, but it did just then to me, and nothing else was important just then. I suppose it was an awful way for the new Queen of Trelandar to carry on, but it is what I did, and you might as well know the truth of what happened then! I flung my sword to the floor at my feet, the sword I had pledged once to Darlanis. That regal golden Empress I had betrayed! The tears running down my cheeks as I stood there and sobbed there before them all! My sword, once Darlanis', now lying at my feet.

"Why, Sanda, why are you doing this to me?" I wept as Sanda undressed me there in the little room, preparing me for my "presentation" to the people of Thistle as the new Queen of Trelandar! I fear I did not make a very impressive Queen just then. I hoped my people would understand. That they would not curse my name as they died beneath the marching feet of Darlanis' legions!

"You are the woman, the one woman who 'can' lead us against Darlanis," Sanda answered in soft tones. There were tears in her eyes as she looked up into my face. Her makeup as the Lady Sanda Harles of Trelandar was running a bit. I would have to remind her of that before we appeared again in public. I did not wish to see her embarrassed after all she had been through. I only wished that she understood that I was not the "Queen" she dreamed of. That I was just a "shrink" from the 20th Century who happened to have flown through a time warp and ended up here in the 26th Century. That I was not "Janet Rogers"! Not what everyone thought I was. That I wasn't the woman to be Queen of Trelandar!

"A slave girl should be doing that," I said as Sanda gently bathed me as I stood there before her in nothing but clips and strap. Sanda nodding, smiling to herself. Why did she worship me so? What was Jon's relationship to all this? There were a lot of questions that I needed the answers to! And right now!!!

"You can collar me if you wish," Sanda smiled up at me, love showing in her dark eyes as she looked up into mine. There was a beautiful gown laid out for me. Black silk, one fitted so that I would be perfectly dressed. As much made of me as was possible!

"Darlanis will have your head if she ever gets her hands on you," I answered. There was the Janis. The Squala. We could flee to Dularn. Throw ourselves on the mercy of Queen Tulis. The thought made me smile to myself. Sanda suddenly "perked up" as she saw my grim smile. Not knowing what its true cause was!

"She's been after me for the last ten years," Sanda smiled. I recalled Darlanis having mentioned something about the matter. About an "outlaw Lady" that her people had been after for years! I had thought she was referring to some 26th Century version of "Robin Hood". Just some woman outlaw with a small following! I had never dreamed that this "outlaw Lady" was my own major domo!

"You realize what all of this means?" I asked her. Was she aware of what Darlanis would do? The power that she possessed?

"Jon Richards says that Darlanis has lost 'face' and that if we 'play our cards right' (that made me smile) that we just may be able to take her without a fight and get Sharon away from her," Sanda answered, perfuming me. The perfume was my own. It was obvious that Sanda was a capable, competent woman even now! "I will take the Squala to Trella and acting as your employee, under your orders, see if I can get her to come back with us." I suspect that the idea would have worked too, had Darlanis not been so "eager" herself to see me that she pulled that "bonehead" stunt that she did by taking the Ronda without

any escort to try to get to my estates. Getting herself nearly killed and my poor Sharon left with memories of the horrors she endured that only my best efforts with hypnosis have ever been able to even partially relieve! DAMMIT DARLANIS! WHY DID YOU HAVE TO BE SUCH A DAMN FOOL TO TAKE A CHANCE LIKE THAT??? ESPECIALLY WITH MY SHARON!!!

"Sanda," I said to her, taking her hands in mine. I was naked but for clips and strap. Heavily perfumed, which was just as well as the sweat was just rolling off me. "Why didn't you tell me what you were planning to do? Why couldn't you trust me?" I was after all the woman that she wanted to be "Queen of Trelandar"! As her "Queen" I thought I deserved at least that much!!!

"I 'knew' you would have never 'gone along' had I told you," Sanda answered in a soft voice. She started to sob again. Her eye makeup running. I would have to take care of that before we stepped back out into the "public eye" as the Queen of Trelandar and her very capable, competent Prime Minister! One must keep up "appearances" regardless of how one feels. Darlanis and I share much now as I write this. She is more than a "friend" to me now.

"Why me?" I asked. "Why not you?" She was after all the late Queen's sister. About as "royal" as I was. It is true that my mother was a "Countess", but I never thought very much of it.

"You are 'Lorraine'," Sanda spoke. "Our 'Lorraine'." I supposed it made sense in a way. I wondered if she realized what was going to happen if she didn't manage to trick Darlanis into coming aboard the Squala. Perhaps it would be better if I went myself. If worse came to worse, I preferred that Darlanis' blood be on my blade than another's. I feared however, that by now Sharon would be "Darlanis" so much that it would do but little good. I had a vision of Sharon holding a dying Darlanis in her arms, saw the hatred in those lovely eyes as she looked up at me!

"Queen Lorraine of Trelandar!" Sanda spoke, standing beside me as I stood on that hastily erected platform before the people of Thistle. More running towards us in the twilight of the setting sun as the word spread to the outlying areas. How long would it be before word reached Trella? The other major cities?

"Our Queen!" "Our Queen Lorraine!" I heard cries. Swords lifted in my honor. Hara Eslund stood at my side. She was my Warlady. The commander of my royal forces. Sanda had done well. As Jon once said of her, "a capable, competent woman". She is.

I looked into Gayle's eyes, saw another. I threw my head back, nearly losing my crown. The royal scepter was there in my hand. The crown and scepter that had belonged to the last Queen of Trelandar. Queen Paula. She had been, I understood, brave, a capable and competent woman. Better with a sword than Sanda, but still not good enough to stand against one such as Darlanis. Jon stepped up beside me. He wore the uniform of a Dularnian captain. With him his lieutenant, the tall golden haired "wife" who now stood beside him. Jon was my Sealord, commander of my Navy. Sa-she-ra was my ambassador to the Nevadas. She too had been part of Sanda's plotting. The woman was amazingly "competent" in what she did. Sanda Talen is that. I saw her husband, much to my surprise. I saw him lift his sword to me. I had always believed that his loyalty to Darlanis was unshakable! I had been wrong. He had been a skillful actor playing out his role too.

Even the late Lady Lana had been part of the plot. She had hidden Sanda, given her a new "identity", a new "history". Carl had known her from before in Queen Paula's time. Loved her. He had married her, made a mother of her, adopted her son, Sanda being a widow, her first husband having been killed by Darlanis' forces when they took over Trelandar. Then I had stepped up on to the scene. A woman from a past now legend. A woman who had known Janet Rogers. More than that, had taught her much! I had

been "different" than the aristocratic Lords and Ladies Darlanis had imposed upon the people of Trelandar. Sanda had seen that. My skill with a sword, my "democratic" ideals, all proof that her country might again be free. They had a woman to lead them. One so great a Warriress that none could stand for long against her!

"People of Thistle! People of Trelandar!" I spoke, standing there sweating, my gown already plastered to my body. I thought of Stan Holt. He was out there somewhere in the crowd. In that sea of faces that looked up at me. I thought of his fantasies.

In a somewhat better mood I said, "I come to you as your new Queen. Not with a sword in my hand as Darlanis did, to lay upon you new taxes, to place over you new 'Lords' and 'Ladies' to rule your lives, but as a Queen who wishes only your welfare. I am a woman of another time, another era so different from yours that I fear few of you understand just how different I am from you all."

"Queen Lorraine!" I heard cry. "May Lys bless our Queen." I thought that wise. I would need the help of SHE. I wondered what the Priestesses of Lys from Thistle's temple thought of all this! There was one standing there to one side, watching. She was old, her ank of gold. She ran my first school. That was a "bit" of me that not even Darlanis would be able to eliminate if she won against us and imposed her rule once again upon us. I sensed the "feel" of the crowd. Felt their love and admiration.

"Much may be asked of you in the future. We seek not war, but we will defend our homes. You have the bows, the swords. It may come to the point that we will have to fight in the fields, in the forests, among the great trees of Trelandar for our freedom from the Sarnian Queen." I felt it best to refer to Darlanis that way. That had been what she had started out as back after the king of Sarn had died in battle against the nomadic Nevadas.

"We will not again repeat the mistakes of the past. Those of Janet Rogers, may Lys bless her name, or those of the Dularnians, or those of Queen Darlanis, who has meant well, even if she has perhaps been misguided in her actions." I felt it best to keep Darlanis' supporters as much on "my side" as I could. I had nothing against Darlanis. She had only made the mistakes that I would have made perhaps had I stood in her boots. It is easy to condemn others. Much more difficult to realize your own errors.

Comment by Queen Darlanis

My first feelings upon hearing that Lorraine Duval had been made Queen of Trelandar were ones of "betrayal"! I wondered why she had saved my life, took the risks she had, just to destroy my dreams! Then I realized upon speaking with her that it had not been her idea, but another's. Another who saw in her what I had not. That I and Lorraine Duval, standing together as "equals", could yet accomplish more than either one of us by ourselves. We are perhaps different in our viewpoints, Lorraine having more "confidence" in the wisdom of the people she rules than I do, but I think perhaps she is right and I am wrong. She is in many ways another "Janet Rogers". Perhaps even better than the first, although I know I shouldn't say or write such things, but Janet did make mistakes. Her "Golden Age" that we worship so much was not according to Lorraine much more than a benevolent dictatorship based upon her possession of the secrets of electronic hypnosis. Doubtlessly she was "benevolent", "kind", if such a thing can be, but yet Janet Rogers herself ruled all of Humanity with an "Iron Hand" as we now know, thanks to Lorraine's wonderful little computer and its ability to "read" the "books" of the 21st Century. Books not on paper like ours, or this one, but on "cards" Lorraine says are "imprinted" with a "laser" and "readable" only by a computer like the one in her possession! Lorraine says that "democracy" has a lot of flaws as a political system, but it's still better than anything we've been able to dream up as of yet!

Chapter Twenty Five

"How much of this did you know about?" I asked, standing there, clad in my long black silken gown, the crown of the Queen of Trelandar there resting in the midnight darkness of my hair. Jon nodding, smiling, perhaps proud of himself for his role in what Sanda had managed to "pull off" without my knowledge or consent! I was angry in a way, but yet proud that they thought so highly of me. It is a great honor to be made a Queen, especially when your own people are the ones who make the decision for you! We stood beneath a spreading oak, the people holding back, giving us a bit of privacy. Sanda and Hara and the sheriff seeing that we were not disturbed. She who wears a crown has little privacy.

"I've been in communication with Sanda for some time, although I promise you, Lorraine, that I didn't know that she was planning to 'do' something like this!" I suspected it was the truth. No doubt Sanda had trusted few with her complete plans. When there is a "price" of a hundred gold crowns on your head you act with a certain degree of caution and "trust" very few people.

"I'm still the same 'Lorraine' I've always been," I told him. Putting a "crown" on my head didn't alter that. True, I do have a lot of power which I use mostly just to stop others from making stupid mistakes and then blaming me for them, and I am so wealthy that "money" hardly means anything, but that doesn't make me any different than what I was before all this happened to me.

"You do make a pretty 'impressive' Queen," Jon admitted, standing there, admiring me. My gown was a bit too "tight". It revealed more of me than what I would have cared to reveal, but I suppose Sanda knew what she was doing. Even she had to admit to the fact that a lot of Darlanis' power was based on her looks and that I'd better be at my best if we were going to go against her!

"Do you actually love me?" I asked, looking straight in his eyes. "Or am I just something to be used to fulfill someone's political ambitions? A means to an end?" I realized the necessity of Sanda's caution, but yet I didn't like being "used" like this. I have always been my "own woman". One who did things "her way". I didn't like being forced into a position from which there was no return. Forced to become the enemy of one whom I honored, respected. Whose friendship I valued over nearly everything else. I had been forced to become the enemy of Darlanis.

"I loved you when you were without title, without wealth," he answered, taking me by the shoulders. "I will love you if you become ruler of the Universe, if you become an outlaw living from day to day, fleeing from place to place. You are, Lorraine, the woman I have loved ever since that night on the Janis when I held you in my arms, tasted of your lips, felt your sweet body press against mine. I look upon you and I find peace, a sense that with you I can live out the rest of my life and never look back with regret on what could have been had I married another woman." Jon can at times make me feel very "special". This was one of those times. I especially liked the last sentence he spoke here.

"I can promise you nothing but my love as long as I live," I answered, moving into his arms. Caring little just then that there were hundreds of eyes upon us. Even if Sanda did manage to capture Darlanis and bring Sharon back to me, I didn't think it would really prevent the war that would soon be. The aristocracy of the Empire would see to that! I was a threat to their way of life! There was also Princess Tara. Baja there to the south. I did not know whether or not Sanda's revolution would succeed even in Trelandar. Someone could betray us to Darlanis. Warn her of what was going to happen. Put her on her guard. We could lose the Squala, everyone aboard. Darlanis was no fool. I suspected that she could be vicious if driven to it. She still had Sharon.

"We don't have much time for an engagement," he smiled back.

"Do you have any `doubts'?" I retorted. I saw no reason for waiting. I might be dead in a matter of days. Or chained in a dungeon waiting to be executed. The Empire usually beheaded its enemies, although I supposed that Darlanis could dream up other means of execution if she put her mind to it. Burning at the stake, for example. She would no doubt enjoy my death agonies!* * The reader will doubtless object here that I have often spoken of Darlanis as being "good", "decent", "honorable" and to speak such of her torturing someone to death is counter to what I have written earlier. I should point out here, however, that Darlanis given sufficient provocation no doubt, would be willing to use such means of execution should she consider them necessary. I am also reminding the reader here that I did just the same horrible thing to another human being with considerably less provocation!

"There is a temple of Lyshere in Thistle," I said. There was also a jewelry store. I was sure the storekeeper would not object to being of service to his Queen should she desire to purchase something to grace the beauty of her neck. Say a length of silver chain that could be riveted together around that neck! My reign as Queen of Trelandar might not be very long, but for at least a few days I would be Jon's wife. Mrs. Jon Richards.

"Here, take it!" I breathed as I slipped the golden crown into Jon's hand there before the jewelry store. The sun now below the horizon there in the west, the closed sign already in the window. The storekeeper luckily for us still inside counting the day's receipts after the delay caused by my crowning as Queen of Trelandar here in Thistle. Jon's dark eyes meeting the smiling darkness of mine as I nodded in return. I saw no reason why I shouldn't pay for things if I had the money and he didn't. I wanted the best neck-chain locked around my throat that money could buy. I wanted him to be proud of his Queen. For everyone to know that I was indeed his woman! That I was now his wife!

"It isn't right!" he quietly protested, very much the man. Sometimes I wonder if things have really changed all that much!

"Consider it a loan then!" I answered in a soft voice, smiling to myself. How little men have changed over the centuries!

"I just don't `know' about you, Lorraine!" Jon Richards smiled. Seizing me in his strong arms for a brief moment to kiss me again. The shopkeeper regarding us, well aware of my identity. That this was indeed Queen Lorraine kissing a man in public!

"You'll have three years to decide whether you want to make it permanent or not!" I laughed softly, kissing him back. I had no doubts. After the three years are up, you have a much harder time getting a divorce than you do during the first three years. It is an intelligent law, one more realistic than those of my own era. The "property rights" also change at that time to full joint ownership. There are also laws regarding any children, but we need not get into them here at this point as I have three years to wait until I can have children of my own. That is if I ever decide to do so, as I legally do have three children already, these being Mara, Ta-she-ra, and Gayle, my own Princess.

"Do you understand what I want?" I said to the owner of the tavern where Jon had been staying with his lieutenant. My eyes meeting his. The man nodding, knowing the fate that would be his if he displeased the Queen of Trelandar in this. We had one place to visit before the night grew any older. I wished to kneel before the old High Priestess with Jon at my side. Ask her to bless our marriage. Have her say the words that would make us husband and wife. Make me into a "wife" as well as the Queen!

"Everything will be as you wish, my Queen," he answered, sweating a bit. I had warned him that if word was to get out, he could expect his Queen Lorraine's anger to be utterly merciless!

"I would not like to cross your path!" Jon laughed as we walked up the stairs to the rooms above an hour later, the tavern owner having assured me that everything was as I wished it. The heat of the upper floor stifling after the sun had baked everything all day. It felt like walking into an open oven! I could feel myself sweating despite the clinging silk of my own attire!

"I would not carry out the threat unless I was sure that he was guilty," I answered with a smile, my hand in his as we walked down that dimly lit stifling hallway. It would get hotter yet!

"Surely you hired a wench for the night?" Jon asked as he saw the things that had been sent up for our delight. The open sky overhead now sprinkled with stars as we sat there on the flat roof top of the tavern. The fiddler tuning his instrument. The meal now set before us the finest that could be obtained here in Thistle. Roast duck, fresh fruit. Thistle spread out below us.

"We have a wench for the night," I said with a smile. "I trust you will find her of interest." Jon lighting the candles. The gown of silk and lace well displaying my figure beneath it as I turned about before him. I was naked beneath it, totally so! It was mostly lace, with just enough silk to cover certain parts of me. The tavern was the highest point in Thistle except for the temple of Lys. I did not plan to get close to the edge of the roof. Telescopes, you know. My attire would have caused Lara Warsan to blush. It made the most of what I had to "offer".

"You are a bit of a tease, you know," he observed, the gown well displaying the fact that I was completely nude beneath. The woman of the 26th Century does not suffer from the false modesties of the 20th. I was bare nipples, bare crotched under it.

"Trust your Lorraine," I said, kissing him, letting him touch my breasts, my nipples exposed beneath the silk. I pushed him back down on the cushions and placing a cherry between my lips, gave it to him. There is little I do not know about how to please a man. I have learned much from my own slave girls.

"You smell nice," Jon said, kissing at my earlobe, the ring of pure gold piercing the soft flesh. Holding my heavy hair back. Worrying the earring with the tip of his tongue, making me giggle just a bit. The fiddler sawing away on his instrument. I supposed he would have something to tell his children. About a certain Queen of Trelandar who did what one never expects a Queen to do. No doubt Sanda wouldn't have approved, but she had already left to ride back to my home to take the Squala to Trella.

"A little perfume in the right places," I answered, returning the caress, giving him a teasing nip to show him just what sort of a woman he had! The Priestess had said a few words over us as we knelt before her. Enough to make it "legal". While I was not a regular "temple-goer", I did respect the religion as being perhaps closer to the TRUTH of SHE than any of my own era had been. I would tell him about it someday, but not right now.

"It's a lovely night," Jon observed, leaning back. The stars were brilliant points of light overhead. The air of the 26th Century is far cleaner, purer than that of the 20th Century. There is little "light pollution". The sky is very beautiful.

"You are not looking at me," I teased, undoing his vest. Running my fingertips across his muscular chest as my eyes glowed into his. I could feel my body sexually responding underneath my provocative gown. Feel the dampness growing there between my thighs! I would tease him, play with him, then later "yield"!

"There is more to you than what meets the eye," Jon said to me as we ate our dinner. My teasing quick caresses hinting at what was to come. I had learned a lot from Yvette in the past month. And from other girls, both Dularnian and Californian.

"I have an I.Q. of a hundred and sixty, if you know what that means," I answered him. Turning so that I laid back on the cushions, his eyes looking down into mine. The fiddler watching the interplay between us as he played. He would be discreet. I had paid him well to be so. He knew better than to be otherwise!

"I suspect I do," Jon said, regarding me. "You're a rather unusual woman, you know." He was very handsome in his leather. I offered him my lips, arching up, his hands going beneath me.

"I've never made love to a Queen before," Jon mused, looking up at the stars overhead. It was cool, pleasant to be underneath the blankets. My fingertips sought the links of the neck chain that marked me for all to see as a married woman. I had bought Jon a wedding band, just to remind him that he was married to the Queen of Trelandar. There are always those "tall beautiful blondes" that plainer women like me have to worry about a bit.

"I'm the only Queen you're ever going to make love to," I teased, nipping at the side of his neck. I suspected that his bare back would betray the fact in the morning that Queen Lorraine "scratches" a bit when she makes love. Especially when she has a strong orgasm and arches and heaves like some slave girl!

Chapter Twenty Six

"What will happen to those under my command?" Colonel Janet Layton of the Imperial Secret Service asked as she stood there in the sheriff's office. She was head of Darlanis' secret service here in Trelandar. Wisely the sheriff had offered the "comforts" of a cell as I feared she might have been "accidentally shot" had she attempted to leave Thistle. It being now well known that she was the commanding officer of Darlanis' secret agents that had been watching us. She was the same redheaded "prostitute" who had tried to sell her life for Darlanis, the same one who got "punched out" by Sentis Santa and who had been placed under my "protection" for her safety. It is the normal practice in such matters as these to collar the women of your "enemy". Sanda having given orders to that effect that I had countermanded. Sanda had obeyed, although she had said that I didn't know what I was doing and that she feared for our Revolution should such women remain "on the loose", an hidden secret enemy there in our midst.

"When things get 'settled' a bit I'll try to get all of you out of Trelandar," I answered. I had already spoken to the head of the Prostitute Guild here in Thistle. Explained a few things. Darlanis had "used" the prostitutes for her own "eyes" and "ears". I thought it wise to do the same. Men often "talk" when visiting such women. "A few Eagles wisely spent can often return Crowns later". It is a saying of the 26th Century that I like.

"The pirates are still 'active' around here," the sheriff said, breaking into our conversation. "They took some foolish slaver two days ago." It was early in the morning. I mention this to give you a sense of the passage of time here from the time of the capture of Darlanis and Sharon until the time that I learned about it. It had taken a little under two days for such information to travel sixty miles and eventually come to me. I am often amazed at how slowly "news" travels here in the 26th Century. How long it takes for even my own orders and commands to take effect out towards the distant borders of Trelandar. To one

of the 20th Century such things often amaze me although I am often "smiled at" a bit when I forget how long it takes to get anything done in this era. When news has to travel by horseback or in the sealed packets aboard some coastal vessel. If I have need of "speed" and it is important enough I fuel up Black Lady and travel at a rate of a hundred and fifty knots to my eventual destination, although Jon always says that he expects some day I'll go flying off and never return, fearing that I'll go through another "Gateway" and end up who knows where! Perhaps back in the Fifteenth Century to end up an "Indian Goddess" or something!

"The funny thing about it is that the slaver actually turned and rammed one of the pirate schooners," the sheriff mused, his dark eyes admiring the figure of the tall Queen that stood before him. I am, when well dressed, an attractively figured woman if no beauty in the face. I don't think anyone understood why the look of horror suddenly crossed my face. Why I whimpered "No-No" like I did. They did not understand at first what was so very clear to me. They did not "know" Darlanis as I knew her. So incredibly brave, so courageous. So very much that wonderful Warriress who thinks not of the risks that she might face. They did see the dark eyes of their Queen suddenly fill with tears as I thought of how "brave" she had been, of the things we had once shared. Now she was dead! Gone! The friend I had betrayed! I thought of Sharon. Hoped the death had been quick. Darlanis was the type who would have seen to that. Given orders that her own warriresses would have obeyed. The pirates had gotten nothing but dead bodies. I knew that. I knew Darlanis all too well to believe anything else! She had died a "Warriress' Death". Perhaps it was for the best, I told myself. She would never know how I had betrayed her. Destroyed all her dreams. I could at least "avenge" her. Make the pirates "pay". I had six NAPALM bombs hidden away on my estate. I thought of Sharon. She had loved Darlanis so much. It was, I thought to myself, perhaps just as well that she was dead too. That she didn't know how despicable her "Lorraine" was. That I was unworthy of her love!

"Lorraine," Jon said, taking me in his arms, holding me. The sheriff, a deputy, Darlanis' agent, all watching, puzzled as to why the Queen of Trelandar had suddenly started to cry as she had. I wonder if they thought I was a "crybaby". I had been doing an awful lot of it lately. There had been too much "hurt"!

"Darlanis is dead," I wept. "She-she was coming to me! You rammed her ship! She-she-she didn't have any other way of getting here!" I broke down completely then, a sobbing figure with a crown on her head. The tears rolling down my cheeks like a dam had burst! I fear I did not act much like the Queen of Trelandar then. I had brought death to those I loved. "The Priestess told me I'd have to pay for my sin!" I wept, everyone's faces nothing but a blur before me! "SHE has had HER revenge on me!" I know better than that, but at the time I didn't think too clear!

"The Janis is yours to command," Jon said to me. I saw the agent of Darlanis. She drew the sword at her hip, offered it to me as everyone gasped in surprise. I kissed it. Such is meaningful. I was a Queen. She was of the Warriresses. We have our Codes, our Honor. Darlanis would be avenged. It was all we could do now. The sheriff told me he would send "volunteers" to my estates. I had no doubt we would eventually find the pirates.

Half an hour later, after I had regained a bit of my "composure" and had remade up my face so that I once again looked like a Queen should look, we set out for my seacoast estate, Jon telling me that the Janis was about twenty miles out to sea, anchored in a cove there inside a tiny island, a waterless treeless little rock, where the ship might be concealed from passing Imperial vessels. I knew of the place, having visited it once with the Squala when I had been trying to train a crew in making practice attacks on an enemy vessel. It also makes an excellent prison, which is what it is now used as, as there is no escape from the place except by ship. Sharon once named it "The Rock", which is its present name, although I suspect those who have felt my wrath as their new Queen of Trelandar have another name for the place!

"Despite what anyone says about her, she was a good ruler," I said as we rode in my carriage, Jon holding his arm around me, Colonel Janet Layton facing me. We were escorted by about thirty men, all armed. Men willing to follow to follow their new Queen in her mission of vengeance against those who had killed those dear to her. Jon saying that the pirates would be hard to find. I wondered if he really wanted to find them. He had no reason to feel as I did about Darlanis. His sword was pledged to Tulis of Dularn. He was married to me. There could be a "problem" here.

"She was not the decent and honorable Queen you are," Janet answered, much to my surprise. "Darlanis was a woman who could and did order the death of thousands of innocent people who were fighting for their country and never weep a tear over the horrible waste of life." Jon nodding in agreement. He had told me of his wife's death. That he felt was part of the "reality" about Darlanis, not the "legend" she had so carefully tried to present to me and Sharon. Yet I do think that Darlanis is basically "good". She never sat and watched a man being tortured to death!

"I had a man tortured to death," I said in low tones. "She would have never stood for that," I spoke, defending Darlanis. I had never told Jon about that. That he was married to a woman who had once ordered another to torture and then kill. I thought of Princess Tara. We were really not all that different either!

"Darlanis ordered Hara Eslund, her Warlady, to burn a village here in Trelandar, slay all its inhabitants for rising up against her," Janet answered. "I was there at Darlanis' side. I remember her words. The hatred in her voice that anyone should 'defy' HER!" Janet pausing, then adding, "I still recall her last words as she snarled, 'let not a dog live in Talos'." I shuddered at the very implications. The innocent women, children! I recalled Vietnam. The soldiers. The innocent dead. Saw in my mind's eye then a tall golden Queen, her azure eyes blazing with cold hatred as she sat on her unicorn and saw the smoke rising up into the sky. Heard the screams as its innocent people "were put to the sword"! This was a part of Darlanis I had never known! The events having taken place just before the death of Queen Paula and the surrender of Trelandar's military!

"Hara drew her sword and flung it to Darlanis' feet, saying that she would not violate her blade with the blood of innocent children," Janet continued in level tones. "Darlanis turned to Princess Tara, and 'made' her Warlady on the spot." Going on to tell me the horrors she saw herself as Tara carried out Darlanis' orders with a sadistic glee that horrified even the most battlehardened of those who served beneath the banner of their Queen! Telling us that horrid tale of how Tara had roasted a new born baby on the blade of her sword before its mother's eyes. Then tortured the mother until she ate of it before then killing her!

"There was the Island of Flowers south of Dularn," Jon spoke, remembering. Much the same thing had happened there, I knew. He had told me something of it. What had been found after the Imperials left. What had happened to the women and children.

"Princess Tara was in command then," Janet answered in level tones. "It was perhaps Darlanis' worst mistake of her career." I saw Jon clench his fists. He had stood beside the Princess only weeks ago. I recalled his words, what he sensed about her!

"Enough!" I barked. I didn't want to "know"! I wanted my memories of Darlanis to be good ones. I wanted to remember her as she was. Tall, beautiful, golden, "The Queen of Light"! Not another as evil as Princess Tara. Not another who served EVIL!

Comment by Darlanis

I once tried to tell Lorraine these things. That I was not what I appeared to be to her. She did not understand. Believe. I fear she "saw" what she wanted to see. The reader might also note here that after the affair on the Ronda when I said I'd never been in "combat" before (according to Lorraine), I meant to say that I'd never been in close personal combat before. I had, of course, led my forces in battle, but I had never actually been in very much danger during these times. There are also some things about Queen Paula that I have tried to explain, but to no avail. It may be noted here that everyone sees what they wish to see and that the TRUTH may be utterly different from what is put down on paper. I fear we Queens are no more truthful than anyone else in such things. My story of Lorraine's adventures here in the 26th Century would no doubt be somewhat different than hers!

The biggest mistake I ever made in my life was making Tara Warlady of the Empire. I think I wanted to "win" just too much! It was easy to ignore the "stories" that I heard about her. Easy to sit on a golden throne and live out the "life" of an Empress while someone else did the "dirty" work of maintaining my Empire of California. You will note that Lorraine herself made use of Lady Tirana in somewhat the same way, although there is of course no real comparison between what Tara did over the years and what my friend Lorraine allowed to happen because she was angry at being nearly killed. We are both monarchs, not "angels". That should be understood. We are "ambitious" women, both different, but yet in a way both the same. We have our "friends", and our "enemies". No doubt Lys will judge us both harshly when the time comes and we stand before her. Neither of us is "without sin".

Chapter Twenty Seven

"WE KCOME HOME, QUEEN LORRAINE!" the banner read there at the entrance to my estate. Someone had misspelled "welcome". I hoped it wasn't Sanda. Scribes aren't supposed to make mistakes like that! "Well, at least they spelled 'my name' right!" I laughed as we all smiled at the banner spread there between the gate posts. There was a new flag too in front of my house, one I'd never seen before! A green flag with a red tree on it. The Trelandarian flag instead of the Californian Imperial Tarl flag!

Waiting for us were all my people, my captain of Warriors, Carl Talen, who had married the lovely Lady Sanda Harles, she who had been once the sister of Paula, the Queen of Trelandar. Lady Tirana in her finest striding to meet us, clad as a High Lady. I knew that Hara Eslund, my Warlady, had gone with Sanda on the Squala. On that now futile voyage to Trella after Darlanis. We had "won" our "Revolution", but at a horrible "price". Sharon was dead. Gone as if she had never existed. My beloved "golden girl"! She had so admired Darlanis. Thought so much of her. I cursed the name of the dead Empress. She had killed my Sharon just as much as if she had put a dagger into her heart herself as well she could have done when she saw the fate that awaited them both! At least Darlanis would have seen to something like that! *
* Actually Darlanis didn't do anything like that, but I didn't know at the time and I am glad now that she did what she did even if Sharon did have to endure the horror of repeatedly being raped by the pirates. Fortunately in Sharon's case I was able to hypnotize her and relieve much of the "pain" from her memories. Such was impossible in the case of Darlanis due to the Priestesses of Lys having installed in her mind a "block" against hypnosis that I was never able to overcome. The "block" was no doubt installed by the use of electronic hypnosis when she was a small child there in Dularn. Hypnosis is against the law, incidentally I might mention here. It is considered in the same category as "witchcraft" and such things, and can get you in a lot of trouble with both the "civil authorities" and the Priestesses of Lys too!

There was Stan Holt, standing next to Lt. Sentis Santa. I recalled what I had said to her. I wondered if she had done what I had suggested. No doubt she had. I expected that he had learned much of what a

woman like her could do to a boy like him!

"Let me have the honor," Jon said to me, taking me by the hand. Helping me down from the carriage. The sun shining there in the east half-way up into the sky, although the day was still cool. The birds singing in the trees. Gayle had gone with Sanda to Trelle on the Squala. Little Mara running up to me, jumping into my arms, crying my name as I held her to me. She was a "Princess" now like Gayle. I supposed I had "everything" that anyone could ever want here in the 26th Century. Then why was my heart so heavy with grief? Why did everyone's faces blur before my eyes as they filled with tears. Everyone smiling, touching me, Lady Tirana standing there in her beautiful gown like another "Queen". I recalled what Sanda had told me about her. How she had helped over the years. The "secrets" they had shared. Now I understood why Sanda had seemed to "have it in" for Maris Marn. The slave girl had unfortunately looked too much like Darlanis!

"This is a happy day for Trelandar," Lady Tirana said to me. I suppose that it was. Unfortunately Trelandar's new "Queen" had paid a high "price" for her crown. I hoped it was all worth it.

"I guess it will do," Jon said with a smile, looking at my little yacht tied there at the dock as everyone stood around watching. The vessel a copy of the one that Maris Marn had stolen from me just over a month before. I wondered if she had made it to Dularn or had more likely perhaps been captured by some passing ship and once again now wore the gleaming collar of a slave girl around her lovely slim aristocratic neck? She was a beautiful woman, worth fifty gold crowns in a slave market. She did eventually make safely it to Dularn, and has written a book about her adventures, as well as being feted almost from one end of Dularn to the other before she finally married Darl Jord, Darlanis' half-brother, the Prince of Dularn. Maris now having become the Queen of Dularn after the recent suicide-death of Queen Tulis. Jon says she's a true "gold digger", which she doubtless may be, but she is also a very competent sailor, and I do admire her for having made such a dangerous voyage to freedom! She is a very "determined" woman, and one who might some day prove to be a deadly enemy of the Empire if our conflict ever starts up again!

I knew what Jon wanted me to do, and I wanted to tell him I couldn't. That he would have to go without me! That I was terrified of Squalas after my experience with one, and that to sail out beyond the sight of land in such a small craft filled my heart with terror. Made the sweat soak my skin beneath my beautiful silken gown. Only my pride as Queen of Trelandar allowed me to step down into that little craft, where I cowered against the little day cabin while Jon pushed off and hoisted the little fore and aft sails for that long and to me utterly terrifying voyage out to the Janis. Feebly waving to those on shore as we sailed out into that vast rolling ocean in my little sailboat. Jon sitting there on the seat with the tiller under his arm, dressed in the gold braided uniform of a proud Dularnian captain. Although his command was pretty small for a "captain" and his "crew" consisted of one now very nervous and scared "Queen" who wished with all her heart that she was standing right then on good old "terra firma" rather than sailing with him in a little twenty foot sailboat out into the vast ocean! An ocean in which swam gigantic sharks over three times the length of our boat!

"Seasick?" Jon asked, sitting there, looking down at me as I sat there with my back against the little low day cabin. Waiting to see that horrible fin rise from the sea behind us, a fin that would tower some ten feet or more in the air. It is said that a coward dies many deaths, whereas a brave person dies but once. I tend to have a very "vivid" imagination at times, and this was one of those "times". On land, with a sword in my hand I'll face just about anything that lives, but here on the water I felt completely helpless. Not that the up and down motion of the boat did anything for my stomach, but that wasn't really the problem!

"No," I lied. I was also growing aware of another problem. We had eaten a hearty breakfast there at the tavern before going to the sheriff's office. At least I had. There had been lots of greasy sausage and

bacon. I had eaten my fill and then some. I tend to suffer a bit at times from "what" tourists used to suffer if they visited a country like Mexico and were careless about drinking the water. I was a woman of the 20th Century yet inside even if I wore the crown of the Queen of Trelandar. It was still less than three months since the time Sharon and I had flown into this era. I was still yet a "tenderfoot" in more ways than one!

"You don't look very comfortable," Jon observed, giving me a smile. Sitting there, pleased with himself no doubt for marrying me. He wasn't afraid of Squalas, didn't have painful cramps in his abdomen like I did. My nerves had also effected my bladder to add to my "troubles". The only "restroom" was the bailing bucket or over the side. I am a woman of the 20th Century. One subject to all the "taboos" of my own culture. Jon would have to watch me relieve myself. There was no where else for me to go!

"I'm not!" I snapped back, my insides painfully gurgling. Jon nodding, seeing a "part" of me that I had managed until now conceal from him. I am "moody", sometimes hard to live with. I suspect now that I wasn't all that great a wife back in the 20th Century either. Jon disagrees, saying that I am "easy" to live with (compared to who?) and that all I need is a bit of affection from time to time and some good "holding" there in his lap to keep me happy and content. So far at least we seem to be doing O.K.

"Trelandarian Trots?" he smiled back. That's what the Dularnians call it. There are also the "Sarnian Shits" if you happen to go there. Public sanitation leaves a lot to be desired!

I nodded, not meeting his eyes. It embarrassed me. Made me less than what I wanted to appear before him. I knew better in a rational sense, but the emotional impact still bothered me a bit. I am not a woman of the 26th Century, who merely goes behind a tree and thinks little or nothing of it if everyone knows what is going on. I fear that in many ways I am still a "stranger" to my people. I react differently than would someone like Darlanis for example. My "instincts" are different. If I go "bare nipped" underneath a gown I think nothing of it, although everyone thinks how "scandalous" it was that I dared to do something like that!

"Feel better now?" Jon asked, holding me, my head against his shoulder. We were far out now, the land only a distant haze. Ahead I could see the tiny speck of that little waterless rock that hid the Janis. The ramship that would now be my "flagship". Would fly my flag beneath the Red and Green of free Trelandar. I felt the heat of the sun, the cool sea breeze there on my cheek. The movements of our little vessel beneath us as it took the waves. Going up and down, the wave rising there to port and going beneath us, lifting us perhaps a yard or so at a time. The wind was picking up. My stomach was complaining a bit about it.

"I'm not a sailor," I smiled back, kissing the side of his cheek. He was a great sea-captain, said to be Dularn's finest. I have excellent "instincts" when it comes to sailing, but I lack the "stomach" for sailing about in small boats. The Squala is deep keeled, more stable in a sea than flat bottomed vessels like the Janis. That is why I use the Squala rather than my flagship.

"I wouldn't want to be in a ship to ship action against you," he smiled back, adjusting my crown a bit, looking into my face. He says that I do have an attractive face. That there is a "depth" to me that he's never met in another woman. I do try to look my best for him. To look like the Queen that I am. I saw a brief flash of light there on the rock ahead of us. We had been spotted. Orders would be barked. Men would scurry about in preparation to greet their captain back on board. No doubt too they already knew that he had a passenger with him, and saw the flag we flew. The flag they no doubt knew well to be my own! A black flag with its silver double barred cross. I wondered what they would think when they saw the crown, the silver chain around my throat. Heard the news that they now served a free Trelandar!

"Take a look, Lorraine," Jon said to me, the Janis yet under sail, perhaps a mile out from shore. Handing me the telescope as I stood there beside him, a black gowned Queen with a golden crown on her head. Over her flew the Trelandarian flag, and her own black and silver banner that is now so well known everywhere!

"And just what sort of a Lorr device is that?" he asked as I lowered the telescope, my eyes glowing with delight. BLACK LADY! It was now mounted on floats, and was tied to the very same dock where we had sailed from some seven hours before! The black Beechcraft Bonanza speaking of another time now nothing but legends. I HAD MY AIRPLANE BACK! The skies were mine again! I saw painted on its side the silvery double barred cross. There could be no doubt! None at all! Once again I could fly! Travel through the air instead of having to ride a unicorn or sail on a rolling sea in some slowly sailing ship! Travel a thousand miles in five hours instead of taking as much as a week there on the Squala! No longer would I be subject to wind or storm! Or have to contend with a unicorn that wanted to go one way while I wanted to go another! I had my airplane back! I had the "air" back!

"It is my airplane," I smiled. For a moment I felt that sense of "superiority" that I sometimes feel when I can do something that no one else can in this era. That feeling of being a "civilized" woman now living among a world full of "barbarians"!

"There are legends about such things," Jon smiled. "That once people flew through the air in such things by means of some 'magic' like that which the Lorr possess." He regarded me as being of that sort. That I was a "magical being" of some sort. I suppose to many that I am. I am the only Queen with an airplane.

"Would you like to go 'up' with me?" I asked, giving him a smile. There were men pointing towards shore. Others had seen Black Lady. Those with telescopes could see my symbol painted on the side. I saw them look at me. With awe in their faces. Jon hesitated before answering. Certainly he wouldn't be afraid of going up with me! With his beloved wife, the Queen of Trelandar!

"You would go up very high?" he asked in low tones. I suspected that he was one of those people who believed that if Man was ever meant to fly, Lys would have given him wings like a bird! The Tarls of Talon are regarded as being somewhat "supernatural".

"No more than a mile or two," I smiled back, remembering how amused he had been at my fears of Squalas. At being in a small boat sailing on the rolling bosom of the vast Pacific. I found it amusing that this man, who had commanded ships in battle, was afraid of flying in an airplane! Even with his Queen flying it!

Chapter Twenty Eight

As a teenager I was tall and lanky, with a figure best described as boyish. The other girls used to tease me with a little ditty that went: "What is tall and lean? What no boy wants? Lorraine Duclare!" This went on until the day I lost my temper and bloodied a few noses. After that I had a bit more "respect"!

As for boys, I tended to end up with those "losers" no other girl wanted to go out with. It being generally acknowledged by the young men of my class that if you went out with Lorraine, you were getting pretty hard up for any feminine companionship! You can guess how I felt about myself back then. Like I wanted to go dig a hole somewhere and then fill it in after myself! I suspect that is why I tend to be

the way that I am. Distrustful, always wondering if people are associating with me because they want to "get" something out of me, etc. That someone might love me for myself without any hope of getting anything in return was simply something I believed to be impossible. The only exceptions to my experience having been Sharon and Janet Rogers. Sharon loving me just for myself and Janet because of my intelligence and my ability to "see" solutions to human problems that no one else could.

It would be quite possible for me to prove to you that I am what I am solely because of the way I look. You could say with a considerable amount of truth that Queen Lorraine is what she is because of what happened to her as a teenage girl. Those amazing abilities of mine with a sword are certainly due to my attempt to be "better" at something than anyone else. In the 20th Century a woman was judged almost solely on her looks, but fortunately here in the 26th Century women are also judged by what they are able to do. That is why I would never want to go back to my own time. Here I have love and the respect of others. Friends who value my opinions, what I think. I am respected, not just because I am now the Queen of Trelandar, but because of the person that I am.

"How?" I breathed out, just standing there looking in awe at Black Lady, seeing An'na smile as she stood leaning against a piling with a delightful smile on her lovely face. Her eyes concealed by the dark glasses that those of Mars often wear here on Earth. Sa-she-ra and Lady Tirana regarding the airplane with the same amount of awe that a person of the 20th Century would have regarded a "flying saucer" had one landed right there in front of them! Darlanis' lovely daughter smiling with delight, telling me that she had finally persuaded Raspa to allow her and some other "Martians" to repair and fix up the damaged airplane for me after its passage through the "Gateway" that had brought Sharon and me to this era. I could tell, however, that mingled with her pleasure was an underlying sorrow that was tearing at her heart. I had no doubt that An'na had finally come to the decision to tell her mother that she did actually live, but now on another world, one that was only a glowing dot of light there in the night sky! And now that she had, her mother was dead, killed by the pirates!

"I had to make a few 'improvements' here and there," An'na informed me with a smile, the technology of the 20th Century to her probably being quite like that of the Seventeenth would be to me. She had wisely not let on who she actually was, perhaps aware that her mother's good name was not very popular just then! An'na making these comments as I stood on a float and peered inside the interior, seeing that there had been "changes" made to the instrument panel, and also the installation of something like a television or computer monitor screen there in the center between the seats. This being, An'na told me, a device that would allow me to know at all times exactly where I was over the Earth!

"This is how you came here?" Jon asked, regarding me with a bit of awe. I suppose he never really "believed" that I was from another time. That I came from a society far in advance of his!

"Like to go for a ride?" I asked, opening the door, standing there on the float. I wanted so much to get in, take off, to fly again. To leave the world and all its troubles there below me!!!

"Up there?" he asked, regarding me with the sort of awe that one might have regarded a woman from another planet. An'na and I sharing much in common, as she was from Mars and I was from six centuries in the past. The crew of the Janis, my own people, all gathered around, crowding the dock, staring, muttering quietly to themselves. I don't think any of them really had "believed" until now that their "Queen Lorraine" was actually from 1988 A.D.!

"I'll show you how to fly," I teased him. "It's much better than sailing around in ships." Jon glanced at the Janis, at the "familiar", and then at Black Lady floating there. I could see the thoughts there reflected in his face. Awe mixed with a bit of terror! His wife had suddenly become an awesome "witch" able to even fly through the air in a strange machine from another time! Trelandar had a Queen who could fly in a metal

bird! Who like the fabled Queen of Talon was a mistress of the air itself!

"Perhaps later on," Jon answered. I suspected he meant to say something like "when I'm old and gray, ready to meet Lys", but didn't dare for fear of losing "face" before everyone there.

"There are legends among my people of such machines," Sa-she-ra spoke up. "There is even a place where some remain." I suspect that the Nevadas found a military base missed by the Lorr in The War of 2047. If they weren't so "hostile" a people towards us, I'd like to make an expedition there, the place being from what I have been able to determine, in an area of the former United States that was once used by the Air Forces of the World Federation. Of course the aircraft would be useless now even if intact, and the manufacture of the liquid hydrogen fuel would be far beyond my own capabilities even as the Queen of Trelandar. I have also plans of visiting Talon, seeing the great Tarls for myself. I will of course fly there in Black Lady. I am just light enough that a Tarl could carry me for short distances, I believe, although it would not be able to launch itself off the ground on the level carrying a weight as heavy as me from what I have been told by those knowledgeable about such things. Most Tarl "girls" being small, usually in their teens, and weighing about a hundred pounds or so. The women of the royal family of Talon being all women of small statue, such as Sela Dai, who is only 5'3", 110#.

I slipped my arm around An'na as we walked back to my house, the lovely blonde obviously having a degree of difficulty walking due to the differences in gravity between Earth and Mars. While An'na is more capable of withstanding Earth's gravity than most of the women of Mars, she does find it uncomfortable, as her body is adjusted to a gravitational pull only 38 percent that of Earth. I had noticed "such" the first time I had seen her, but had not paid it much attention then, as Raspa's appearance was enough to make you forget about just about anything else! I am used to the Lorr now, and the sight of one doesn't make me "cringe", but they do terrify most people, perhaps of the "power" that they possess.

"I didn't see a Lorr disc land," I told An'na, although it was quite possible that one had during the time I had been on the Janis explaining to its crew who I was and who they now served.

"I flew Black Lady here," An'na smiled. "It wasn't hard."

"Did you ever fly an airplane before?" I asked, amazed. An'na is somewhat more intelligent than her mother, perhaps having an I.Q. as high as mine if not higher, but still, to fly an airplane and land it without any previous instruction seemed to me just simply impossible! Something that no one, not even An'na would be able to do! Of course An'na flew the Starfire, but that operated on an entirely different principle than did my airplane! On the other hand, her own mother did something even more amazing as you will see further on when she actually managed to fly Black Lady and make takeoffs and landings with just one flying lesson!

"I used a computer to stimulate flying an airplane and practiced with that," An'na smiled back. I wondered if she felt the same towards me as I sometimes feel towards my own friends here in the 26th Century. She came from a civilization as advanced over that of the 20th Century as the 20th Century was over that of the 26th! A civilization where anti-matter was used as a power source, where anti-gravity was a common means of flight, and where one relied upon that technology for nearly everything else!

"I came here to see my mother, and now I learn that she is dead," An'na said to me, sitting there on my bed as I changed into something more "suitable" than a long black silk gown. The crown of the Queen of Trelandar carefully put away for safekeeping. I could see the moisture in An'na's eyes, but she was of a stoic culture where one made few close friends and emotion was looked down upon. Yvette dressing me, her dark eyes glistening.

"I plan to avenge her death," I answered, Yvette buckling my harness around my waist. An'na had given me a present. A weapon that had once been but a fantasy device in a science fiction movie back in the 20th Century. I had not believed that even the technology of the Lorr permitted such a thing to actually exist!

I drew the weapon from its sheath, the device resembling in some ways a common two D cell flashlight of the 20th Century. It had taken the best scientists on Mars to build it. It was in its way the ultimate close quarters weapon. Nothing could stand against it. It operated upon scientific principles only dreamed of in the 20th Century. It was a "FORCE-SABER"! It generated a beam of pure force a meter in length. Edgewise it had "no width", and could cut through anything without any resistance. I had found that it would when held "flatwise" serve as a defense against a sword or club or anything else, the beam being about two inches wide. The softly glowing beam was truly out of "STAR WARS"! (A science-fiction movie of the 20th Century) I clicked it on, stood there with it glowing in my hand. It would serve me well, I thought, when we went up against the pirates. An'na had a blaster pistol. A weapon that fired explosive bullets that had the force of 20mm cannon shells. Yvette shrank back in terror, going to her knees. She saw the look in my face. Men would die. Darlanis, whose hair had been the color of gold, would be avenged as would another who had once been a beloved of two tall rulers.

"I'm going to fly to Trella," I told Jon as he came in to check up on me. I could hear the sounds of merriment through the open windows. The men and women of the Janis were enjoying themselves. I wore a black tunic, hose, boots. The "weapon" now once again there at my hip that he had seen glowing in my hand only a moment ago. I think suddenly he realized just how "alien" I was. That I was not the woman that he had married, but something different, something perhaps not "really" of his "world"!

"I'm going to go with you," Jon said, touching my neck chain with a fingertip. I knew how the thought of flying terrified him as it would have many a brave warrior of this era. "You are my wife. My Queen. You wear my neck chain about your throat." My arms went around his neck. My mouth sought his. An'na and the provocative Yvette there watching, thinking what thoughts that they would. He had told his men not to drink too much. That they might soon be going into battle. To rid Trelandar of the pirates that plagued it. We had not mentioned the name of Darlanis, only that of my beloved Sharon. It was really for her that we would fight now. My heart was dark with hatred that burned deep. It would take many lives to avenge those I had once loved!

Chapter Twenty Nine

"All your 'possessions' that you brought with you into this era are stored in the storage compartment behind us," An'na informed me as the three of us got inside Black Lady and I took my seat at the controls, wondering how well the plane flew after all that An'na had done to it. The engine was rebuilt to run on ethanol, which could be manufactured far easier than could gasoline.

"Including what was in my purse?" I asked cautiously, recalling my own PPK .380 and Jack's S&W .38, both weapons being of course quite forbidden under the EDICT as was Black Lady herself!

"People flew in the air in these things?" Jon interrupted, tapping the side of the fuselage. The plane rocking a bit under us in the swell, Sa-she-ra and Lady Tirana there to see us off as were a number of my own people and some of the crew of the Janis such as Sentis Santa and the boyish young Stan Holt. I told Jon that people had indeed "flown in these things" and that we were going to do just exactly that as

soon as I figured out how to start the engine. An'na having modified the starting procedure.

"Turn to 'on', then wait for the red light to go out before you turn the engine over," An'na explained, giving me a smile as I warned the others to stay back from the propeller, which looked "different" from the one that the airplane had originally come with back there in the 20th Century! An'na explaining that it was necessary to vaporize the alcohol before drawing it into the engine. A similar system being used in the 21st Century with the replacement of gasoline by alcohol as a motor fuel. The visual display now on, showing this section of Trelandar in full color. There are various levels of display, ranging from one that displays an area of half a mile to one that shows the entire Earth!

"Here goes," I smiled, turning the key, the engine catching almost instantly, An'na explaining that both the fuel systems and the ignition systems had been upgraded to the limits of technology for such things. The engine having been gone completely over there on Mars, tuned to a degree almost unbelievable back in the 20th Century. I will admit that Black Lady runs better now than she ever did back in my own time, although the power produced on alcohol is not as good as what was produced on aviation gasoline, my top speed being noticeably lower. The pontoons and their internal wheels no doubt do add something to the wind resistance. My top speed is now about a hundred and eighty five knots, or two hundred and twelve miles per hour for you landlubbers. This was my cruising speed in the 20th Century, so you can see that there has been a loss in speed due to the redesign of the airplane and its conversion into an amphibian able to land on either calm water or any smooth land surface, there being few runways here in the 26th Century! I do however have the "oldest" Beechcraft Bonanza still flying by quite a good few centuries, I believe!

"Wind's picked up," Jon commented, looking through the windshield. I could see the rollers beyond the edge of the cove. Nothing for the Squala or the Janis, but already far too much for Black Lady to ever butt through without swamping herself in them!

"It's about a quarter mile to my house and the land's pretty flat from here to there," I said, yelling out the window to my people to untie the plane. Lady Tirana finally doing it, although the look on her face left no doubts about what she felt about getting so close to that deadly whirling propeller! As she told me later on, she'd rather have faced an armed warrior any day than get down on those pontoons and untie those ropes while someone else clung to the end of the wing to keep the plane from immediately drifting off with the wind there from the north. The propeller being so designed that I had both "forward and reverse as well as neutral" by merely adjusting the prop lever beside me!

I roared out into the cove, testing the controls, everything seeming to work satisfactorily. An'na had fortunately not tampered with the plane's original design, which while I suppose makes it not the easiest airplane to fly, does allow a considerable degree of versatility in making takeoffs and landings. The people there on the dock waving at me, while a slave girl stared at the plane from the Janis, her reddish hair glowing in the sun.

"Here we go!" I yelled over the roar of the engine, Jon muttering a prayer to Lysto watch over us, his "confidence" in his wife's abilities to "fly like a bird" leaving something to be desired! The Beechcraft Bonanza bouncing and leaping over the roughness of the cleared path towards my manor, the propeller a gleaming blurred disk there in the bright afternoon sunlight. People walking down the path fleeing for the "safety" of the woods as they saw this "strange roaring monster" bearing down on them! My airspeed not picking up as fast as I thought it should have, doubtlessly due to An'na's modifications to the engine. We were also heavy with fuel, and carrying a total of three people over rough ground, which didn't help anything either! I needed sixty knots to take off, and I didn't have sixty knots yet as the house and the barns beyond grew rapidly nearer there ahead of us. It was then that I saw the slave girl ahead of us. Standing there totally paralyzed by terror as she saw the airplane bearing down on her! I saw the "O" of

her mouth, the darkness of her hair, the red of her shift, the wench being one of my own girls! "OH GOD!" I gasped, knowing that to turn would send us crashing into the trees at some fifty odd knots! We might survive the collision with only minor damage, I suspected, but the girl would be ripped apart by the propeller! It was her life or ours, the thought went sickeningly through my mind!

Then suddenly there was a racing figure, a young Dularnian oarsman from the Janis flinging the girl to the ground as I yanked the wheel back, the pontoons clearing them by only a few feet as we passed overhead. The "stall warning" buzzer screaming "disaster" as Black Lady struggled into the air, my free hand yanking at the flaps to give us just that little bit of extra lift that I needed to stay up as we raced over the fields in front of the house! The barn just ahead as I very gently banked and swung to one side of it, Black Lady's performance obviously not what it once had been back before An'na's modifications!

"Do you do this every time?" Jon asked as we cleared tree tops by only a dozen feet or so, the airplane's performance not up to what Beechcraft had designed into it! Bonanza's are designed for high performance, high speed, and they lack the short takeoff and landing capabilities of something like Cessna 182's and the like. The sweat wet beneath my armpits as I smiled and told him that usually my take-offs weren't all that "exciting"!

"I think in the future I'll stick to craft with anti-gravity capabilities," An'na announced, expressing her own opinions of the matter. I wondered if Jon would ever fly with me again or if he'd sail back on the Squala rather than trust his life to a wife who obviously had nearly gotten them all killed! My airplane now behaving itself better as we leveled off a few hundred yards over the treetops and I could ease back a bit on the throttle and push the flaps back in. An'na glancing down, pushing in a knob, the engine suddenly roaring away as if it had grown a couple more cylinders. An'na giving me a remorseful look, and saying she had forgotten about pushing the choke back in after I had started the engine. No wonder we hadn't had any power! The choke had been left pulled out! We had been damm lucky to get off the ground!

"I would suggest that you use some sort of list before you take off in this damn thing to determine if you've done everything that you should have done," Jon suggested with a dry laugh from behind me, sounding just like a flight instructor back in the 20th Century. My new husband smiling to himself, enjoying his royal wife's discomfort and embarrassment at the situation!

"Why do you think that Darlanis is dead?" Jon asked me as I flew low over the shoreline, looking for the pirate vessels that I suspected were anchored in some hidden cove concealed from the sea. One such cove having concealed the Ronda from Sarnian Lady.

"She'd never allow herself to be taken alive by such men," I answered him, not liking to think about it. I had too many good memories of her. Far too many of Sharon. The adventures we had shared here in the 26th Century. Why had I agreed to letting Darlanis have her? The woman had been utterly reckless with her! Why had Darlanis been trying to reach me anyway? Had she known about the "Free Trelandar" movement and hoped to stop it herself?

"Something ahead," An'na spoke, staring through the windshield. We were over a part of Trelandar that is usually avoided by most people except for outlaws and that sort. The ruins of northern Los Angeles were visible here and there through the trees. There were a lot of shallow spots in the waters below. One would have to know these waters extremely well to avoid disaster or possess a ship as flat bottomed as the Janis. Squala's deep keel would make her a bad choice for any "activity" in such an area as this! It was a good "hiding place" for the pirates.

"Schooners, their masts taken down for concealment," Jon said to me. There were two at anchor, a third lying over on its side, under repair. A fourth vessel I recognized as the Ronda! We had found the

pirates! I eased back the throttle, put two clicks on the flaps. Watched the scene before me grew closer, larger as we came down perhaps a hundred feet above the water!

"Bad place," Jon muttered. "We'd have to 'feel our way in' and they'd have every chance to escape us while we did." I could see the shoal water there below. The pirates had indeed picked an ideal spot to hide. Only a flat bottom galley could get into here and even then it would have to "feel its way" as Jon said!

"They are readying weapons," An'na announced. I ignored her. We were in an airplane. They were but primitive barbarians below! What harm could a couple arrows or crossbow bolts do? Such brutes as those below couldn't hit anything flying past at seventy knots anyway! So I felt just then. My old 20th Century arrogance once again at work! It is a bad failing of mine. Gets me into "trouble" now and then when I forget. We were lucky this time. I flew over the schooners, banked, and came back for another look. They didn't understand what an airplane was, but they saw the symbol on the side. Knew who I was. They opened fire upon us with ballistae and crossbows. One of them knew enough to lead us! His marksmanship left nothing to be desired!

Beechcraft Bonanzas are made of "aircraft grade aluminum". They are not "armored" or are they proof against ballistae bolts! That was suddenly taught me very effectively as the head of a ballistae bolt suddenly thrust through my right wing, passing completely through the wing, and puncturing the fuel tank on that side! The alcohol streaming out into the air as I veered away, suddenly aware of my own "vulnerability" to such "primitive" weapons as these! It was a lesson that I have never forgotten! They could have actually shot us down had such a missile hit the engine! It was one very chastened Queen Lorraine who veered away towards Trella, so very much aware of how close a call it had been for her! For those dear to her she had just so thoughtlessly risked. Jon didn't need to say anything to me. I was embarrassed enough without having any "salt" rubbed into my "wound"!!!

Chapter Thirty

"Will you be able to land this?" Jon asked, staring down at Trella there spreading out before us, the harbor filled with ships of various sizes and types. I would have to make a water landing this time. The plane's handling was not improved by so much weight on one side, the punctured wing tank having drained itself during the flight. The ballistae bolt still yet piercing the wing speaking of the victory of 26th Century technology over that of the 20th! I found it all rather "embarrassing" although Jon had not tried to "rub it in" as he might have done. I had been too confident, too proud of Black Lady to recognize the danger. It had been a mighty "close call" for one Queen Lorraine!

"Shouldn't be any problem," I assured him, telling him to sit as far over to the right as possible, An'na doing the same to better balance us. I hoped the pontoons were alright. Otherwise we'd be fishing the plane out of the "drink" again if I couldn't make shore in time! The Squala there at anchor below a comfort.

"You said that when we took off," Jon reminded me, a grim smile there on his handsome features as I turned in reply to give him a reassuring smile. No doubt he would have preferred to have a deck there beneath his feet. Feel something solid beneath him!

"I'm sure Lorraine can land us safely," An'na assured him. So far as I could tell we hadn't suffered any

serious damage from the pirates' firing at us, although it was quite obvious that my airplane had suffered damage from the "primitive" technology of the 26th Century! It had been quite a blow to my "ego" too!

I came down alongside an anchored galley, one of those 36's the Empire uses a lot, the Trelandarian flag flying from its flagstaff there in back. I saw men run, point, thought of what they must have thought. It was, I thought to myself, just the sort of a thing that Sanda would love. Having the Queen of Trelandar come in for a landing in her capital city in an airplane!

"I see it, but I don't believe it!" Sanda Talen said to me, her eyes glowing with pleasure into mine. Jon delighted to have the solid dock there beneath his feet once again. Guards holding back the crowds that were gathering as fast as men could run to this spot to see "Lorraine's airplane". No one saying anything about there being a ballistae javelin sticking out of the wing!

"We located the pirates that took the Ronda," I told her. An'na standing there looking at everything. She was clad in the common costume of a woman of Mars. Her sort were almost as feared as the Lorr they served and equally hated by most people!

"And now you plan to avenge the death of your stepdaughter?" Sanda asked, her eyes glowing into mine. I supposed she muchly preferred it that way. With Sharondead. Then there would be no possibility of a successor to Darlanis at least until the Imperial Senate could decide who was to take her position!

"And that of my mother," An'na spoke in icy tones. I saw the look on Sanda's face as she realized just who An'na was! That she was indeed the true daughter of Empress Darlanis. That she was the legal successor to her mother. That the Empire was in fact hers to rule should she wish to take over as she might! I was also very much aware of the "power" that An'na had over Raspa! It would be one thing to fight Imperial warriors from Sarn, another entirely to come up against some Lorr battle-disc!

"Dammit, not after all this!" Sanda snapped, her hand going to the hilt of her sword in her anger. She was tired, exhausted no doubt from all she had been through. Finding another daughter of Darlanis was perhaps only the "final straw"! I don't think I really needed to stop her. Sanda is a sensible woman. She knew better than to draw a sword against someone armed with a blaster!

"Easy, Sanda," I spoke, taking her by the arms. I saw the tears in her eyes. Saw the "fear" there that the Revolution she had worked so hard for might all be taken away from her by An'na!

"I'm sorry," Sanda answered in a soft voice, regarding An'na as she stood there silently, the breeze ruffling her golden hair. In profile she does remind you considerably of Darlanis, although their facial features are not all that similar, Sharon in some respects looking more like Darlanis than does her own daughter!

"I have no interest in your `politics'," An'na spoke in level tones. "As none of you govern without our permission." There was in her voice the hint of infinite power, of the sort of power that made me realize just who really "ruled" the Earth! Raspa!!!

"We were so close!" Sanda sobbed, the tears rolling down her cheeks, her eye make-up running as I took her in my arms, held her close. Telling her that everything would be all right in the end. I had no way of knowing what An'na thought of things. She viewed me with some affection, although should she wish to rebuild her mother's Empire, there would be nothing we could do about it if Raspa allowed An'na to use Lorr technology. A few dozen men armed with Lorr blaster rifles could defeat an army. The Starfire itself carried enough destructive power to perhaps depopulate all of California! We were as helpless as the Neanderthals had been when the Lorr descended from the sky over fifty thousand years ago to take

their young women as serving slaves!

"Sarnian Lady," Sanda said to me as we stood before it, the crew and its officers now under guard. I had done what I could for Sanda. I did not believe that An'na had any interest in rebuilding Darlanis' Empire of California. Her interests laid in different fields. In the worlds and their satellites that circled the Sun. In the comets and other objects that entered our solar system from time to time. She was an astronaut, not a warrioress. I doubted if she really cared much one way or another what happened here on Earth. We were now just a "backwater". A bunch of barbarians that had to be "watched over". Nothing more.

"Want to come with me?" I asked Sanda, stepping to the ladder that led up to the deck as it laid there in dry-dock. Sanda nodding, following as I climbed to those decks that had once been so familiar to me. Where there were still yet so many memories!

"This was all hers," I said as Sanda stood there beside me. I saw the luxury, the fine paintings there on the walls. Darlanis had been a woman who loved such things. She had been, I mused to myself, a woman of "taste". The closets yet contained her clothing, the golden mesh attire she had once worn. It was like her ghost still lived here. I felt as if I was an intruder.

"I will have it sold, the money given to the poor," Sanda snapped back, her eyes hard, filled with hatred for the memory of Darlanis. What she had stood for. Sanda was wearing a black leather skirt, a lovely red silken blouse. A sword at her hip. Boots on her feet. She looked and was a very competent woman. I had no reason to doubt that she had once been a high born Lady.

"There is a possibility that she still lives," I said. Jon had believed it possible, saying that Darlanis was worth at least three hundred gold crowns if delivered alive to the Emperor of Mexico, who would have kept her as a preferred slave girl! That is a lot of money here in the 26th Century. Far more than the hundred thousand dollars in 20th Century terms that it calculates out to. Three hundred gold crowns having the purchasing power that a quarter of a million dollars would have had in 1988 A.D.!

"And you would return her to all this?" Sanda spoke, her tones icy cold. She knew how I felt about Darlanis. About Sharon who was legally now Darlanis' successor to the throne of the Empire of California. That "dream" Darlanis had once spoken of.

"Not under the terms she once knew," I answered. I saw the relief go flooding across Sanda's attractive features as she nodded in reply. The "Revolution" we had begun in Trelandar could spread to Sarn, perhaps even to Baja and Orgon. Perhaps someday even to distant Dularn. I was after all the woman who many believed to be "the second Janet Rogers". Even the Nevadas remembered her! The "Janet Rogers" of legend. The "Golden Age of Man" that I knew was but a legend. The truth had been much different. She had been an idealist. At best a "benevolent" absolute dictator! One thing the world didn't need was another of her sort. We'd probably be better off with Raspa ruling us! No emotions, able to see beyond our lies, our delusions to the truth as it existed. The Lorr had a stable, non-violent social order.

"I have hated her all these years, hated her for killing my sister as she did. I still remember her eyes, her arrogant smile as I held my sister's dying body in my arms, the blood running from her mouth as she gasped and choked on her own life-blood," Sanda spoke, her eyes seeing another scene, another time. Queen Darlanis having thrust her blade through Paula's chest, which is not an instantaneous death although the wound is of course fatal.

"It was a fair duel?" I asked. Darlanis had been a "Queen of Swords". It had been a foolish act on

Queen Paula's part, although she herself was well known for her own skill with a blade. Both Queens had been of the Warriresses. Dueling is common among those of the caste. Sanda was a Scribe, not a Warriress.

"According to your own Caste Codes, yes," Sanda snapped back, standing there. I picked up a little statue, regarded it. Darlanis had been a woman of "taste". Cultured, civilized by the standards of the 26th Century. Well educated, knowledgeable. She had done her part to raise the standards of civilization here in the 26th Century. She had reminded me somewhat of Janet Rogers. Both had been "idealists". Both had also "meant well". I wondered if I would really do much better than Darlanis had done?

"Why didn't you become a Warriress instead of a Scribe?" I asked Sanda, setting down the little statue. It was of a little girl. I suspected that same girl, now grown, stood outside in the sunlight. Anna Marden, the new crown Princess of California!

"My sister was a good example of the foolishness you of the black castes have," Sanda snapped back. "Your foolish codes that get you killed." She paused then, seeing my eyes. I am of the Warriresses. I am proud of my caste even if we sometimes do not act as wisely as we should. I suspected that her son had become a Warrior against her wishes. There had no doubt been considerable conflict in her marriage to Carl Talen, who was of the Warriors. He had no doubt wished his foster son to wear the caste mark. To someday take his place there in the world. One always wishes to see one's children do well. I recalled that I had once discussed such things with Darlanis about a month and a half ago.

"I suggest that we change the subject," I spoke in level tones. Sanda was a dear friend. I had no desire to get into an argument with her over such matters that to both of us carried a heavy emotional charge. "We still face a common enemy," I added. The "Revolution" wasn't yet assured. The fact that we had been "victorious" in part of Trelandar did not mean that the rest of the country would fall into step behind us. There was also the Imperial Senate. The Imperial Legions perhaps already on the march. I wondered if Sharon still lived. Jon had considered it a good possibility. That would also "color" things considerably.

"You may be putting your life in Lorraine's hands if you come with us," Jon teased Sanda as she seated herself beside him. Black Lady rocking a bit as everyone shifted themselves for the trip back to my estates. Now that we knew where the pirates were, I had every intention of attacking with the Janis. It would be a nasty fight, Jon had warned, but I was determined to see it through. I would pack the Janis with my best fighters. I thought it would be enough. They would be fighting for their new Queen. For a worthwhile cause. I did not consider the dangers I would be facing. The fact that I might die in battle and leave the problems we faced to Sanda and Jon to sort out as best they could. I would make the proper "arrangements" Warriresses make.

"I do trust her," Sanda smiled, "But I will pray to Lystoo." Sanda was an intelligent woman. She "hedged her bets"!

Chapter Thirty Four

"Lower the sails and the masts, raise the centerboard" Jon ordered, men there in the darkness instantly doing his bidding there on the slippery wet deck as a fine mist fell from above. We showed no lights. I respected his judgment in such things. Sentis Santa stood at his side, her golden hair faintly visible there in the darkness. Our only light was that which lit our compass. We had done our navigation by means of

that computer device An-na had installed on Black Lady. She was below right now. Suffering from sea-sickness. The wind had risen up a bit.

Sanda had remained behind on my estate at my direct orders as the Queen of Trelandar. I had written a "will" that covered everything that I could think of "just in case" I didn't come back. I remembered the Lady Lana, others. This time it could be my turn. I hoped that SHE would be merciful when I stood before her and faced her judgment. I had brought both my own PPK and Jack's Smith & Wesson. I had my "force-saber". Anna her blaster pistol. It was perhaps two or three am in the morning. I knew that many aboard would never see the sun come up again. The "Queen of Trelandar" could be among them. My body given to the fishes. I hoped they would remember me for what I had tried to do. I had not spoken of Darlanis to them. Only of my Sharon.

"It's going to be a nasty fight," Jon said to me in the darkness as I stood there beside him. I shared his opinion. I did not look forward to what was to come. There would be many who would never see the dawn. We both might be among them. I had given him my body earlier. I had not douched afterwards. I would carry a "part" of him inside me when we went into battle.

"We'll be together," I said. There was nothing more that I could say, or wished to say. His neck chain was snug around my throat. That was the way I wanted it to be. I was his wife now.

"Oarsmen to their benches, drop your wenches and grab those oars!" I heard the first officer snap. His words made me smile. We had embarked a number of "hip-swingers" from Thistle to add to our fighting force. Some had been plying their "trade" during the voyage to this place some sixty miles or so south of my home. Jon now pacing his quarterdeck there in the darkness. The Janis was his command. The decisions would be his. I would advise, but I felt it best that he still made the decisions. I wore the black of the Warriress, of the Lady. My veil concealed my face. We flew the Dularnian flag just to confuse the pirates a bit. I thought it might help a bit in surprising them when they found out that we were no longer their "allies" any longer. I had no way of knowing if they knew about the events that had taken place in the last couple days or not. I hoped that they did not. Our losses would be bad enough as they were. I hoped SHE would be merciful. Look upon what we did with favor. Many souls would be standing before HER before long. Mine perhaps there among them!

"We will have the element of surprise," Jon said, putting his hand on my shoulder. My people know what to do," he assured me. He was of the Warriors. Death is no stranger to our castes. I could hear the man at the bow making soundings as we "felt" our way into the area where we had seen the pirates from Black Lady. Jon had suggested that we pretend that it was only a meeting of "allies". He would give the recognition signals. The rest would be up to the pirates. It would even the "odds" against us a bit.

The night was cloudy and dark, wet and chilly. A depressing night, quite suitable for what we were planning to do, I thought to myself. The darkness, the rain, matching my own mood. I could feel the Janis moving beneath me. The deck swaying beneath my feet. I had taken a good swig of brandy earlier to warm my stomach, steady my nerves. Lady Tirana had suggested it. She was below somewhere now, perhaps talking softly to those who now followed me. We had Sa-she-ra on board. A couple dozen volunteers from the senior class from the Academy. I had left Delilah with Sanda and Mara. With the rest of the children. Gayle was in Trella with the Squala. She would be safe there regardless of what happened here. I thought once more of Darlanis, so tall and golden. Like a Viking Goddess from Norse legends. I did not believe as Jon did that she was still alive. I knew Darlanis too well for that. She would have died a Warriress' Death, her sword in her hand. That was the way she would have wanted it! I wept softly there beneath my veil where none could see the tears.

"It will be good to be fighting on the 'right' side for a change," Jon said to me, clasping me in his arms.

Honor is important to us. It is what separates Man from the beasts of the forest. We have something "more" to fight for. On the other hand we are a far more "dangerous" species than any that has ever inhabited the Earth. We love War, the Arts of Combat. We are not a "peace-loving" race like the Lorr. Perhaps we will always be "barbarians". Perhaps that is truly the destiny of Mankind!

"Promise me you won't make me a widow," I said softly, moving closer to him. I was scared of what was to come. I often do wish I was like some of the Warriresses I know. Afraid of nothing. Like I used to think of Darlanis until I learned better. I think sometimes it is better if you don't "know" what is coming.

"You will remember me at the temple?" he asked. I nodded. We die, but our memories live on in the minds of those we love.

"Should we drop anchor, sir?" the first officer asked, a shadow there in the darkness clad in the black of the Warrior.

"No," Jon answered. "We will hold position with the oars." It was the best decision under the circumstances. If we failed to surprise the pirates or they already knew of our intentions, then it would be best to have the men ready there at the oars. I knew of the Janis' power. It was the most powerful ramship afloat that I knew of as a "56". Superior to the Empire's 48's or even a bit superior to Darlanis' own 54, Sarnian Lady, now in dry-dock at Trella. Jon was the best captain afloat, I thought.

"We wait now," he said to me, turning to me in the darkness. I shivered, the rain soaking through my dress. It was cold out here at sea. A hint of fall, the summer only a treasured memory.

It was fortunate that in my pose as a Californian Lady who aided "the other side" that I had a heavy veil over my features. The sight of seeing my Sharon kneeling there before us gagged and chained, the mark of the lash livid on her naked body, would have been too much for even my emotional control. The swarthy brute holding her slave leash telling us about how they had captured both her and Queen Darlanis along with their prize, the Ronda.

"This wench is the Imperial Princess!" the man said to Jon there in the captain's cabin where we were all gathered, jerking up Sharon's head, her beautiful azure eyes liquid and wet with her tears. I did not know if she had recognized me or not as she looked up into our faces. The fury was a hot flame that washed over me as I saw what had been done to one once so innocent! "I want three hundred gold crowns for her!", the pirate said, such a ransom being a fortune here in the 26th Century. Obviously those who were now "allied" with Dularn were not above turning a "profit" when they thought that they could get away with it! I did not think the man would receive his money. He did not have long to live. My hand caressed the butt of my "force-saber". I felt Jon's hand touch my arm. He understood my feelings, my emotions.

"And Darlanis?" Jon asked, his voice level. I dared not speak as I stood there at his side. The rage burned hot inside my body. One of the ship's girls put a glass of whiskey in the pirate's hand, her lovely face wooden as she fought to control her emotions at what she saw there before her. I thought of Darlanis, tall and golden, one of the most beautiful women who had ever lived in any era. I did not have much hope that she had survived. She was of the Warriresses. She would have died with a sword in her hand. She had no doubt given a good account of herself. She would want to be remembered that way, I knew. She was a proud Warriress, a proud Empress. No one could ever take that away from her. She would live forever in our own memories.

"My men were too rough with her, I fear," the brutal pirate captain laughed, watching the slim dark haired slave girl as she served. She was a Dularnian girl, and knew little of our plans. One does not usually inform slaves of the plans of their masters. The pirate laughing, "I'm afraid Darlanis won't live more

than couple days or so according to what 'THE LADY' tells us with the burning fever that she has now burning in her body." I felt the touch of Lady Tirana as she stood beside me, posing as another traitoress to the Empire. She had sensed the emotions that burned there inside me at the news that Darlanis yet lived! And that Princess Tara was here now aboard one of the pirate vessels!

"We have medical facilities," Jon answered. "My Queen will pay highly for Darlanis and her brat." We needed to drag as much information out of the pirate as we could before we made our move on them. I understood that, although Jon had wisely suggested I keep my mouth shut and just observe during these "negotiations".

"'THE LADY' wants her to die," the pirate answered, taking a swig of the whiskey there in his glass. "Too bad too to waste a woman like that when we would have been able to sell her to the Emperor of Mexico for maybe another three hundred gold crowns."

"I'll buy her off you for that price," Jon ventured, his voice level, as if he was discussing the price of fruit with some peddler there in Thistle. "Take a chance that we can cure her of 'whatever' is wrong with her." I was amazed that Jon would make such an offer considering what he actually thought of Darlanis! I did have six hundred gold crowns, but not with me, of course. One does not carry that sort of money around with them as a rule!

"I don't think that 'THE LADY' will go along," the pirate answered, setting down his empty glass. "She wanted Darlanis for herself, and now that she can't have her, she probably won't let you have her either." I took a step towards the pirate, and flung back my veil, letting him see my face. The force-saber was in my right hand now, although I had not yet turned it on. The man as he regarded me suddenly to my surprise gasping, going for his sword as he cried out in terror, "YOU'RE LORRAINEDUVAL!!!"

My right hand was swift. There was a blurred flash of light and the pirate let out a gurgling cry and started to sink to the deck, his head suddenly falling free of his body, the blood spurting from the severed arteries over the beautiful carpeting!

"Messy, Lorraine, messy!" Jon breathed, regarding the headless twitching corpse there on the deck. I snapped off the force-saber and bending down, tore the cruel gag from my girl's lips, letting her sob against me as I lifted her up and held her in my arms, my tears of joy scalding my cheeks as I stroked her soft golden hair and soothed her terrors with my soft words.

"We're in trouble, Lorraine," Jon said to me as I held Sharon in my arms. I didn't understand why. Sharon telling me that the key to her shackles was in the dead man's pouch attached to his weapons harness. Lady Tirana nodding, her eyes glowing into mine through the netting of her veil. Sharon no doubt knew where they were keeping Darlanis. It would make things easier for us.

"Why?" I snapped, freeing Sharon, Lady Tiara tossing her a blanket to throw over herself until we could find her something to wear. In her eyes the look of a terrified animal from what I knew she had been put through. She was just a teenage girl from the 20th Century. One who should have been dating, talking on the telephone, worrying about "history exams", and so forth. She would be safe on the Janis as we fought our way to rescue Empress Darlanis. I prayed our medical facilities were up to the task of saving her life. I had few doubts as to the cause of the fever!

"Those aboard this ship are Dularnian and Trelandarian," Jon said to me in sober level tones. "They will see utterly no reason why they should risk their lives and perhaps die for the Empress of California." That thought had never crossed my mind. I knew now why Jon had tried to "bargain" as he had for Darlanis.

Chapter Thirty Two

"You're not going to leave her to die!" Sharon begged, her eyes pleading into mine as she clutched the blanket to herself. I feared for her mental state after everything she had been put through. As Sharon once put it, she learned first hand in intimate personal detail every sexual perversion that this era possesses! I do know what was done to her, but it is not something I wish to write about. I treated her injuries. I know what she endured. I am glad we did not leave a pirate alive, although their deaths were far too "easy" for what they did to my Sharon!

"There has been a revolution here in Trelandar," I told my golden girl. "I fear that those here aboard consider Darlanis as being the 'enemy' of all their hopes and dreams for the future."

"The 'Free Trelandar Movement'," Sharon breathed. Her voice was just a little too steady, just a little too "calm". I handed her a glass of brandy. She drank it like it was ordinary water!

"I fear that they made me 'Queen of Trelandar'," I smiled back. Sharon would hear about it sooner or later, I thought. She might as well hear it from my lips as from those of another.

"And you 'married' Jon Richards," Sharon added, seeing the silver linked chain there about my throat. Her voice was cold, hostile. She now believed that I too wanted to let Darlanis die!

"I will ask for volunteers," Jon interrupted, "Although I can't promise you too much considering the way my own people feel about Darlanis." Jon then going out, leaving us, only Lady Tirana, who Sharon had never met before, remaining along with the headless body of the pirate there still bleeding on the carpet. The slave girl with the brandy bottle watching us all with dark glowing eyes that missed little of what went on there before her.

"I will fight, as will those who I brought with me," Lady Tirana spoke, holding Sharon's eyes with her own as she removed her veil. "It is not as you think. Your stepmother did not ask to be made a 'Queen' nor does she desire the death of Darlanis."

"Those faithful to me will obey my orders," I added, telling the slave girl to find something for my stepdaughter to wear. I saw the wench nod, briefly size Sharon up, and then leave. Lady Tirana and I helping Sharon to a sofa where we might sit beside her. Sharon was starting to shake now, a nervous reaction from what she had been put through in the cruel hands of the pirates. I gave her another glass of brandy, made her sip it slowly this time. Held her in my arms, stroked her hair as I used to do long ago. I could hear footsteps on the quarterdeck there above us.

"I saw Black Lady," Sharon spoke softly. "It scared that bitch that the pirates take orders from so badly that she actually cringed there on deck as you flew over." Tara no doubt was concerned that I might drop a NAPALM bomb from the airplane. I had to smile at that bit of information. Tara, being a well educated woman, knew of course what airplanes were. "I knew that you were flying it as there isn't anyone else in this era with an airplane and the pirates were all yelling 'ITS LORRAINE!' in terror." Sharon knew of course that I had been to Mars. I suppose she figured out that was where I got Black Lady and the force saber that she had witnessed in operation only a few minutes ago.

"What did they 'do' to Darlanis?" I asked, interested in the details from a medical viewpoint, it being

obvious to me that the pirates had punctured her uterus or caused some sort of similar internal injury. It was also obvious that neither they or Tara had anyone of the caste of Physicians with them, or it would have been an easy matter to treat Darlanis' infection with antibiotics. Such items, not being under THE EDICT, being more advanced than those of the 20th Century with which I am more familiar with. Now, however, I was worried as such infections are deadly.

"I heard a woman's screams a couple times," Sharon admitted, although whether or not they were Darlanis' or another's is a good question, the pirates having a number of other women that they were abusing, such being the survivors of the crew of the Ronda, some half dozen women who had faithfully served their captain, the burly muscular Shirl, once the wife of a fisherman.

An'na came in then with Sa-she-ra, along with Colonel Janet Layton of the Imperial Secret Service, who had a pleased smile on her face as she told me what had happened to the rest of the pirates that had come with their captain to the Janis. It appearing that the prostitutes of Thistle had slit their throats! Jon following her, giving me a happy smile as he told me that much to his surprise everyone aboard would follow their "QueenLorraine" wherever she went! Jon in turn followed by the slave girl I had sent for clothing for Sharon, the wench now carrying an outfit I saw was that of a Warriress, there being even weapons with it!

"Are you sure you want to do this?" I asked Sharon, my lovely golden girl standing there before me in the black of a Dularnian Warriress. She was wearing sword and dagger, and had a bow slung over her shoulder along with a quiver of arrows. The bruises on her face, the swelling of her lip gave her a "look" of sullen determination. As she nodded, I handed her my PPK .380, which Sharon calmly checked and thrust into her harness. Six shots, six lives. I did not think she would miss. She was no longer the girl I had brought with me into the 26th Century. She had been through far too much, seen far too much, and had far too much done to her to retain any of her girlhood innocence. At the tender age of sixteen she was now a hard-bitten Warriress whose hatred burned so hot inside her that nothing else mattered now!

"I'll be all right," Sharon smiled, taking my hand in hers. I could only pray that the burning hatred that now drove her would last long enough for her to complete what she wanted to do.

"We're putting all our eggs in one basket," Jon warned me with a final kiss as we swarmed down into the boats. I would go with Sharon to the Ronda. I had Sa-she-ra with me. Her skill with a bow was far superior to anyone else, her skill with a sword second only to mine. She was the match of Sentis Santa, who was a Queen of Swords. The Dularnian Warriress officer would be with An'na. She was big, strong, a good companion for An'na, who had trouble climbing ladders and such things due to the differences in gravity between Earth and Mars. With them was Stan Holt, who had seemed to have taken a "liking" for the big blonde haired Dularnian and she for him. We had four boats, our three and the pirates'. Enough to transport perhaps a hundred and twenty men and women. The Janis would follow us in under the command of the first officer. I had not brought the NAPALM bombs with me. There would be slave girls chained in the holds of the pirate vessels. This would have to be a hand to hand struggle!

"Boat ahoy!" the call came from the Ronda. I thought of Shirl who had died there on a pirate schooner's deck, standing beside the Empress of California. Sharon had told me what she had seen before the pirates had taken her. Darlanis had been brave, but somewhat lacking in tactical ability when the fight came. I recalled Sharon's words to the effect that I would have done a lot better! I recalled Jon's comments about seeing Sarnian Lady all lit up there in the fog. Darlanis was brave, but somewhat lacking in tactical ability. Beautiful, but not too "smart" when it came to fighting. I suspected that it was true, although it hardly mattered anymore. We would rescue her, take her back with us. She would live or die at least among friends.

Comment by Darlanis

I have never pretended to be a great military commander. I do respect Lorraine that way, as she is a very "crafty" wench when it comes to such things. Not that it would have made any difference in the end there aboard the Ronda, although I believe that she would have given a better account of herself than I did.

"Boat from the Janis!" one of our men called. The pirates knew that the Janis was close by. There was no value in claiming something that we were not. The pirate was apparently satisfied by our reply. He had in any case not sounded all that "sober".

"Hey who are ----" the man gasped, a softly glowing beam of force a meter in length then severing his head neatly from his body as I reached up with my force-saber. I thought once again of the movie "STAR WARS" as the head fell with a thump beside me!

Three pirates dropped the wenches they were pawing and whipped out their swords and charged me. I drew Jack's .38 and fired three times, dropping them. Leaving but one cartridge left in the five shot cylinder. Jack having fired one back in the 20th Century as I have mentioned if you go look back in this story to the first chapter where I took the gun away from him.* * Book One, Chapter One. (author)

A crossbow bolt whistled by my head, Sharon's return shot with my PPK a sharp bark as I saw the man fall there in the darkness. I could hear yelling from the other pirate vessels. Heard the sound of An'na's blaster. The sharp, high pitched crack, then that "THUMP" as the bullet exploded in some unlucky pirate's body! Another bolt dropping the man behind me as we charged across the deck, my force saber once again glowing in my hand! I saw men come boiling out of the forecastle, Sharon firing her remaining rounds into that swarming mass. I swung my force saber in a vicious arc, severing a pirate's body in two! Then it was a melee with everyone for themselves! I dealt death right and left, Sharon at my side, doing surprisingly well with a sword, the PPK now useless, there not being another cartridge for it anywhere on Earth! I had one cartridge left in the .38, but my force-saber was I felt then a more effective weapon at these close quarters! Sa-she-ra wonderful as she fought at Sharon's side, protecting her as much as she could. I had given her orders that Sharon's life must be protected at all costs. She was after-all the crown Princess of California. If Darlanis died as well she might from her injuries and abuse, then Sharon would be California's new ruler, although I would be under the laws of the Empire her regent until she came of age in another couple years.

I saw a pirate in terror leap over the side, then the rest of them followed, leaving us in command there on the bloody deck!

"Darlanis," Sharon breathed, Sa-she-ra in the lead as we headed towards the captain's cabin, our forces considerably reduced from the bloody battle with the pirates. It was then that I saw Princess Tara standing there, some sort of weapon leveled at us! A small weapon, not a crossbow, but a flintlock pistol!!!

"DIE, LORRAINE!" Tara screamed as I went for the .38 thrust into my harness with my left hand. I saw Sa-she-ra leap forward, saw the flash, the smoke as Tara fired, Sa-she-ra taking the bullet meant for me! With grim pleasure I swapped weapons and took careful aim at Princess Tara as she stood there before me, thumbing back the hammer for a better shot. The career of the "Princess of Darkness" had just come to an end! I am an excellent shot. Tara would die! And with her all the horrible evil she had brought into this world! I was "the Queen of Light" who would destroy "The Princess of Darkness" that SHE had spoken to me about! I drew back on the trigger, keeping the sights steady. Tara stood there in paralyzed terror. I have no doubt she knew "what" I held there in my hand. She had her shot. Sa-she-ra lay dying in Sharon's arms, her eyes upon me as they glazed in death. As her "blood-sister" it was my duty to avenge

her death. I had every intention of doing just that then as the hammer dropped! I had a good sight picture. My shot would pierce her evil heart!* * SHE warned me about "The Queen of Darkness", but I've always felt thatTarawas somehow her "understudy", you might say here. THE BOOK OF LYS mentions that there will someday be a great "battle" between the forces of Good and Evil in a "land of snows". I will let the reader draw what conclusion he may about all this...

There was but a muffled "click" as the defective primer failed to go off. That is the most logical reason I can think of. There is of course another, but I don't really believe that.

"Kill that damm bitch!" I screamed. "A thousand crowns for her body!" I screamed in enraged fury, flinging the useless revolver at her as Princess Tara dove over the side into the dark waters below! I am told that she is an excellent swimmer. She is dark haired, and was wearing dark clothing. That is perhaps why she survived to escape into the nearby forest. I can assure you that my people did their best to catch her. She would not have died a pleasant death at my hands. My hatred was too hot!!!

My forces ran to the side, shooting arrows, flinging spears, catapult rocks, ballistae javelins into the water at anything they saw below. But none ever hit the evil Princess, for she was as gone as if she had never existed. A number of pirates were not so lucky, butTaradid escape us and now is back in Baja. I have discussed with Darlanis the possibilities of joint military action, but asTarais quite friendly with the Empire of Mexico, Darlanis feels that such a war would be only a disaster for us! There is also the problem of Baja's alliance with Talon, asTaraholds the beautiful Princess of Talon as her "guest", Sela Dai presently holding the position of captain of her personal guards.

Chapter Thirty Three

Darlanis tried to raise herself from the wooden deck where she laid helplessly chained as we burst into the cabin, my force saber gleaming there in the still air of the captain's cabin. The once beautiful golden Empress falling back, that naked and once magnificent body now a mass of bloody welts, her face like a piece of raw meat from being repeatedly struck.Tarahad been obviously tormenting her as she laid in a fever, whipping her, striking her, no doubt making her few last hours here on Earth ones of torment! Darlanis has never spoken much of these matters. I have no doubt that she has no wish to relive again what she was put through at the cruel hands of the Princess of Baja!

"Lys!" a battle-hardened warrioress from the Janis gasped, seeing what had been done to Darlanis as I knelt down beside her, cutting her free of her chains with my force saber set on "low". Darlanis whispering my name, reaching out to me, sobbing, her naked body burning hot with fever!Sharonbeside me, stroking her golden hair as she held the sobbing woman's body in her own arms.

"I knew you would come," Darlanis sobbed to me. "I knew you would killTara. Avenge me." I told her thatTarastill lived, although not due to any lack of efforts on my part. I was still puzzled why the Smith & Wesson had failed me when the other cartridges in the cylinder had fired without any problems. I recalled what Tais had told me aboutTara. It seemed impossible. Mere superstition! YetTaraeven survived the Starfire's awesome energy bolts asAuroraordered its crew to fire upon the pirates!

"I used to be a pretty good doctor back in my own time," I assured the Empress, swiftly checking her injuries. WhileTarahad badly abused her, Darlanis didn't have any serious injuries that I could see except for that fever that left no doubts in my mind what had been done to the woman! The swiftness of the

fever puzzling me medically, although it appears now that human excrement had been introduced into the wound. Darlanis confirming my worst fears as she told me what had been done to her. The agony as she had been pierced internally by some drunken pirate with a belaying pin coated with human wastes only hours after capture!

"Lorraine!" the warrioress from the Janis screamed, a sudden powerful thunderclap deafening us all! The entire area as seen from the stern windows of the Ronda suddenly as brightly lit up as if some gigantic lightning bolt had just passed overhead! I heard yells of terror, saw another bright flash, then a brilliant beam of light that flashed searingly into action! A Lorr laser!

"Bring her, but be careful!" I snapped, dashing out so that I could see. The STARFIRE was floating there in the sky, glowing with infinite power! Another blinding, deafening thunderbolt leaping from its pointed bow to send hell-fire into the forest! I saw the running, fleeing figures of those pirates who had fled to shore there in its searchlights, then that searing beam of light as the Starfire turned "THE LIGHT THAT BURNS" upon them!

"We're on fire!" someone yelled, flames flickering from an open doorway that led into the forecastle. No doubt a lamp had been overturned in the fighting. Darlanis in the arms of two men from the Janis as I saw the big ramship edging up to us. Sharonyelling something about "below" as the Starfire again fired one of those awesome bolts of pure energy at the few remaining pirates. Its infrared sensors and such being able to see them in the darkness, although its searchlights lit the scene as bright as day. It was, I thought to myself, a fitting end for them all!

"Do what you can for Darlanis!" I snapped, aware that my stepdaughter had gone below with several other women. I ran to follow, fearing that we might just find more of the pirates! But none were to be found, only half a dozen women I quickly freed with my force-saber, cutting through their heavy chain with that glowing beam of light as if the heavy iron was nothing but a fog!

The Starfire had stopped firing when we came back up on deck, the Ronda's forecastle now a mass of flames, the Janis having backed away a bit, although there was still a boat left for us! I saw a couple of slipper shaped craft now floating in the air, the sight of them bringing back memories of my adventures there on Mars! Such being used to travel short distances over its surface. They are powered by energy cells, and supported by the Lorr anti-gravity technology. One such craft floating down to examine us closer, the pilot a lovely blonde haired woman that I immediately recognized as Aurora, An'na's own foster mother!

"My daughter! Is she all right?" Auroracried, almost crashing her craft into the deck as she came swooping down. Darlanis stirring at her words, a puzzled look briefly in her eyes as she regarded the woman in the silvery jumpsuit of a Lorr servant. I don't think she connected the words with her own "Anna". * * I now know the true meaning behind her words. I did not then.

"She is on another ship," I said. "This is Darlanis, her mother." Auroranodded, understanding why I didn't want to speak further. I prayed that nothing had happened to An'na. That some pirate crossbowman hadn't put a foot of steel through her heart.

"She lives?" Auroraasked, looking over at Darlanis there. She seemed surprisingly "interested" in Darlanis for some reason.

"We have her, but she is badly hurt," I said, grasping her arm. Darlanis of course knew nothing of what I had learned on Mars. That Aurorahad raised her own Anna as her own daughter.

"She must not die, not now!" Aurorasobbed, stroking the cruelly battered face of the woman she had so badly "wronged" twelve years ago. "Not until I can explain everything to her!"* * And believe me,Aurora did have a lot to "explain" about things, but that's also "another story" as they say. (Darlanis)

"Who are you?" Darlanis gasped, puzzled by all this, Aurora now clinging to Darlanis, stroking her, touching her as the two men from the Janis held the badly injured Empress of California.

"I am a woman who did you a great wrong!"Aurorawept then! Perhaps she believed from Darlanis' appearance that she was now dying. "I raised your daughter as my own!" Darlanis giving her a puzzled look, the Queen no doubt quite "confused" by all this!

"Later!" I snapped. This was not the time for this now! I prayed we had not been too late to save Darlanis. The pirates were all dead except for perhaps a few who managed to reach the safety of the woods and hide between the trees where the Starfire's sensors would have been unable to detect them. I huggedSharonto me, glad that Darlanis was still alive despite whatever the future might bring when she recovered (if she did) from the terrible horrors that had been inflicted upon her helpless body!

"'Mother'," An'na wept as she stroked Darlanis' hair there aboard the Starfire. The physician assisting me as I studied the scanning device and what it showed. It was obvious that the Empress' uterus was infected, and that the infection was spreading through her body. Darlanis reaching up, stroking her face, whispering her name as she had once long ago named her "Anna".Aurorawatching silently,Sharonstanding nervously to one side, one eye on me and the other on Darlanis, whose appearance did little to settle my stepdaughter's nerves. I had givenSharonan injection. It seemed to be of little effect despite what the Martian doctor had said. I knew our losses had been heavy. Jon had told me as we took Darlanis aboard the Starfire. Carl Talen was dead, as was Sentis Santa and Stan Holt. Sa-she-ra would be buried at sea with the rest. They would all stand before SHE together. Janet Layton of the Imperial Secret Service was dead of a crossbow bolt through the heart. She had died in the service of her own ruler. I think that was the way that she would have wanted it to be. We had lost fifty seven to the pirates. The toll might run higher yet. I had given the Janis' physician and my own personal physician that I had brought with me the medicines from the Starfire. Enough of the modified Lorr venom to place them all in that state of near suspended animation until we could treat them all. Some if bad enough might even be put into the "Cold Sleep" and taken to Mars for treatment there, the Starfire's own medical equipment being rather limited, not all that much better than the Janis'! I wondered what Raspa would do when she learned that Aurorahad used the Starfire to rescue Darlanis!

"You are my dear Anna," Darlanis whispered in reply, her eyes glowing into those of An'na. She was now paralyzed from the waist down by a medical version of Lorr venom. It is ideal for surgical operations as it slows all body functions considerably!

"I am going to have to remove your uterus," I told Darlanis. "The danger of infection is too great to make any other choice medically advisable." I could try to wash her out, perhaps have her taken to Mars under "Cold Sleep", and treated there, but I did not think it would be possible to save her uterus now that I had seen what I had on the scanner. I saw Darlanis' eyes glisten with tears as she heard the news. I took her hand into mine and said, "You have Anna and Sharon. They are yours." I saw the two clasp hands, take Darlanis' hands in theirs. Saw the tears in their eyes as they looked down at the battered body before them.

"'Do' what you have to do,Lorraine," Darlanis answered, the tone of her voice one of "defeat". I suspected she had heard of what had happened in Trelandar. Heard that I was now Queen of Trelandar. She had said nothing about it, but I sensed that it had "hurt" her terribly. Her "dream" had been destroyed. Now I would take from her that which made her a woman. Leaving her an empty "shell". I

wondered if Tais might be able to help her. On the Starfire was a machine that could reprogram minds. The Lorr version of electronic hypnosis that Janet Rogers had once used to take over the world back in the 21st Century and remake it into what she had believed would be a better world for all of Mankind.

"It would be best if everyone left now," I said. I did not wish them all to stand and watch me cut into Darlanis. See the blood, smell the odor of the infection as I cut her open. I asked the Martian physician to cover Darlanis' eyes. She would feel no pain, I knew that from my own experiences there on Mars.

"She will live," I told An'na and Aurora as they sat there waiting outside to hear the news of how the operation had come out. I had once considered a career as a surgeon after I got out of the military, but masculine prejudice against women had been too great back then and I finally decided to become a "shrink" instead. "I think she would like to see you both right now," I added with a smile. Darlanis lived, but I did not think we would ever have the relationship between us that we once had. That had died with Sanda's crowning me the Queen of Trelandar. I wondered if my "crown" was worth what it had cost Darlanis in return. There were others who needed my attention, my skills just then.

Chapter Thirty Four

"The Squala is in sight," the warrioress said who had been sent down from the quarterdeck. The first officer had died of his injuries from a pirate crossbow bolt despite my best efforts. Lady Tirana stood with a crutch beside me, her right leg wrapped in bandages from where the sword had slashed her thigh. Aurorasitting at Darlanis' side with the lovely golden haired An'na of Mars as the sun now rose brightly over the trees there in the east. Sharonstanding beside her beloved Empress. Darlanis on a stretcher, weak, pale, her face drawn, dark with bruises, her body covered by a blanket. I had tried to speak to her, but she had only turned her head away. Even Sharonseemed a bit "hostile" towards me. We were now having burial service. The men and women of the Janis drawn up in their ranks. My own people, what remained of them in their own formation. About half the "hip-swingers" had survived. Six of the cadets from theWarrioressAcademywould stand beforeLys. The bodies there beneath the blankets now numbered sixty. There were another half a dozen on the Starfire racing towards Mars now stored in "Cold Sleep". I wondered if they would survive their wounds or perhaps end up buried somewhere on that ruddy desert world up there in the sky.

"Inform her to heave to and wait for our signal," Jon spoke from beside me. His left arm was bandaged from a sword thrust. We were battered, bruised, tired, but still proud of what we had done. "We" had won the victory, I pointed out, not the Starfire!

Standing before them all, I said, "It will be said by some that they gave their lives in vain, that little was accomplished here, but those who say such things are liars, for much was accomplished here last night. Much that in the history of our world will never be forgotten. We stood together against a common foe, all of us. We were not Dularnians, or Trelandarians, or even Californians. We fought for higher ideals than those of our countries, of our societies. We fought for something that separates us from the beasts, for our Honor. For something precious without which as history has shown, we become 'less' than human."

"Sword salute!" Jon snapped, all of us drawing our blades. Once again I carried the sword I had once pledged to Darlanis. I felt it proper. I would see that her "dream" did not die even if she no longer believed in it. Together we could do for Mankind what neither of us could do as the individualQueensof

our countries. Perhaps someday she would understand that, I prayed. I saw Darlanis raise a sword in her hand, An'na helping her, the blade shaking in the sunlight as she too saluted those who had died. I felt tears come to my eyes as I saw the scene. We were "enemies" now in a way, but yet I hoped she would someday understand that I had not betrayed her. Her recovery from surgery would take time. I was her "attending physician". She would have to "put up with me" for a while more if she liked it or not!

I had to smile to myself as Gayle stepped up on to the deck of the Janis after the boat from the Squala had hooked on to our gangway. She was dressed as the Princess of Trelandar, even to the long gray silken gown and the diamond studded tiara. I, the Queen, on the other hand was sweaty, dirty, no doubt badly in need of a bath, and looked like something as I sometimes hear men say, "rode hard and put away wet". I was tired, my clothing splattered with blood from the surgery I had done. The wounded I had treated. The hands I had held as they died while I was still trying to save them with all my skills. I fear I did not present a very good picture of the Queen of Trelandar for Gayle to greet!

Gayle turned to the Squala and waved. I wondered for a moment why she did, then I saw men removing something from the ship's catapults, which to my shock I saw had been readied for firing! The red spheres even at that distance were unmistakable!

"Had I not waved, they had orders to attack," Gayle spoke in level tones that made a shiver go down my spine. "Two for this ship, two each for the others." We had with us the two captured prizes. The Ronda had burned to the waterline. We had burned the other schooner rather than leave it. "You would have been avenged." She would have of course died. I felt the tears come to my eyes. She was of the Warriresses. I took her in my arms, crushed her to me. Darlanis had her Sharon. I had my Gayle. I had my "Princess". She had two of hers. One from the 20th Century, and the other from a world only a dot of light in the sky!

"Had the pirates 'won', they would have been a very serious threat to Trelandar and Sarn to the north," Gayle said with a smile as we watched Squala disarm itself of my terrifying NAPALM! "Sanda told me to make sure that they didn't," she added, glancing about. It being quite obvious that we had been in a fight.

"They didn't 'win'," I smiled, remembering. Sa-she-ra was gone. Carl Talen was gone. Sentis Santa, Stan Holt. Janet Layton. Others I had known only the brief time I had been their "Lady" and for a few days, their Queen. I still had my Warlady, Hara Eslund, and my first and most dear friend, Lady Tirana. She had suffered her losses, I had suffered mine. Her leg would always bear the scar of the injury she had suffered. My scars were internal, where they didn't show. I had lost Sharon, Darlanis.

"Empress Darlanis, Princess Sharon, may I introduce Princess Gayle of Trelandar," I said, Gayle standing at my side. Sharon's eyes were icy cold, frigid. She had made her decision. I hoped she was happy with it. I did not believe that what Darlanis now "represented" would survive for long. What Sanda had done for Trelandar she could do for Sarn too. There would be a new "Empire", but it would be ruled by me, not by that golden bitch now lying there on the stretcher that we had wasted sixty lives for!

"Pretty fancy clothes for some jumped up slave girl," Sharon snapped back. Gayle had been a slave girl only a month before. I suppose Darlanis' Imperial Secret Service had reported that to her. Sharon had no doubt learned that from Darlanis' own lips.

"I would much prefer to have some 'jumped up slave girl' as my Princess than a 'snooty bitch' like you," Darlanis suddenly snapped! "The way you've treated your own stepmother after all she's risked for us both disgusts me more than you can ever realize." I think you could have heard a pin drop as everyone heard Darlanis! Sharon suddenly breaking down in tears and fleeing to a hatchway where she might be

away from all the eyes now on her!

"My deepest apologies, Princess Gayle," Darlanis said, giving me a wink as if to say Sharon had coming what she had gotten!

"Gladly accepted," Gayle answered, taking Darlanis' hand in hers. "You are everything that Lorraine said that you would be."

"And what has Lorraine said about me?" Darlanis asked. I felt it best to take my leave then, and go see where Sharon went. Aurora giving An'na a hug as the two "Martians" watched us all. Aurora having told me that Darlanis had "forgiven" her, even saying that perhaps it was for the "best" as things had turned out!

I found Sharon down on the lower deck, where the ship's stores are kept below the waterline. Among the barrels, the dim light from the hatches above shedding but the dimmest of illumination. I heard her sobbing before I saw her, crouched down in among the barrels, a pitiful little thing, all curled up, sobbing as if she had just lost everything ever dear to her in the entire world. She was still a girl of sixteen, a lost little waif in a world not her own. A world that had hurt her terribly, caused her to suffer torments as few young girls ever suffer and live. A world where the two women she loved had now turned upon each other. Where her foster mother was now the enemy of her step mother. A world where she was torn between two hostile monarchs whose armies might one day soon be marching against each other's.

"Sharon," I said softly, placing my hand on her, squatting down before her. "I know what you have been through, what you have suffered. What some damn unthinking fools on this ship have told you just because they hate Darlanis so much and want to 'get even' with her any way that they can, including hurting you if they can just hurt her too." I thought of Sanda Talen. Of her burning hatred for Darlanis, everything that Darlanis stood for.

"Lorraine, I just want to go home," Sharon sobbed as I took her in my arms. "Go home with you. Make it like it used to be!" I knew better than that. It could never be the same as it once was. As the saying goes, "you can never go home again". Sharon was now Darlanis' own foster daughter. She belonged with her.

"Is that truly what you want, or are you just mad at Darlanis and can think of nothing else that would hurt her more?" I asked, taking her face, and forcing her to look into my eyes. I recalled too what Queen Tulis had once done to Darlanis long ago.

"Jon," I said to him as he stood there, "Inform Squala that we are setting sail for home." Adding with a smile, "I'd like to sleep in my own bed tonight." He would of course sleep with me. Sharon standing there, looking on, her eyes still a bit red and puffy. Gayle still there with Darlanis, An'na sitting at her side clad in the form fitting jumpsuit of the woman of Mars. She had fired all the cartridges in the blaster at her hip, I recalled. All twenty five rounds. Sent the souls of twenty five pirates to face their final judgment. She had obtained a full clip there on the Starfire before it went racing back to Mars. I had also recharged my amazing force saber, although I would reserve it for those few times when it was actually called for. I saw Aurora standing there by the rail, looking out at the sea. At a "world" that was as "alien" to her as Mars had been to me! She was wearing sunglasses now against the glare of the sunlight.

"I'm sorry," Sharon said in a soft voice to Gayle, "I hope you can forgive me for acting like a fool in front of everyone." I saw Darlanis smile. It wasn't a big smile, but it was a smile!

"In oars!" Jon barked. "Ready with those ropes!" The Janis now creeping in towards the dock. Black Lady drawn up on shore where I had left her after our landing the day before. I would have to figure out how to repair the wing and the fuel tank. For now, however, I had a more serious problem as I saw

Sanda standing there waiting for us, her daughter, my Mara, and Ta-she-ra beside her. We had paid a very high "price" for getting Darlanis back. For ridding Trelandar of that one group of pirates that had been Princess Tara's own lackeys. We had taken papers off the two captured schooners. They might tell us much of what had gone on. What we might do to defend ourselves now against Tara!

Squala and the two former pirate schooners coming in behind us, anchoring in deeper water. I had my own "Navy" now. Doubtless Darlanis was well aware of that fact. That I had the means to fight back should she decide to try to reconquer Trelandar. I was a more able military leader than her, and unlike Queen Paula, I was more than a match for Darlanis if it came to a sword duel!

"Lorraine, where's my husband?" Sanda breathed as I stepped down from the gangplank and took her in my arms, drawing Ta-she-ra to me also. I shook my head in the negative. Told her the truth. Our losses had been heavy. Ta-she-ra looked up into my face, her eyes wet with tears. Her mother was gone. Gone to that place in the sky where the hunting was always good and there were no pale-face slavers to steal women and kill their husbands.

"That's not our Gayle!" Sanda gasped, her eyes blurred with tears as Sharon stepped down to stand beside me. I had suggested that they not carry Darlanis down as of yet. That would have been too much of a blow for even Sanda to take. She had lost her husband, and lost her dreams of vengeance against Queen Darlanis!

"This is Sharon Duval, my stepdaughter from the 20th Century," I said, introducing Sharon to Sanda. I could feel the hostility. Sharon was the Imperial Princess. Darlanis' own legal successor to the golden throne of the Empire of California!

"I'm sorry, but I've just 'lost' my husband for you," Sanda said, the tears running down her cheeks, perhaps believing that at least Darlanis was dead and gone! Sanda was well dressed, the usual blue silken blouse and soft black leather riding skirt that she likes. A sword at her hip. High heeled boots, glistening with polish. She is an attractive woman. Capable, competent. I think highly of her. Her advice is usually well worth following.

"We have all lost much," Sharon answered in soft tones. I had "coached" her a bit about Sanda. Warned Darlanis. I didn't know what Sanda would do when she saw that Darlanis still lived!

"Ta-she-ra," I said, taking her hands in mine as I squatted down before her, "Your mother was my 'blood-sister' and by the blood we shared you are now my daughter just like Mara." Ta-she-ra nodding, her dark liquid eyes glistening into my own.

"You good with sword, but need to practice with bow more," Ta-she-ra smiled back, moving into my arms. She is a good girl. Someday I think that there will be friendship between Trelandar and her people, the nomadic and barbaric Nevadas there beyond the mountains, and she will play a major role in making that happen.

"There's a lot of fighting going on, but we're 'winning'," Sanda said to me as I walked back to her, Gayle now having joined Sharon there on the dock as more people streamed off the Janis. Boats pulling from the schooners anchored further out. I wondered what would happen when she learned that Darlanis yet lived. The Revolution was turning out to be "bloodier" than any of us had first thought. There were those who believed in Darlanis. I feared that Sanda might not understand why I had saved Darlanis. Why Darlanis now lived when her own husband had died there on a pirate schooner. Such is often hard for any woman to understand.

"We have Darlanis," I said to Sanda. "I saved her life."

Chapter Thirty Five

"You are `the Lady Sanda Harles'?" Darlanis said to Sanda as we entered the captain's cabin where Darlanis laid. With us were Gayle and Sharon. Jon stood to one side. I wondered how he felt about the woman. She was the enemy of his people. The woman who had begun a war that had killed thousands over the years. The same Empress who had unleashed upon the innocent people of Dularn that vicious, sadistic Princess Tara, a woman that was more like some rabid dog than anything that belonged to the human race! Now she had gone completely insane, and become only a vicious and cruel inhuman monster, dangerous to all, even to that tall golden beauty she had once served so faithfully before their duel a couple months ago! Tarawas no doubt mentally unstable, unbalanced. Perhaps, I suspected, even "possessed" by a "demoness" from Hell!

"I am the sister of Queen Paula, whom you `murdered'," Sanda answered in icy cold tones standing before her. "Damn your black soul to hell!" Darlanis merely smiled, as if she little cared for what Sanda thought. I had disarmed Sanda. I feared for her.

"If it hadn't been for Lorraine, no doubt you would have gotten your wish by now," Darlanis answered in level tones. She is a proud woman. A true Queen. Not another "innocent idealist" like me who has been "used" by others to suit their own ends.

"We all make mistakes," Sanda snapped. "Even Lorraine."

"You would not have saved my life?" Darlanis asked.

"Would you have saved mine?" Sanda asked back.

"Without any hesitation," Darlanis answered.

"Why?" Sanda asked, no doubt muchly puzzled.

"I am of the Warriresses," Darlanis smiled.

"The Caste Codes?" Sanda ventured in reply.

"I am `She-Ra'," Darlanis then smiled back.

"`She-Ra'?" Sanda breathed, puzzled considerably.

"A woman who goes around doing good," Darlanis explained.

"A 20th Century cartoon character," I explained smiling.

"A Warriress both brave and sometimes foolish," Darlanis explained. "One who like me believes in something more than herself. One who has dreams of a better world for all of Mankind."

"And one who has been responsible for the death of thousands," Sanda answered, standing there. "Innocent people who did nothing to deserve their deaths, Darlanis. Innocent women, little children put to the sword. How do you answer that? You sent Princess Tara to Trelandar like a rabid dog to kill and destroy!"

"I wanted too much," Darlanis answered. "I `used` Tara because she always `won` and I didn't ask `how` she obtained the results that she did. And when the word came to me of what she was doing, it was too easy to not to listen, not to believe." I had no doubt that was how it had happened. I understood even if the others could not. I saw Jon nod, his eyes meet mine. Tara had been there on the Island of Flowers at Darlanis' own orders.

"Let he who is without sin cast the first stone," I said. Such is in THE BOOK OF LYS. I was more familiar perhaps with the reference than Sanda, who was not a "religious" person and considered such things as best left for the education of children.

"I don't have a `Tara`," Sanda answered, regarding me. No doubt she considered herself quite morally superior to Darlanis.

"But had you one you would have used her," I answered back. There was no need for an answer. I knew the truth. So did she. I thought of incidents I knew back in the 20th Century. It is too easy "to look the other way" when such things happen. I did not think that Sanda would have done any different had the roles been reversed. There are always "Tara's" to do your dirty work!

"Like Darl Jord has used the pirates for his own ends to discredit his own mother," Jon added. We had just gotten done dealing with some of those. Tara and Darl Jord were now no doubt working together hand in hand from the papers we had found. From what Sharon had told me. The forces of "evil" were now combined up against the forces of "good". Darlanis and I on one side, her own brother and the evil Princess Tara there on the other side.

"Whenever we `want` something bad enough we don't think of what the final results might be," Sharon added as she sat beside Darlanis. I could see the fatigue there in Darlanis' face. Yet I suspected that she wanted all this to come out. That she wanted Sanda to "understand" even if she would never approve of what she had once done because she wanted to see her "dreams" become real. I knew that Darlanis wished to be "a second Janet Rogers". She did not understand the truth about Janet Rogers, that what we did not "need" was another of her type now ruling all of Mankind.

"The end justifies the means," Gayle smiled, wiser than her years. An'na nodding, keeping her thoughts to herself. I knew she was torn between her love for her mother and her love of what Lorr technology could give her. The excitement of colonizing a new world, of seeing the stars from the surfaces of other worlds. Auroras at there to one side, keeping her thoughts to herself. I wondered what she thought of Darlanis now. Of what Darlanis had become. If she still even thought of Darlanis as a "barbarian". * * Lorraine of course had no knowledge of the "truth" here, although I think she did suspect what it was later on. (Darlanis)

"And sometimes the means we use destroys the end we seek," I added. I had done something similar. I had given Janet Rogers the means to become the first World Leaderess. At first I was proud that I had played my little part in all that, but now I had learned the truth. That Janet was a woman who had towards the end of her life become almost another like say Lenin. Hard, unbending, unyielding. Unwilling to even allow that she might be mistaken in any of her decisions. I wondered if it had been her orders, carried out after her death, that had lead up to The War. Whether or not Domino Tremaine, her Warlady, had just "followed orders" that Janet had given her before her death there by Mars?

I suggested then that we allow Darlanis to rest, as I could see that she was getting considerably fatigued by all this. As it was only twelve hours after her surgery I was amazed that she had done as well as she had. She was of course a "young" woman in the prime of her life, physically being in her middle twenties despite the fact that she was actually a little older than I am.

"My arm's pretty sore," Jon said as he held me in his arms. I had drunk a considerable amount of coffee to stay awake even this long. I didn't know if my body would respond very well or not after everything I had gone through. I had cautioned Darlanis not to expect too much for a while that way herself. Her vaginal sheath had been like a raw piece of meat. Sharon's had been but little better. I still wondered why Jack's revolver had failed to fire that last cartridge when all the others had gone off O.K.

"You're making love to a Queen," I smiled, rolling over on top of him. "Relax and enjoy it," I said, fitting myself to him. Clamping his thighs between mine. I knew that Darlanis made love that way, "riding" those who she had selected to "please" her. It was a part of the legends that surrounded her. She had once admitted that she actually didn't enjoy it that much, but that it was expected of her because she was "dominant" in her appearance.

"One who is delightfully competent at everything she does," he observed, running his unhurt hand down my back to my buttocks. I thought of Sanda Talen, of the new life she carried inside her. Recalled the time that Lady Tirana and I had seen her making love to her husband there in her office. I found the thought sexually arousing. My kisses became bites as I "rode" Jon. It wasn't long until I gasped and squirmed in the throes of sexual orgasm.

"You're really good at that," Jon observed as we laid together afterwards. He was stroking me, caressing me a bit. Easing me back down. I was tempted to say the same about him. His lovemaking left nothing to be desired. We were well matched that way. Why he loved me I no longer questioned. I have no doubt he sees in me something not visible to other eyes. Jon says that I have a "depth" to me that he's never seen in any other woman. I suppose I do have certain "qualities" that he's not likely to find elsewhere. Even Jack used to have to admit that I was good when it came to making love. His major objection to me was that I wasn't good looking. That I didn't have big breasts, wide hips like the wives of other men. That I was "hard looking", not feminine in my appearance like most women. That I had a "lesbian" look about myself. That last I really objected to, as I am not that sort of a woman despite whatever I might look like to some.

"And outside of the bedroom?" I teased, kissing him. I was wet, sweaty, still "juicy" from having made love. His come was inside my vaginal sheath. I usually douche later on so that I don't "drip" during the night and end up staining the bed sheets.

"I look at you and think that I'm the most fortunate man of all time to be married to you after some of the sluts I've known," he said, doubtlessly referring here to Gayle's older sister, who would no doubt have her own opinions of the matter too.

"You haven't been with me when I get into one of my 'moods'," I smiled, wiggling closer, fitting myself to him. I enjoy being "held", just being with him. I sometimes enjoy a bit of "teasing", although it all depends what sort of mood I am in.

"And when you do?" he asked, caressing a bare nipple. I do often go without "clips" when we are alone so that he can see my nipples beneath my clothing. It is considered quite erotic for a woman to do so here in the 26th Century. Not really "proper" for any woman of "breeding" to ever do so. I once horrified Sanda by suggesting that I might go "bare nipples" beneath my formal gown at some royal affair. I had to

laugh at how upset she became!

"Just remember that my bark is worse than my bite," I told him, snuggling up, hoping that he would understand that I was not "perfect", that there were times I just needed to be left alone.

"QueenLorraine! Hail Queen Lorraine!" the people cheered as I stood there tall and regal in my black silken gown before the crowd there on the dock, the golden crown of the Queen of Trelandar there upon my head resting in my coal black hair. My long slim blade at my hip. The Janis tied to the dock behind me. I spoke briefly to them, telling them that a new day was dawning for Trelandar. That their sons, their daughters would no longer be sent to fight a winless war there in the north. That the oppressive taxes collected by the Lords and Ladies imposed upon them by Queen Darlanis to fight that war would be coming to an end. That their sons, their daughters, would be going to school to learn to read, to write, to "figure", and to get a good moral education as future citizens and citizenesses of free Trelandar!

"No longer will you be represented by those who have no interest in your welfare. No more will you be exploited," I spoke, telling them of the new day that was dawning for Trelandar. Now, I explained to them, there would be free elections for the Senate, and the same would be true for qualified candidates to represent them now in the House of Representatives. I avoided going into further detail, having found it to be usually a waste of time. My speeches were more "rhetoric" than anything else. The admiration of the crowd excited me. I could understand why men had followed someone like Hitler. Why evil men had been able to take over entire countries just on the power of the spoken word!

"QueenLorraine! QueenLorraine!" the crowd cheered. Sometimes I wondered what they were really cheering for. Often I did not really say that much, but it didn't seem to matter anymore! I had been "touring" the coast ofTrelandarnorth of my estates. Stopping wherever I felt it worthwhile. Speaking to the people. Giving them something to fight for if Darlanis decided to try to regain the southern part of her "Empire" by force of arms. I did not think she would try it, but one could never be sure of that! She seemed to be rather "hostile" towards me, and no doubt felt that I had betrayed her trust in me. I could understand how she felt. EvenSharonhad seemed "distant". The Revolution had been so far relatively bloodless, although I did not think that would continue for long once those loyal to Darlanis rallied their own forces against us. I hated to think of the bloodshed that could once again occur. Sanda had told me stories of the conquest of Trelandar by the forces from Sarn under the command of Darlanis.

"Think you can fix it?" Queen Darlanis asked from beneath her sun awning as she watched An'na and me working on Black Lady. Both of us verbally cursing the crude tools of the 26th Century. The lack of "proper equipment" to do a repair that would have been simple back in the 20th Century. No fiberglass, no replacement parts. None of the equipment necessary to do the job right! No aluminum sheeting, riveting tools! One gets very frustrated!Aurorahad been "careless". Her sunburn was doubtlessly painful. She had forgotten the "power" of Earth's sun on a woman like her!

"Any suggestions, your majesty?" I snapped back, not in the best of moods. Jon wisely keeping his thoughts to himself as he watched. Gayle and Sharon both wading in the water, stripped to clips and straps. They did look a little like twin sisters, althoughSharonis a touch fuller bodied and Gayle is a little taller thanSharon. Darlanis giving me a smile as she nodded. I hoped she was "enjoying" herself seeing us working, sweating like we were. Lying there in the sun, getting a tan, without seemingly a care in the world! Naked but for her clips and strap. The scars of my surgery four days ago now healing amazingly swiftly!

Lady Sanda was now down in Trella with the Squala busy taking care of things. There was vicious

fighting starting south of the city between those loyal to me and those still yet loyal to Darlanis. It was my hope to fly there tomorrow and try to avert further bloodshed. Try to get some sort of "agreement" that would allow everyone to live in peace with each other. I would take Darlanis with me if she would co-operate in this. Perhaps the two of us could stop this bloodshed before it went any further. Before Trelandar was "split" in two by political hatreds!

"Ships are sheathed with copper," Darlanis ventured, "And I think you would be able to fit some to that wing." Perhaps not here on my estate, but Trella had a shipyard, Darlanis pointed out. Obviously she was not the "dumb blonde" that I had thought!

I listened to Aurorasings, her voice so beautiful that I cursed the fact that I had no way of "recording it". She is said to be the "best" on Mars among the lovely women of that world. I saw Darlanis watching her, saw the tears in her eyes. It had "worked out" better than I had hoped between Darlanis and Aurora.

"She is a beautiful woman," Jon said to me, listening to Aurora, my head against his shoulder. I thought so too. Darlanis turned, gave me a smile. I thought that perhaps there was "hope" now that the relationship we'd once "had" before could be again!

Chapter Thirty Six

"You shouldn't be asking this of her yet," Sharon said to me as she helped Darlanis climb inside Black Lady the next morning. The expression on her lovely bruised face proof of the pain she still felt as she settled herself in the seat next to me. What she had gone through there at the hands of Princess Tara and her pirates well displayed there upon that magnificent body by the brevity of her attire, the Empress once again wearing that golden costume she had worn the day that she had been captured just over a week ago. It was only five days since her operation. In my own era she would still have been in a hospital bed, but the medical technology of the Lorr is far beyond anything I knew back in my own time. That amazing "glue" that is used now having healing powers almost undreamed of by the finest surgeons of the 20th Century. Darlanis' own swift recovery having amazed her surgeon.

"There are lives at stake," Darlanis answered for me. She is truly "She-Ra". A woman with ideals, dreams, a personal code of morality that is almost beyond understanding. We had found her clothing, her golden armor, her amazing bow, everything there aboard the Ronda only a few feet away from where she laid chained to the deck. Perhaps Princess Tara had kept such as a personal trophy of some sort. In any case we had all of Darlanis' things.

"I love you," Sharon said, kissing her cheek. Gayle standing there on the dock, frowning to herself. I knew her feelings about Sharon. The fears she felt that she might be replaced in my own affections by my 20th Century stepdaughter. There was a touch of hostility between the two lovely teenage Princesses. I had discussed the matter with Darlanis only this morning while we had a lousy breakfast. Our regular cook off sick, his replacement being totally and completely worthless. None of us knew of course that she was actually an agent of the evil Princess Tara!

"Like to come, Gayle?" I asked. Gayle shook her head. I fear that my first flight with Black Lady had left the impression in everyone's mind that "going up" with me was about in the same category as such things as going fishing for Squalas in a canoe!

"I'm not as brave as Darlanis," Gayle smiled back. Darlanis didn't look too delighted about the idea either, no doubt wondering if I had only rescued her from the pirates and Princess Tara to get her killed in an airplane crash! "Let Sharongo instead."

"No," Darlanis answered, settling that issue right now. Even An'na had turned me down after that first flight. Saying I was no doubt a good pilot, but she'd prefer a safer type of aircraft to ride in. Preferably one shaped like a three hundred foot cylinder and built with good old reliable Lorr technology as updated by the lovely women of Mars! An'na had told me that she planned to return to Mars on the Starfire when it returned. She had told Darlanis that she would visit her from time to time, but that she had her own life to lead and that she would never make a good daughter now that she had experienced the life that she had. Darlanis had taken it without showing much emotion, but I have no doubt that she was still "hurt" there inside by An'na's words. Aurora would remain on the Earth, but as the ambassador to Trelandar, which I think really didn't "delight" Darlanis that much! I suspected too that Raspa had told Aurora to keep an eye on me.

"Here's your orange juice," Sharon said to me. I had gotten a supply of fresh oranges and had some squeezed for the juice. I enjoy fresh orange juice, but it is not usually available here in Trelandar except by trade with fabled Talon, which lies in the same area where in the 20th Century such things were once grown.

"It doesn't appear all that difficult to fly this," Darlanis observed watching my hands on the controls as we lifted off in a rooster tailed spray of water. The Pacific was calm enough that I could make my take off from the cove rather than over land as before. I had not bothered to refuel as I had enough to reach Trella with ample to spare, the plane having a range of well over five hundred miles even on only one wing tank. I mention these facts now at this time only because of what happened later on.

"It's not really that hard," I smiled, seeing those lovely azure eyes glowing into mine like those of a little child with a new toy. I love Darlanis very much. She is to me what Janet Rogers was back in the 20th Century in a way, but yet different.

"Could you show me how?" she asked, a hint of a pleading note in her voice. As the plane has dual controls, it was an easy matter to let her take the wheel, make a few easy turns and climbs. Let her get the feel of the Beechcraft while I explained to her something of the principles involved in flying an airplane like mine. Darlanis having a surprising "talent" that amazed me. She seemed to have a "head" for flying that utterly surprised me!

"Want some orange juice?" I asked, pouring myself a big cup of it from the bottle I had brought with me. Darlanis now flying the plane with a gleeful delight like a child with some new toy. Darlanis shaking her head in the negative as I took a big swallow, noticing that it didn't taste as good as I had first hoped. There was an odd flavor to it that I couldn't place, but yet felt I should know. I suspected that someone had squeezed the oranges too hard and had gotten some of the flavor of the rind into it.

"This is fun!" Darlanis laughed as I explained the meaning of some of the instruments to her. The Empress forgetting for the moment the pain, discomfort she still had in her abdomen where I had removed her uterus only five days ago. The incision was concealed by her brief skirt, being quite low on her abdomen, just above where her strap ordinarily covered her. I had checked it that morning. Her recovery amazed me, but she was "young", in excellent health, and possesses a "vitality" that I can only envy! She is in every way a truly wonderful woman I love dearly!

"Watch your airspeed or you'll stall out and go into a spin," I warned her. Darlanis wanted to try that, but I had no desire to demonstrate a spin, being terrified of them myself with good reason. Its a good

way to "buy the farm" if you "goof up"!

"I'd like to know what to do though if it happens," Darlanis smiled back. I promised that I would show her sometime later on. Secretly hoping that she'd forget about it, as it is not something I like to do, as I have a terrifying fear that I won't be able to "recover" in time and I actually will crash the plane! I am a good pilot, but I am also usually a "careful" one too, I might add here. Of course the reader may disagree with me here, considering how I managed to arrive here in this era with Sharon by flying into a "Gateway", but that was something that I've never been able to figure out just why I did what I did back then!

"That's odd," I muttered a while later, feeling a growing numbness in my fingers and toes. Darlanis at the moment playing with the plane's throttle, pushing it in and out, varying the engine speed. Noticing that we either climbed or descended depending upon how it was set. We were perhaps thirty miles or so out from Trella. Just about where we had earlier fought the pirates.

"Something wrong?" she asked, regarding me as she sat there beside me with her hands on the wheel, flying the plane with a skill that amazed me for this being only her first "flying lesson". The numbness rapidly growing in my hands and feet, my feet now almost without any feeling in them. They felt heavy, lumpy. There was no doubt in my mind that the orange juice had been poisoned! And by one of Princess Tara's agents, I had no doubt!!!

"We'd better get down," I said to the golden haired Queen, taking the controls. I prayed that I would live long enough to get us down. Darlanis could taxi on the ocean to Trella even if I died from whatever poison had been placed in the orange juice!

"There is something wrong with you!" Darlanis observed as I started to take the plane down toward the ocean below. I could no longer use my feet at all, and my hands were growing more numb by the second. It was almost as if I had been given a dose of LORR VENOM! I could feel the paralysis effect starting already!

"I've been poisoned," I spoke, terror filling my thoughts, my tongue already heavy, slurring my speech. "It was the orange juice." I could hardly fly now. "That damn Tara!" The plane started to drop off on one wing, swing around as I fought to retain control just long enough to get us down. I had no doubt that Princess Tara had been the one behind all this now! I was losing control! We were going to go spin out and crash into the sea! Darlanis forced the wheel around and brought the nose up level as the gently rolling sea below came racing up to meet us!

"I'll fly," Darlanis said in reassuring tones, pushing me back against my seat, taking control. Swinging the plane back on its original course to Trella. Pushing the throttle all the way in. There was a determined set to her lips. I had no doubt that she would avenge me if she survived the crash landing she was certain to end up making somewhere in Trella's harbor! "There are Physicians in Trella," she assured me. "I won't let you die." I could see tears glistening in her eyes. I never knew she thought that way about me. I was completely helpless now. I suspected that the "poison" was the anesthetic used by the Lorr, a modified version of their own venom. We had a supply of it there on my estate from what had been left over after my use of it on the Janis. I had no idea whether or not the amount I had ingested would be fatal or not. Lorr venom is tricky stuff to handle. Too much and the patient stops breathing, the heart stops beating. I thought what it would feel like to die up here! Helplessly paralyzed, unable to speak, to breathe, to move as my heart finally stopped for lack of oxygen. It is somewhat like the effects of curare once used by the natives of South America.

"It's Lorr venom," I tried to tell Darlanis, but I could no longer talk clearly, my words only so slurred even I could hardly understand them. I wanted to tell Darlanis what she would have to do to land the

plane. To come down in a long slow descent and fly the plane right down to the water. For a totally inexperienced pilot like her it would be far too dangerous for her to even attempt any other sort of a landing! I was now starting to have difficulty breathing. I gasped out the word "oxygen", but I feared it was so slurred that Darlanis would never understand me!

"I read a book on this one time when I was a girl," Darlanis said to me. I knew such things had been found. That did explain why she was able to fly to the degree that she was. Not that it would do either of us any good, as it is one thing to fly a plane and another to make a safe landing. Especially with a Beechcraft Bonanza, which is not an "easy" airplane to fly like a "hi-wing". She was now fishing around under my seat, where I had once kept a tank of oxygen and a mask for flights above fifteen thousand feet. I had mentioned such to her earlier, when I had been showing her the plane. I had no idea how much remained in the tank. Darlanis fitting the mask over my face with surprising competence, and opening the valve to the cylinder she placed in my lap. The blessed oxygen flowing into my gasping weakening lungs!

"Trella," Darlanis said to me, touching my numbed hand. She could have held a red hot poker to it and I would have felt not a thing. I was totally paralyzed now, unable to speak. It took all I had just to breathe those tiny shallow gasping breaths that I was taking. My mind filled with terror at the sight of my rapidly approaching death. Even if Darlanis landed us safely, there was still the danger that I would die from the effects of the poison there in Trella. I recalled what I had learned about the stuff on Mars. I was starting to hallucinate now, everything starting to spin around although Darlanis seemed to be flying the plane steady. I saw my vision of her changing, saw SHE sitting there instead in Her beautiful white gown. Mused to myself that perhaps some Priestess of Lys had once seen HER and that was why they wore the same long white gowns themselves. Lorr venom effects the mind. I have no reason to believe that their own medical version of it wouldn't do the same if you got too much of it!

I saw the harbor grow rapidly larger below us, saw that the plane was descending, although not in the easy glide I would have used, Darlanis coming in at a power setting I would have never used! "TOO FAST! SLOW DOWN!" I tried to tell her, but only low gasps escaped from my lips. The airspeed indicator read a full two hundred knots! (About two hundred and thirty miles per hour)

I saw the harbor come racing up to meet us, then Darlanis drew the nose up and cut the engine to an idle! The airspeed now falling rapidly as the plane leveled off a hundred feet over the water. I could see the ships in the harbor, and prayed that we would not collide with one, for I had my doubts that Darlanis was capable of easing the plane around one without letting it fall off on one wing and crashing! And killing us both! I should have insisted on Sharon coming along. She knew how to fly. Not all that well, but at least she knew how to make a safe landing!

Chapter Thirty Seven

The impact was not as smashing as I had feared, the landing actually not being all that bad, Darlanis having let the plane settle down to a landing there in the water. I think I remember her giving me a smile as we came down, but my vision was starting to "go" now and I am not really sure what happened next. Sanda says that Darlanis managed to taxi the plane to the dock and get help for me. I faintly remember being "handled", seeing Darlanis' face looking down into mine, seeing Sanda's, and then nothing as I lost consciousness completely. Drifting off into a nightmare I only faintly remember of distorted scenes that make no sense now. I have no doubt that I am lucky to have survived!

"She is starting to come around now," I heard a voice say. I felt very cold, very weak. It took an effort to open my eyes.

"I am here, Lorraine," Lady Sanda said to me, taking my hand in hers, looking down into my eyes. "Darlanis flew off in your 'metal bird' and 'gave us' Trelandar." I could see her eyes glistening with emotion. I suspected she no longer looked upon Darlanis in the same light as before. I tried to speak, to ask what Darlanis was doing flying in my plane, but only a weak croak escaped from my lips! I saw a man of the Physicians sitting there regarding me. I wondered what had been done to me. What sort of antidote had been used to counteract the Lorr medicine!

"Welcome back to the land of the living!" Darlanis smiled as she stepped into the hospital room, glorious in her golden attire. A smile on that beautiful face. "Although I fear your airplane no longer flies as the engine quit just before I reached Trella and I just managed to get back on some fisherman's boat."

I tried to croak something in reply, but I don't think that anyone understood me. Darlanis going on to say that there was a red light flashing on the instrument panel as she flew back next to a dial marked "fuel" for a while before the engine sputtered and then died as Trella became visible just ahead! Now I know how impossible this all sounds, but Darlanis actually did manage to fly my plane to where the fighting was going on between those loyal to her and those loyal to me, and after halting the fighting, (She told them that both sides would be able to vote on which Queen they wanted!) then managed to fly back to Trella! It was of course fortunate that there was a large lake for her to land on, as her landings do need a bit of work as yet! It is of course easier to land on water, especially if there is enough of it that you don't have to worry about running out of "runway"! I fear I did "rib" her a bit about forgotten to put in fuel before she flew off, Darlanis protesting that she didn't know such was necessary as I hadn't told her about having to do such a thing!

"You saved my life," I told Darlanis as I laid there in the sun on the roof top of Trella's hospital the next morning, an awning over my face to protect my eyes from the glare. I was still "cold", the effects of the poison not yet completely gone from my badly weakened body. It had been "close"! Darlanis reminded me much of another I had once seen there on Mars. SHE had been also tall and golden like Darlanis, although I think that was just the appearance that I "gave" HER, as SHE is of course without shape or form. I recalled what I had once been told about a "Queen of Light". Darlanis, like Tara, was I supposed, "unkillable". I had told Darlanis about my attempt to kill Tara, explaining that the revolver had been wetted and no doubt the cartridge had been defective. I did not tell her that I suspected that there was another reason. That someday she and Tara would meet again face to face as the representatives of Good and Evil, and that they would fight a duel that would decide the fate of Mankind! As Darlanis did best Tara the time they fought, I have no worries as to what the outcome will be. That GOOD will triumph over EVIL! That she who now serves The Evil One will finally die there at the razor sharp point of Darlanis' keen blade!

"You saved mine," Darlanis smiled back. "And you have given me something very precious in return," she added with a smile, reaching down to gently stroke my brow. "Understanding." Lady Sanda smiled and nodded. I wondered what they had spoken about.

"There is something that puzzles me," Sanda said to Darlanis. "Only that portion of Trelandar that you visited in the past few weeks has resisted the Revolution." Darlanis smiling, a glow there in her beautiful azure eyes that indicated a delightful "secret" that I wondered if she would "share" with us or not!

"You have your 'Lorraine' and I have mine," Darlanis smiled.

"Sharon," I ventured, suspecting much. Remembering much.

"The best thing that ever happened to me," Darlanis smiled.

"We were going up against 'She-Ra'," I explained to Sanda.

"She-Ra?" Sanda said, somewhat puzzled, not understanding.

"A beautiful 'champion of the people' against 'oppression'," I explained. Sanda nodding, not understanding. "My stepdaughter got Darlanis to start behaving like a 'friend of the people' instead of like the 'Imperial monarch' that she used to portray."

"I went out and talked to the people, got my boots dirty," Darlanis explained. "Behaved like a 'politician'," she smiled. I suspected she had been extremely effective. Fortunately Darlanis didn't have enough time to cover the country or we would have been lost before we even got started, thanks to Sharon's ideas! Darlanis is a wonderful public speaker, and she is so beautiful I fear that any man who sees her will instantly fall in "love" and believe anything she says. That is why she dresses as she does. Making herself appear like some golden Goddess out of mythology.

"She could cost us our Revolution!" Sanda breathed, looking at Darlanis. No doubt wondering what I could do against her. I suspected Sanda was thinking of what it would be like to try to "compete" against a woman like Darlanis in any political contest!

"You don't consider me 'competition' for Darlanis?" I asked. This was one of those questions like "have you stopped beating your wife?" Obviously Sanda would have "trouble" answering it!

"You've got 'brains', she's got 'beauty'," Sanda spoke, I fear without really thinking through all the "implications" of what she had said. The implication being that I had "intelligence", but not "looks", while Darlanis had "looks", but not "brains". She doesn't like being called a "dumb blonde" either!

"You should pick your 'friends' better, Lorraine," Darlanis observed, giving me a smile and a wink. She was obviously enjoying herself at Sanda's expense. "She just said that you're as 'homely as a dog' and that I'm a 'dumb blonde' with hardly enough brains to come in out of the rain." Now you will note that Sanda didn't say anything like that at all, but of course Darlanis did twist her words around a bit so that she might tease Lady Sanda!

"I didn't 'say' anything like that!" Sanda protested hotly.

"You did say that I had 'intelligence' and that Darlanis has 'beauty'," I pointed out to my lovely dark haired prime minister. Sanda was attired in a clinging green silken blouse with a fitted leather skirt that well displayed the delights of her figure. She reminds me just a bit of Carol Simmons in some ways. I used to tease her that way too at times, much to her utter irritation!

"I didn't 'mean' it that way!" Sanda protested helplessly.

"And just what did you mean?" Darlanis teased her back.

"I meant to say--" Sanda uttered, now lost for words.

"That Lorraine is not really unattractive, and that I am a bit smarter than some people happen to give me

credit for?" Darlanis laughed in reply. Obviously Sanda had just learned a good lesson. She had always considered herself smarter than Darlanis. While she probably is, Darlanis is "quick-witted" and knew how to tease a woman like Sanda, who is a quite "serious" sober person.

"I'm just glad that you are the woman that you are," Sanda admitted. I suspect she was starting to fall for Darlanis a bit!

Now changing the subject, Darlanis smiled to Sanda, "A good looking woman like you shouldn't have any trouble finding herself another husband." Sanda was both widowed and pregnant, although she didn't "show" yet and wouldn't for a couple of months even in the most clinging of gowns. I remembered Jon's comment about her, "A capable, competent woman. Not bad looking either." That was a pretty good description of Sanda too. Accurate, precise.

"I suppose so," Sanda answered, not meeting her eye. I wondered if Darlanis had "hit a sore spot" with Sanda. Sanda had not said too much to me about such things after learning that her husband had died in the battle with the pirates. I suspected she might still be in mourning and not really too interested as yet.

"Well, I'll go see about having your airplane towed in and fixed," Darlanis said to me, getting up, the sun glowing in her hair and making it almost appear like she had a halo surrounding her head like one of those saints there in a Medieval tapestry.

"I 'envy' her," Sanda muttered as Darlanis strolled off.

"Why?" I asked. I knew a great deal about Queen Darlanis.

"She's always been able to 'have' everything she's wanted." Sanda answered, shifting her position in the chair beside me. I supposed it was easy to envy someone like Darlanis until you knew the truth about her. What it had been like for her as a child. Brutally raped at the tender age of fifteen by her own eighteen year old brother, and then despised by her unbelieving mother for having made such a horrible accusation against her brother! The nasty rumors as they spread throughout Dularn causing the sensitive young Princess nothing but terrible embarrassment until her vindictive "mother" finally disowned her and shipped her off to a boarding school just to get rid of her and the embarrassment she caused! Darlanis' teenage years nothing but misery as she tried to escape the eyes, the whispered words that were spoken about her. It being commonly held by her classmates that she had "provoked" her own rape, that she was nothing but a shameless worthless "slut" who had gotten exactly what she deserved getting! I had always thought my teenage years were bad, but at least my parents loved me and nobody whispered behind my back all the time that I was just some sexy slut that had provoked her own brother into making love to her and then had gone yelled "rape" afterwards just to conceal the fact that she had lost her virginity!

"She's fought and scratched for everything she has," I said. I suspected that was why she "used" someone like Princess Tara as she had. Darlanis has a low sense of her own "self-worth". I am speaking here professionally. That is why she is always trying to "prove" herself. And why she does the things that she does.

"Perhaps," Sanda answered, the tone of her voice leaving no doubt that she had still had her own opinions of the matter. She can be a rather head-strong woman at times. No doubt that is why she was successful in establishing the "Free Trelandar Movement".

"You need a father for that little girl you're carrying," I pointed out to Sanda. I knew she was a good mother, but still, I feel from my own experience that a single woman, even with enough money so that she can devote herself to her children, does not do as good a job of raising her children as does one with a

husband.

"Perhaps Jon could act as a father to my children," Sanda ventured, regarding me. Her words making me a bit "suspicious"! Sanda was an attractive woman. Probably "good in bed" from what I'd seen of her. I remembered that the "Free Trelandar Movement" had assisted the Dularnian privateers and such from time to time against the Empire. Also, Jon had seemed to "know" quite a bit about Sanda there too in Thistle and Sanda in turn seemed to have been just a bit too overly competent in setting things up for me!

"You knew Jon from before," I said to her. It was a statement of fact, not a question. Sanda nodded, not daring to speak. "As a matter of fact I also think you are in love with him too."

Terror showed in the darkness of her eyes as I saw the truth of my words reflected there in those dark glistening depths. I was weak, almost helpless yet, but I was still able to command men, give orders! I was the Queen of Trelandar. I had the power of life and death over Sanda. I wondered what Darlanis would have done had she been in my boots. I remembered Jack, that slut Sandra Stevens. Sanda shuddered. This was not the 20th Century.

"There's a name for wives like you," I told Sanda. I was a Queen. Sanda's Queen. You don't "fool" with the husband of a Queen if you place any value on your life. I was reasonably sure that Sanda hadn't made any "advances" towards Jon since I had been married to him, but that didn't mean that she wouldn't do so should the opportunity happen to present itself at a later date.

"It never came to that," Sanda breathed, her words so soft that I had some difficulty in hearing them. "Jon said that no man of honor would sleep with a woman who wore the neck chain of another." Her eyes were glistening now, the tears starting to flow. I had no doubt she would be sobbing in another minute now!

"Have you ever spoken to a Priestess about this?" I asked. A Priestess will guide you in working such things out in your own thoughts. I used to do the same thing in the 20th Century, but I charged a lot more for my advice than do the Priestesses of Lys.

"I-I'm afraid to," Sanda answered, starting to sob now too.

"You fear what she would say to you?" I asked, reaching out, grasping Sanda's hand in mine. I had very little strength, but I didn't need any more than I had just then to do what I wanted to.

"I've committed adultery in my heart!" Sanda sobbed. She was starting to draw some attention now although no one came near us. There were three warrioresses standing nearby. Imperials, women of Darlanis' own personal guard, serving under her own orders. I had no doubt that they at least could be "relied" upon to protect me against assassins. Tara's agents could be anywhere about, Darlanis had suspected. Obviously Tara knew that her attempt to kill me had failed. It was possible that she might try again! For a moment I wondered if it could have been Sanda! She knew of the medicine. Where I had kept it. She would have eliminated both Darlanis and me with one stroke! Made Jon "available" under such conditions that he would have been "easy prey" for a woman like her. She was a good looking woman too. The Prime Minister of Trelandar. Gayle was just an innocent teenage girl. She would have suspected nothing. Neither would have Sharon. Sanda could have easily ended up ruling both Sarn and Trelandar as their regent! Become another Empress of California!

"And would you have committed adultery in deed had Jon been willing to take you to bed?" I challenged the sobbing brunette. "Been unfaithful to your own husband?" I forced from my mind the horrible thought that Sanda could have been the one who tried to have me poisoned. I wished I had the

power to read her mind. Find out the truth. Perhaps she was another like Princess Tara!

"Yes,Lorraine!" Sanda sobbing, throwing herself to her knees beside me, burying her face against my bosom. (That is the way it's supposed to read, but I don't have much of a bosom when I'm lying flat on my back, although I suppose it didn't matter.)

"And if Jon was to come up to you some fine day and slap you on that nice curvy rear of yours would you do it then?" I asked that sobbing Trelandarian Lady as she wept on her Queen's bosom. Darlanis would no doubt get an "earful" from her guards standing there now listening to our every word as closely as they could!

"Oh, No,Lorraine, I'd Never Do Something Like That!" Sanda protested, raising her face from my bosom, now well "wetted", the outline of one of my nipple clips now visible there on her cheek. I having been lying there with only a sheet half drawn over me, my breasts bared to the sun. I wondered if I could believe her? And what about the other matter? Who had ordered my death and Darlanis' too? Had not Darlanis been able to fly the plane, we would have both died in the plane crash. And no one would have been the wiser! And Sanda also knew more about flying than anyone else, having ridden in the airplane only a week or so ago!*

Comment by Lady Sanda

It is of course very painful for me to relive all this as QueenLorraine's friend. What I think "hurts" more than anything else is that she actually could think that I would try to kill her! I will grant that I did have "feelings" for Jon, and I did one time "offer" myself to him (this was beforeLorrainecame on the scene), but I never would have hurtLorrainefor anything!

Chapter Thirty Eight

(Lady Sanda's Version of Events)

"Lorraine!" I sobbed, her features blurred before me by my own hot tears of shame. Why, Oh, Why Had I Told HER Such Things! Knowing that she herself had been betrayed back in the 20th Century by her own faithless husband! The betrayal that had driven her to fly up into an awful storm, perhaps seeking an end to her own mental anguish. It seemed as if the entire world was coming down around my ears! I had destroyed everything with my comment! Lost everything that I had worked for my entire life! I thought briefly of suicide, of plunging my dagger into my heart. Of taking poison. Something more effective than the Lorr medicine that had nearly killed my Queen only a couple days ago! I deserved death. To die for what I had done toLorraine. Only the thought of the innocent life now growing there within my uterus kept me from whipping out my dagger and plunging it right into my heart!* * The attitude of the woman of the 26th Century towards abortion is considerably different than that of women of Lorraine's time. It is not "Right to Life" asLorraineonce said without thinking about it, but the fact that a woman has to really "want" the child she carries before she is allowed to conceive one. (Sanda)

"Can I trust you not to destroy yourself?" my Queen asked, a warrioress of Darlanis' now standing there. I supposeLorrainehad motioned her over. "Remember the life you carry within you."

I nodded, standing up, feeling like I had just been condemned to death. Darlanis' warrioress, a big

muscular brunette, quickly stripping me of my weapons. Taking me by the arm as my Queen motioned for her to pause. I saw Lorraine's eyes burn into mine. She was a Queen. My Queen. The Queen that I almost worshiped, although Lorraine is not a proud woman and always laughs when people make her out to be something more than she is not.

"See that she comes to no harm nor allow her to harm herself," Lorraine ordered. It was the order of a Queen. I knew I would be watched, observed like some felon awaiting punishment.

"Yes, your highness," the warriorress answered, regarding me from beneath the visor of her helmet. She was a trained fighting woman. Bred down the generations to be just what she was. Such is a result of our caste system. I was a Scribe, not a fighter. * * Sanda is an excellent swordswoman, as good as many warriorresses that I have met. She has, however, her own personal reasons for never becoming one of the "black castes", although her own sister was of the Caste of Warriorresses and she was married to a Warrior and has a son who is also a member of the Warriors. (Lorraine)

"Come with me, bitch!" the warriorress snapped, dragging me off. Taking down the stairway to the floor below, pushing open a door, roughly shoving me inside a room, the window being barred.

"Put your hands up against the wall and spread those legs," the warriorress snapped, kicking the door shut behind herself. I did so, submitting to the embarrassing humiliation of a body search for concealed weapons. The woman checking the inside of my thighs and the rear portion of my strap for any tiny concealed daggers or picks that a woman might carry as a concealed weapon.

"This isn't necessary!" I protested, terribly humiliated.

"I heard enough to figure that your own Queen isn't very delighted with you right now," the brunette warriorress smiled back. "And she gave me my orders too to see that no harm comes to you." I suspected that she was enjoying herself however humiliating me!

"Now you can just peel out of those fancy clothes of yours and put this on," the warriorress snapped as she stepped back, indicating a brief robe that would cover little of my thighs. I felt "dirty", terribly humiliated. Like I was a slave girl, not a high born free woman, a member of the Trelandarian aristocracy!

"No," I sobbed, backing up against the wall of the room, the tears starting to flow again. The Imperial warriorress laughing at me. No doubt she hated me for what I was, and this was her way of "getting even". The window was barred, the room being one used here in the hospital for the treatment of sick slave girls!

"Crybaby, aren't you, 'fancy lady'," the warriorress laughed, seizing me by the blouse, lifting me nearly off my feet. She was strong, like Lorraine is, and some others that I have known. "Bet you'll go sobbing and weeping and bawling to your beheading when your Queen decides to lop off that pretty head of yours!"

"That will be enough!" I heard a woman's voice say, Lorraine standing there in the doorway dressed in a robe, half supported by another warriorress of Darlanis'. "I gave you no orders to abuse her," my Queen spoke to my tormentor, her voice now as cold as ice. The warriorress shrinking back, no doubt in terror of Lorraine, whose temper when aroused can be truly awesome to see! Edging around the Queen like a whipped cur as Lorraine half fell into a chair there by the barred window. The paleness of her face and the set of her thin unrouged lips speaking much of the weakness she still felt from the poison that had nearly taken her life there in the air before Darlanis managed to somehow amazingly land her airplane and get

medical help for my beloved Queen.

"Leave us!" Lorraine snapped, her eyes hard. The women doing so. Closing the door behind themselves as they went out. I looked into Lorraine's eyes, saw little there that gave me hope.

"Take off your clothing, Sanda," she said to me, much to my surprise. "Everything." Her eyes were hard as they burned into mine. I did so, sobbing, the tears now rolling down my cheeks.

Naked now, I stood before her, bare crotched, bare nipples. I did not attempt to conceal myself from her as I blushed with the embarrassment of being so seen by her. The shame of being as naked as a slave girl there before my beloved Queen of Trelandar!

"Look at yourself in the mirror, Sanda, and appraise yourself as a slave girl." I did so, weeping, hardly able to see.

"And what you would bring in a market?" Lorraine asked.

"Fifteen-twenty gold crowns," I sobbed back in reply.

"You're worth 'more' than that to me," Lorraine answered, a grim smile curving her thin lips. She looked up at me, regarded me as I stood there before her. I remembered seeing her doing the same with slave girls back on her estates before buying one.

"You are going to enslave me and then keep me?" I sobbed. Lorraine would no doubt take her full revenge upon me then. She would be able to torment me, to humiliate me as long as she wanted too! Take my children away, turn me into some rightless female animal! Some slut to pleasure our men at arms, any visitor!

"If you ever give yourself to my husband," Lorraine warned.

"I-I don't understand," I breathed, standing there, naked.

"I am willing to permit my husband slave girls," she smiled. Such was something most wives have to put up with if there are slave girls available. I had done so with my first two husbands. Although when my last husband started in after Maris Marn, a "Darlanis-look-alike" if there ever was one, I did have "enough"!

"I think I understand now," I answered. I had been warned very effectively of what would happen should I ever try to express my feelings for Jon physically. I had no doubt either that Lorraine would carry out her threat to enslave me. She had the power, the moral authority if need be to do it. I would have to look for love elsewhere. Not that I would have ever done it, I assure you, but I suppose that Lorraine wanted to make sure that I understood exactly just what would happen to me if I ever did!

"Put your clothes back on," Lorraine smiled. "You do have a very attractive figure, Sanda, but one never knows when someone will come in here and perhaps get the wrong ideas about us two."

"What I'm trying to figure out is why someone tried to poison you with Lorr medicine instead of a more common poison," Queen Darlanis commented to Lorraine as the three of us ate dinner together. I wondered how much her warrioresses had told her.

"I marked the bottle 'poison' a week ago as no one can read what it says on it and I was afraid someone would mistake it for something else," I interjected with a smile, the writing on the bottle having

been in a language unknown to me or anyone else save for someone like An'na who could read the strange writing of the Lorr. "I suppose whoever poisoned your orange juice thought that it was just some new sort of poison and didn't realize what it actually was." Lorraine giving me a look that made a chill go down my spine as her dark eyes burned into mine for an instant!

"Well, now we know," Darlanis commented as she sipped at her wine. The slave girl serving us one of hers, the wench called "Lynn". Lorraine nodding, her eyes still holding my own. I felt the terror rise in my throat. Did she think that I poisoned her?

"I'm sorry, Sanda, I should have known better," she said to me, taking my hand. Her words for a brief instant were meaningless before I suddenly realized what thoughts had been in her mind. Now suddenly everything was clear! And I would have been the logical person to "suspect" too, I realized to my horror! There was a chain of circumstantial evidence that could have gotten me convicted of attempted regicide in any court in Trelandar! I was in love with Jon, I hated Darlanis, and had Lorraine died I would have "inherited" everything as Prime Minister of Trelandar! All because I had marked that bottle of Lorr medicine "poison"! * * I have no doubt that Sanda's action actually saved my life as otherwise Tara's poisoner would have used something much more effective on me! In any case it was a very close call! (Lorraine)

"What still amazes me is how easy it was to believe that you might be the one responsible," Lorraine said to me as we shared drinks later on. Such having become our nightly custom over the short period of a couple months that I had known her. These talks meant a great deal to me, especially as I was always fascinated by her tales of a time now only legend to us of the 26th Century. Tales of how men flew in great silver metal birds, and even traveled out into space like the Lorr do. She also spoke of the "dark side" of life then. Of the poverty she had seen, the racism, the sexual prejudices against women such as ourselves. Of streets "unsafe" at night except to those illegally "armed". I have always considered Trella "bad", but "LA" was a lot worse!

"I can only hope were our positions reversed that I would have shown the wisdom that you did about the affair," I answered.

"What terrifies me is how 'easy' it was for me to suspect you," Lorraine replied, studying the wine there in her glass. I nodded, studying her as she sat there. She is in her way an attractive woman. Extremely competent. The greatest swordswoman of all time perhaps, although she will deny that if you ask her.

"I can hardly blame you considering what happened," I said. The train of "circumstantial evidence" against me was overwhelming. My feelings for Jon, my hatred for Darlanis, all had combined together to make it appear as if I had been the one guilty of attempted regicide. A Queen less "just" than Lorraine would have probably have had me killed on the spot without further ado.

"I now fear, Sanda, that you will always 'remember' the time that I suspected you and what I could have 'done' to you had I wished," Lorraine answered. "There will always be that between us now. We have both lost something that was very precious." I saw the tears growing in those dark eyes as she looked up at me.

"Steel and friendships both need to be 'tempered'," I said.

"That is a 'saying' of Warriresses," Lorraine smiled back, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand, "Not one of Scribes."

"I once studied the Caste Codes," I told her, remembering.

"But you became a Scribe instead of a Warriress," Lorraine smiled, her eyes glowing once again into mine. She has a way of questioning you that probes your deepest secrets without you being aware of it. In so many ways she reminds me of a Priestess.

"I found the ideals of the caste not to my taste," I spoke.

"I do," Lorraine answered. I had no doubt of that either.

"I do not believe in the killing of innocents," I said.

"Neither do I," Lorraine answered back with a smile.

Chapter Thirty Nine

"Well, how do you feel today?" Darlanis asked as we ate breakfast, Sanda giving me a warm smile. I had asked Darlanis to tell her warriresses what they had seen the day before was never to be repeated. Not that they had actually "seen" that much, but such things have a way of repeating themselves and growing more and more fantastic with time. Darlanis' own rape by her brother being a good example of that. The current tale in Dularn being utterly fantastic and unbelievable to anyone who knows Darlanis! Especially the story about her being a fifteen year old prostitute who was selling her body to all the young studs of Arsana!

"Not quite up to taking you on yet, although I think I could probably 'best' anyone else around here," I smiled back. Most of my strength having returned. The recovery had been slower than when I had been stung by Sisa there on Mars, but on the other hand I didn't have the advantages of the Lorr's own medical technology either. Recovery had thus been slower this time. I had "dressed" for breakfast this morning, and had plans to start taking over some of the duties of being the new Queen of Trelandar.

"You know I plan to 'campaign' against you if you keep your word to hold 'free elections'," Darlanis smiled back. Sanda giving me a smile as she sat there, although I didn't think it was all that impossible that we might "lose" an "election" to Darlanis. I did have Sanda, but Darlanis had Sharon, and Sharon was turning out to be an even more "crafty wench" than Sanda herself!

"You have a lot to learn," Sanda smiled, regarding Darlanis.

"I learn swiftly, as perhaps you have noticed," Darlanis answered, sipping at her coffee. We now had "tasters" for our food, although I did not think there was much danger here in Trella. Only those personally known to me were allowed to serve.

"And you have an excellent 'advisor' in Sharon," I smiled.

"But the handicap of a winless war that has already turned the people against you," Sanda then now pointed out with a smile.

"I plan to offer the Dularnians a 'cease-fire'," she smiled.

"At least until the elections are all over," I smiled back.

"I see that you will be a worthy opponent," Darlanis smiled.

"Looks like the Janis," Darlanis smiled, shading her eyes there from the rooftop of my new palace that overlooked Trella. It had once been Darlanis' winter palace, Trelandar being warmer than Sarn, which gets quite chilly at times in the winter months.

"It also carries your Princess and ours," Sanda commented to Darlanis, speaking to a leather clad warrior who had received the information from our harbor defenses with which the ship had exchanged the information earlier. Jon having obviously decided that we had been separated long enough, although I thought it was much more likely that he had found out from a passing ship the tale of how I had been poisoned and nearly killed three days ago!

"What in the name of God happened to you two!" I gasped in shock as I saw Gayle and Sharon. My step-daughter had a beautiful black eye and Gayle a swollen cut lip along with assorted various bruises and scratches. Jon giving me a smile that left no doubt where our two Princesses had gotten all their injuries!

"I defended your 'honor', Darlanis," Sharon told Darlanis.

"And I 'yours', Lorraine!" Gayle said to me in hot retort!

"Seems our two lovely young Princesses went into Thistle and got into some sort of a 'cat-fight' over 'politics'," Jon said to me, giving me a "smile" as if to say that "girls will be girls"!

"And what about their guards? What did they do?" I snapped back, both girls being of course heavily guarded thanks to Princess Tara's still being on the loose somewhere here in Trelandar if she hadn't already made her way back to her own country. Sharon now edging towards Darlanis while Gayle edged toward me in turn. Darlanis smiling delightedly to herself as she took Sharon and I took my beloved Gayle in my arms. I wondered who had won?

"They are Princesses," Jon smiled back. "The sheriff finally poured a bucket of cold water from a watering trough over them both to stop the fight." His smile did leave a lot left unsaid! Obviously it had been a delightful "cat-fight" there in Thistle!

"I defended your 'honor'," Gayle said, looking up into my eyes. Sharon had done a good job of marking her face. It was also obvious that Sharon had gotten the better of Gayle, although that is only my opinion and those who witnessed the fight say that both girls were pretty well matched and put on a good show!

"How are we going to ever have peace between our countries when we have a pair of 'spit-fires' like these two ready to make 'war' on each other at the slightest provocation?" Darlanis asked. The smile on her face that she tried to conceal from me no doubt further proof of the delight that she felt that Sharon had "defended" her against Gayle and against "me" in a way too!

"I think perhaps it is time that our royal palms made acquaintance with their royal behinds," I suggested back in reply. Darlanis agreeing too that it would be a suitable action on our part to insure a future "peace" between our respective countries.

"I guess we did act like a pair of fools," Sharon admitted, obviously not all that comfortable as she stood there before us. Gayle nodding, her eyes still a bit red from the tears that had flowed. The palm of my

right hand still stung as no doubt did Queen Darlanis'. I have "harder" hands than Darlanis, but she is stronger than I am, so no doubt both Princesses had learned much as they laid across our respective royal laps and took their punishments where they deserved to get it for embarrassing us both.

"Although you did make your mothers 'proud' of you," Queen Darlanis smiled in reply. There could be no doubt now who belonged to who. Perhaps, I mused to myself, it was for the best.

"I'm just glad you didn't go at each other with your daggers," I smiled, both girls having been so armed as Princesses.

"Our argument just got a bit 'out of hand'," Gayle admitted. "We would have never used weapons on each other!" she protested!

"I guess there's no doubt now who Sharon 'belongs to'," Darlanis said to me as we stood that evening overlooking the harbor, the sun setting there in the west. We were crowned Queens, rulers of our respective countries. I had come a long way since I had flown through the "Gateway" little over some three months ago with Sharon. Yet "losing" Sharon still hurt although I had Gayle to take her place. And little Mara and Ta-she-ra, whose mother's bravery would never be forgotten. I had a good marriage, a husband who loved me for what I was as a person, not as the Queen of Trelandar. I had wealth, power, everything anyone could want in this barbaric era. Yet why did everything blur before me then?

"Tell me your thoughts, Lorraine," Darlanis said to me, touching my hand where it rested there on the edge of the marble.

"I fear what will happen if we do what we plan to do," I told her. I knew what such a political campaign would be like. It would not be like the "Republicans" or "Democrats" back in the 20th Century. There was too much at stake here. Too many people had died already in the Revolution. Civil war was now a danger. There was also the risk of an "economic revolution" of the sort that had given Lenin power in Russia so many centuries ago now... Syndicalism is superior to Capitalism, although Janet Rogers never believed so, I might mention here for those curious about it.

"I have given my word as Empress to those who support me," Darlanis answered in level tones. I knew she couldn't violate the trust that her people had put in her. She was of the Warriresses. Our word is our "bond". Her azure eyes glowed into my own as I nodded, understanding. Could our friendship survive it?

"Sanda is thinking of extending our Revolution to Sarn, Orgon, and then Talon," I answered back. No doubt Queen Dala Dai would have something to say about that! Talon's "air force" was greatly feared although the great birds weren't really all that dangerous to well trained and equipped ground forces. I also had Black Lady, which gave me "air power" of my own up against Talon.

"Which means I might 'win' a country divided against itself and torn by civil war," Darlanis smiled back. She is not a "dumb blonde" despite what you might think of her. "And have to deal with you and Sanda and all her radical ideas behind my back too," Darlanis added, understanding much. Blood could flow for years!

"I think there should be an 'Empire of California'," I said. "Ruled by an Empress who is tall and golden and very beautiful."

"Sanda will never 'go along' with that," Darlanis warned me, her eyes glistening as they glowed into mine. The sun now gone, leaving only behind the twilight before the night to come. The Moon was high in

the sky, glowing down upon us, as it perhaps one time had glowed down upon the dinosaurs millions of years before.

"Trelandar will be semi-independent," I explained, seeing Darlanis nodding in agreement. "We will run our own internal affairs. I will be Queen, 'Leaderess', whatever is decided, but you will be our new 'Janet Rogers' able to say, 'Lorraine, I won't allow that'." I respected Darlanis. Loved her as a sister of the sword. We had stood together, side by side, together. We were both of the Warriresses. We lived by much the same Codes.

"We have a lot to work out," Darlanis warned me. There were various formal requirements that would have to be set down in writing. No doubt the negotiations would take some time to work out. "Understandings" would have to be made. A "Constitution" perhaps written. Agreed to. I wondered if it wouldn't be a good idea to eventually get Queen Dala Dai of Talon involved too in these matters. I had no doubt that we have to eventually deal with Tara again too. I had already spoken to Sanda earlier about our chances of extending our "Revolution" down into Baja itself.

"But the first thing we have to do is to somehow get things 'patched up' enough between you and Queen Tulis to stop this warfare between the Empire and Dularn," I added, giving her a smile. Orgon had once belonged to Dularn before Darlanis reconquered it. Queen Tulis had once been another almost like Darlanis in a way. She had been "Warlady" of Dularn before the former Queen had been forcibly deposed for going against the "wishes of the people".* * This is covered in more detail in a later book. (author)

"Why?" Darlanis asked with a smile. "With Black Lady and your NAPALM bombs we could bomb Arsana and force Queen Tulis to submit to us. Bring Dularn into the Empire and settle things for good." I shuddered at the look I saw there on Darlanis' face in the growing darkness. It was like for an instant that Princess Tara stood there beside me! Did she hate her mother that much! I recalled some of the things that Sanda had told me about Darlanis. What she had done in the conquest of Trelandar and after.

"Do you hate her that much?" I asked, horrified by the thought of bombing the innocent people of Arsana from Black Lady! Granted by 20th Century standards such bombing wouldn't be very "effective" as Black Lady isn't big enough to carry that many fire bombs, but still there would no doubt be a considerable loss of life among the innocent people of Arsana every time we flew over the city and dropped a dozen or so more fire bombs on it! I had treated innocent children in Vietnam with NAPALM burns when I had been a doctor there in the last couple years of the war. If Darlanis ever bombed Arsana, it would be over my dead body first!

"She slapped me when I told her what my own brother had done to me, called me a 'lying slut' right there in front of everyone," the tall golden Empress said in level tones. "Then she later officially disowned me and sent me away to another country when the tale leaked out and the newspapers got hold of it." No doubt it had been a "juicy scandal" even by their own standards! "Can you imagine, Lorraine, what it is like to grow up with every finger pointed at you, at everyone whispering behind your back?"

"And you learned the sword in retaliation," I answered, suspecting that was where she had learned her fantastic abilities with a blade. Driven to practice day after day by the hatred now burning there in her heart. Our childhoods had not been similar, but we had both suffered insults, "hurts" from other children.

"Between the ages of eighteen and twenty when I became the 'Queen of Swords' of Sarn I fought in several duels, all fatal," she answered in level tones there in the rapidly growing darkness. I thought of the gunfighters of the "Old West" of legend. Darlanis had been a "26th Century" version of them. A woman driven by hate, by her own internal torments, to kill any who in any way "crossed" her. Finally her

reputation became such that no one but an utter fool would dare utter a challenge to her!

"You need to resolve that hatred before it destroys you," I said to her, hoping that she would be willing to let me help her.

"I do not wish to have my mind, my memories tampered with," Darlanis snapped back, the hostility showing there in her voice. It was obvious that she had already sought the aid of the Priestesses of Lys at one time, and had refused to allow them to help.

"I don't work that way," I smiled back, touching her arm.

Chapter Forty

"You aren't going to try to 'take control of my mind' or something, are you?" Darlanis asked as she relaxed beside me there on the sofa. I felt it best that we retained eye contact.

"It is quite 'impossible' for me to do so to anyone of this era," I answered. I had once tried hypnosis with Gayle as an experiment. I had been unsuccessful in my attempt although Gayle had been willing to let me try, saying that she had no terrors of allowing me to practice my "witchcraft" on her! I had then learned from Sanda that what I had attempted was illegal and that I should never attempt to do it again or I could be in very serious trouble if word ever got out of what I had attempted to do. Sanda telling me that the Priestesses of Lys turned such people like me over to the "civil authorities" for execution as witches!

"I'm glad of that," Darlanis answered, regarding me, perhaps more fearful of being treated by a "shrink" than would someone of my own era. I had no doubt that she "trusted" me, but yet I had no doubt that she also "feared" me in a way, perhaps because to her and others I will always be "alien", a woman from a past now more legend than fact. I wondered why there was such a terror of hypnosis in this era, when the Priestesses of Lys routinely used their own secret technology of electronic hypnosis to reprogram people's minds almost as a matter of course. I had asked a number of questions, gotten back answers that hinted of things perhaps better left alone! Word had finally gotten back to the High Priestess at the temple in Thistle and I had been very politely "asked" by her that it would be best to discontinue my questioning of the people before I "got myself into 'serious' trouble"!

"We are just going to talk," I assured her, "Nothing more."

"And people actually 'paid' you to do this?" Darlanis asked with a smile, not believing perhaps that such services as mine actually deserved the fee that I used to charge for my services!

"You do make a 'donation to the temple' when you go see a Priestess, don't you?" I challenged her back. You are expected to make the "donation" according to your own level of "income". For someone in Darlanis' income category, that would be in the multi gold crown range. The Priestesses live simply, but they do not lack for much, I notice. On the other hand they are far more "helpful" to Humanity than were any of the religions of the past.

"You're not a Priestess," Darlanis pointed out with a smile. She is "quick-witted", and a lot "smarter" than she "looks" too!

"I am in my own way 'responsible' for their existence," I pointed out in reply. I had suggested the basic concept of the Priestesses to Janet Rogers back in 1988 a month or so before Sharon and I had made our epic flight through time to this era. I am glad that she followed my advice to the letter in this too!!

"You are 'like' a Priestess in a way," Darlanis admitted. I had given orders that we were not to be disturbed for "anything".

"You can trust me as you would a Priestess," I told her.

I drew the entire story slowly from Darlanis, starting with her experiences as a little girl. Seeing through her words how a Princess of Dularn lived. She had been a beautiful little girl. Much like Sharon in a way, but yet different. Her father had died when she was small, although she did remember him somewhat.

She had grown older, reached puberty, felt those strange and to a young girl terrifying feelings. Experienced her first period before her mother took her to the Priestesses for the drug that would control her reproductive system. She told me of having her nipples pierced, of wearing her first set of clips although at that time her breasts were small and not yet developed.

Her brother had later seen her nude while she was bathing, made some sort of a comment about her sexuality and "exposed" himself to her. Darlanis had been horrified at such ideas! She knew that men desired a woman for her "body", but she did not understand very much about sex. She had been raised much like a girl of the "Victorian Era" back in the Nineteenth Century. Her sex-education, what there had been of it, had been mostly rumors and terrifying tales told by the other girls her own age. Girls of the aristocrats of Arsana, who were raised much as she had! I knew from my conversations with Gayle that such practices were a common feature of life among the upper classes of Dularn, although Gayle of course had never suffered all that Darlanis had.

Then had come the rape I've mentioned earlier. I dragged the details out of Darlanis as she sobbed softly to herself while telling of how she had known it was her brother by a birthmark on his groin. There had been two other boys, ruffians of a gang her brother ran around with, a teenage gang much like those of the 20th Century, and just as troublesome as any of my own time too! The three boys had been masked, but Darlanis recognized her own brother as one of the three, and he appeared to be their leader too in the horrible crime committed on her innocent young body!

Then bruised from her struggles and the beating she had gotten in return, bloody, she having bled considerably from the breaking of her maidenhead, Darlanis made her way stumbling back home to the palace, a sobbing terrified young Princess of Dularn who had not understood why she had been so horribly attacked by her own brother. Why they had hurt her as they had "down there"! In that same place that her own mother had told her was a "bad place" and not to touch! Queen Tulis being the sort who obviously believed that young girls should be kept scared of their own sexuality! There are also a number of other issues here, but as they would be of interest only to a member of my own profession, I will say no more of them but to say that Tulis failed Darlanis as a mother in every sense of the word. This fear of "sex" that is common among Dularnians is one reason why I consider their own society badly "flawed", and why we of Trelandar cannot look to Dularn for any example in the setting up of our own social order!

Then came the even worse horror when the disbelieving Queen slapped her own daughter's face in front of everyone. Calling her a "lying slut" and saying that it would have been better if she had been drowned at birth like an unwanted puppy rather than place such disgrace upon the royal family of Dularn! The tale of her rape soon spreading over the land, and growing more and more distorted as it spread until poor

little Darlanis was made out to be a some sort of fifteen year old prostitute who gave her "favors" to everyone, including her own brother. Darl Jord having claimed that Darlanis had actually "offered" herself to him and all his friends, telling them as they sat together that they could each "have" her any way they wanted for only an Eagle apiece! The tale spreading to the point that Darlanis was said to have performed every perverted act there was with her own brother and his friends! That she was a disgrace to the country!

She was eventually officially "disowned" by her own mother, and sent in shame to a boarding school, where she suffered the insults and torments of the other girls, who believed the rumors that had been spread about her to the point that she had several times seriously considered killing herself. Putting an end to all of the suffering, the cruel words, the whispered accusations that she was but a "royal whore", a teenage slut who had been exiled from her own country, from her own people, for her uncontrollable sexuality! She grew vicious, learned to fight back. Pounded several girls nearly senseless. Became bitter. A hard embittered young woman that no wanted to be friends with anymore.

She learned the sword, fought her first duel at the age of eighteen. Killed one of her own classmates at theWarrioressAcademy. Killed another before she graduated at the age of twenty hard and bitter. A tall beautiful golden "swordfighter" who all feared to "cross"! A woman who caused even her instructors concern for fear of being challenged to a duel! That was this woman who now sat dry eyed before me, telling me her own story!

"Then you entered the `Games'," I said to her, guiding her. She was "big" now, 5'10". a hundred and fifty pounds. A beautiful big muscular blonde that men lusted after, but Darlanis was unable to have sex and enjoy it. She was "frigid", and hated all men with a passion. To her a man wanted only "one thing" from a woman. Love to her was but a word that "liars" spoke to deceive her. I called forth the hatred, let it flow, horrified at what I heard! Only my own professional training allowing me to go on! I once treated a hard core feminist, but her own anger was nothing compared to Darlanis' own deep seated hatreds of all men...

"And Thar Marden saw me, had me sent for," Darlanis replied. The rest was history. The new King of Sarn (he was a "Warlord of Sarn" who had just married the recently widowed Queen Tara Bisan) quickly divorced Queen Tara so that he could marry the more beautiful Dularnian and make her his Queen. He had one child by Darlanis before dying in a battle against theNevadas. Anna Marden, the first Imperial Princess, being "lost at sea" before Darlanis' eyes as the horrified Empress saw her drift off! Sarnian Queen, her flagship, having been sunk in a storm when it struck an uncharted rock at night somewhere north of Trella. Little Anna then being "picked up" by a Lorr battle-disc investigating the area and taken to Mars where she quickly became the "child" of another, the lovely Aurora of Mars.Aurora's own actions here no doubt are subject to a certain degree of criticism as she certainly knew "better" here than to "keep" Darlanis' daughter!* * There is of course a "good reason" why she did so. The details are in my own book, which I think will shock everyone! (Darlanis)

"And now you know the entire story," Darlanis said to me, sipping at the wine I had provided for us. We were alone, without slave girls or anyone else who might overhear or repeat what had been said. "And why there is now nothing but hatred between me and Queen Tulis. Why peace between Dularn and the Empire is impossible." I recalled what Jon had told me about Queen Tulis. The fits of rage, the now obvious signs of mental instability!* * These were caused by her brain tumor, I now understand.

I wondered about Queen Tulis. About the "guilt" she carried deep within herself. One does not do what she had done to one's own daughter and not suffer later on. I suspected Tulis was now well aware of what she had done to her lovely little girl. Aware perhaps even that Darlanis had been telling the "truth" and that her own brother had indeed raped her some thirty years ago now!

"And what of you?" I asked Darlanis. "Tell me your feelings. What do you feel deep inside? Hatred or longing for what could have been?" That was part of my task as her psychiatrist. To bring out HER deepest feelings. To bring everything to light! Then "guide" her in seeking a "solution" to her own "problems"! In some cases where possible I used hypnosis to get at the TRUTH, but this was now impossible here for reasons as I have mentioned.

"I do have a mother who loves me," Darlanis said to me, much to my surprise. "She would never 'hurt' me even if sometimes she doesn't understand how I truly 'feel' about her." Darlanis was starting to weep again, her azure eyes filled with tears as they looked into mine. "She is good, kind, and very understanding."

"And this woman in your fantasies has replaced your own actual mother?" I ventured. I had encountered this before in my own practice back in the 20th Century. Often abused children do create for themselves a loving parent in their fantasies to replace the cruel parent of reality. Considering what Darlanis had gone through, such a "retreat" from "reality" didn't surprise me!

"She is not a 'fantasy'," Darlanis said to me. "She is real. She is the woman I wish could have been my real mother!" At this point Darlanis broke down completely and could only sob as I held her, still wondering just who this woman could have been. Perhaps some instructor at the Warriress Academy who had understood the torment that this lovely young woman had suffered.

"If only you-you could do it!" Darlanis sobbed against my silken dress, wetting it with her salty tears. I wondered what I could "do" for her. What she now hoped that I could do for her.

"And what is that?" I asked, raising that beautiful tearstained face to mine. Those lovely azure eyes brimming with hot tears of emotion. She is a very beautiful woman. At first I used to resent her for being so beautiful, but I do not any more.

"Go-go back in time! Be my mother!" Darlanis sobbed, clinging to me. "Oh Lorraine! Could you do it? Do it for me?" She wasn't making too much sense here. I knew time travel was possible in the sense that I had traveled from 1988 A.D. to 2565 A. D. by means of one of the "Gateways", but such travel was completely unpredictable, and Sharon and I could have just as well ended up in the Fourteenth Century instead of in the Twenty Sixth instead!

"You have made me into your mother?" I ventured, not knowing what else to say. Even in my own professional experience, I had never encountered anything like that before! I have no doubts that Darlanis didn't really consider me as her mother, but yet at times she had behaved towards me much like my own child might! I was "older", at least in appearance, Darlanis appearing to me as a woman in her middle twenties in the 20th Century, although she is actually well over forty years old, and will soon celebrate her forty fifth birthday in another month or so. Her own mother was close to a hundred, but still yet looked younger than I did!

"I know that you aren't, but I often dream of what it would have been like had you been my actual mother." Such fantasies are of course usually not too "realistic" as had I given birth to Darlanis she wouldn't have looked anything like she does today!

"Sharon seems to prefer you to me," I pointed out in reply, quickly changing the subject to something that I was more comfortable with! Darlanis is a good mother to Sharon, perhaps better than me in some respects, although she "spoils" her a lot.

"Sharon sees only what she wants to see of me," Darlanis answered with a smile. I thought that she was speaking the truth. Sharon tended to some degree to see Darlanis as a "fantasy" figure, not as a real person. There was just enough "child" left in Darlanis that their relationship did work as it did. Sharon did enjoy Darlanis' own sense of humor, Darlanis being a less "sober" person than me. More like a "big sister" than a "mother" figure.

"Sharon also gives you something you never had," I told her. Sharon was an "emotional prop" for Darlanis. She now "depended" on Sharon. Darlanis no doubt at times saw Sharon as herself! I knew of such things. Of mothers living through their daughters. Darlanis was raising Sharon as she would have wanted her mother to raise her at the same age. She was "reliving" her own teenage years now through Sharon! That was why she seemed to Sharon more as a "sister" than as a "mother". Why she liked Darlanis better! I was "older". Not like Darlanis. Not "playful" like she was!

"You have also made yourself 'vulnerable' to Sharon," I pointed out. I had already seen "evidence" of that. I wondered how long it would take before Sharon realized the power that she had over Darlanis. I prayed that she would not abuse her power.

"She is the girl I wish I could have been," Darlanis said, refilling her glass. "The girl my own mother never let me be." I saw the hostility, the hatred flaring once again in those eyes.

"Have you ever written to your mother?" I ventured. It was now nearly thirty years now since Darlanis had last seen her.

"Why?" Darlanis snapped back. "Why should I do something stupid like that? She hates my guts for telling the truth about my brother. That fancy 'pet' of hers that could do 'no wrong'! She always 'liked' Darl and Janis a lot better than she did me!"

"What about Janis?" I ventured. Janis had been her older sister. The heir to the throne once Tulis died or was deposed as now seemed likely from what Jon had told me. Such could be done I knew by a vote of the Dularnian Assembly, although it took a four fifths vote to do it. The society had a lot of defects, but at least there was a way of getting "rid" of a bad Queen if it became necessary. The only trouble was that there was no Princess of Dularn to replace Queen Tulis unless Darl Jord married. And as Dularn was a "Queendom", only a woman could be the ruler!

"Janis always took my mother's side," Darlanis snapped. I recalled the two there on Sarnian Lady. They had not been very much like two sisters. I had wondered why. I thought now that I knew why. Yet I recalled Janis' emotional reactions. The bitter tears, the later attempted suicide Sharon had stopped when Darlanis had seen her sister die there on the decks of the Seahawk.

"We still have to go to Dularn to end this war," I said.

"You can go as my representative," Darlanis snapped back.

"You have no desire to see your mother again?" I asked.

"After what she DID to ME?" Darlanis then "snapped back".

"If you could save Queen Tulis' life or Princess Tara's, which would you save?" I suddenly challenged her in reply. I saw those azure eyes widen in shocked surprise at my words. I needed to break through all of Darlanis' "armor". Break on through to the TRUTH! This was the only way that I could do that now!

"Tulis isn't Tara," Darlanis snapped back. "And I don't appreciate having you compare them like that either," she snapped! She was angry now, her eyes like a icy cold azure as they burned into mine! I had struck "pay dirt" with my insistent probing! I don't think Darlanis really understood what sort of "doc" I was!

"There is still a bit of love left, isn't there?" I smiled. I had hoped that there might be buried deep in the most secret recesses of Darlanis' heart. I could only hope that Queen Tulis still had some for the daughter she had disowned thirty years ago. Darlanis nodded, her eyes moist and saw something I did not as we sat there together. I suspected, however, what she saw.

Chapter Forty One

"Be careful all that alcohol goes through that strainer," I warned as the last of the medical alcohol was poured into Black Lady's wing tanks. I hoped the patched wing would hold together. The shipwright thought that it would, but he didn't know anything about airplanes. About the effects of alcohol on the patching materials of the 26th Century. This was not some galley with a hole in the hull from battle! We had to hold liquid in, not out!

There was a big crowd to see us off, all the "high and mighty" of Trella. Both our golden haired Princesses, Jon, Sanda, Lady Tirana, Delilah, and all the others I had gotten to know during the time that Sharon and I had spent here in the 26th Century. Four months ago to the day I had flown through a strange thunderstorm and ended up here in the 26th Century. Now I was going to fly off again, this time to Dularn with Darlanis to end a war that had taken thousands of lives on both sides. I had left written instructions as what to do if neither of us "came back". If something happened to Darlanis and me in Dularn.

Darlanis had a beautifully fitted golden thread dress that outlined the curves of that perfect figure, but also concealed enough of her that her mother might find her more "acceptable". I wore a black tunic and hose suitable for the more cooler climate of Dularn, and had packed a silk gown for the more "formal" occasions. Both of us had taken ample clothing for our stay. For the flight to Dularn Darlanis too had selected black tunic and hose. We had brought our swords and Darlanis' compound bow. Not that I felt our weapons would make any difference, but this is an era where women of our caste are expected to be armed formally. I was also taking my force-saber with me "just in case".

"I still wish you'd reconsider and take the Squala," Jon said to me. My adventures in the air recently had been enough to deter nearly any body from getting into the plane with me. It would take Squala nearly two weeks to sail from Trella to Arsana or a bit less, depending on the wind. Black Lady could in theory make the trip in ten hours or a bit less, although I did not plan to attempt it, planning to take two days for the trip. We would arrive over Arsana in the early afternoon. I would first circle the city, tell them who we were before landing in the harbor. Have them signal us if they wished us to land. Otherwise I would fly back to California and we'd have to figure something else out to do. I had just enough "range" to make such a flight after our last refueling stop in Porlan some six hundred miles south of Arsana. Just enough to get us back home to safety in California!

"If something happens to me marry Sanda," I said to him.

"There will never be another like you," he answered.

"I'll be back," I promised, kissing him before all.

"I don't like the looks of that storm," I said to Darlanis as we neared Sarn about three hours later. The thunderheads towering up into the sky there before us like gleaming snow-white fluffy mountains. They are beautiful to look at, but deadly to small airplanes such as mine with their internal wind gusts. You can fly underneath one, but it is not really advisable to do so if you can manage to fly around them instead as I planned to do.

"Can't this stand a storm?" Darlanis asked, her hands steady on the wheel. I had been letting her fly, get in some practice. We were flying at about a hundred and fifty miles per hour, which is the plane's best cruising speed. The thought going through my mind that I'd flown into such a storm in 1988 and ended up here!

"The last time that I flew into a storm like that I ended up here," I smiled in reply, taking the controls and swinging inland away from the storm. I planned to give it a wide berth. So far the repaired wing hadn't been leaking noticeably, and my fuel consumption seemed normal enough considering that I was burning alcohol instead of gasoline. If I couldn't avoid the storm I'd land on any fair sized body of water and beach the plane until the storm blew over. Staying the night if necessary and then flying back off in the morning. I had packed food, water, if needed. We had our weapons. My force saber. Darlanis her compound bow. I supposed there was little to worry about, although one can never tell in this era what they will run into out in the "sticks" now. Especially in areas where there aren't any people. I still recalled that scaly "horror" Gayle and I once had seen.

"I wouldn't mind visiting your era although I don't think I'd want to live there," Darlanis smiled back just as the engine suddenly started to sputter and miss for a serious lack of fuel!

"Look for anything flat," I snapped, glancing out the window at the ground below. We were flying over forest, with rolling hills ahead. I needed a body of water a quarter mile across or a field of somewhat similar size. I spotted the gleam of water a ways ahead, the water now reflecting the azure sky like a mirror.

"We're in 'trouble', aren't we?" Darlanis spoke in level tones that betrayed no trace of the terror she must have felt even though she understood as well as I did what would happen if we failed to reach the lake and crashed down in among the trees!

"We'll make it," I answered, giving the plane full throttle and pulling out the choke a bit. The fuel line was obviously now plugging up with something. I suspect that the wing tank had not been properly cleaned out when the repairs had been made to the damaged wing. I supposed I should have supervised the repairs myself, but I had thought that Sharon and Gayle could "do" that!

"It's going to be a long walk to Sarn," Darlanis "smiled".

"We'll fly there as soon as I make repairs," I told her.

There was no doubt now that we would make the little lake.

"The fuel line is plugged," I told Darlanis, standing on the float with the cowling open, a wrench in my hand. The wind blowing through the trees. It was starting to spit rain. Cold rain.

"There is a big Garth watching us," Darlanis announced in level tones. The fearsome reptile no more than fifty yards off!

"We can get in the plane and push off from shore," I suggested. I didn't think the creature would come in after us, although I didn't really know that much about the habits of Garths.

"I have my bow," Darlanis answered, climbing in, getting it.

"You'll only irritate it," I warned her, watching the Garth, remembering how Sa-she-ra had killed a similar creature only a month ago. I knew that Darlanis was a skillful archer, better than me, but she was no Sa-she-ra either! Granted that big compound of hers would punch arrows deep right into the Garth's vitals, but it takes an awful lot of killing to do in a Garth! I told her to wait, thinking of my force saber. Together we might stand a chance up against that 26th Century mutated scaly horror!

"You fix the plane, I'll take care of the Garth," she said, stepping down off the float, her boots sinking into the mud, a quiver of arrows slung over her shoulders. Her sword at her hip.

"You'll get yourself killed, you big beautiful blonde!" I protested back, jumping off the float, grabbing her, pulling her back. Darlanis' azure eyes glowing into mine as the Garth then lumbered off into the woods, having had little interest in us!* * It is possible that it feared the airplane, which was of course strange to it. I have noticed how animals shy away from the airplane. It is nearly impossible for example to get Delilah in it!

The rain pounded against the aluminum of the fuselage like hail as we huddled inside, sharing some of the snacks I had brought with us and a bottle of wine from my own vineyards that Darlanis pronounced as being "suitable" for our "royal palates"!

"You're a lot different than all the 'Queens' I used to read about in the story books when I was a little girl," I told Darlanis as we passed the bottle of wine back and forth between us. I always think of "Queens" as women in long gowns, wearing crowns, with lots of pomp and ceremony surrounding their every activity.

"You're no different now as a 'Queen' than you were before," Darlanis pointed out, taking a healthy swig of the wine from the bottle before handing it back to me. She is the sort of a woman that you instantly like. There is just "something" about her!

"I guess because I really don't 'feel' like one," I smiled.

"You do get used to it after a while," Darlanis assured me.

"What gets me is how Sanda and all the others pulled off what they did without my even suspecting what was going on," I told Darlanis as we nibbled on a bit of cheese and some sausage. Outside the plane the greenery of the forest dripped wetness, the raindrops running down the windshield in front of us as the rain pounded against Black Lady's aluminum fuselage almost like hail. The sky a hazy iron gray reflected off the rippling rain spotted water of the little lake we had fortunately been able to land on.

"Just remember what they can 'do' for you they can also 'do' against you if and when the time comes," Darlanis warned with a grim smile. I supposed that it was true, although I didn't fear that my friends would ever turn against me. Yet, I remembered how easy it had been to suspect Sanda of poisoning me. Of trying to kill both Darlanis and myself with that synthetic Lorr venom!

"How do you live with that?" I asked her. Knowing that your life was always in danger from those who sought your death. Who perhaps sought to replace you with another. I have no doubt that Sanda for example would have been happy to kill Darlanis had she had the chance to do so before I came on to the scene. I remembered Tara. She was still free to make trouble. To make more attempts on our lives. She had already tried to kill me twice now. She had come close to killing Darlanis. And could I trust people like Sanda? I recalled the French Revolution. The beheadings. The betrayals of the "revolutionaries" by the others.

"Live each day the very best you can," Darlanis answered. There was that in her voice that spoke of her own personal experience. "Choose your friends carefully and then stand by them." I was to recall her very words only a short while later on too.

"I wonder if it's wise to land here in Sarn," Darlanis said to me as we swooped down over the great harbor of Sarn there in the growing darkness. Her words puzzling as certainly here we had nothing to fear. This was after all the center of the Empire! Where Darlanis' own awesome power would be the greatest.

"The Imperial Senate may just decide that lopping off your head would be in 'the best interests of the Empire'," she said to me with a grim smile. "Especially if Tara got to them first." I suppose I never had thought of that. We had always thought that Tara would flee to Baja, but she was still the Prime Minister of the Empire. Head of the Senate. Warlady of the Empire of California. I SUDDENLY REALIZED THAT DARLANIS TOO HAD NO REASON TO WISH ME TO LIVE! I was a threat to everyone. It would be "easy" to have an "accident" happen. There could be a "crossbowman". I recalled that first attempt on my life. The man had not said that the heavily veiled and disguised woman had a bad hand. What if that woman had been one of Darlanis' own secret agents? I had always "suspected" Princess Tara, but it could have been another! What if it had all been "done" at Darlanis' orders? After-all, I was far more of a "threat" to Darlanis' own "interests" than I had been to Tara's! The Princess and I hardly knew each other!

"Lorraine," Darlanis breathed, reaching out, touching me. I took her hand in mine, held it, looked into her eyes. Felt shame for what I had thought of her. I know how my words written here "hurt" my friends. I can only ask their forgiveness when I speak the truth of my own feelings. I have at times even distrusted Sharon! For a few moments as I cleaned out the fuel line I wondered if she hadn't been just a bit "too careless" about seeing that the fuel tank was cleaned out after having it repaired. Sometimes I even fear that I will someday become another like Queen Tulis of Dularn became before finding that she was dying of an inoperable brain tumor. I am extremely "paranoid", I note. I sometimes fear what I may someday "become". I know too much of history. Of what some did "become" in "positions" such as mine.

"At least it will be a fight that the Warriresses will talk about for a thousand years," Darlanis smiled then. "I've always wondered how well we'd 'do' side by side, back to back together." Her azure eyes glowed into mine there in the growing darkness as I reached out and put my arm around her. There was no need for words then! No longer did I "doubt" Darlanis' friendship for me!

Chapter Forty Two

"We'll load as much alcohol aboard that we can and run for it if we have to," Darlanis said to me as we flew over her white marble palace there below, the flag of Empire still flying from its flagstaff. The blue and gold of her own personal flag still yet below it visible in the landing lights as I came around up into the wind. I wondered if we were worrying ourselves needlessly about nothing, although I knew that if

Princess Tara had somehow managed to reach the Senate before us we could be in very serious trouble. She had far too much power in the Empire! I had no doubt that if she was here she had doubtlessly already managed to seize control of the Empire. All she would have to do would be to terrify the Senate with tales of our "Revolution" to get whatever "emergency" powers that she needed to become a total dictator over all of Sarn! Make herself into another Napoleon!

"A Queen doesn't run from her people," I said to Darlanis. "What was done in Trelandar can be done here too by `YOU' too."

"I don't know how!" Darlanis protested, the idea perhaps of overthrowing her own government seeming unbelievable to her too! She was after all from a culture to which such things were almost unthinkable. Even our "Revolution" there in Trelandar had been more in the nature of a coup d'etat than any actual "revolution".

"All you have to do is go talk to your people," I told her. I would be there at her side to help her. Give her what "moral support" I could. It was a cold and rainy night. The first week of October had already gone by. Fall was racing down upon us from the cold northlands. Soon the leaves would be changing now.

"And wear the most provocative outfit you have," I smiled as she nodded, understanding. She was a wonderful public speaker. She had certainly done an excellent job there in Trelandar. I wouldn't have cared to have tried to "campaign" against her anywhere! Even in Trelandar she still had her supporters after all that had happened. There were still those who supported Darlanis Marden, Queen of Sarn, and Empress of the Empire of California!

"And if we fail we will at least die together," Darlanis said, giving me a grim smile as I brought the plane down a few hundred yards from the palace there among the anchored ships. I prayed that the Senators wouldn't be prepared for what was to be!

My teeth chattered in the cold rain as I stood beside Darlanis on the piled crates, the gold mesh of her brief attire well displaying her incredible beauty there in the light of the smoky sputtering torches. I wore my own brief outfit, outlandish as it appeared, the force saber ready in my hand. Black Lady floating tied up to the dock behind us. I had to admire Darlanis, the way she "played" a crowd as she did. The upturned sea of faces there in the darkness listening to every word. Cheering her, crying out her name! I thought momentarily of another, and wondered.

Around us were gathered the warrioresses of her own personal guard, their chain mail glistening in the torch light. Not enough if the Senate was able to rally the city's own forces against us, but enough that I had little doubt that we might stall things long enough to turn the tables upon those opposing us. Fortunately the 26th Century is an era where most men go armed, and there is not really that much of an advantage that the military has over civilians! I once mentioned the anti-gun laws of the 20th Century to Darlanis, who remarked that she wasn't too surprised that we had the sort of a political system that we had. She also said that our "democracy" of the 20th Century wasn't really that, since the "people" in her eyes had no more actual "say" over things than did her own people of the Empire of California. Perhaps she has a point there. The Constitution of Trelandar states that the right of the people to keep and bear arms is the basis of a free state and shall never be "infringed" by the government. It is not just an "Amendment" like what the old "United States" had in its Constitution, but an actual basic part of the Constitution of Trelandar itself! We have learned a few things from history over those six centuries, I am happy to say!

"I now stand before you as your Queen," Darlanis spoke to the crowd gathered there before us. "But

now as a much different Queen who has learned much from another from a time now only legend. From the time of JANET ROGERS HERSELF! I now stand beside Queen Lorraine Richards of Trelandar who has just brought a 'NEW ORDER' to her own land! A 'NEW ORDER' that we too of Sarn can now HAVE HERE right in our own land!"* * Janet's own political system was called "THE NEW ORDER". When we made our "Revolution" there in Trelandar I suggested that we called our own political system "The New Order" after hers. (LR)

I listened to Darlanis speaking to the people before us in that clear ringing beautiful voice of hers. I supposed it really didn't matter all that much what she said to them, it was just that she was "THERE" and that the people could see her standing up there in the rain before them. Political speeches are usually just a lot of "rhetoric" anyway. Both Darlanis and I are pretty good "rabble-rousers" by 26th Century standards. She is perhaps somewhat "better" at it because she is so stunningly beautiful no man can disbelieve her! I would hate to have Her as an enemy!

"HAIL DARLANIS!" I heard the people cry. There were a few who also "hailed" me as I stood there beside Darlanis. They had heard of our "Revolution" from the passing ships. Word travels slowly in the 26th Century as I have mentioned. No doubt the tales had been a bit "distorted" by the time they reached Sarn. There was, I knew, even some of our own revolutionaries who were now hard at work along the border between Sarn and Trelandar. Stirring up the people of the area. Making "trouble" as best that they could for the titled aristocrats of the region. Sanda's "Revolution" was now getting "out of hand" despite our own best efforts to contain it! It was spreading like "wildfire"! I feared what the ultimate consequences might be if it got out of hand. I am a Frenchwoman by birth. I know of our own Revolution and what it brought. What the American Revolution could have been had not men like Washington, Jefferson, and Hamilton been in control. I feared what Sanda might do once she saw how "easy" it was to arouse the people. Send them like maddened rabid dogs at the throats of the oppressive aristocracies of the 26th Century!

What I feared most of all was crossbowmen as Darlanis stood there tall and golden, her wet body glistening there in the rain. I feared that bolt out of the darkness that would take her life! Without Darlanis there would be no way to control the revolution we were starting. Without her all of Sarn could be plunged into a "bloodbath" like what had happened in France in 1789! Then the "scavengers" would come. The Nevadas, the peoples from the dry arid wastelands to the east beyond the mountains! And then the forces from Dularn as Queen Tulis took advantage of her disowned daughter's death! I thought of anti-matter, of its "containment" in "magnetic bottles". Revolutions were much the same! Controlled, a revolution could alter civilizations, change the entire history of the human race. Uncontrolled, disaster and death would be the only outcome! Sarn would be destroyed, chewed up and bitten apart by its neighbors to the north, south, and east. What Darlanis had so carefully built up could be destroyed by one crossbowman! With one carefully aimed two ounce bolt!

I saw the glitter of armor, saw spear points moving in the darkness behind the crowd. Heard Darlanis pause, her azure eyes glowing there in the torchlight as she saw the Legion. Heard the muttering of the crowd as they too saw the cause of their Queen's concern. The "establishment" had finally reacted to our "Revolution". Darlanis' warrioresses moving up, drawing their blades. I saw the flash of steel among the crowd. The people were ready to fight! To die for their golden Empress. The odds were far worse than my worst nightmares! We were outnumbered at least by twenty to one! We faced perhaps seven thousand men, armed men! An entire Imperial Legion! Their own Warrioress forces outnumbered those who stood by Darlanis by some ten to one! I saw Darlanis draw her sword. Saw the look in her eyes. She would die as she had lived. Die with her people against these overwhelming odds that it would have taken thousands to stand up against! We had not known the awesome forces that would be thrown against us. We had "miscalculated", and badly, I feared! TARAHAD WON!!!

"There is Black Lady," Darlanis said to me. "See that I am avenged." I knew the thoughts in her mind. There was enough alcohol in the plane to make it to Trelandar. To safety! She and her people would hold the Legion long enough for me to take off.

"WeQueensdon't `run'," I snapped back. I had no doubt who would be in actual "command" of that Legion. She would not have left such a task up to others. Princess Tara is no "dumbbell"!

"Like a bad copper you keep `turning up'Lorraine,"Tarasnapped as she sat there on a pure black unicorn before the Legion, glorious in helmet and chain mail. I had to smile at that, since she took the very words that I was going to say right out of my own mouth! Behind her seven thousand men in armor, spears in their hands, shields on their arms, swords at their hips. The force of warrioresses on their unicorns alone outnumbered us all!

With one motion I lifted the force saber and flicked it on. The beam of gently glowing force extending out a meter from my hand. A totally alien weapon from the fantasies of another time.

"Couldn't you do better than that pitiful little force of primitive barbarians, Tara?" I snapped back. "Don't you realize that I command the very forces of the stars themselves? That she who is First among the Lorr is my most dear friend? Didn't you see the power that I command when the Starfire blasted your pirates into sub-atomic particles? Don't you realize I could give an order and have the entire Earth turned into a radioactive cinder as totally lifeless as the Moon? Do you think I am some simple barbarian like you who has to ride around on some dumb beast while I command the skies themselves! You see my craft. Don't you know I could burn this entire city to ruins and there wouldn't be a single thing that you or anyone of you simple barbarians could do about it! DammitTara, don't you realize `WHO' controls this world of yours? That behind me stands a `POWER' so infinite that your simple little primitive mind can't even understand it!"

"You!" I snapped to a warrior atTara's side. "Toss me your shield!" The man did so. There was a blur of light and the shield crashed to the flagstones in four pieces, my force saber having passed through the metal as if it was but a mere mist!

"You see my power,Tara," I snapped. "Dare you defy me?" I saw her face, saw her eyes. Saw the terror in their depths. She wheeled her mount and galloped off into the darkness, BEATEN!!!

"I think,Lorraine, that I would not care to play poker with you," Darlanis said in quiet tones, her azure eyes filled with awe at what I had done. It had of course been a bluff. Perhaps the biggest bluff ever pulled in the entire history of the human race. I had, of course, known thatTaraknew of the Starfire. Knew that she knew that such a craft was commanded by the Lorr, which she muchly feared. My force saber did the rest for us all. We had won without crossing a single blade. The power of the Imperial Senate was broken. Darlanis was now truly Queen of Sarn! Empress ofCalifornia. She handed me her sword. I kissed it. As I have said before such is meaningful among those of my caste.

Chapter Forty Three

I carefully adjusted Black Lady's dual fuel injectors on the eight cylinder engine as one of Darlanis' own warrioresses watched the dual vacuum gauges there on the instrument panel for me. The plane being carefully tied down to stakes driven into the ground as the engine roared out at full power before me, the

whirling deadly propeller only a foot from my hip blowing my hair out like a flag and whipping up a tornado of dust that rose like a mist there over the bay. Two other warrioresses were posted close by to keep the idle curious away. The fact that I was a "Queen" who would "get her hands dirty" astounded everyone! Darlanis was now off making another political speech somewhere, the beautiful regal Empress of California greatly enjoying the adoration of the crowds that now instantly gathered wherever she went. Our original mission to fly to Dularn and bring an end to the warfare between the Empire and Dularn had been momentarily forgotten in the excitement of Sam's new unbelievable "Revolution"!

I had adjusted the timing, cleaned the fuel system out, and had installed a "belly" tank below the fuselage that now increased the range of the plane by fifty percent. And now that I had gotten the fuel injection finally adjusted properly, my range had increased to an awesome eighteen hundred miles in theory, although I would never attempt to make such a long flight in practice. It is said that there are "bold" pilots and "old" pilots. I tend to be as a rule to be numbered among the latter. (Most of the time anyway!) I now actually had enough "fuel capacity" to fly the length of the Empire itself without needing to refuel!

I made a quick chopping motion with my hand to the warrioress there in the cockpit, the woman staring at me for a second before she realized that I wanted her to push the throttle back in to an idle! While Darlanis' fighting women were brave enough in battle, I had encountered a bit of trouble in getting one to sit in the cockpit and monitor the instrument panel while I worked on the engine. The first woman I had tried had simply sat there terrified and had been utterly useless to me. This one, however, at least was willing to carry out my orders, although I don't think she really thought too much of the idea either. Perhaps fearing with good reason that the ropes might possibly break and she could end up flying up into the air all by herself!

"That's it," I told the woman, pulling the packing out of my ears that I had used to stand the noise of the engine, reaching in and turning off the key and then placing it in my pouch fixed to my weapons belt. While it wasn't too likely that anyone would have been able to get the engine started, even so I was careful to take precautions against anything happening. Three armed warrioresses being stationed at all times by it to keep anyone from tampering with it! Princess Tara might yet just be around! We thought she had now fled the area, but one can never be too sure!

"There is much magic here, your majesty," the woman said, her voice showing a bit of the awe she felt towards me. While she was of high caste, being of the Warrioresses, still actually sitting in an airplane must have been the sort of experience that she would be telling her children for years to come. The glittering gold of her neck chain there just above her chain mail left little doubt that she was doubtlessly a mother. There are few childless "career" women in the 26th Century. Motherhood is generally considered the proper status for all married women after they wear the gold chain of a wife of more than three years.

"Science, not magic," I smiled back. There is a difference.

"There is a trio of ships from Trelandar, your majesty!" the warrioress announced, now a bit out of breath from her run as I cleaned my hands of the grease. I had rather expected that there would be. I had sent the fastest ship we had to Trella. "Two big galleys and a schooner, a big one!" I expected that one of the galleys was the Janis, and the big schooner would be the Squala. No doubt the other galley was Sarnian Lady now being returned to Darlanis by my request. It was, after all, her ship.

"Have someone find Darlanis and tell her to expect guests," I answered with a smile. I was sure that she would want to know!

"I heard of your latest exploit," Jon said to me as I welcomed him with open arms. "Standing off an entire Imperial Legion!" The handsome dark haired naval officer being the sort of a man that any

red-blooded woman would be happy to married to. As my Prince-Consort he had been helping Sanda and Gayle run things in Trelandar while I helped Darlanis here in Sarn. I had merely taken a copy of the Trelandarian Constitution and changed "Trelandar" to "Sarn" where needed for Sarn's new Constitution.

"All I had to do was bluffTara," I smiled back in his arms. It much pleased me to be so held. To be "his woman" before all. Little Mara and Ta-she-ra were there watching. I was very close to Ta-she-ra, but Mara still seemed a bit "distant" from me at times. I suspected that she remembered Lana. It would take time for me to break down those "barriers". Become part of her life.

"And you certainly did it from what I hear!" he laughed in return, sweeping me up in his arms and giving me a good kiss before everyone. "You are really some woman!" Later I would tell him how scared I had been then, but this wasn't the time for it.

"I had to tellSharonthe truth about Darlanis," Jon said to me as we laid together, his fingertip gently caressing my nipple. "She had been hearing too many rumors there in Trella for me to lie about what had happened there fifteen years ago," he added, his dark eyes looking into mine as I nodded in reply, understanding what it must have been like for him to tell her the truth!!!

"I hope she took it well," I answered, concerned as to how she had reacted. Darlanis was not the "fantasy heroine" that my stepdaughter had tried to make her out to be. She was a woman of the 26th Century. A "barbarian" by 20th Century standards. It would have been a hard blow forSharonto realize that Darlanis "was" the same woman who had ordered the deaths of innocent women and children in the conquest of Trelandar fifteen years ago! On the other hand Darlanis certainly wasn't any worse than those in the Vietnam war who had called down "air strikes" on villages when they received hostile fire from those same villages. War is not "civilized". I hoped that Jon had been able to explain that!

"She said that she had `a lot of questions' for Darlanis to answer and that Darlanis `had better have some answers for them too'," Jon said, giving me a smile. He didn't care that much for the Empress anyway and I suspected that Darlanis was "sweating" a little right now trying to explain things to her Imperial Princess! I hopedSharonwould realize that Darlanis loved her dearly and she, Sharon, shouldn't expect Darlanis to be "perfect" in every respect. Gayle knew of my experience with the crossbowman, although it didn't seem to bother her any, Gayle being of course a girl of the 26th Century and well used to hearing such tales!

"Were all women of the 20th Century as `good in bed' as you are?" Jon asked me, changing the subject, feeling the touch of my hand. I was "in the mood". Hard to "satisfy". Sometimes I get that way. It is, I think, a "nervous reaction" of some sort.

"The average woman of the 20th Century was a lot like the average Dularnian woman," I told him with a smile. They have a reputation for being "frigid". That is why Californian women are so popular in Dularn as slave girls. On the other hand many men ofCaliforniaprefer a Dularnian if she is properly collared and has felt the lash a few times across her bare back and buttocks.

"I'm glad you're not 'the average 20th Century woman' then," Jon said to me with a smile, reaching down, touching me, feeling of my "heat" and wetness. The "need" there strong in my slim muscular body. He had not "touched" me for a week. It had seemed longer perhaps for both of us. No doubt Yvette had been "neglected". Jon claims that I am "better", although I don't see how that can be possible knowing what I do about that slave girl!

"You sure do bring back a lot of memories," Jon smiled as Mrs. Jon Richards in her fitted black silk evening gown and crown made sure that he was properly "presentable" for being the consort of the

Queen of Trelandar. I had sent Yvette "packing", preferring to do such things myself. It is perhaps a trait that I have. I don't think that Jon minds my "fussing" a bit over him at times. He brushes my hair. Touches me. Makes me feel "married". I like feeling that way. Jack never laid a hand on me unless he wanted sex. He made me feel "used" after it was over. That I was just something like a slave girl that he kept around for his "convenience". Jon on the other hands finds me "fascinating" (that is his word for me) and in private often playfully pats me on the rump and in other ways keeps me well aware of the fact that I am to him a desirable and attractive woman. Naturally I am highly responsive in turn, Jon laughing and saying that we probably should sell Yvette as I am just too "demanding" a wife for my poor slave girl to get "hers" as a slave girl should! I don't think that Yvette suffers too much, as I do have an ample number of strong lusty warriors around, and they all seem to "appreciate" a girl like Yvette too! Such is the life of the Queen of Trelandar. Here I am happy, content. At "peace" with myself.

"Good ones, I hope," I smiled. I knew he had been married before, and that his wife had looked somewhat like I did. That was something I had already accepted. We were both widowed. We were both people with "memories". Both of us accepted that as a part of our lives. Alexis had been better looking in the face, although we both had perhaps pretty much the same sort of physical builds. Princess Tara had commanded the forces that took theIslandofFlowers. Darlanis had been her commander in chief.

"With you it is always good," he answered, kissing me lightly on the lips. My mouth was heavily glossed, my eyes made up. My hair brushed and set, my face "painted" to conceal my age. I am perhaps reasonably attractive when so made up. I try to be in any case. It is important for a Queen to be attractive to those who come see her. I have in any case a beautiful Princess with two more coming on the way up. Ta-she-ra will be a lovely girl, as will Mara when she grows up in another ten or fifteen years.

"Pretty good for a 'jumped up slave girl'," Gayle said to me as Jon and I came down the stairs to the brightly lit throne room, her diamond studded gold tiara and fitted blue silk evening gown making her truly look like the beautiful Princess that she was. But her comment was almost like a sudden violent blow to me as I instantly recalled just "who" had said exactly just that insult to her! And what my own unthinking reaction had been to it also! I had gone running afterSharon, while Gayle had been the one hurt! How could I ever have been so utterly thoughtless! I had been thinking too much ofSharon, and too little of my Gayle!

"We have to talk, and now," I answered, taking Gayle by the arm. Jon stopping me, telling me that Darlanis was expecting us. The Empress of California even striding over towards us, followed by a troupe of men and women dressed in the finery of Californian aristocracy. With them Lady Tirana and Sanda Talen, along with Sharon, the Imperial Princess. She who had once been mine before Darlanis took her away from me. I hopedSharonhad gotten an earful of what Darlanis was truly like. What had happened there in Trelandar. Maybe then she'd understand a bit more about life!

"Tell her what you can, but this is far more important than her damm politics!" I snapped back, my grip on Gayle's arm no doubt painfully tight as the golden haired Princess of Trelandar stood there at my side. "Tell I need ten minutes, no more," I added, turning, pulling Gayle with me into a small anteroom off the big throne room. Closing the door behind me, looking about for a way to lock it. I had no wish to be disturbed. Not by Darlanis, not by any body! We had to talk! Work this out! Gayle turning to face me in the dimly lit room. Standing there.

"I know, I understand," I said to Gayle, taking her in my arms, stroking her golden hair. "I know everything." I understood how Gayle must have felt seeing me go running after Sharon when Darlanis had reprimanded her for her thoughtless cruel comment. And I had been thinking how "superior" I was to

Darlanis! "And I never realized at all what I did to you," I said, holding her, my eyes blurring with tears of shame for what I had done to my lovely Gayle. My lovely golden Dularnian maiden. And I could understand now how that fight had started in Thistle. And I had no doubt that the newspapers in Trella had found out by now that Gayle had been a slave girl. That she had once been my property!

"There was a time when I wished the pirates had killed her," Gayle said to me softly. "A time when I wished you'd not been in time to save her." I had no doubt as to who "her" was either! I remembered all too vividly how Sharon had stood beside Darlanis and sneered at Gayle, cutting her to the quick with her comment about how she had "risen" from slavery to become a "Princess". I remembered too Darlanis' reaction. At least she had understood!

"I was told by the High Priestess of Thistle that I would someday have to 'pay' for my sins," I answered, weeping now, "But I never dreamed that it would be you who would have to pay the price for what I did," I answered, her face blurring before me.

"Lorraine, why aren't you ---?" Darlanis asked as she opened the door and entered the room, closing the door behind herself, the surprise showing on her beautiful face as she saw the tears in my eyes. Darlanis quickly bracing her body against the door so that it could not be opened without first forcing her aside!

"We are having a private conversation, your majesty," Gayle said to Darlanis, who nodded, her azure eyes glowing as I wiped at my own eyes. I knew my eye makeup had run. That I would have to "fix my face" before I could appear again in public to face all the Imperial aristocrats. All of those bastards and bitches out there who would no doubt get a perverse pleasure in seeing the suffering of others. "Send for Yvette, not one of yours." Gayle said to Darlanis. I had to smile a bit at that. Yvette would keep her mouth "shut". She was "trustworthy". The same could not be always guaranteed with one of Darlanis' own wenches.

"You're pretty competent," I whispered, regarding Gayle. Darlanis taking her leave of us. No doubt she would post a guard so that we would not be disturbed. Darlanis is "quick-witted".

"I would not wish to see my Queen embarrassed," Gayle smiled back. "Especially when I love her as much as I do," she added, giving me a smile. Taking a cloth and dabbing at my face as I stood there before her. "And I know now that I am truly yours."

Chapter Forty Four

"We need to talk," Sharon said to me in low tones as we both stood side by side filling our glasses there at the gigantic cut glass punch bowl. Darlanis at the moment busy talking to a group of Californian aristocrats, explaining to them the implications of the "New Order" that we were now establishing here in the 26th Century. Gayle off somewhere with Sanda and Jon, mingling with the others there in that brilliantly lit Imperial throne room. I nodded in reply, giving my golden haired stepdaughter a smile in return. I had few doubts what the conversation would consist of.

"I could use a breath of fresh air," I assured her in turn. Sharon had become much more "adult" in the last couple months. I suspected that Darlanis had something to do with that, although it was quite possible that what she had recently endured had matured her considerably. She was no longer my "little girl". She

had become a woman now, a surprisingly very capable and competent Princess, I understood from what Darlanis had told me earlier. I thought of Gayle. She was also competent and capable, I had seen for myself as she "covered" for me while Yvette fixed my makeup.

It was a lovely night, a bit of chill in the air speaking of fall. The stars bright in the sky above. There is little "light pollution" from 26th Century cities, which are not brightly lit at night. The night sky is gorgeous to see, the Milky Way like a gleaming band of tiny sparkling diamonds sprinkled across the heavens. Three planets were visible, Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn. The Moon would not rise until well after midnight, I remembered. Deimos had gone over some time during the day, I recalled then, the Lorr "starship" circling the Earth now about every two hours.

"Darlanis loves me very much," Sharon said to me softly. I could understand why. Sharon was more a "sister" than a "daughter" to her. Their relationship was different than what ours had been. Sharon was to Darlanis both "sister" and "daughter" both. They had stood together side by side against a common foe, knowing the "horrors" that awaited them in the hands of the pirates.

"I'm well aware of that," I smiled back in reply, wishing I had a wrap for my shoulders as we walked side by side along the graveled walks of the palace grounds. The crunch of the footsteps of the warrioresses behind us speaking of the security precautions we had taken. Princess Tara was still on the "loose". The Imperial Guard had "gone over" to Tara when she tried to take "control" of things. Darlanis like me was now rather "paranoid".

"And I love her just as much in return," Sharon said to me.

"Even if she isn't 'She-Ra' any more?" I smiled back. I had once warned Sharon about that. That Darlanis was a woman, not a fantasy figure drawn out of the Twentieth Century cartoon series.

"She is still 'She-Ra' to me," Sharon smiled back in the darkness as we halted. The warrioresses behind us halting too. "She will always be to me something 'good', something 'decent'."

"None of us are without 'sin'," I answered, remembering. I knew that Sharon knew of the crossbowman, of what had been done.

"She has 'Talos', you have that 'crossbowman'," she smiled.

"And I have my memories to haunt me," I answered, remembering. I should never have let Lady Tirana do what she did to him.

"Darlanis believes now that it was one of her agents who was also working for Princess Tara who paid him," Sharon spoke there in the darkness, the lights of the city of Sarntwinkling across the calm waters of the bay. I thought of those who had once been imprisoned here on this very spot over six centuries ago. They would have been surprised to know what it was now being used for!

"There was a time when I prayed that it wasn't Darlanis who had been responsible," I told Sharon. She knew of my "moods", of the fact that there were times that I distrusted everyone close to me. It is, I suppose, part of being what I now am. A Queen lives from minute to minute, knowing that a crossbowman could at any time squeeze his trigger and end her life. Darlanis and I share much. Sometimes I hate myself for what I think. The way I have of "hurting" others. My "moodiness", my suspicious nature. The feeling of "superiority" I have because I am from a technologically advanced era. That I can fly an airplane, travel in the skies while those of this era must ride about on dumb beasts. Perhaps An'na and Raspa feel the same about me because they have space ships to ride around in and

can travel between the planets.

"She is your 'friend', perhaps more so than any one else," Sharon said to me, looking up into my eyes, her hand on my arm. We had stood side by side, facing a common foe. We were "sisters of the sword". I had saved her life, and she had saved mine too.

"Yet she has you, and I don't," I answered in reply, taking her in my arms. Happy to hold her, feeling the "warmth" of her. She is "different" than Gayle. More like Janet Rogers, I think.

"You will always be my 'mother', but she is like a 'sister' to me. A big sister that I can always turn to." Sharon replied.

"And when I 'lost' you I bought a slave girl to replace you," I answered, looking out into the darkness, my teeth chattering a bit from the chill. My evening gown offered little protection from the elements. No doubt Sharon's did little better.

"And do you 'love' her?" Sharon asked me. I knew the answer to that. I had held Gayle in my arms only an hour ago, wept on her shoulder. I had "used" Gayle for my own selfish needs, not ever realizing how much she loved me even although I didn't really deserve her love. Often I wonder why people "admire" me so much. I am not an "admirable" person really. I am not "good and decent" like Darlanis is. I fear that I will have much to answer for when I finally stand before SHE and SHE judges me for my sins. I have done evil things in my life, not perhaps intentionally, but because I "hurt" and I wanted to "hurt" others back.

"She is more precious to me than I believed," I answered. I had once "used" Gayle as a "replacement" for Sharon, but Gayle had a personality of her own, different than Sharon's, but in her own way she was a lovable well bred girl who I now loved dearly.

"I am glad now that you have her," Sharon answered, "Although there was a time that I hated her because she was yours."

"There on the Janis," I replied, remembering, holding her. I saw the glitter of chain mail there in the darkness. Darlanis' warrioresses are well trained, alert, capable. I felt very safe.

"It was like Darlanis struck me, the words she used," Sharon said in soft tones. I remembered the Empress' comment. Sharon had perhaps deserved it, although I don't think Darlanis quite understood then just why Sharon had said what she had. I HAD! I am trained in such things. I understood what she said and why.

I heard footsteps on the stones, looked around, saw golden hair there in the starlight. The glitter of precious gems. Saw the figures of three more warrioresses. Knew that Darlanis had come looking for us. For an instant I felt hatred, felt my hand seek the hilt of my sword as Sharon broke our embrace and stepped back to my side. Then I let my hand drop, hoping Darlanis had not seen. She is my dearest friend here in the 26th Century. I hope she understands when she reads this why I sometimes behave as I do. Why sometimes I hurt those I love the way that I do. * * I have often wondered about this myself, Lorraine! (Darlanis)

"There were things I had to explain to Lorraine," Sharon said, Darlanis standing there. I wondered what thoughts went through her mind. She had seen us together. Perhaps drawn certain conclusions from what she had seen. I was after all still Sharon's step-mother. I had allowed Darlanis to "adopt" Sharon under the Codes of the Caste of Warrioresses, but she was still mine in a way. Not really hers. The situation here is

complex.

"I understand," Darlanis answered, her long gown clinging to that perfect body. She is, I think, the most beautiful woman who has ever lived. She is to Beauty what I am to Swordsmanship. I did not think that Darlanis actually "understood" the situation.

"You are 'better' for her than I can ever be," I said to the golden haired Empress of California. "She worships you as something I can never be." I saw Darlanis nod, the diamonds glittering there on her tiara. It was too dark to see her face, eyes.

"Yet you will always be to her the woman who held her when she was small, the woman who 'protected' her from thunderstorms," Darlanis answered. That was true. I had been Sharon's "mother". Her "mother" in a way that Marcia had never been. Marcia and Darlanis looked somewhat alike in a way, although Darlanis is far more beautiful. I wondered if secretly Sharon had an idealized fantasy of her own true mother, and if Darlanis fulfilled that fantasy. Children often do such in cases of divorce and such. I had treated several cases back in the 20th Century. Darlanis herself had been an "abused" child. She shared much with Sharon.

"Just as I can never be Mara's or Ta-she-ra's true mother," I answered. Gayle of course never viewed me in any such light.

"You must have brought an 'army'," Sharon commented from beside me, the crunch of more feet now audible there on the gravel. The palace grounds are quite lovely in the day time. There was a small dock behind us. Some sort of small craft tied to it now.

"I don't understand," Darlanis said. I feared I did. There was a rasp of steel as my sword left its sheath. I wished I had brought my force-saber instead. I feared Princess Tara might yet win as I saw Darlanis whip out her own blade and face those now facing us. One of the warrioresses removed her helmet. Her hair was black. She was slim, muscular. HER RIGHT HAND WAS STIFF!!!

"Kill them, but don't harm the girl," Princess Tara said.

Chapter Forty Five

"Sharon! Swim for it! Go for the Squala!" I snapped, sizing up the situation with a Warrioress' instinct. Tara had nine women with her. The best the Empire of California had. Women of Darlanis' very own personal guard who had now "betrayed" her. There could be but only one outcome to such a fight against such terrible odds. Darlanis and I would die together. Take as many of the bitches with us as we could on the way. I felt no terror of what the future held. Darlanis would be with me all the way!

"Do it!" Darlanis snapped, the two of us moving back, our swords there in our hands. I would have preferred to have Darlanis on my right instead of on my left, but it didn't matter much.

"Like old times again," Darlanis smiled. She is of the Warrioresses. Tara ordered her warrioresses to attack. She did not lead the attack. She knew what sort we were. What we could do.

"We've got good Princesses," I answered, meeting the attack. Sharon somewhere behind us as we stood

there on the dock, letting our attackers drive us back. My blade seeking the throat of the armored woman facing me. Darlanis thrusting, her opponent falling. She is good. Stronger than me, but not quite as "quick".

"Stop that girl!" I heard Tara cry out as there came a splash behind us. I wondered if she had a boat out there in the darkness. Sharon would be hard to catch in the water. There were men on Squala. Enough to deter any force that Tara could muster against the ship. Sharon would be safe there from Tara.

I got my blade beneath my opponent's guard, dropped her. A sword slipped out from among those before us, slipped into my thigh as I was kept helplessly busy with another's attack. Driving deep in a searing painful thrust into my leg. I dropped another of those bitches who had betrayed the golden Empress of California there beside me. I heard Jon's voice, saw figures there in the darkness as Tara sent some of her women to deal with this new threat. I feared much for his life! Saw blades flash! More than just his. Lady Tirana's, Sanda's, Hara's. My friends!

"Lys-dammed bitch!" Darlanis snarled, thrusting, taking a thrust herself, staggering back. I shielded her as best I could until she could recover. My right leg was painful, not fully usable now. I partially parried another thrust, felt the sword grate against my ribs there beneath my right arm. Got my point into another throat as the last of our opponents went to her final judgment. Heard yells, cries, saw more blades flash. Those loyal to Darlanis were finally here now. The end was swift then for those traitors to Darlanis who had followed Princess Tara.

"Tara?" Darlanis snapped, a dozen of her warrioresses standing there, their blades in their hands. Jon, Sanda, Tirana, Hara together to one side. Bodies there on the ground. No quarter had been asked or given. Tara's body was not among those there.

"I saw her run, leap into the water," Sharon said, her teeth chattering, her gown soaking wet, revealing every curve beneath as she stood beside a bleeding Darlanis. Gayle here now, others, the scene now well lit by torches. Jon supporting me, the blood running from my body, from my leg. My beautiful gown now ruined!

"She won't survive long in those waters," Jon said. I did not think however that she had drowned. We would see her again!

"I had a 'feeling'," Jon said to me, carrying me into the palace in his arms. He had cut my gown, made a quick tourniquet. I thanked "SHE" for the lives of my friends. That all the "losses" had been on Tara's "side". There had been no survivors. It was, I thought to myself, just as well. Sharon would not have cared to watch the executions, although I think Darlanis would have merely have run the women through with her sword rather than be bothered with trials and executions and etc. She was furious. I could understand why. Those we had fought had been members of her own personal guard. Those who she had always "trusted" above anyone else. I think she felt both "betrayed" and "uneasy" at how easy Tara had managed to gain entrance to the palace grounds!

"I'm getting too old for this sort of stuff," Tirana said to me as Darlanis' physician tended to her wound. Lady Tirana had been cut on her cheek. The woman now stitching up the cut. It would probably leave a scar although I doubt that she cared much. She had once been the Warlady of Sarn. That had come as a surprise to me. Thar Marden's own Warlady! The same Warlady that Darlanis under public pressure, had used as a "scapegoat" twenty years ago when the King of Sarn was killed in a Nevada ambush. Much like Custer had been some seven centuries ago. Darlanis, seeking someone to "blame", had picked on Tirana as her victim.

"I've detailed forces off our ships to reinforce security here tonight," Hara said, striding into the room. She was a good Warlady. Capable, competent. Sanda was sitting beside Darlanis. Once they had been bitter enemies. I did not feel they were now.

"That damn Tara must have `agents' everywhere!" Darlanis snapped back. Sharon and Gayle sitting together, speaking softly. "My own warrioresses! Attacking us!" She was still "hurt".

"I don't think you have anything more to fear," Sanda said to Darlanis, pouring a glass of wine, handing it to the Empress.

"Why didn't you ally yourself with Tara?" Darlanis asked. I could understand how Darlanis felt. Her entire "world" had just been "turned upside down" by what had happened tonight. She had taken a sword blade through the left shoulder. Her arm was in a sling. A robe drawn about her otherwise naked form. My own attire a blanket, nothing else as I laid there watching everything from the Empress' own bed, propped up so that I might take part in things if I so wished. I had lost considerable blood. Tara's women had been excellent swordswomen. I had killed three of them in the fight. Darlanis two. The other four had died at the blades of either my friends or Darlanis' own loyal warrioresses.

"I didn't like you, but I detested Tara," Sanda answered. "You at least I respected for being `honorable' and `decent'." Tara of course is the exact opposite of that. Darlanis nodded.

"Perhaps there's hope for you yet," Darlanis smiled back. I saw Sanda nod, smile. I don't think she hated Darlanis anymore.

"I don't like leaving you like this," Jon said to me. I had asked him to take the Squala to Sana. Take Gayle, two hundred gallons of medical alcohol for Black Lady. It would take him perhaps ten days to make the trip. Perhaps eight hours for Black Lady although it wasn't my intention to make the trip to Dularn in one jump. We would stop at Porlan, refuel, refresh ourselves, and leave the next morning. In the air at least we would be safe. As safe as one can be here in the 26th Century with its dangerous beasts and more dangerous people. I planned to take off in about a week after our wounds healed up somewhat. I could hardly walk on my bad leg and Darlanis had but little use of her left arm. Fortunately Princess Tara hadn't damaged the airplane.

"I doubt that there is any danger here anymore," Darlanis assured him, a cloak drawn around her golden form against the chill that had descended from the north. Summer was long gone.

"And if worst comes to worst we'll still have Sharon and Sanda to put things back together," I pointed out. Hara was capable and competent, and Lady Tirana had seen enough in her life to provide level-headed council to those two "radicals" of ours.

"But I would lose a wife who's `good in bed'," Jon laughed. "And those kind are more valuable than any Queens or Princesses."

"He loves you," Darlanis said to me as we walked the graveled paths, a crutch under my armpit, her arm about me, three of the Janis' warrioresses following close behind. They at least we could "trust", Darlanis felt. I had suggested to Darlanis that probably the rest of her women were still "loyal" to her. That she would have to eventually "trust" those around her. On the other hand I was a "fine one to talk". I had at one time or another mistrusted everyone I knew with the exception of Gayle, Lady Tirana, and Jon Richards. Even Sanda, my own Prime Minister, had once felt my mistrust. Had suffered the humiliation of being possibly considered the woman who had tried to kill both me and Darlanis there on our flight from my estates to Trella. Now of course I knew it had been one of Tara's agents, but then, yet,

as you can see if you look back in my story, I actually did consider it possible that Sanda was the one guilty of poisoning me!

"I'm just 'lucky', I guess," I smiled back, flinging a stone into the bay. I was glad that Jon disliked Darlanis as much as he did. She was far too beautiful for any married woman to ever want "hanging around" her husband. Her stunning beauty was enough to make any wife "sweat" a bit with worry. Darlanis is fantastically beautiful by the standards of the 26th Century or by those of any century for that matter. Sort of a "Goddess of Beauty" if you will. Men are almost helpless before her. I have seen such things enough times to know. She can only be successfully opposed by another woman. I'm glad Jon doesn't like her.

"I would give up everything I have to have a man who loves me for myself like Jon loves you," Darlanis answered, staring out into the bay. Watching the seagulls as they now swooped about searching for something to eat there in the rippling waters below. Her gem-like azure eyes for a moment burned hot into mine.

Chapter Forty Six

"You keep a diary in a ship's log?" Darlanis asked with a smile, seeing me writing down my latest adventures. Ever since the first day that Sharon and I entered this era I have kept a record of my adventures here, perhaps more for myself than for "posterity" or anything like that. It is from the pages of this diary that I have written these books. That is perhaps why they are written the way that they are. That is why in the first book you see a somewhat different "viewpoint" on things than you do in this one. I feel that it is more "fair" to the reader to do it this way than the more usual way where I look back over what has happened to me over the period of time covered in these pages. They are after all my own books. The story of the Queen of Trelandar. The story of a woman who flew through time to this era.

"It was what was available when I started," I answered, glad that I wrote in French as she peered over my shoulder, trying to read what I have written. Her puzzlement making me smile a bit!

"I have seen books in Dularn written in that language," she said to me, her azure eyes glowing into mine. I supposed that if necessary it would be possible to find someone who could read it. French is still spoken I believe in certain parts of what once was Canada. I understand that some of the people living there can read it. Yvette speaks it, of course, but she is illiterate.

"It does allow me to write my feelings without the worry that someone might read this and not understand," I answered her.

"Like my own feelings for you," Darlanis answered in reply, her eyes glowing down into mine as she stood there at my side. "You are the best friend I've ever had, but yet at times it pains me to say that I have hated you almost as much as I would have someone like Sanda," Darlanis admitted, much to my shocked gaze!

"Because I let Sanda make me into the Queen of Trelandar?" I asked, wondering. Yet knowing that there had been times that I had felt the "same" towards Darlanis. Suspected that she perhaps had paid the crossbowman to kill me. I had not suspected Tara.

"That' and the fact that everyone I've talked to has said that I made a bad decision with the pirates doing as I did," she answered, looking down into my eyes. I recalled what had been written about that in the newspapers here in Sarn. That I would have done it differently. That even Sharon was a more "competent" military commander than Darlanis! That I thought had been "cruel" towards Darlanis. She had done the best she could under the circumstances. I would have doubtlessly dragged things out a bit more, but the final outcome would have probably been the same. I have no doubts of that. Darlanis did well, I feel here.

"I've always admired your courage and bravery," I said, placing my hand over hers where it rested on my shoulder. Those lovely azure eyes glowed down into mine. She is a very beautiful woman. One I do admire very much for the sort of person she is. "The fact that you risked your life for a slave girl's speaks much of the sort of person you truly are," I added, remembering. That was something the newspapers should have written about her.

"SHE-RA?" Darlanis smiled. Sharon still called her that.

"We need a 'SHE-RA' to inspire us," I smiled back. She is.

"But she was just a children's cartoon character," Darlanis answered with a smile. It had of course been necessary to tell Darlanis exactly "who" "She-Ra" was. That she was but a fantasy.

"Children do need a good moral education," I smiled back. That was part of the political speeches that I gave urging parents to let their children go to the Priestesses of Lys for their education. It was one thing that I was very proud of having done here in this era! Universal literacy was part of our "New Order". A portion of what I hoped to accomplish here in the 26th Century! Whatever happened to me, that would still remain "mine". A "mark" if you will upon history itself. A "step back" towards what once was. What might someday exist again as before.

"I am not 'She-Ra'," Darlanis replied. "I am but an overly ambitious monarch who has cost thousands of people their lives."

"None of us can change the past, but we can change the future," I answered, looking up at her standing there beside me. I thought her the "Janet Rogers" of this era. Mankind's only hope. SHE had given us Darlanis to oppose The Evil One's own champion. I believed in such things. Darlanis considered them "nonsense".

"I used to read about your era," Darlanis smiled. "I often thought of what it would have been like to have lived then." I wondered what she would have been like back in the 20th Century. No doubt she would have ended up a well-known movie actress or perhaps even the President of the United States. She was "smart" in her way, quick-witted. An "idealist" much like Janet Rogers. I have no doubt she would have been a better President than Reagan was. That old "over the hill" movie actor best left retired!

"You're better off here," I assured her. I thought it true.

"Where I can be 'She-Ra' to Sharon?" Darlanis smiled back.

"And to others," I answered, looking up into her eyes. I have shared much with Darlanis. I have no better friend. We are both perhaps in our own ways women who "see" what others "don't".

"I am still the Queen who ordered innocent women and children killed there in Talos. That same Queen

who sat on her unicorn and watched the smoke rise above the trees," she answered.

"And I had a man tortured nearly to death and then had him killed when we were done with him," I answered back in reply, remembering the crossbowman. What Lady Tirana had "done" to him.

"I allowed Princess Tara to torture dozens right here in the palace dungeons and never even lifted a finger to stop what I knew was going on right there beneath my feet," Darlanis answered back. "I fear what the judgment of Lyswill be when I stand before Her and have to answer for what I've done with my own life."

"You didn't sit there and watch it done, I did," I answered.

"And what you saw sickened you, didn't it," she smiled back.

"It's not something I could ever bring myself to do again." I answered. Darlanis looked down into my eyes. She "understood" as perhaps no one else could. She too lived with her own "sin".

"Do you consider me 'competent'?" Darlanis suddenly asked.

"You seem to do pretty good as the Empress of California," I answered. I suspected, however, that Darlanis was not referring to that. But to something else. The ramming of Sarnian Lady by the Janis there in the fog. Her reckless voyage on the Ronda that had resulted in her capture and near death at the hands of the pirates serving Princess Tara. What had been written about her in the newspapers here in Sarn. Even there in Trella too. I recalled the comment that even Sharon was more "competent" than her. That perhaps Sharon should be the Empress of California in place of Darlanis. We have "freedom of the press" under the "New Order". I suppose such "freedom" is often abused, but there is nothing that can be done about it without restoring censorship and the political oppression that goes hand in hand with such.

"I want your honest assessment of my actions when the pirates attacked the Ronda," Darlanis said to me, pulling up a chair, seating herself beside me. The glittering gold of her costume making her seem "exotic", "different". Her azure eyes burned into my own as she waited for my answer. I thought of what I could say. I didn't want to hurt her, although I did consider the newspapers right. Darlanis was not much of a military commander. She was brave, incredibly so, but even Sharon was a better tactician. We all have our "flaws". Darlanis had hers.

"I think you wanted to be remembered for your bravery, for your courage," I answered. I could see her in my mind's eye standing there on the forecastle of the Ronda, her bow there in her hands. She was, I thought to myself, truly courageous, truly brave. She had set an example for centuries to come of courage and bravery. I told her such things. That I, for one, was very proud of her!

"You are a very dear close friend, Lorraine," she smiled. I thought we were as close as two women can be without becoming too close. I had once experienced that with Lana. It would have been "easy" to have allowed our relationship to become "that". I think only my knowledge of what Janis would think had stopped me.

"Yet at times I have hated you, and wondered why I still respected you as I did after everything," I answered, meeting her gaze directly on as she sat there. I recalled what I had said to her there on Sarnian Lady after we had taken Squala. Quoting that tale from the Bible to her about "Uriah the Hittite" who had been put in the "forefront of battle" to get rid of him so that the King might marry his widow. I had then thought much the same of her. That she wanted me dead so that Sharon might be "hers".

"And what horrifies me is that I think it was true, too," Darlanis admitted. "I `wanted' Sharon too much for my own good." I knew that Darlanis doted on Sharon, and did "spoil" her a lot. On the other hand Sharon loved Darlanis like she had never loved me. Sharon had always "admired" me, but Darlanis she "loved". I suppose the difference is due to our own personalities, our own ways of seeing things. Darlanis is a more "loving" woman than I am, I might mention here. Perhaps more "affectionate" with a child. I do not have the "maternal instincts" that Darlanis has.

"And I sometimes think that Sanda thought at one time that she could perhaps arrange a `duel' between us and avenge her sister's death by having me kill you," I said. Sanda had been extremely interested in my skill with a blade. Awestruck was perhaps a better term I think recalling what her reactions had been. "Although I think she was disappointed when she found out how I felt about you." I wondered if Sanda had once nursed such hopes?

"Queen Paula was a brave, proud woman. A Warriress," Darlanis answered, remembering. "But she was no match for me." I remembered what Sanda had told me. Paula had stood less of a chance against Darlanis than Darlanis would have had against me!

"You were losing that war, weren't you?" I said, remembering what I had been told. Trelandar had come close to licking its invader. Forcing Darlanis and her Legions back across the border that separated their countries. It had been then that Darlanis had issued the challenge that she had. Paula had accepted it. I suspected that she had been a proud, brave Queen. A Warriress.

"Yes, thanks to Princess Tara turning the people against us," Darlanis answered, remembering, her eyes seeing scenes now fifteen years in the past. Tara's horrible criminal tactics had cost her much. Unified the people of Trelandar as nothing else could have done. Much like the Nazis had done in World War Two. I remembered my mother the Countess Duclare telling me of those times. She had been a member of the "Resistance" in that War. I recalled her comment one day about the French "gun laws". That a government that can't "trust" its people with firearms is a government that the people shouldn't "trust" in return. I think it is "true". I wish Janet Rogers hadn't made that same "mistake".

"Why did you ever hang on to Tara?" I asked. That was a question I had been meaning to ask now for months. I knew that Darlanis knew what Tara was like. Why had she "clung" to Tara?

"Tara had `friends' in `high places' and she `won' battles," Darlanis answered. I suspected that Tara had threatened Darlanis at one time, and that Darlanis had lived in actual fear of Tara!

"She could have cost you your throne, your life," I pointed out. "Sometimes a Queen must be careful who her `friends' are."

"And Sanda could cost you yours if she carries her `Revolution' too far," Darlanis warned me back in return with a smile. I knew what she thought about my Prime Minister the Lady Sanda.

I might note here however that I trust Sanda completely and feel that Darlanis, despite everything, is still a person who was at that time perhaps guilty of excessive "ambition". I too could be guilty of the same "crime" should I attempt to carry out those ideals of mine that I once held so dear. True, another carried out my "ideals", but yet in a way I am responsible for Janet Rogers, both for the good she did, and for the evil things she also did. There is sometimes nothing "worse" than a "TRUE BELIEVER"!!

"What Sanda really needs is a man to spank her curvy behind from time to time and keep her happy and content," I smiled back. She reminded me a lot of Carol Simmons in certain way, and Carol had been the type who "needed" a husband like a drunk the bottle.

"Something to keep her out of politics," Darlanis agreed. I had to smile at that, as I rather doubted that it would do any good. Sanda enjoyed being the Prime Minister of Trelendar. Making decisions, having a "role" in things. She was, as Jon had observed, a "capable, competent woman." Darlanis needed someone like her, although Sharon was already showing somewhat similar capabilities, much to my own surprise. Sharon had "matured" much with Darlanis, perhaps because she could relate to Darlanis in a way she could never do so with me. She was mentally superior to Darlanis, and probably even had a dozen IQ points on her beloved "She-Ra" if not more. I suspected Sarn would be well governed. Darlanis would provide "experience", and Sharon "intelligence". I had no doubt that Sharon would do well for herself in this era. She was a capable, competent girl. Beautiful, almost another "Darlanis" in a way although she would not have the height or the magnificent muscular figure of the awesome Empress of California.

"You have Sharon," I pointed out. Darlanis smiled, nodded.

"The best thing that ever happened to me," Darlanis smiled, getting up as there was a knock at the door. The warrior on duty now letting in Sharon, coppery skinned Ta-she-ra, little Mara, and two others that made us both start with surprise!

"I felt it best to do it this way," Prince Jers Bisan said with a smile, tossing back the hood that had covered his features. The woman beside him short skirted, briefly attired beneath her concealing cloak, his lovely and provocatively sensual wife, Lara. Sharon's "Daisy Duke", Lara being a near dead ringer for Catherine Bach, a Twentieth Century television actress. No doubt it had been a wise decision as if Lara ever fell into the cruel hands of Tara her death would be neither swift or pleasant!

"The Seahawk?" Darlanis ventured. I could understand Jers' reluctance to bring the ship into port. Sarn was still in the middle of a Revolution. Princess Tara was still somewhere about. We had already learned that the evil Princess was trying to organize a counter-revolution against us. She had the "support" of many.

"Awaits my signal," he smiled back, his arm around Lara.

Chapter Forty Seven

"You can do the honors," I said to Darlanis as she nodded, turning Black Lady's ignition key to "on". The warning light above it glowing for a few seconds as the pre-heaters heated the alcohol in the fuel injectors for starting. The plane was heavy with fuel, with a full one hundred and eighty gallons aboard. A hundred and twenty in the wing tanks and another sixty there in the streamlined belly tank between the floats beneath us. The beautiful golden haired ruler of California pulling out the choke and when the light went out, turning the key the rest of the way. The eight cylinder air cooled engine starting up with a roar. Darlanis easing the throttle back a bit while giving me a smile.

Outside to see us off were the high and mighty of the Empire, along with our friends and one dear to us both. She would become the new Empress if anything happened and we never returned from Dularn. Sharon was, I thought to myself with a smile, surprisingly capable and competent for one so young. Truly a Princess in more than just her own title. I was proud of her. I felt that much had been accomplished. That once again Mankind's footsteps had been set on the path that would lead to the stars.

"We are going to make history, the two of us," Darlanis said to me. There was love between us. We

were like sisters now. We had stood together against a common foe. Faced death together.

"Let us hope that they realize that we tried our best," I smiled back. I thought that was all that anyone could ask for. I waved out the window to Sharon, to Ta-she-ra, to Mara. To Sanda, Jers and Lara, to Hara and Tirana. Two who had once commanded Legions. Sent men to war. I was now Darlanis' new Warlady. I wondered if I would do any better than they had. Darlanis had also made me her new Prime Minister. My powers in the Empire now were second only to hers. I was of course also still yet the Queen of Trelandar too. The Lady Lorraine. I had come far. I thought once more of my experiences on Mars and wondered a bit?

"We will be legends," Darlanis smiled back, pushing in the choke and idling the engine. We would let it warm a bit first...

I glanced over at Darlanis as she sat there beside me flying the plane, the fleecy clouds like puffs of chilly fog as we flew between them. Her calm confident grip on the wheel left no doubt that she was a "natural pilot". That flying came as naturally to her as swordsmanship had once come to Sa-she-ra, my blood sister. I had a couple days ago performed the same act with Darlanis. Cutting her hand and allowing her to cut mine so that we might taste each other's blood. Such had been meaningful to me. I think to Darlanis too. We were at heart both "barbarians". Sisters of the Sword. Caste sisters. Both of the Warriresses.

"I hope Tara doesn't try anything while we're gone," she smiled, seeing my eyes upon her. I wasn't too much worried. The evil Princess had been too much discredited in the eyes of good and decent people everywhere in Californiato ever have any political role to play in affairs again. True, she was still dangerous enough, and her alliance with Talon and the Empire of Mexico made her a dangerous adversary, but I did not think that we needed to do more than take the proper precautions that would be needed in any case considering the type of a bitch that she was.

"If she does I am sure that our friends can handle it," I smiled back. Sanda was a capable and competent administrator. I had confidence in Hara and Lady Tirana. Unlike Darlanis, Sharon would not be "merciful" if Tara ever fell again into our "hands".

"I pity Jers," Darlanis smiled in reply, steering between a pair of white fleecy clouds. We were flying quite high, about nine thousand feet. The air was thin, chill, making the heater a comfort. "He is truly now caught in a situation from which there is no escape." I nodded back in reply, understanding. His own lovely wife had already been the victim of two assassination attempts by his own mother, who would no doubt try again if she ever got the chance to do so. And Lara herself no doubt was well aware of the horrible fate that awaited her should she ever fall alive into the hands of the cruel and sadistic Princess of Baja!

"I don't," I said. "He has a wife like few that have ever lived." As a matter of fact, I could only think of one other who had the same "qualities" that Lara had, and she'd been dead for over five centuries now! The provocative, sensual Carol Simmons!

"I wasn't a very 'nice' person when I was young," Darlanis said to me suddenly. "I don't you'd have liked me back then." I nodded, smiled. I knew quite a bit about Darlanis' own history. Darlanis was a very beautiful woman. She was also quite "ambitious". The sort who might just do as "they" said that she did. It being said that she "gave" herself to Thar Marden like a slave girl, performing all the "love tricks" that a trained slave does!

"He (the King) wanted a beautiful Queen," Darlanis answered. There was that in her voice that left no

doubts of her feelings. She had been "ambitious", eager to "advance" herself regardless of what it "cost". The marriage had not been very happy, I knew.

"Let's change the subject if it bothers you," I suggested, shifting there in my seat, my eyes glancing over the instruments.

"I wasn't a very `admirable' person back then," she said. I knew that. I also knew "why". That was to me more important.

"What puzzles me is why Tarawa was willing to serve you later on," I asked. Wondering if I was now "venturing where only fools dared". There were parts of her life she didn't talk about much.

"Why not?" Darlanis smiled. "I was `useful' to her anyway." I was also aware that Tara no doubt had looked upon Darlanis as a "dumb blonde" who could be easily controlled and used as needed. I suspected that many of Darlanis' actions as the young Queen of Sarn perhaps had been suggested by Tara. Tarawa was an older woman, more intelligent than Darlanis. Old enough to be her mother. Darlanis might sit on the golden throne, but Tarawa would be the true ruler of the Empire of California. Such things have happened before in the history of the human race. There have been others like Tara. I recalled the first time I had seen Tara. I had been horrified by how arrogantly she had treated Darlanis! I had not then understood the "relationship" between the two women.

"Until you were provoked enough to fight back," I answered.

"You gave me the courage to do what I had to do to regain my self-respect," Darlanis answered. "I feared she would kill me."

"It was a close match, but I never had any doubts about you." I answer, seeing her eyes glow into mine as she touched my hand. The sky an azure blue sprinkled with white cottony clouds. Up here we were safe from anything Man could do. I had the only airplane in the world. Only the Lorr had power here in the sky.

"You spared her life. I wouldn't have done so," I told her.

"I was thinking of Jers. How it would look if I killed his own mother there before his eyes," Darlanis answered softly back, staring out through the windshield at the sky, the clouds, but perhaps seeing something else than what laid ahead just then. I recalled what Tais had told me. She was truly "The Queen of Light". Sharon's "SHE-RA". Something "good", "decent". The "Second Janet Rogers" that all of Mankind had been searching for.

"I think long after I am forgotten, they will remember that once there was a `Darlanis'," I said to her. "That `She-Ra' did live." I suppose it was but foolishness on my part, but that was the way I viewed her. There is just something "good" about her.

"You are `too old' to believe in `She-Ra'," Darlanis smiled.

"It is still nice however that she `exists'," I smiled back.

"Porlan," Darlanis announced, pushing in the throttle and putting two clicks on the flaps. The city spreading out below us as we spiraled down towards a landing in the bay. It was a medium sized city, perhaps a third of the size of Trella or Sarn. We were perhaps now five hundred miles north of Sarn. A few hundred miles from where the forces of the Empire yet confronted those of Dularn. I thought of

Sanda's son. Darlanis had written a letter. We had sent it on ahead aboard the Squala. The fighting would stop, although it would take time to get word to the more scattered forces now engaged in battle. Once again I thought of Vietnam. That war too had been "winless". Much like this one was. The people of what once had been Washington hated Darlanis, the area having once been a part of the Dularnian Empire before when Tulis, Warlady of Dularn under "mad Kathis", had made a name for herself much as Darlanis had attempted to do later on here...

"Let's hope that we're `expected'," I smiled back. The people of this era often tend to be a bit "trigger-happy" at times. To most people of the 26th Century an airplane like mine is viewed much as those of the 20th Century would have viewed a "flying saucer" had one suddenly come down for a landing right there in front of them. Even in Trelandar I am viewed as being somehow "different" from other people. Not really quite "human".

"Porlan (Portland?) is part of my Empire," Darlanis smiled back. The city was the capital of Orgon. Her use of the term "my Empire" indicated much that made me smile to myself. It is after-all hers. She is our Empress. Our ruler. I suddenly remembered what had happened there in Sarn when we had come flying up from Trella. Taracould have been here several days ago!

"Circle low over the city, but don't land," I said. Darlanis nodding, her azure eyes glowing with a puzzlement into mine.

"Even some old tub like the Ronda would have only needed a few days to make the voyage," I pointed out. Darlanis nodding. Understanding. This time Tarawould not make the mistakes that she had before. We would be quickly and quietly taken captive.

"And enough people knew of our own plans," she added as we swooped over the city at an altitude of perhaps a thousand feet. Low enough to see what we wanted to see, but high enough that we were in no danger from any missile weapon fired from the ground.

"We need to find out for sure," I answered back in reply. The streets beneath filled with armed men, the bay with warships.

"I am their Empress," Darlanis said. "They are my people."

Chapter Forty Eight

(Darlanis' version)

"Of all the hare-brained stunts that I've ever heard of!" Lorraine gasped in shocked disbelief as I told her what I planned to do. I gave her a smile. I thought it something that "She-Ra" might do. The kind of a fantastically heroic "stunt" that only Sharon would have approved of. The very type of an "exploit" for which I had become justifiably famous over the last few months. Something that would impress the people below like nothing else!

"Do you have a `better' suggestion?" I challenged her back, having her take the controls while I climbed into the back of the plane to change my clothing. I would wear my gold mesh outfit, nothing more. There would be no doubt that way as to who I was!

"Darlanis, you big beautiful blonde, you are the bravest and most courageous woman who's ever lived!" Lorrainesaid, her voice starting to break now with emotion as I stripped off my clothing.

"If this fails," I said, now stripped to clips and strap, "Tell Sharon that I loved her." My own eyes now glistening with tears as I pulled on the cold golden mesh over my naked body. I tried not to think what Taramight do to me this time if I fell alive into her hands. I would wear my weapons, my bejeweled regal trappings. I thrust my tiara through the front of my halter between my breasts. I prayed that the parachute would work as it should. I did not look forward to making the first parachute jump of the 26th Century. But such a jump would be seen by everyone in the city. There would be those with telescopes below who would see that I was Darlanis Marden, the Empress of California!

It was exactly that now that I was gambling on. That such a daring action might just cause men to "think", to "doubt". That was all I had to go on. The rest would be up toLys. I prayed I would die swiftly when the time came. That this time I would not live to fall intoTara's hands. I still recalled the time before. What it had been like there in her hands. The humiliations, the tortures, that sadistic pleasure there in those eyes. She had been like something out of a nightmare. Something awful!

"Tomorrow atnoonI will circle the city and watch for your signal,"Lorrainesaid to me. I nodded, looking down. I am not much bothered by heights, but the idea of jumping out of an airplane and descending by parachute wasn't really my idea of "fun"!

"Three fires, nothing else," I answered, strapping on the parachute. LettingLorrainecheck it. Praying that she didn't sense the terror I felt in my voice. I knew whatTaracould do to me. It can take a long time to die when she is torturing you.

"We'll land and face them together,"Lorrainesaid. "Side by side." I smiled. I had thought of that too, but thenTaramight have us both andSharonwas no match forTara's "evilness".

"This time I go alone," I answered, looking down out the window past the wing to the ground below. Mentally adding to myself under my breath, "And mayLyshave mercy upon my soul when I stand there before Her for my final judgment."Lorrainenodded.

I pushed the door open, stood half inside, the cold wind blowing at my hair. My rapidly beating heart now clutched by a cold hand of terror. I would have much preferred to face armed men than jump from an airplane a thousand feet above the ground!

"Now!"Lorrainesnapped. I leaped into thin air, the wing flashing by as I fell tumbling in the cold air, yanking at the ripcord that would release the parachute! The flagstones of the plaza swirling about below seemingly racing up to meet me as with a sudden teeth jarring jolt the canopy suddenly opened above me!

"ThankLys!" I breathed, looking up. That great white nylon mushroom there above me. Beneath my high heeled boots the white concrete of the plaza grew nearer. Men standing there, looking! Others running about, pointing up into the sky. Warrioreesses on their unicorns, their beasts prancing about there beneath them!

"Oof!" I grunted, hitting the ground, just missing a tree! Squatting, then straightening up, and now grabbing for my tiara. The parachute pulling at me, making me stumble a bit as I tugged off the straps. Lorrainecircling back around, the buzz of the engine loud. The plane low, perhaps a few hundred feet now up in that cloud sprinkled azure blue sky. It was now mid-afternoon.

"It's Darlanis!" I heard one cry. "Our Empress Herself!" I shook myself free of the parachute, the soles of my feet smarting from the impact of the landing. Put on my tiara, and faced them! The chilly breeze from the sea blowing over my briefly clad body! Making the goose pimples start, my teeth already chattering now!

"For California! For the Empire!" I cried out, drawing my sword, lifting it up high. I saw those who would oppose me being overwhelmed by those who would support me. Around me men fought! My men fighting Tara's! I knew I had done the right thing jumping over the city by parachute despite the dangers. A warrioress rode through the crowds, halted at my side, her lance in her hand. I saw her eyes glisten. She was of dark complexion, one of Tara's own fighting women. A Bajan. One who had decided to stand upon the side of "good" against the forces of "evil". We were then joined by others, both men and women. Those of the military and those of the city. I suspected that many would die this day. Many would stand before Lys for their final judgment.

"Join Me! Stand by your Empress!" I cried, drawing them to me. Others facing us, drawn swords there in their hands. Tara's men. Those loyal to her. A number of warrioresses among them. Men and women of the Imperial Armed Forces. Even a few seamen!

"Darlanis!" I heard men cry. "All hail Darlanis!" I felt myself now being lifted, held, their hands on my body (no doubt they enjoyed that considering how little I was wearing) as I was raised up and tossed into a unicorn's saddle. Hands touching me, my ears deafened by the cheering as the mob swarmed out of the plaza into the city around me. Men, women running to join us. Housewives, women of low caste, mostly without weapons but for brooms and garden tools. Men of all the different castes, some with swords, but many armed with only what they could quickly grab. I saw Lorraine circling in Black Lady. I waved to her, although I do not think she saw me. Not from a thousand feet up.

Other warrioresses joined us. Women in armor, with lances. They raised their weapons in salute, but I saw others who galloped off in search of reinforcements, and I knew that they now served Tara Bisan, that cruel Bajan. "The Princess of Darkness"!

"For California! For the Empire!" I cried, raising my sword high. Standing in my stirrups. Well aware that it would take but one crossbowman to put an end to my life. To insure victory for Tara. I was a glittering, gleaming golden "target". "For the 'New Order'," I cried, turning in the saddle. "For us all!" I wondered how many would die this day. For Tara. And for me?

"The city is now ours, your majesty!" my general cried, his chain mail gleaming in the rays of the dying sun as it set in the west. Porlan had been the "R&R" center for the Dularnian front. A good part of my own military forces had been there on relief. It had been a nasty fight. Much blood had been spilled. It had been warrior against warrior, warrioress against warrioress, sailor against sailor. We had fought on land and on the ships.

I was chilled, cold and miserable in nothing but my brief halter and matching brief skirt of golden mesh. It was now in late October. I shivered constantly now from the chill air. My teeth chattered so badly that I could hardly talk. I could think of nothing but a long hot bath. To be finally "warm" once again! The cloak I'd put on earlier doing little now to "warm" me here.

"And Tara?" I asked. She had led her forces against mine.

"No one knows, your majesty," he answered. Like a bad copper I had no doubt that she would turn up

again to make trouble.

I walked among the stripped, shivering chained women as they knelt there before me. They had been among those who had served Princess Tara. I could hear their teeth chattering. I felt considerable sympathy. Even with my cloak I was still cold. Over a thousand had died. Brave men and women, fighting for me or for Princess Tara. I wondered if it really mattered that much in the long run. Here and there you could yet still see the blood where a sword, a lance, an arrow, or a crossbow bolt had taken a life.

"One year as camp sluts," I ordered. My general nodded. They would not be harmed by such servitude. Had Tarawon my own women would have probably all been sold into life-long slavery. I saw the light of the torches reflected in their eyes. They had made a bad choice in following Princess Tara. Believing in her.

"And the men?" the general asked. Male slaves are usually of little value. Fit only to do the work free men refuse to do.

"A year of penal servitude," I answered in reply. It was night now. The stars were bright there in the sky above. Orion high in the south. My eyes picked out the dim glow of "M-42". A name from a past now only legend. Of men and women now history.

Chapter Forty Nine

"You're unbelievable!" I laughed with admiration as Darlanis finished telling me her story there in the air as we flew towards Dularn the next day. She was tired, worn out from lack of sleep, but still the unconquerable and incredible Empress of California. The gold mesh of her brief provocative attire making her seem exotic, unreal. Like something truly out of a fantasy. A real life "She-Ra" in the flesh! Sharon had indeed "named" her right!

"Lucky more likely," Darlanis smiled back. She was running on "nerves" right now. Later on the reaction would hit. Hard.

"You'd better change," I suggested. Her attire was rather "provocative" for the "strait-laced" Dularnians. Even their prostitutes usually wear more than just halters and miniskirts.

"Why?" Darlanis smiled. "Let my mother see me as I am."

"Arsana," I said, staring ahead through the growing clouds. I dislike flying on instruments. I like to see where I am going.

"I'm sure we're expected," Darlanis smiled. She had been dozing a bit. Slumped down in the seat next to me. She didn't look so "young" then. She had not spoken much of what she had seen there in Porlan. It had been too much like a "civil war". Blade against blade, lance against lance. Over a thousand had died in total. I had not wished to "pry" further into her memories. I understood. She had been, I knew, once again "SHE-RA"!

"At least we won't have to worry about Tara," I smiled back.

"Perhaps we should hire crossbowmen," Darlanis said. Leaving the rest of her thoughts unspoken, but so clearly understood!

"The end does not justify the means," I answered her back.

"I grow weary of fighting," Darlanis smiled back in reply.

"I'm going to drop a note telling them who we are," I said.

"That would probably be wise," Darlanis agreed with a smile.

"You're going to freeze your balls off," I warned Darlanis. Getting out of the plane there at the palace dock as men tied it to cast iron rings set in the stone. Feeling the chill there in the air that made me glad for my lined leather jacket. A couple dozen warrioresses, twice as many warriors, many big burly "Vikings", watching us. They had bows, lances, long heavy swords. The royal palace of Dularn towering up before us. A number of other men and women. All well armed. Dularn has true "Universal Armament". It is against the law in Dularn to appear in public without a sword at your hip. These people do take "The Right To Keep And Bear Arms" extremely seriously! That is also why they have the advanced democratic political system that they do. Why no one will ever be able to conquer them by sheer force of arms. Our own "New Order" is based upon their own political order to a degree, although I have made "improvements" based upon my personal knowledge and experience. We are, for example, much less "puritanical" than they are. Our society is more "colorful", less "equalitarian" perhaps, but yet just as "free" as their own is.

"Freeze my 'what' off?" Darlanis smiled, a bit puzzled. The cloudy sun glowed off her golden mesh. She had refused to wear a cloak or cover herself in any way. I hoped she wouldn't take sick from exposure. I could already see the goose pimples there forming on her skin. The temperature was in the high forties if all of that, with a chilly breeze blowing off the sea. I understand that it even snows here in Dularn two-three months out of the year. There have been major climatic changes due to The War.

"Never mind," I smiled, hoping they would not make her wait. I could already hear her teeth start to chatter. Sometimes she isn't too "bright" in some ways. This was certainly a prime example! On the other hand she was certainly impressive enough standing there, her golden mesh glowing in the sunlight. Like a heroine out of some fantasy tale. Darlanis does have a high tolerance for personal discomfort. A stoic disregard for pain that reminds me so much of one who will always live in my memories...

"Maris Marn!" I gasped, seeing a golden haired beautiful woman step forward to greet us. She wore the colorful and impressive uniform of a Sealady of Dularn, a position of awesome status within Dularn's own military. I had heard rumors that she was soon to become the Princess of Dularn. Gayle's sister had indeed done well for herself! I recalled Sharon's comment to Gayle there on the Janis. Smiled to myself as Darlanis stood there miserable at my side. If there ever was a "jumped up slave girl" Maris was certainly one! She had done well for herself!

"And how is little Mara?" Maris asked, ignoring Darlanis as if she wasn't even there. I recalled what Darlanis had told me about her earlier teenage years. About her mother disowning her. Apparently orders had been given out. Darlanis was to be ignored! Completely! Just as if she didn't exist at all here!

"She still speaks of you from time to time," I answered. It was the truth. She had been to Mara almost like another mother. Why she had fled my slavery to risk her life at sea was a question for which I had never been able to obtain a suitable answer.

Maris Marn (Now Queen Maris Jord of Dularn as I write this, I should state here.) is a beautiful blonde of about 5'8". She is well proportioned, and quite striking. I tend to be somewhat "prejudiced" against her for personal reasons, and will only say here that she is a beautiful woman who is also very capable and competent. The book of her adventures in sailing from my estates to Arsana is well worth reading, although whether or not she is truthful in her writing is another matter. Her depiction of me, for example, is quite unflattering, and is not at all realistic considering the extremely short period of time that she knew me.

"Your 'companion' is turning blue with cold," Maris smiled. Darlanis was shivering uncontrollably in the cold, the chattering of her teeth being audible perhaps even to Maris as it was to me.

I slipped off my jacket and slipped it over Darlanis' shoulders, feeling the bite of the cold breeze through the black silk of my fashionably stylish dress. One suitable for the much warmer climates of my beloved Trelandar, not this frigid and seemingly near arctic land! Maris' own cloak half covering her uniform no doubt had been drawn about herself only a minute or so ago!

"You Dularnians do lack a bit in being 'civilized', " I answered, drawing a shocked gasp both from Maris and Darlanis too! "My companion here is freezing to death and no one here seems to even give a damm," I snapped, adding insult to injury. A shocked muttering going through the Dularnians present, although none of them did much of anything about it. I didn't think that they would. I have a reputation with a sword that terrifies everyone!

"No doubt my mother has given orders," Darlanis said to me.

"Which doesn't speak much for her either," I snapped back. I was "freezing" myself now, but I still needed to force Maris to formally recognize Darlanis as a fellow human being! Maris had her hand on the hilt of her sword although I didn't think she was stupid enough to draw on me. She was about as able a swordswoman as Sanda. Which meant she'd last about three seconds against me!

Darlanis suddenly tore off my jacket and flung it back at me, snarling, "I'd rather freeze instead!" The fury burning on her incredibly beautiful face making me wonder if she would draw on me! That would be a fine kettle of fish to start things off!

"Here!" Maris snapped, whipping off her cloak, and handing it to Darlanis. I had gotten the reaction out of Maris I wanted. Forced her to recognize Darlanis as a fellow human being. I would explain things to Darlanis later on. Hope she would understand why I had insulted her country as I had. The fury in her face left no doubt in my mind that it would take some explaining too! On the other hand I thought it was time that Darlanis confronted her own feelings towards her mother right here and now!

"Later," Darlanis hissed, her voice as cold as ice, "We will settle this in private." She was mad and not thinking too clearly. I would have never insulted her people or her mother without good reason. I had provoked Maris into "recognizing" Darlanis despite Queen Tulis Jord's own orders to "ignore" her completely.

"Come," Maris said, her eyes icy as they glowed into mine.

The royal palace wasn't as impressive as Darlanis' in Sarn, but I thought it fitted the "character" of these austere people. Darlanis handling Maris' cloak back to her as soon as we entered the place. She wouldn't even look at me, she was so furious yet!

The walls of the corridor down which we passed were lined with a number of large colorful tapestries, all of which either depicted hunting scenes or scenes of battle. Dularnians are a war-like people. Many of them hire out as mercenaries to fight in other people's wars. Of course since Dularn lies between the Empire of California to the south and various "Viking-like" groups to the north, they get plenty of chances to do some fighting. Also, they are often battling the Montanas, which are much like the Nevadas that Darlanis and I often now have to deal with!

"Impressive," I smiled, Darlanis glaring at me, Maris just looking uncomfortable, perhaps worrying what the Queen would say to her for having given Darlanis her cloak. A number of others following us, muttering among themselves. My comments having now stirred up considerably anger towards me as I had muchly feared.

"And not the work of 'barbarians'," Maris snapped back. Darlanis glancing at her, nodding, the anger still on her face.

"I have never considered the people of Dularn to be such," I smiled back, "Although those who ignore the suffering of others are always such in own my eyes despite of whatever level of 'civilization' they happen to claim to possess." My statement making Darlanis gasp as she suddenly realized why I had spoken as I had!

"Queen Tulis," Maris said to me, but just then I had eyes only for two others. One a tall dark haired handsome manly warrior and the other a young beautiful teenage blonde girl, both standing there beside the Queen of Dularn. My husband Jon Richards and my beloved Princess Gayle! What was going on here! And what had they done to the Squala? Had there been a battle at sea? Had my ship been taken by the Dularnians? I fear I thought only the worst of those now standing about. No wonder Maris had smiled as she had. I felt a cold fury fill my fevered thoughts!

"It is not what it appears, Lorraine," Jon said to me. He had seen the look in my eyes. He knew me too well to believe that I would submit peacefully to any "trick" Tulis might "pull"!

"We are always pleased to make the acquaintance of a Queen of Trelandar," Queen Tulis Jord of Dularn said to me as Darlanis and I stood before her. I wondered if she knew of the "trick" I had pulled on Maris Marn. Darlanis at my side being totally ignored by her mother as if she didn't even exist! I sensed Darlanis' hurt, pain, and pitied my friend! To be so rejected by one's own mother is a terrible blow for any daughter, in any era!

Queen Tulis was not a young woman. I could see the first signs of age there in her face. She seemed drawn, in ill health. Yet she was still tall, regal, golden. Beautiful in black. Somewhat hard featured. A woman, I thought to myself, that could command men, ships, in battle. I did not doubt that she was capable, competent. Much like me. I remembered Janis. This widow was her own mother. The Queen of Dularn who had sent her own daughter on a perilous mission! Such spoke much of Queen Tulis.

"I trust that my husband and my daughter are not being held against their will," I answered, my voice level, the force saber now in my hand. A flick of my thumb produced that awesome glowing beam of force that nothing can withstand. That can cut through the hardest strongest metals if they were but only fog!!!

"It is true. You are allied with the Lorr," Tulis said to me in level tones. I could see the look in her eyes. Fortunately Darlanis had enough sense to keep her mouth shut while this interplay was going on. "You are indeed the Lorraine of legend."

"I am the Lorraine mentioned in Janet Roger's writings," I smiled back, clicking off the force saber. Darlanis staring at me, her face unreadable. I was glad that she hadn't interfered.

"It would have been better had you not brought the one now at your side," Queen Tulis said to me then, referring to Darlanis. "She is not welcome here." I saw Maris' eyes meet mine. I suspected that it was time, so to say, to "take the bull by the horns". Part of my mission here was to reunite these two again.

"You gave birth to her, nursed her at your breast," I said.

"She has brought much dishonor upon us by word and deed," Tulis answered. "She has dishonored her own family by her lies." Around us were the high and mighty of Dularn. Its own nobility.

"It is her brother who dishonored you, not her," I snapped. Darl Jord was sitting there next to his mother, a gross swollen man. I thought of a pig crossed with a wolf. That did fit him!

"You should not have believed her lies," Tulis snapped back. Her eyes were cold, her voice icy. She was a "hard" woman. Not one, I thought to myself, given to emotion. A true "Dularnian".

"I have considerable reason to believe she speaks the truth," I retorted. "That her own brother did indeed rape her. Take from her that which is most precious to a young maiden." Virginity is highly prized among the Dularnians. It is not so in the Empire except among the daughters of high born aristocrats as a rule. The cultural standards are different. Who is "right" here is a question for which I have no answer. I doubt there is one. Such things tend, especially now, to be rather meaningless. It is usually impossible for a young girl to become pregnant except by the help of the Priestesses with their fertility drugs.

"She is but a slut," Tulis snapped. "Look at her attire!" Personally I found it quite beautiful. She is a stunning beauty.

"I am not a slut, mother!" Darlanis suddenly snapped, "And my own brother actually did in the company of two other boys rape me when I was fifteen and then you wouldn't even believe me!" I suspect that it was in the nature of a "prank" that went too far!

"She's lying, mother, just as she did thirty years ago!" Darl Jord protested, Maris Marn standing there at his side. I wondered what she thought of all this. She was due to marry him in another few days. And now perhaps she had "second thoughts"!

"I have entrusted your daughter with the care and upbringing of my own stepdaughter, Sharon, who like me is from the 20th Century," I told Queen Tulis. "I would not have ever done so had I believed your daughter to be of a low moral character." I put my arm around Darlanis. "I have stood side by side with your daughter against armed foes. She is even my 'sister' under the 'blood codes' of the Nevadas. I have trusted Darlanis with my life. An insult to her is an insult to me." I wondered if Tulis wanted to face the consequences of that! She had seen Black Lady fly over her city. The Dularnians knew enough of history to know what an airplane could do to an unprotected city like theirs. I might not be able to do much damage, but the moral effect of being helpless against me would be telling. Queen Tulis was no doubt well aware of that fact. That it was one thing to face their own primitive technology, but another entirely to face that of the 20th Century! She could of course kill me, but that might have political consequences that could be totally unpredictable. She would also be in violation of the Code of Honor, which is sacred to all Dularnians of the upper castes. She was, I thought, in a "Catch-22" situation. The thought made me smile. I thought of Maris Marn now standing there next to Darl Jord. Tall, golden, beautiful. She would be a dangerous enemy. Capable, competent! As "Princess" Tulis would no doubt also make her "Warlady" too...

"I do not ask that you believe what I told you thirty years ago was the truth, I ask only that you accept me as your flesh and blood," Darlanis spoke. "That although I am now an 'enemy' of Dularn I am also still the daughter that you gave birth to forty four years ago," Darlanis added, standing there beside me.* * Actually, she is Aurora's child, but that's another story! I understand that the child Tulis bore was "stillborn", and that Aurora's baby girl (Darlanis), was substituted for her instead at the wishes of Prince Paul of Dularn, who was Darlanis' father... Proud, beautiful, and so magnificent! The golden mesh of her attire exotically lovely! She truly did look like "She-Ra" then!

"I am a dying Queen, you who were once mine," Tulis spoke, standing, her eyes glistening there in the light of the lamps. I saw the horror there on Darlanis' face as she heard Tulis words! "Maris Marn will soon wed my son, and then take my place on this throne as the new Queen of Dularn," she added with a glance at Maris as she stood there beside Darl Jord. I understood now what I had not understood before. Why Maris would marry such a man! I supposed that Queen Tulis considered her a good choice. I did.

"No! Mother! NOT NOW!" Darlanis sobbed, dashing to the throne, taking her mother in her arms! The bitter tears welling up and running down her cheeks as she sobbingly held her mother!* * Darlanis of course did not know that Aurora was her "mother" at this time, although I suspected such from conversations that I had with Aurora, and the "comment" that Aurora let slip there on the Ronda as to the "welfare" of her "daughter". While it seemed to most I suppose that she was referring to An'na, I suspected in my heart that Aurorawas really referring to Darlanis herself...

"Lorraine!" Darlanis pleaded. "Can't the Lorr do anything?" I shook my head. I suspected the truth now. Tulis was dying from an inoperable brain tumor. One deep within her own brain!

"The Priestesses of Lys may be able to help," I suggested futilely. Tulis shook her head. They had been my last hope. I knew now that there was truly no hope. The best that could be done would be to make Tulis' final days as pleasant as possible.

"We have a war to end," Tulis said, touching Darlanis' face. Her fingertips wetted by the tears that now flowed down those lovely features. "There is not much time, my dear Sunflower." I saw Darlanis start, and then crush her mother to her. I had not known of Darlanis' childhood nickname. I found the name lovely.

"I need the keys to the plane," Darlanis said to me, wiping at her eyes. Her arm possessively around her mother. There was that in her voice that indicated that argument would be futile.

"There isn't much daylight left," I warned her. She nodded. Briefly placed her hand on my shoulder. Looked into my eyes. I understood. Such danger meant nothing to her now. Tulis nodded.

"I owe you much,Lorraine," Tulis smiled as they then left. She had but perhaps weeks to live, but she had her daughter back. Just then I didn't think anything else was important to her now.

Chapter Fifty

"It was a good thing that it wasn't war time," Jon admitted with a grim smile there in our room as he told

me how the Squala had been "taken" by two Dularnian warships under the command of their new Sealady, the lovely Maris Marn. Nearly everyone had been ashore there in Sana. The two "North" class heavy schooners had come racing up from Arsana. The North Wind under the command of Miles. The North Star, a new ship, under the command of that lovely Queen soon to be. I had to smile at the look on his face. Maris had "won" this one, although it really didn't matter much.

"She's capable and competent," I smiled back. That she was!

"And beautiful," Jon smiled back, teasing me just a little!

"Was she 'good in bed'?" I teased him back, kissing him, naked but for clips and strap at the moment. A fine black silken evening gown on the bed waiting for me. I knew she had once been his. That he had been intimate with her. She was a beautiful woman. Tall, golden, and quite striking in her own way. She did also remind me somewhat of Darlanis, but more capable, competent in her own way. Queen Tulis Jord of Dularn had made a good decision in picking the lovely Maris Marn of Sana as her "successor".

"Not as 'good' as you," he smiled back, holding me in his strong masculine arms. I was glad of that. I hate "sharing a bed" with another woman, even if she is only a treasured memory of the past. I could live with the memory of his late wife, Alexis, who had been something of a cross between Sanda Talen and myself in her own personality from what he has told me. As for Maris Marn, I hoped our stay here in Dularn wouldn't be too long.

"She's nicely assed," Darl Jord observed with a smile to me, regarding his lovely wife to be as she mingled among the guests. The clinging evening gown that Maris wore did reveal she was so. The sight reminded me of Sanda Talen, who is built much the same.

"She is a beautiful woman," I answered, really not at the moment that much interested in what Maris happened to look like in her figure-revealing evening gown of a beautiful bluish silk.

"And her sister is not bad looking either," he observed with a leering smile on his pig-like face as he watched Gayle now moving through the crowd to stop and talk with her older sister.

"Don't lay a hand on her or I'll take it off with my sword," I warned him, my voice hard, my eyes icy cold as they glowed into his. Darl Jord's eyes, like those of a predatory animal, burned into mine as he nodded, understanding. I knew the sort of a man he was. And what he had done to his own sister thirty years ago!

"She's not a virgin like ----," he muttered under his breath in reply, my eyes burning into his. Betrayed by his own unthinking words. He had raped Darlanis! Not that I had ever doubted.

"I often wonder what would have -----," I mused to Maris as we stood side by side there later on at the gigantic cut glass punch bowl. Darlanis had a similar one in her own palace there at Sarn, I recalled, smiling to myself. Sometimes it seems like a "small world". That things really haven't "changed" all that much since I left the 20th Century. Only "technology" changes.

"I would not have become what Gayle has," Maris said to me in level tones. I wondered why she was so "hostile" towards me.

"You don't think very much of your sister?" I ventured back. This was the sort of a retort of course for which there would be no possible answer that she could make. A "Catch-22" situation.

"I think very highly of my sister as my sister," Maris answered with a "knowing" smile, aware of the "trap" I had set. She was highly intelligent. Not a "dumb blonde" by any means. She was also a very beautiful woman. Beauty and Brains can be a "dangerous" combination in any time, and in any place. This woman could be a very serious threat to "established order". Dularn would be far more "dangerous" with her as its Queen. I could see why Jon had been "fascinated" by this woman. Why he married me.

"But you would not have followed in her footsteps," I smiled back. I enjoy conversations of this type. Janet Rogers and I used to do this all the time. Pick a topic and challenge each other on it. Maris was the first woman I'd ever met here in the 26th Century who could stand up to me in such a "game" as this.

"A 'mother-daughter' relationship would have been impossible," Maris smiled back. "I am not as 'impressible' as Gayle."

"Perhaps you don't know your sister as well as you think," I ventured back, enjoying myself thoroughly in this game of "verbal swordsmanship". Maris' beautiful azure eyes glowing into mine.

"No doubt she sees things in you that I don't," Maris smiled back. Jon now joining us, putting his arm around me, smiling at the lovely Queen soon to be, who nodded in reply. I don't think she was too comfortable either at having Jon there at my side. I knew he didn't have a very high opinion of her. She no doubt knew that. I sensed her own discomfort. It also pleased me too.

"What I've never been able to figure out, Maris," Jon said to her, "Is how you and little Mara managed to get together all the supplies necessary for your flight to Dularn without anyone being the wiser." His words making me wonder too how it had been done! I supposed I had never really thought that much about it!

"I'm afraid that will have to remain my secret," she smiled.

"You had a lover," I smiled back, developing a logical line of thought. Maris was a beautiful woman. Highly intelligent. Not like many slave girls. Darl Jord had mentioned something in passing that now fitted together. I remembered seeing Sanda Talen in an evening gown one time. Having noticed the jut of her buttocks underneath the silk. Maris had much the same build too.

"You were Carl Talen's 'mistress'," I said, giving her a smile. The shocked surprise on her face told me everything I had wanted to know. Everything fitted together now. All those little pieces to this puzzle that I had never been able to resolve.

"Of all the slave girls there on the estate you were the only one that a man like him might develop any sort of a 'relationship' with. You were of high caste, and no doubt were able to provide him with a quality of companionship that even his own wife couldn't match," I smiled, seeing the entire answer to all my questions standing right there before me. "And when I came on the scene and threatened to sell you, he helped you escape." I saw the look in her eyes. She did not, of course, know that he was dead. Perhaps it was just as well, I thought, thinking of Sanda. He had loved her, but she was no "competition" for Maris.

"You won't ----," she said softly, reaching out, touching me, her azure eyes pleading. I wasn't surprised now why Sanda had been so "hostile" towards this woman. While no doubt Sanda had not known the entire "truth" of the matter, she had no doubt suspected enough to make life miserable for this lovely blonde!

"Carl Talen died in the battle against the pirates," Jon said in level tones. Maris nodded, understanding.

Her eyes, I saw, were moist with emotion. "His widow is now the Prime Minister of Trelandar and pregnant with their third child." I recalled vividly the time that Lady Tirana's "tamed" dire wolves had threatened Sanda when she had come bursting in. What Carl's unthinking reaction had been when Sanda had been "threatened". It is possible for a man to "love" more than one woman. I hoped that Sanda would understand and not hold this against his memory. He had loved her. He had also loved a very beautiful slave girl.

"I feel sorry for her," Jon said to me as I laid in his arms wet and sweaty. He had used me well. My "performance" had been excellent. It had been "too long" since we had "touched". Our "need" had been strong. Sometimes with me "once" is not enough.

"She's lucky Sanda didn't learn the truth," I smiled back.

"She doesn't love Darl Jord," Jon observed back in reply.

"She will be Queen of Dularn when Tulis dies," I answered.

"And like Darlanis she will be a 'driven' woman," he said.

"Dangerous, easily provoked," I answered, thinking. Unlike Darlanis, Maris was a very competent and capable military leader.

"You should have kept her properly chained," Jon said to me. "Kept the key to her shackles." I suppose I should have done so. On the other hand then I would have never purchased Gayle to replace her. Perhaps it was best the way that things turned out!

I watched Black Lady coming in for a landing. Darlanis is a good pilot. A bit "inexperienced" perhaps, but yet a good pilot. It was early in the afternoon of the day after we had first come to Arsana. Darlanis bringing the plane down to a smooth landing there in the bay. Taxiing up to the palace dock like a veteran!

"At least she does something good," Jon smiled. He doesn't think too much of Darlanis. There are reasons for his feelings.

"She is 'good' at a lot of things," I smiled, raising to her defense. I like Darlanis. A lot. I admire her bravery, the fact that she is a "good" person. Not an "old bitch" like I am.

"We did it!" Darlanis said, throwing her arms around me. Queen Tulis standing there, looking on. Regarding me. Darlanis. I had spoken to the High Priestess who had treated her. I knew now that there was no hope. The brain tumor was located where no surgery or telekinetic power could do any good. There were drugs that could be used for the pain. None to save her life. I wondered what it would be like. To be in her "boots". To know you were dying. That nothing could be done for you. That at the end you would become insane. Have to be tied down like a rabid dog!

"It is very beautiful up there," Queen Tulis said to me. I knew that Darlanis wished to stay here in Arsana until the "end". Darlanis had been taking her up every day now. They were close.

"I'll leave the airplane," I said. They could share their last few weeks together before the end came. Darlanis would assist her then in her suicide. Such is part of the "Codes" that make up civilization here in the 26th Century. It is part of the heritage that Janet Rogers gave us. Part of what I believed in. That one

should have the "choice" of dying with "dignity" instead of in a hospital bed drugged and strapped down like some animal.

"Maris is a beautiful Princess," Tulis said to me. The wedding had been the day before. I did not think much of it. Darl Jord had little actual love for his wife, and his wife little for him. They were "united" by "politics", nothing more. No doubt Tulis was aware of that. Unfortunately Darlanis was far too unpopular with the Dularnian people to ever be a Queen of Dularn.

"Who thinks too much of the glories of war," I answered.

"She is of the Warrioreses," Tulis pointed out in reply.

"A second war between Dularn and the Empire will be far worst than the first one was," I answered in level tones, staring out over the bay. I would command the forces of the Empire under Darlanis. Maris those of Dularn. We were unfortunately both able and competent military commanders. I did not look forward to it. To the horror, the killing, the thousands that would die.

"But just as "winless" as this last one was," Tulis smiled.

Chapter Fifty One

Squala smashed through the waves like a living thing as the cold northwest wind drove her south through iron-gray seas. Back towards the warmth of my beloved Trelandar. My heavy cloak a comfort as I stood at Jon's side. Gayle was below, taking a nap.

"The winds of November," he said to me with a smile. Squala taking the seas well, her speed well in excess of ten knots. The three straining masts towering up into the almost totally clouded sky above, the tan storm sails hard and taut as they took the wind. I thought of Darlanis, of Queen Tulis, of what they faced.

"I'm glad you're in command," I smiled back, kissing him. I felt depressed. Like life was "over" for some reason. I had been thinking of Tulis. Wondering what I would do in her place?

"I'm glad that you're here," he said to me. I am "more" to him than just a wife. "There's something 'comforting' about you." I nodded, and put my head on his shoulder. Let him hold me close. I was cold, chilled from the gusty wind as it blew off the ocean. "A feeling that with you, victory is always ours." I wondered if he knew of the "doubts" that affected me. That I was not the awesome warriorress that others made me out to be. I was, I thought to myself, a woman who just happened to be good with a sword. A woman who had flown from the 20th Century where her own abilities meant little, to this one where she was admired and respected for what people believed of her, not knowing the reality!

"Let us pray for peace, an end to war," I answered him back.

"We could get a dispensation from the Priestesses," he said. Such would allow us to start a family before the usual three year waiting period was over. Such is sometimes done. I had no doubt that it could be arranged in my case. I was forty years old. I didn't have much "time" left any more to have children of my own. On the other hand I already had three "children" of my own. I do not think that I am that good a

mother, but others disagree here.

"I want a son from you," I said, "But not until there is gold about my throat." The crew of the Squala going about their duties, paying us little note. I had been exposed to beta radiation there on Mars when the saucer had exploded. Not enough to "harm" me that much, but one never knew about such things. The Priestesses of Lys could take of things. There are drugs. Even after my "change of life" I would still be able to bear children.

"Why wait?" Jon asked, looking down into my eyes. For the time being the world was at "peace". I was a Queen now. I could let others do the fighting for me if it eventually came to that.

"I'm not 'ready' yet to become a mother," I answered him. I hoped he did not doubt my love for him. "There is too much left yet to be done." I hoped he understood why this wasn't the time!

"We have much to be thankful for, for the blessings that Lys has given us, for a world once again at peace, for the fact that we are all here at this table together," I spoke as they looked up at me standing there. Jon, Sanda, her daughter Sara, the Lady Tirana, Hara, Gayle, Ta-she-ra, little Mara. Yvette kneeling there to one side, waiting to be of service. It was now Thanksgiving Day. The year 2565 A.D. 518 A.W. as you call it. The great dark oak table before me groaned with food, all the luxuries that the Queen of Trelandar was now "entitled" to have. Auroras was there with us, her features reminding me of Darlanis'. She seemed strangely "concerned" about something, although I had not "pried" into her affairs. I supposed she was worried about An'na. About what the future might "bring" for all of us. An'na was off somewhere in the Starfire exploring a comet the last we'd heard of her. Living the "dream" her mother had once had for us!

Sanda's son had come home from the war and promptly married Phara Holt, the blacksmith's daughter. They were on their honeymoon now. Phara had promised me that she would learn to read and write. She was a lovely girl, a bit "ripe", but very attractive.

Sharon was now busy in Orgon, keeping that northern country "loyal" to Darlanis much to Sanda's "irritation". Sharon being a very "capable" young lady well able to "awe" those who listened!

"Let us thank Lys for 'you' being here with us," Sanda said. "Without you Lorraine there would not be a free Trelandar today."

"You have altered the course of history," Tirana said to me.

"The right person at the right time," I smiled back at them.

"I hope Darlanis is all right," Aurora spoke up. I nodded. I saw the others glance at each other. Darlanis would "help" her mother when the time came. She would take her own life. Die with dignity as a Queen should, not strapped down in a bed like a rabid animal when the tumor growing in her brain took her sanity.

"You seem a bit down," I said to Sanda that evening as we stood looking out over the city that spread out there before us. She was starting to "show" a bit now if you looked at her close. Her cloak was drawn about herself. There was a chill in the air.

"I keep thinking of Maris and my husband," she said softly. I knew I shouldn't have told her what I had found out in Dularn. Maris had been blonde, beautiful. Intelligent, different. I had no doubts that Carl had

found her attractive. I understood much.

"Men often 'use' slave girls, it doesn't mean that much," I answered. Jon had "used" Yvette several times during our marriage. I was a bit "uncomfortable" about it, but that was due to my own 20th Century upbringing. I did not doubt his love for me. We had not spoken again of my bearing him children. I supposed it was for the best. One never knew what the future held for me.

"There is a difference between 'sex' and 'love'," she said.

"Carl loved you, Maris was but a 'fling'," I answered her.

"Why, Lorraine, why? Why a woman like her?" she asked me. Maris was blonde, beautiful, intelligent, capable. Sanda was attractive, but no match in her looks for a woman like Maris Marn.

"That is a question even I cannot answer," I told her, my arms going around her. I remembered Jack, Sandra Stevens. Why? Someone like Maris Marn I could have understood, but why Sandra? Why do men do this to us? Why do they betray our love like this?

"I'm worried, Lorraine," Sharon said to me. It was now a week before Christmas. There had been no word from Darlanis. We knew nothing of what had happened in Dularn. I cursed the slowness of communications in this era. Even the Squala would take three weeks to go to Dularn and return. Sharon and I were of the 20th Century. We were used to telephones, instant communication.

"I'm sure she's safe," I assured her, giving her a warm hug.

"I 'miss' her," Sharon smiled. "I miss the way she laughs."

"I'm sure she'll be flying down to see us pretty soon now." I told Sharon. I hoped Darlanis had remembered to check the oil. I had warned her about such things. I hoped that she remembered.

Christmas Eve, 2565 A.D. The good people of Trella were suddenly aroused from their slumbers by the sound of an airplane flying over their city. No, it wasn't Santa Claus with presents for all the children. But a very beautiful woman I love dearly! Our Empress had returned from Dularn! Darlanis was back with us!

"Maris is now the Queen of Dularn," Darlanis said to me. She was tired, almost exhausted from the long flight from Arsana. Some fifteen hours in the air. There was in her eyes sorrow. She told me of how Tulis had died. Sixteen thousand feet in the air, Dularn spread out there below them. The poison had been swift, painless. It had been the way her mother wished it to be. She had died in her daughter's arms, the airplane almost as high up as it could go. The air thin, cold, Dularn spread out below.

And with this I come to the end of my story. We spent Christmas together. All of us. I found it the very best Christmas that I have ever had. No clock radios or anything like that, but just a lot of love, sharing, togetherness. I am glad that I flew into that strange thunderstorm. That Sharon and I ended up here in the 26th Century. Here now is my home. Where my husband is. Where my children are. Where my friends are. I am content.

The End

