

Freedom Fighters of Trelandar
A Tale of Adventure in the Second Dark Age
Book Nine of the Warlady Series

By Jerome B. Bigge

Author's Note

Unlike my other books of the Warlady series, this one is set in a different time from the others, set in a time before the famous Warlady herself came on the scene. Back in a time when Darlanis first attacked Trelandar in 2550, and "freedom loving" men and women followed the lovely Lady Sanda Harles, sister of Queen Paula in an guerrilla war against the new Empire of California...

While Sanda is not the awesome fighter that Lorraine is, she is a capable and competent woman, well able to lead her forces in a terroristic guerrilla war against the forces of Darlanis, who is seen here through Sanda's eyes as an invader of a peaceful and tranquil land. One who must be resisted with everything one has!

Then at the conclusion of the book we see the last hours of Earth, as an old woman takes Black Lady up for her final flight. Tells us of the super hurricane winds, the earthquakes, the tidal waves that resulted as the Earth was dragged out into the frigid depths of outer space by a neutron star in the year 2648. Sanda then escaping back through time to the 19th Century, where no one will believe the stories that she has to tell here of the future.

Forward

"You should go to bed, get some rest for the funeral tomorrow...", my son Eric said, placing his hand gently on my shoulder. His beautiful golden haired foster sister Gayle Dai, now Queen of Trelandar at his side as I sat there going through Lorraine's own things, her diaries, all the things that she'd ever written down. For fifty six years we'd been married, Lorraine and I, and now it was all gone, only "memories" like

this world would soon be here!

"She died with a sword in her hand," I said, weeping now as I looked up at them both. "She would have wanted it that way..." Their faces blurred before me as my eyes filled again with tears. She had been legend, her name honored on two worlds, the greatest swordswoman of all time, this "Warlady" whose name so many knew.

"I have given execution orders for the outlaws," Gayle spoke to me, her eyes, as blue as the sky, glowing down into mine here. As Queen of Trelandar it was her duty to give such orders, just as it had once been Lorraine's before she retired here last year. Saying that she was getting "old" and that it was time to retire! But when the outlaws had come, she'd grabbed her weapons and before any of us could stop her had gone running to the forest, the dogs swarming around her, to take the arrow in her heart that had took her life. Those who had survived the battle we'd sent on to Trella to face swift justice there in the courts of law. A lynch mob had fought her Warriresses, but I was proud of the people of Trella, who had for the most part "understood" Gayle's pleadings. That Lorraine's memory would be dishonored if such happened here!

"Do whatever you want," I said, knowing that nothing we did now would ever bring Lorraine back to life. I thought of taking poison, of death, of being with HER again in that land beyond the mists of knowledge, standing with her again as I have so often...

"Lady Sanda is here," my son Eric said to me, perhaps aware that I needed "company", someone to talk to, just to listen here. Sanda waving away the others, Eric and Gayle nodding, leaving us. The former Prime Minister of Trelandar herself now old, as old as I was, both of us having seen a century passing by. Watched our friends die, both of age and of things like this, these outlaws. I thought of Ta-she-ra, a young woman who had never been happy as a Princess of Trelandar. She'd transported herself back in time, "back" to an era two thousand years before, when Rome was falling to barbarians and it would be a thousand years before the white man would come to the New World to take it from its own peoples. Of Eric's own wife, Sequoia, truly a Princess, waiting outside. A woman of the Sierras, of the mountains, a "half breed" to some. Of others whose names were recorded, who had fought beside "her".

"There's not too many of us left any more," I said to Sanda. Her husband had died years ago of an assassin's dagger, serving the Crown as only he could as head of Lorraine's secret service. Lady Tirana had died two decades before of old age, and Darlanis' last resting place no one knew, save that she had no doubt died a "Warriress' Death" as she would have wished it to have been now.

"But we have made legends," Sanda spoke, her dark eyes wet.

"Lorraine more than any of us," I said, seeing her nod back.

"She was like no other that ever was, or will be," Sanda answered in a soft voice. Earth had but a couple of decades left. Then the neutron star would come, and end everything for us here. There were the colonies on Mars, suitable I supposed for some, a world far different than the Earth, an arid cold harsh world, not like our warm life giving Earth, a world that belonged to others. To the Women, to the Lorr, a truly "alien" race if any ever was.

"Here are her 'diaries'," I said, seeing Sanda nod back now.

"We should translate them, publish them so people can know," Sanda answered, her dark eyes holding mine as I nodded back. "It will be a final 'tribute' to a woman who was an example to all..."

"There is also this manuscript..." I said, giving it to her.

"She kept 'this'!" Sanda breathed in awe, holding it there.

"I think it was 'important' to her," I said, seeing her nod.

"I never was a writer," Sanda said, giving me a rueful grin.

"It is a part of the history of Trelandar," I answered her.

"It is but a tale of what I did before we met," Sanda said.

"I think she would have wanted it published," I said to her.

"You have my permission to do so," Sanda answered me softly.

Jon Richards

Prince Consort of Trelandar

Chapter One

"They will be 'here' in five minutes," Carl Talen said to me as I nodded, standing there beneath the tree, the spreading limbs and the leaves overhead cutting out much of the sun's light here. My unicorn, a dapple gray, was nuzzling here at the sparse grass as we stood there waiting and hidden for the wagon train to come. The winding trail here before us the way the Imperials would have to take here through these woods. Hopefully once again we might be successful here in denying to Darlanis the supplies now aboard it. Doing what we could to "ease" the "pressures" on my sister's forces. Carl was a handsome man, very much a Warrior, I mused to myself. The black leather of his attire leaving few doubts here. The tunic and hose part of the uniform here of a Royal Guardsman. His rank markings that of a Captain of Warriors, the Queen's own. A black beret, a gold hilted sword, all the martial trappings of the once proud Royal Guardsmen of Trelandar, now but thirteen...

"You and your men will cut off the advance guard," I ordered in level tones. Aware that he was looking at me again not as a "commander" of this force, but as an attractive woman... That he was aware of the jut of my firm breasts beneath my leather tunic, the delightful fullness of my thighs beneath clinging green hose now the "worse" for wear. I had no doubts that I smelled, that I quite badly needed a bath, a chance to rest, to recover from this endless warfare the Queen of Sarn had brought to my beloved Trelandar. "Hold them as best you can while we attack the wagons," I continued, aware that he was of the Warriors and that I was of the Scribes. That he might have "doubts" now about my ability to command here. His "squad" of Warriors having just been assigned. I was angry that Queen Paula thought

so little of my efforts here that she'd only given me this officer and his pitiful dozen men! The last remains of a company that had been so devoted to her! I had asked for a thousand, for a force powerful enough to strike, and strike hard at the enemy, not just "harass" them like here!

"Yes, my Lady," the Warrior said, his eyes holding mine.

"I have only been widowed for two months," I said then.

"My family died in the assault on Trella," he replied.

"We have all 'lost' much to these Sarnians," I nodded.

"You are a 'Scribe', not a Warriress," he "observed".

"I am the sister of the Queen," I spoke in level tones.

"And as much a 'fighter' as she is," Carl Talen grinned.

"I fear I am not at my 'best'," I smiled, aware of the fact that in another couple minutes I might be dead. My people having orders to kill me rather than let me fall alive into the hands of the enemy. I am normally a quite attractive woman, dark haired, dark eyed like many Trelandarians, a hint of "olive" to my skin. A squirrel in a tree chattering away, angry at being "disturbed".

"I trust you are skilled with that blade at your hip," Carl smiled, "And that odd looking bow that you carry," he added here. The sword a light slim blade, suitable for a woman's strength, my compound bow a "rarity" here in Trelandar, although they are more common in Dularn. The weapons being hand made, and quite costly.

"They come," I spoke, seeing the first of the advance guard now through the trees, Carl Talen hurrying off then to his men... I prayed he would not be reckless, die under a Warriress' lance. I'd seen too many die, too many whom I'd spoken a last word over!

"Hold your fire!" I hissed, my right arm lifted high. I did not wish to warn the Imperials too soon of the ambush I'd set for them. My objectives here were the wagons, not the escort of Sarnian Warriresses with their long lances, helmets, shields, armor of chain mail gleaming in the sun... I was not interested in any slave girls we might be able to collect either, only in destroying the military supplies being shipped to the front. Handicapping that "disowned" Dularnian Princess in her battle against us! That beautiful blonde "slut" who had "bedded" her way to a Crown! Who now wanted to build an "Empire of California" with Trelandar as her first conquest after finding the Nevadastoo "difficult"! And that new Warlady of hers, that Bajan, was truly a witch too!! Destroying everything in her path like the Mongols from the past!

Then came the CRASH of the cut trees crashing to earth, now shutting off escape for the wagons on this narrow trail, the officer in charge whipping out her sword, crying out her "warning". The uplifted blade glistening in the sunlight for an instant before one of our hidden crossbowmen now brought her tumbling down! The unicorns of the escort rearing up as the Warriresses wheeled them around, searching for the "source" of these deadly missiles! Men jumping off their wagons, most now cowering down behind them! A few, braver than most, firing small crossbows in our direction. The horses hitched to the wagons, rearing and yanking the wagons about, several with arrows or crossbow bolts sticking into them!

Here in the forest the long lances were more a "handicap" to the enemy women than a "help", our flights

of arrows and crossbow bolts emptying saddles as the Warriresses wheeled their unicorns about, searching out the source of their trouble and charging us! I watched a Warriress, thrown from her saddle, throw up her arm in terror as a bolting team of four horses now trampled over her!

We were all yelling and screaming at the top of our lungs, such serving both to "encourage" our people and to demoralize the enemy here, as well as keeping any surviving officers from taking command. I had so far shot three arrows, one hit, two misses, a fair ratio considering how rapidly everyone was moving about now! The woman I'd hit having been struck in the hip, which didn't I'd noticed here seem to handicap her all that much despite things... She'd dropped her lance, and with drawn sword, had charged into the woods, seeking out the author of her hurt like an enraged Tigon might, that saber toothed monster caused by The War of 2047.* * It appears that Sanda believed at this point that such animals were the result of radiation, not genetic experiments made earlier in the 21st Century as Lorraine has always claimed here. (JBB)

I took another shot at the woman, missed, the Warriress now striking down a luckless Peasant lad, the blood running down her leg from the arrow, which obviously hadn't caused her to lose interest in things as I'd first hoped... My missile attracting her attention, another striking her shield, sticking in it, as she now charged me with drawn sword, obviously fully intending to see that if she was to die here, she'd take as many of us with her!!

I dodged back around behind my tree as she charged on past, the armored woman wheeling her unicorn about, screaming curses at me in her fury, her sword slashing down as I jumped back, unable to nock another arrow in time! Only the fact that we were in a thick forest allowing me to dodge her sword slash in time here as I dropped my bow and drew the blade I carried at my own hip now!

"YOU LYS-DAMNED REBEL SLUT OF A BITCH!" she screamed at me, a crossbow bolt now striking her in the right shoulder then causing her even more troubles, although she didn't drop her sword, which I'd expected, but came charging right at me again here! I jumped back as the woman flung herself from the saddle, my sword driving to the hilt up into her body as she came smashing down on top of me! Her own blade fortunately missing me as I twisted to one side just enough to avoid her last thrust, the weight of the armored woman smashing me to the ground, my head being "slammed" here against a root of the tree against which I'd been standing!!

"My Lady!" one of my green clad fighting men cried, running up to me. Everything seeming to "swim" about before my eyes from the blow to my head, although at least I was still alive, which was more than I could say for this Samian Warriress whose body my sword blade had pieced for its entire two foot length here! I had no doubts that she knew she was going to die, and her last thoughts had been no doubt to try to take me with her! Her face was set in a last snarl of rage, of a fury that spoke much here! Her eyes seemingly wide in shock, as if she couldn't believe it!!

"I'm... I'm all right!" I answered, my head feeling like it was going to split apart! My forces having by now mostly "dealt" with the Warriresses, the survivors having fled back down the trail from which they'd come, along with the wagon men who'd been able to seize mounts and follow them. We had achieved a victory, even if it had been by military standards only a mere "skirmish".

"Three dead, two wounded," Carl Talen said to me, almost as if he was accusing me of having caused their deaths or injuries. The wagons were loaded with corn, with dried meat, although one I found had carried several of the new Dularnian compound crossbow, which is an excellent weapon, far superior to anything we'd had. There had also been several slave girls chained on to the wagons, whose chains I'd had struck off before I ordered the wagons to be burned, the wenches now kneeling to one side watching the flames. The smoke rising up into the sky, marking where death had struck! The enemy's

loses had been eleven dead, with two so badly wounded I did not think that they would live to see the sun set this day. I had the captured men from the wagons make litters, put them on them to protect them from beasts even if they wouldn't survive... I was not of the Warriresses, but I kept the "caste codes" here.

"The enemy's loses were considerably higher," I retorted. I could only swap Trelandarian lives for Sarnian at as high a price as I could get, in the growing "futile" hope that Darlanis would give up her attack upon us and be willing to come to "terms" now! With that damn Bajan of hers, that didn't seem too likely either. My sister was "brave" enough, but not a good military tactician.

"You're 'good' at what you do," he suddenly said to me then.

"I read a lot," I snapped, not in the best of "moods" here. I had a splitting headache, my neck was stiff, I was feeling that emotional "drain" that comes after you fight a battle like this. I was in no mood to play little "man-woman" games here right now! He might have been "Lys' Gift to women", but I wasn't interested!

"What 'were' you before this?" the handsome Warrior captain asked me, standing there, glancing over at the three slave girls. "A historian, someone who 'read' about wars in the past here...?" I'd never had much to "do" with any government affairs, and he'd never actually met me before even if I was the Queen's sister.

"I was an attorney at law, Mr. Talen," I now snapped back.

"You were probably pretty good at 'that' too," he "grinned".

"If you want a woman, 'use' one of them!" I "snapped" then. The three slave girls might as well be put to some good use here!

Chapter Two

"She needs the 'services' of a Physician," the woman spoke, looking up at me, holding the hand of the other now seated there. The wounded woman had been hit by a crossbow bolt, which had been driven into her right shoulder right down to the shoulder blade, the agony of it twisting her otherwise attractive face. Some of the wagon masters having been armed here with lightweight crossbows of the sort often now carried by such men. Lani was a woman of the Peasants, just a simple "farm girl", who had not hesitated to leave her family, and follow the tree flag of Trelandar! The other members of my force gathering around, watching us here as the breeze gently rustled the leaves upon the limbs up overhead. Most of them were low caste people, simple workers and farmers.* *In this society of the 26th Century, people were divided into "castes" based upon what their occupation was. The "high" castes were the Warriors and the Warriresses, who were the "rulers". Followed by the "learned" castes such as Scribes, Physicians, and Builders. The Merchants were the "middle" caste, with the Peasants, Iron Workers, Leather Workers, and such on the "bottom" of the social "pecking" order. There were also "guilds", organizations similar to labor unions for the skilled workers. (J.B.B.)

"When those Warrioreses reach..." Carl replied, there being no need to finish the rest of the sentence. The Imperials would send out a force powerful enough to put "paid" to mine in spades! And with those Nevadatrackers they were using now, it meant that we had to make "tracks" out of here, and quick too if we were to live to fight another day again for our beloved wooded Trelandar. This land of the great redwoods which gives our country its name. The three slave girls I'd freed, as was my practice here, not so much to hinder the Imperials, but because I didn't like slavery.

"She's in no condition to `ride' like that!" I snapped. My Physician was dead, and although I knew something of medicine, I was well aware that I didn't know enough here to get that bolt! Not without leaving the head in the wound as was all too likely!!

"Don't leave me `alive' for them, my Lady!" Lani now cried! Those gathered around here in the forest "nodding" to themselves. We were considered by the Empire pretty much as "terrorists" now. A favored method of execution by the Imperials being to "suspend" the captive from a tree limb and then shoot arrows into them now. Another being to build a fire beneath you, which the Nevadas did.

"You have medical supplies?" Carl asked, knowing that I did. Such things I kept when I could get them from the Imperials, as I could always trade such things with the Peasants for food, tools, and sometimes arms, although the Imperials had been going about disarming everyone of weapons, much like was done long ago. Making sure that the territory they controlled remained "peaceful"! No conqueror enjoys the fact that the people have effective arms.

"I can do some things, but to do `that'..." I answered back.

"That crossbow bolt has to come out," Carl Talen said to me. I could hear the leaves rustling in trees around us as I nodded. The chirps of birds, all the sounds of life here in my Trelandar.

"There will be no `pain'," I promised Lani Grant as I moistened the cloth with chloroform and held it over her face. I'd given her two shots of morphine too, just to help make sure here. Carl Talen going through the medical supplies, picking out the tools that he would need to do the operation out here beneath the trees. The thought going through my mind that every moment that we tarried here added to the "dangers" that we faced in this now. Dripping more chloroform on the cloth as Lani breathed deeply of it. Carl now joining us, the surgical tools he'd use now ready.

"Wish we had more time," Carl breathed, glancing over at me. Lani now unconscious, or at least appearing to be here. I was no Physician, and I didn't know how "much" chloroform to use, aware that too much would kill her, which was another concern here too, especially with all my people standing there watching us operate.

"Just get that bolt out!" I hissed, looking up, ordering the rest to leave us. To regroup at the place that I had picked out earlier. Such being necessary so the Imperials couldn't track us as a group, but only upon a basis of a few at a time here, which was far more difficult for them to do, we'd found by experience.

"Odd how Darlanis' army is so much `bigger' than ours," Carl spoke as he cut into Lani, the blood spurting as he did, running, the young woman having a tint to her skin that left no doubts in the distant past one of her ancestors had been of another race, a "Black" as historians referred to them, such racial intermingling being commonplace in Trelandar, a bit less so in Sarn, with those of Dularn being more pure blooded "Whites" than anyone else here.

"She's been building it up for `years' now," I answered him back as my force now mounted up and rode out. Darlanis also had a lot of men at arms, (both sexes) "filling it out". As well as mercenaries that she'd

hired from everyone she could. She'd also introduced a sort of "military conscription" to fill the ranks of her support forces, such as the wagon drivers we'd seen. We believed this "last" was now upon the "advice" of Princess Tara of Baja, the former Queen of Sarn before Thar Marden divorced her to marry Darlanis. The only really surprising thing about this was that Tarawas willing to assist Darlanis, although we'd suspected that some sort of "deal" had been struck here between these two!!

"We should have been doing the `same' ourselves," Carl said, cutting deeper into Lani, the woman softly moaning a bit here. I quickly now dripped some more chloroform on to the cloth over her face, wondering to myself if Lani would ever survive all of this! "Think I got it," he breathed, wiggling the crossbow bolt a bit! And forcing a soft moan from the yet unconscious woman before us as he pushed the small blade he was using deeper into the wound!!

"A big army costs a lot," I answered, recalling the debates. I'd suggested to my sister a civilian militia, but that idea had not been too popular with the upper classes, who distrusted those below them, especially if issued arms and given training here... In any case the King hadn't been at all in favor of the idea, and neither had my sister that much, even though she listened to me. Paula and I having had our own "differences" here over the years. She was of the Warriresses, and looked down upon "lower" castes, even those who studied history, the law, engineering, medicine... I suspected too that she looked down on me now for having become a Scribe instead of a Warriress as she had done. My doing so in a way had made me the "black sheep" of the Harles clan, unfit in some eyes to be considered an equal even if I'd so proved myself!

"Being subjects of Darlanis is going to be `costly' too," he answered, withdrawing the crossbow bolt now from Lani, the thing covered with blood, while more came pouring out of the wound now! "Darlanis is bleeding her own people white with these new taxes."

"Got to stop that bleeding," I breathed, squeezing out wound compound on it, using up an entire tube of it, then putting on a compress. Carl quickly following this then with more bandages.

"She'll have a `scar' to show her children," he grinned.

"We have to get her out of here, and now!" I hissed back.

"She's in no condition to ride," my Warrior now pointed out. Lani was just recovering consciousness, and in her weakened condition, it was "doubtful" that she'd be able to stay in a saddle! She needed "care", care of a sort that we couldn't give her now.

"Mine will carry double," I said, referring to my unicorn.

"I'll help you get her into the saddle," he smiled at me, cleaning off the small blade he'd used to make the incision here.

"That's a woodsman's hut," Carl breathed as I halted, holding Lani against me, supporting her in the saddle. It was not a "choice" I would have wished to make, but Lani was too badly hurt to be kept with us, not without some sort of medical facilities! The structure was so ramshackle that I wondered if any now lived there in it. In any case I didn't feel we had any "choice" now.

"We're not `moving' swiftly enough," I pointed out to him.

"They could turn her over to the enemy," he retorted back, dismounting behind some trees so that we'd not be "spotted" here. One never knew here what you might find riding up to such a hut.

"They're Trelandarians," I said, aware we had our traitors. People who betrayed us both for Sarnian gold and for "political" reasons. People who saw Darlanis not as a conqueror, but more as a "liberator", that beautiful blonde being no dumb belle either.* *This is the proper "usage", I should note to the readers. (JBB)

"I'll `cover' you," Carl said, unslinging his crossbow here, drawing the string back with his foot there in the stirrup, using his belthook that crossbowmen use to draw back the bowstrings of their arms. The weapon one of the Dularnian ones we'd just taken from the Imperials, a far superior weapon to those that we used. Fortunately there'd also been a supply of bolts with the arms. A big dog, more a wolf than dog, now alert, looking over at us now. Perhaps alerting a force of Imperials hiding inside the place... The dog being tied to a stake driven into the ground before it.

"If it's a `trap', don't let them take me alive," I ordered. I had no wish to be "used" by the Imperials as they would here. It would be better for Trelandar if I died in battle, rather than to live as a slave girl kneeling at the feet of the Empress now! I thought briefly of my son, "safe" I hoped in the hills east of Thistle, who might never see his mother again if "such" occurred. His father two months in the grave. The black silk I'd worn once over my golden neck chain the "mark" of a widow in mourning. The thought here of making love now seeming almost like a "betrayal". I'd kept the neck chain, although I no longer wore it as before.

"You've got just as much `guts' as any Warriress, Sanda," Carl smiled, leaving off my title and calling me by my own name. His dark eyes looking up into mine as I quietly nodded in reply.

"We all serve Trelandar, each in our own ways," I answered. The thought now going unbidden through my mind that once this had been a part of the United States of America six centuries before. Once part of the awesome World Federation ruled by Janet Rogers. A civilization now mostly myth and legend, even to my own caste.

Chapter Three

I could feel the sun warm on my shoulders as I rode into the clearing, holding Lani there against me in the saddle, aware that she required a level of care that we could never give her... The dog barking, a man stepping out from the hut to peer up at me, an axe held in his hand, his own "occupation" without any doubt. He was, I observed, of an indeterminate age, heavy set, not what one would ever call handsome. His leather vest and kilt worn, dirty.

"Friend of Trelandar?" I ventured, my hand on my sword hilt.

"I chop wood, raise some food, a bit of `Mary'," he replied. "Mary" being the slang often used for marijuana, which many now "used" much as others drank alcohol. "You a Warriress?" he then asked, studying me, Lani Grant there in my arms, it being obvious no doubt to him just "what" I was, and why I'd come here now too! "Haven't seen any `Imperials' around these parts lately," he volunteered to me as I urged my unicorn up closer, the dog snarling viciously as he pulled it back and now tied the animal securely. "Bastards about as `welcome' as a Lorr," he grinned up at me now, referring to the true "rulers"

of the Earth, those "ants" who in their way had prevented Mankind from rebuilding any civilization.

"I will stay with him," Lani breathed, her voice weak, soft.

"She needs someone to take care of her," I said to him, the man helping me ease Lani down from the saddle. The woman unable to even walk yet, no doubt due to the after effects of the operation. The woodcutter half "carrying" Lani as I followed behind. She was not an unattractive woman, with black hair, dark eyes. A sturdy Peasant girl, a bit stocky, but in otherwise good health.

"I'll tell the Imperials that she's my wife," he said to me, kicking open the door, and helping Lani down to a cot at the side of the single room that made up his home out here in the forest. "Tell them she took a fall and pierced herself on a splinter..."

"They are going to `ask' where's her neck chain," I pointed out, even the wife of a man like him wearing some sort of chain. It might be only gold plated brass, but she would have a "chain"!

"I'll tell them we pawned it," he grinned, looking up at me. Obviously he was a bit more "intelligent" than I'd first thought!

"I have one for her," I spoke, thinking of my own here. I'd never wear it again, now that my husband was dead, and it might as well be put to some sort of use instead of just lying there in my saddle bags as a painful reminder of what once had been here!

"I was getting `worried' about you," Carl Talen said to me as I now came riding up, Lani hopefully now safe. I thought too that the woodcutter, who had never been married, might treat Lani well, perhaps in the "hopes" that she might be willing to become his wife later on. Her career as a "terrorist" obviously ended!

"She's in good hands," I replied, giving him a smile back.

"I expect we'd better get going then," he said, mounting.

"We'll stop here," I ordered, the sun now "low" in the west gleaming through the trees there before us. We'd kept to the "lesser" trails, cutting across the forest here and there, making it difficult for even Nevadatracers to follow us here. A small brook cutting through the forest making a good campsite for us... Some ruins there just ahead a reminder of civilization long gone. Crumbling walls, mostly just "rubble" here after five centuries, but "better" than sleeping out in the open here in these forests. I'd have myself abath, get the "stink" off myself, smiling ruefully at the thought of how "far" I'd "fallen" now here since the "invasion" early this spring when Darlanis had attacked Trella... I'd been of the upper nobility of Trelandar, a Lady by birth, my own parents of the martial castes, the ruling castes of this era. A woman who bathed every day, who had owned a slave girl, who had every luxury that gold could buy, a woman of "breeding", culture. The Harles tracing their own "ancestry" back to Queen Amethysta.

"`Good' a place as any," Carl Talen answered, swinging down from the saddle, his unicorn like mine now in need of rest here. "Not likely to find any Imperials around here," he "added" with a smile, undoing the saddle and setting it aside as I did mine now.

"I'm going to take a `bath'," I announced, meeting his eyes.

"I'll do the same up around that bend," he offered, smiling.

"Just remember that I'm the sister of the Queen," I spoke.

"I'm sure I'll remember that," he grinned back at me now.

Squatting in the water, using the last of my soap, I shaved my body, armpits and pubes, as proper for a woman of my status, a woman of a higher caste, not some plain simple Peasant girl here. Washing my hair, trimming it, making myself once again beautiful. Using the last of my perfume here and there as I dried myself as best I could behind some brush before slipping on my dress. The sun now settling behind the trees in a lovely glowing red sunset.

"Ah," Carl Talen grinned, looking up at me as he chewed on a piece of dried meat, we having loaded ourselves up with it here. Sitting on a fallen tree trunk, the end hanging over the brook. The unicorns safely tied up for the night there inside the ruins. I'd washed out my clothes as best I could, hoping that they'd dry by morning so that I could put them back on when we rode out now. Otherwise I'd have to ride in this dress, which I didn't care to do as it was the only decent piece of clothing I had left to me. A lovely green silk that clung like a second skin to every curve.

"You are a man of `honor'," I said, giving him a smile then.

"What do you mean?" Carl asked as I sat down and started now to brush my hair out, no doubt aware that I had used perfume and cosmetics, that I wasn't just a simple guerrilla fighter as he'd no doubt thought when we'd first met early this morning here now.

"You didn't try to `sneak' a `peek' at me bathing myself," I smiled back, aware that I had only clips and strap on underneath this clinging green silk... That I'd done things to myself that I'd not really needed to DO!! What was I thinking of anyway now?

"Good things come to those who wait," he grinned back then.

"The emotional pain's too strong yet," I answered softly.

"We're losing this war with the Sarnians," he said to me.

"That's because we don't understand how to fight," I said.

"And just `how' would you go about it here?" he challenged.

"When someone grabs you by the throat, you knee them in the groin," I answered. "We should have struck back with everything we had against Sarn itself when Darlanis invaded," I explained... "Kicked her royal butt where it would have done us some good," I said with a big grin. "Made an alliance against her with Talon, with Dularn, given her so much `trouble' she'd have wished she'd never been born!" I'd expressed these same "thoughts" when Darlanis had first started getting "unpleasant" last year, but neither the King or my own sister would even seriously listen to me! "You can't win a `defensive' war like we're doing," I protested!! "Paula's brave, she's a great Warrioreess, but she doesn't understand that you can't win a war the way she's doing against Sarn!" Paula's tactics leaving no doubt she really didn't understand you can't win a defensive war, not if you allow the enemy free rein! Darlanis was slowly eating up Trelandar like a mouse nibbling on cheese. Slowly occupying the country, taking it over, ruling it!

"I assume that you've told her this," Carl smiled in reply, cutting off a piece of the dried meat with his dagger, and giving it to me as I sat there beside him. His dark eyes meeting mine. I was so very much "aware" that he was a MAN, and I was a woman. He was also a Warrior, not another Scribe like my late husband... I'd had a good marriage, but it had lacked something I'd needed. We'd been more

"friends" than "lovers", each going our own ways.

"I'm a Scribe, and that means to her I don't know anything!" I protested back. "I've spent years studying history, the wars of the past, even the 'wars' men fought before The War!" I added! There was a lot of confusion with the historians about these, but I had come to the conclusion that some of what was written did in a way make sense, even if I had a hard time understanding things. There had been so much that had been "lost" when Man fought The War there in 2047 against Mars, against the alien Lorr, horrors from another world, monsters out of some drug addict's nightmare!

"You were raised as a Warriress," Carl suddenly said to me. "Queen Paula told me something of you," he continued, explaining. "I'd like to hear your side of the story," he smiled as I nodded, having little doubt here of what my sister had said about me now. The Harles clan having almost "disowned" me for refusing "caste". For refusing to become a Warriress as everyone thought I should!

"I was first at the Academy," I answered, remembering it as if it was but yesterday. I had been the pride of the family, the valedictorian, the daughter who had made everyone so proud of her even if she wasn't ever going to be the awesome swordswoman like her older sister. Everyone saying how wonderful it was to have a young Warriress like me to bring glory and honor to the Harles!!

"But then you rejected the caste mark," he said, looking at me, aware that I was no doubt a more competent military leader as he'd seen than my sister, than even Lady Tirana, our Warlady was! That my tiny little scattered forces were forcing Darlanis to now devote an entire Legion to protect her rear against me! Forcing her to provide armed escorts for all her supply trains, and making her withdraw forces she badly needed just to defend her rear! Proving that I was "right", that I knew exactly what I was doing!

"I learned too much," I said, looking into the forest as the night came from the east, the sunset behind us doubtlessly lovely as we sat there on that log talking... Watching the little brook before us flow to the ocean perhaps a dozen or more miles away, a dire wolf howling in the distance making me shudder just a bit at the thought of being "alone" here in these forests by myself now!

Chapter Four

"Why did you decide to become a Scribe instead of a Warriress?" Carl Talen asked as we sat side by side there on this log. The sounds of the oncoming night making me glad he was "there"... There being creatures here in these forests that not even the new Dularnian compound crossbows we had would have "stopped" in time. Like the Garth, a reptilian horror like some dinosaur of legends. Other creatures once thought extinct since the last Ice Age, the dire wolf, the saber tooth tiger, the mammoth, the mastodon, cave bears, all the creatures that Neolithic Man must have once faced! The keen blade at my hip, my compound bow, all so "useless" here. I'd have him build a small fire in the ruins, just for "comfort".

"Because all our societies are just military dictatorships!" I snapped. "Even Dularn with its so called 'democracy' is just a military dictatorship with the 'black castes' firmly in control!" The attire of the Warriors and Warriresses being blackcolored, the symbol of death. In my opinion dating back to the Nazi SS... This last opinion of mine having almost cost me my life here too! Especially when I'd expressed the opinion that Janet Rogers' own "World Federation" was based upon the NEW ORDER of Nazi

Germany!! Fortunately I'd won the sword duel against my challenger, but I'd learned to keep my mouth "shut" about Janet Rogers and Lorraine Duval, who everyone believed had been the FOUNDER of everything!* * In life Lorraine was a warm kind person, not the fearsome Warlady that she's often been seen of by others. She did however at one time admit to me that she felt responsible for the "mistakes" that Janet Rogers made, that she'd been too concerned with "solving" the social problems of her time to realize the consequences. I was her close friend for fifty six years, and while we had our "differences" at times, I always respected her for what she was. I mourn her passing, although she died as she wished to. (Sanda)

"Not exactly `opinions' that would endear you to some," Carl smiled back, regarding me as I sat there on the log beside him... "You sound like one of those `revolutionaries' I've heard about."

"I wanted a society that was truly `democratic'," I said, my voice soft as I stared out into the growing darkness, hearing the "sounds" of the night come to my ears now from between the trees. "Not one based upon the writings of Janet Rogers, but upon those of a society that had existed a couple of centuries before her."

"My wife used to `speak' of such things," Carl mused to me. "She was Dularnian to the core, a Warriress like few others..." I "nodded", aware that his family had died in the Sarnian assault on Trella, when King John had died fighting Darlanis' own forces. My sister had rallied the survivors, fought her way free of them, leaving Darlanis firmly in control of Trelandar's capital city.

"I used to `know' Darlanis," I said, remembering my years at the Warriress Academy. She'd been a woman with a "chip" on her shoulder, hard, embittered, ready to "fight" a duel for the least insult to her ever so touchy honor!! Stunningly beautiful, hated by most of the cadets at the Academy, although few dared to cross her path, Darlanis being a "loner", with few if any friends then. I'd tutored her, helping her try to understand military tactics. Darlanis was smart enough, but unable to comprehend such things, leaving no doubts in my mind now that this war was actually being fought by Princess Tara, not by Darlanis even if she was Queen... Her first Warlady, Hara Eslund, having resigned shortly after the invasion began, apparently over Tara's "scorched earth" tactics.

"You believe her claim that her brother raped her?" he said, it being commonly believed that Queen Tulis had disowned her due to Darlanis' own "immorality", which I tended to disbelieve here, as the "conversations" I'd had with Darlanis back in the Academy had led me to believe that she was speaking the "truth" in this.

"One thing she is," I said, "Is honorable." I'd admired her that way, even if I didn't like what she'd done as Queen of Sarn! I suspected that Darlanis was trying to "win" something with the sword that cannot be won, no matter how many conquests she made!! She was a woman "driven" by her own internal demons, a woman whom I thought would go to her death still never knowing true "peace"! I hated too what she'd done to my country, but I found it hard to hate Darlanis the woman, even if Darlanis the Queen was my enemy! "And this war is so `unnecessary'," I breathed, sitting there on the log beside him, the darkness flooding in from the east as the sunset now started to die out behind us. The howl of a dire wolf in the distance making me shiver ... I'm not a "country woman" as such, used to such things, but one who was raised in a large manor, who had a slave girl to serve her, who had read book after book while other girls her age were out doing what teenage girls have always done here in every society that Man has ever known.

"Darlanis didn't exactly give us a `choice'," Carl spoke.

"A `federation' would have been possible," I answered.

"With her as 'Empress'," he grinned there beside me.

"America did have a 'President'," I pointed out to him.

"I suppose so," Carl Talen answered rather doubtfully now.

"George Washington was the first President," I said to him.

"That was in one of my wife's books," Carl answered me now.

"Democracy 'worked' for a hundred and fifty years," I said. It had been in the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt I knew that the first trappings of "liberalism" had appeared, much like mold grows on bread... FDR having been the first to dare go against the ideals of America and attempt to change it into a socialistic welfare state of the sort that it eventually so became!

"And what happened to it then?" Carl grinned over at me, the forest now growing darker with every minute that passed. I felt however but little concern now of such things, despite the sounds that came to my ears just because he was sitting there beside me. A night bird crying out as it flew just over the tree tops now.

"We don't have to repeat the mistakes of the past," I said.

"The Lorr won't allow us to rebuild," he pointed out to me. The Lorr did not allow any of the "modern" technology of the past although they did allow certain fields of knowledge to exist now. Medicine had not been effected, nor had the Priestesses of Lys...

"They do not interfere in our political affairs," I replied. They were monitoring this war between Trelandar and Sam, I knew, their spaceships having been seen floating in the sky, but otherwise they'd done nothing to indicate that they cared very much as to what happened upon the Earth as long as we didn't manufacture firearms or build ships that didn't rely upon wind and oar power. The Lorr themselves were seldom now seen on Earth, but their own Servitors were common enough, especially in our capital cities... The Servitors serving the Lorr as "hands", the forelimb of a Lorr being clawed, much as is an ant's, and unable to do things that a woman with her slim fingers, her delicate touch could do easily. It was commonly believed that they were the "slaves" of the Lorr, but the relationship I suspected was more complex than that here.

"You never did say just 'why' you decided you could not become a 'Warrioress' even after graduation from the Academy," Carl said to me as the shadows now closed in ever closer here. It was late summer, the end of August, and while the nights were getting cool now, the days had still been hot. I've read that just after The War that it used to "snow" here in the lowlands, like it does up in the mountains, but such has not happened now for centuries. The two of us having both done "justice" to dried meat he cut up.

"I'm going to get a drink of water," I said, getting up now. The brook just visible yet before me, although one could see some of the brighter stars now appearing, the Moon due to rise later. I wondered if he'd even understand now why I hadn't been able to accept the caste mark, not after what had happened there before. It was not something that I thought he'd be able to "understand".

"Don't fall in," Carl grinned now, sitting there on the log.

"I'll be careful," I answered, going to the edge, dipping my hand into the water, cupping it and raising it

to my lips, water running from my hand. It would have been easier to kneel at the bank and put my face to it, but that would have positioned me before him like some slave girl with my rear end stuck up, which is not a "pose" that any self respecting Lady ever does before men!

"It is said that the caste chooses you, you do not 'choose' the caste," I heard him saying as I drank, the salt of the dried meat having made me thirsty. Such is one of the sayings that the Warriors and the Warrioreesses have. Another such being that the companion of the Warrior or the Warrioreess is "steel", which I'd remembered that Darlanis used to say when I knew her back then... The "implication" being the only one you can trust is your sword!

"I'm a Scribe, not a Warrioreess," I replied, standing up, my foot sinking into the mud there at the edge of the brook, a trout now jumping somewhere out beyond me, no doubt after some insect. "I fight for my country, because it is my country, not because it is my duty because of my caste to fight for my country," I spoke. "I do not glory in war, or in killing, or feel that it is proper to die with a sword in my hand as those of your caste believe..." Unlike my "sisters" at the Academy, I didn't "glory" in violence, nor did I feel as they felt that the sword "solves all problems". It is true historically that "violence" has settled many issues, but on the other hand it often merely makes things worse later on as I believe history shows even more clearly here. One thinks of the great wars of the 20th Century perhaps as the best proof too. "There was no 'need' for this war either," I said, standing there before him in the darkness, Carl Talen only a darker shadow now. Another fish jumping behind me, the sound of the splash making me start just a bit. "But King John wouldn't listen to me either!"

"Darlanis' terms were unacceptable," Carl pointed out to me. I was aware of "what" Darlanis had wanted, but I felt that these "terms" of hers could have been negotiated, much as disputes between two parties are "negotiated" in a court of law... And as a lawyer I felt I could sit with Darlanis, negotiate with her, even perhaps get her to trust me, to become my friend once again here.

"And will we be any better off now?" I challenged him back.

"We can retreat to the mountains, fight for years," he said.

Chapter Five

"We'd better get a fire started," I suggested, aware of the nature of "life" here in these forests. The war had changed much more than just the "lives" people led now. Even the animals were "different" due to the dead bodies about after every battle here. Many of the predatory beasts having developed a "taste" for human flesh, and they were quite willing to "kill" to get it sometimes! The boles of the trees surrounding us on all sides barely visible now in the last light of the sunset's dying red glow to the west.

"You never did really answer my question," Carl said to me, the firelight flickering on his face as he squatted over it now. The crumbling walls of the ruins seeming to move with the light. There was but little smoke, and I knew Imperials did not enter a forest at night, but stayed out in the open away from the trees. Archery at two hundred yards at night can be quite disconcerting, if perhaps not really all that effective in the military sense.

"I killed a classmate in a duel," I said in a level voice.

"Duelling is not 'uncommon' among the cadets," he stated.

"I didn't mean to kill her," I said, looking at the fire.

"It is hard to control one's point at times," he answered.

"She cut my shoulder, and I slashed out with my sword..." I said, remembering the scene, seeing the blood, the horror in her eyes as she clutched at her throat, the blood welling between her fingers. The strangled choking sounds she made before she died!! "I killed her, just because she 'hurt me'!" I spoke, squatting on my calves before him, my knees tight together, as befitting here. I'd dropped my sword, grabbed her in my arms, the others standing there watching, Darlanis too, tall and golden, as Jani died then choking on her own life blood, "staining" her clothing, mine too.

"You killed today," Carl Talen pointed out, sitting down on a bit of rubble, some sort of device so badly rusted now there'd be no way of telling what it had once been so long ago here now. The firelight gleaming off his leather tunic, the golden hilt of his sword. His eyes in the firelight seeming to gleam into mine.

"I'm defending my country, fighting its enemies," I replied.

"I think it's more a matter of that they're 'strangers'," he mused thoughtfully. "Your classmate was someone that you knew." His dark eyes holding mine as I now nodded thoughtfully in reply. "She was a 'person', someone who'd you'd talked to, shared meals with, opinions you'd heard, perhaps even shared secrets with..."

"I murdered her in a fit of rage..." I said, squatting there by the fire, feeding it little twigs, watching them flame up now. "It all 'happened' so fast..." I breathed, memories coming back. The heated angry words, the inhibitions released by alcohol, it having been a last "fling" together before graduation, the young men there with us perhaps even egging us on a bit as men will do. I remembered too the "blood", so much of it, Jani's eyes looking into mine, the horror in their depths as she knew she was dying!! Choking on her own blood, unable to speak, Jani lived for perhaps a minute, a horrid long dragged out minute, before she then died! And every long second of that awful minute she kept looking at me with those eyes, making those horrid gurgling sounds, touching my face while everyone just stood there and watched. Even the bartender and the bar maids now standing there along with everyone. Everyone gathering around us like ghouls, watching a young woman, who only a minute ago had her whole life before her, lie dying in the arms of the sobbing cadet who had just killed her right here!

"I think I understand," Carl Talen said to me sitting there.

"The idea of killing again was something I couldn't face," I said, getting up, finding something to sit down upon here. "Jani wasn't a close friend, but I did know her, even if Darlanis said that it was Jani who actually started the fight here with me..."

"You saw Darlanis as your 'friend'?" he asked, regarding me, one of our unicorns pawing at the ruins, making a ringing sound. The stars now bright in the sky above there between the treetops. I could smell the smoke, the odor of wood burning, as I "nodded".

"She was 'different' than anyone else, and she listened," I said, remembering. "She didn't make fun of my ideas like everyone else did. She was a real 'princess' even if she was disowned by her mother," I

added, so aware I was speaking of the woman who was now killing my people, raping my country, burning villages... I wondered to myself if Darlanis was the way she was now because as a young woman we'd all made fun of her, teased her, called her names, and even I never stood up for her like I should have done!

"I still remember my first time as if it was yesterday," he said to me, getting a blanket, and putting it over my shoulders. "it was when Tulis was giving us so much trouble there with her raiders," he spoke, sitting back down across the fire from me. I nodded, aware that Carl was speaking of "something" very private, very personal here. Not something one might share with anyone.

"Go on," I said softly, giving him a reassuring smile.

"She was a woman, a young woman, blonde," he said to me.

"And you slew her in battle," I said, suspecting this here.

"My thrust was low, not instantly fatal," he said to me now. I could visualize it for myself, having seen such before. Death is sure, but not swift. Sometimes the person will live for a period of time, as much as an hour, although not usually as a rule. "She screamed in agony as I drew my sword out of her belly," Carl said, looking down at the fire flickering there between us here. "I wanted to put her out of her misery, but I couldn't do it..."

"There were others about?" I asked him, well aware of how it would have been. The ship coming in under the cover of darkness. The sails taken down from the masts, the vessel now under sweeps. The boats being drawn up on the sands, the sudden attack on them!

"I picked her up and carried her away from the battle," he said, "Knowing nothing but that I had killed this beautiful young woman even if she still yet lived, still breathed..." he went on. "This fair 'flower' of Dularn that I'd thrust my own sword into!" I saw the glitter in his eyes, understood how he felt about this. She'd been an enemy Warriress, a professional fighting woman, as were those who we'd shot down today, but face to face is different than it is shooting at people with missile weapons in combat. I think that is why the ancients with their rifles could kill so easily, even to using "telescopes" on their weapons so that they might kill from even greater distances, perhaps as much as half a mile away. Why men could fly airplanes over a city, drop bombs. "Do" all the things that those of the past did here so long ago. Maybe that's "why" The War happened, why we are like we are now.

"She was a mother too, with a little daughter back home," he spoke, almost sobbing now as it all came pouring out. "She could talk for a while before the end came..." he said, wiping his eyes as he sat looking at the fire, no doubt seeing only "her" dying!! I got up, the blanket over my shoulders, and sat down beside him, pulling him to me, drawing the blanket around us both as we sat there, aware of the ghosts of the past that now filled the ruins.

It is easy to speak, to write of the glories of war, to tell of battle horns, of the feel of a charger between your thighs, of the flights of arrows like a flock of birds, of the ring of steel as swords meet, but war is still killing people, hurting people, even if those people have come to your country to kill and hurt! It is in my opinion the "facelessness" of the enemy that makes it possible to kill, the very term "enemy" speaking so very much now too of the realities of war. This is perhaps why I've never been able to accept the caste mark of the Warriress, even if I was in fact trained to be one, taught to use the weapons of a Warriress in battle, taught military tactics at the Warriress Academy, a bit of "knowledge" that I later put to good use against Darlanis.

I used to speak of these matters to Lorraine when we sat together there on the estate in '65 and talked, but even she never really understood the way I felt. Lorraine was a true Warriress in the very meaning of the word... A professional fighting woman who died as she would have wished, with a sword in her hand... I can only say that I admired her greatly, even if we didn't agree.

"What did your commanding officer say?" I ventured, aware of the rules and laws of warfare, of deserting one's comrades, even in a case like this! Such had been a part of my own training as a Warriress, and part too of what I'd been trained as a lawyer.

"Queen Tulis the week before had signed a peace treaty with us," he answered. "It had all been a horrible 'mistake', both on our side and on theirs too," he explained, looking into my eyes. "We were in northern Trelandar, and notice arrived the next day."

"You said your wife was Dularnian," I spoke, hoping to draw him away from these memories, aware of how they could "fester" so inside a person. I suspected that there had been "more" to this!

"There was a court martial over it," Carl said. "My lawyer was Mathis Olan, one of the 'finest' in Trelandar," he smiled, no doubt aware that I'd known of her, she having been of two castes, both that of the Warriresses and too of the Scribes. "They kept it out of the papers due to the political ramifications, both due to the fact that we were now allied with Dularn and because Tia (the woman he killed) had been the daughter of a Senator there."

"And you married your attorney," I said, remembering now.

"She was 'Dularnian', and blonde," he said, meeting my eyes. I could guess the rest for myself. A position in the Royal Guard where this "incident" might be kept a state secret forever now...

Chapter Six

I could hear the sounds of crickets chirping in the forest around us as the Moon, just before its last quarter, gleamed down from up above the trees. Carl a sleeping hump there beneath his blanket. The fire only now glowing red embers there between us. The air was cool, not quite "chill" yet, as I knew it would be now in another month or so. Our unicorns dozing on their sides, their ivory horns gleaming in the moonlight shining down upon us.

Reaching out, the blanket falling away, I put another handful of twigs on the embers of our fire, then topping with larger. There was, I supposed, little danger now of predatory beasts, but I was also well aware that such dangerous animals did live here. That should a hungry Tigon (saber tooth tiger) come, our swords, my bow, Carl's crossbow would be of little value here against it. It is one thing to inflict a mortal wound on such, another still to stop it in its tracks as it charges, only heavy ballistae being powerful enough to handle such creatures. I'd also heard the Nevadass speak of "things", of great monsters bigger than even any mammoth, of Garths that stood three times as tall as any man did! On the other hand they are a superstitious people, and not always to be believed in things they say, I've found from experience...

Picking up my blanket and drawing it about myself, I went to the opening in the ruins and peered out into the forest beyond, the moving waters of the brook gleaming in the Moon's light. Despite what had happened this day I felt at "peace", as if somehow the cares of a world had been lifted from my feminine shoulders. I felt a "kinship" with Carl I'd never felt with my own husband, a sort of companionship that seemed to meet an unfulfilled need. Carl and I were a "team"; not just two people who happened to be married as had been the case with my late husband here. We did not share "caste" as such, but with Carl I now felt a much closer kinship than I had with Taimes Hibber, my late husband, who had I suspected only seen me as a means to raise his own social status. I'd been to him a "showpiece", a high ranking Trelandarian Lady, a woman whose own sister was the Queen of Trelandar. The war had been a decisive factor, showing that he was not the "man" that he had pretended to be, a fact I'd also suspected before here. Yet, I'd still felt "responsible" for him, and his death when we were surprised by that patrol of Warriresses still was vivid. Taimes had at least died with a sword in his hand, even if he'd not been a match for the woman he faced, the one I slew only seconds later in a hotly contested battle between my forces and those of Sarn.

I thought too of my son, Jerry, who hopefully was still safe with my parents there in the hills to the east of Thistle, the place of my own birth thirty years before. He was five now, a fine young boy, and I prayed to Lysthat he'd be safe from harm.

I wondered about Darlanis, what passed through her mind now. I remembered her there at the Academy, although she'd been a hard person to really get to "know" there, almost as if she was living inside a "shell" of some sort much like that of a turtle. I remembered all the conversations I'd had with her, Darlanis having been a great "admirer" of Janet Rogers, of whom I wasn't, feeling in my heart that the woman was more just a "legend" than "fact". Darlanis had been "hard"... The sort who could kill without emotion, without even feeling, I suspected, knowing what I did here. We used to say that she was a "man" in a woman's body, that she didn't "feel" as a woman would, that she wasn't really "human"... She didn't have any boyfriends, although enough chased after her, Darlanis being a "beauty" like none I've ever seen, tall, blonde, so stunningly beautiful; so aristocratic in her facial features. Some of the boys thought she was "queer", although none dared to say "that" to her, for I'm sure she would have considered "that" to be an insult to her "honor", as most women I know would here. She was touchy, ready to strike out at any for the least provocation. I never saw any of her duels, and I'm glad that I didn't. Those who had said that she slew like a great cat would, cutting you up to ribbons before she finally put an end to your torment!! That even in mortal combat her face never "changed", but only remained a set "mask" that told "nothing" of her own feelings here.

I thought too of my sister, Paula, who was tall, slim, much the Warriress in a way that I never could have been even had I'd not slew Jani and been sickened by the thought of killing again. She was a wonderful swordswoman, far better than me, perhaps even a "match" for Darlanis, although I wasn't too sure, having seen Darlanis fence at the Academy, even having crossed foils with her a few times! An "experience" that quickly taught me that while I was not inept with the sword, I'd never be another like her or my own sister, both who were truly awesome in their own way, both I should note here being "Queens of Swords" of their own countries!

A sound behind me made me jump, "go" for a sword that wasn't there, Carl Talen giving me a smile as he then sat down beside me on the outcropping of rubble that I'd been using for a seat here.

"You left your sword where you slept," he smiled at me now. Holding his blanket about himself like I've seen Indians doing.

"Just `thinking'," I said, giving him a smile in return.

"We're losing this war," he spoke, his voice so calm here.

"There's still a lot of Trelandar `she' hasn't got!" I said.

"We let the Dularnians `down' when `she' attacked them, and now they see little `reason' to give the lives of their sons and daughters for us," he explained. Speaking a "truth" that I knew. It had been too easy to sit back and watch Darlanis fight another war against someone else, there always being those in any era who will speak against war, against acting even in your own interest. There are historical "parallels" in the 20th Century, just before the beginning of their second great war although one should not draw them too closely. On the other hand I was well aware of the source of Darlanis' tactics, of the fact that in a way I was now responsible for what was happening, if you consider the fact that I'd introduced her to books, to reading, to understanding that it was quite "possible" that people in the past had faced these same problems that we were facing now. Showing her in the history of Trelandar itself that Queen Amethysta Broadica had united Trelandar into one country by using the exact same tactics that were in use in the Middle Ages of Europe over a thousand years before us! Methods that are much like how an infection takes over your body. Darlanis taking over Trelandar "piece by piece", establishing her own "government" in that portion, using its resources, its assets to finance her next move much as "corporate raiders" in the 20th Century took over business after business by such methods here...

"Ten years ago in her senior thesis she explained how it was possible to take country after country by piece meal conquest, using what you conquered to finance your next conquest," I said, aware that right now Darlanis was doing exactly that here!! "She `just' passed small unit tactics, but she's probably the greatest strategic military thinker in the history of Mankind," I grinned. Darlanis already establishing her "political control" over those parts of Trelandar that she had conquered, her actions reminding one much of those of some infectious disease taking over a body! Breaking up Trelandar into more easily managed great "estates"...

"And what was your thesis on?" Carl grinned back at me.

"How to make `trouble' for invaders like her," I grinned.

"What kind of `score' did she get on her thesis?" he asked.

"Same as me, one hundred percent," I smiled right back here!

"You should be our Warlady," he smiled, making me smile now!

"I'm just a `Scribe', not a Warriress," I pointed out then.

"You only `think' you aren't a Warriress," he smiled back.

"We'd better get some `sleep'," I suggested, Carl nodding.

I halted at the edge of the forest, the sky cloudy, speaking of rain soon to come, and still concealed by the trees, swept the area before us with my small telescope. Carl beside me, waiting. Ahead of us laid a small village, a half dozen stores, a tavern. The fields of Peasants beyond, the grain I saw ready for harvest. A military tactic of the Imperials now being to burn such fields. To drive the people from the land, such part of Tara's own plans! The Imperial Warlady well aware here of what such could do to us! Unlike Darlanis, who was at least "honorable", Tara was like the worst of the "scourges" of the distant past, like another Attila.

"I hope my men are all right," he said, looking over at me.

"Trelendar will `survive', even we do not," I smiled to him.

"You think like a Warriress, even if you aren't marked," he observed. Such I knew was part of the caste codes of the caste. The Warriress is trained and taught to believe that her country, her cause is more important than her life... That while she may not survive a battle, the cause for which she fights is worth it. That the good of the whole may demand the sacrifice of the part, that some must die in battle so that the many can live in peace. I wondered if he was right, if the caste had indeed selected me? I was no longer an attorney at law, a "Scribe", a woman who lived by laws written down in books, who stood before judges representing her clients, but now a woman who relied upon her skill with a bow, with a sword, upon the training she'd once received long ago to "guide" others in military "assaults" against superior odds. Against the forces of one who she'd known now ten years before.

Chapter Seven

"If `they' ever find `you' here..." the man whimpered, whining like a child, no doubt terrified of what the Imperials might do! He was the "mayor" of this village, this "speck" on the map, this "farming village" in the foot hills of Trelendar. The Sierras there to the east visible on a clear day rising up into the sky like the spine of some legendary monster. He was not "much" of a "man", hardly worthy of the title of "man", I thought to myself as I stood there. My own "presence" here leaving no doubts. Certainly not the sort of a person anyone would ever want to risk their own lives for. I wondered how such a person had ever been elected "mayor" in the first place? My own attire now that of an ordinary civilian, the "bearing" of arms being "outlawed" inside territory occupied by the Imperials. I carried a small concealed blade, as did Carl, our other weapons now hid there in the woods. There was a small Imperial detachment here in the village, some dozen men at arms, who had paid little attention to us riding in. That is "attention" other than they noticed I was a good looking woman, their "antics" here reminding me much of teen aged boys... We were in occupied territory, a part of Trelendar Darlanis held. My sister had several times taken such territory "back", but it was a hopeless and thankless task, and costly in lives to do now. After months of war Trelendar north of Trella was Darlanis' now, my sister having successfully "held" forty miles south of Trella. The ruins of Los Angeles to its north being a "no man's land" the Imperials carefully avoided here as much as we Trelendarians did. Whether the legends are true about the place I don't know, but I do know that there are "things" living there Lys never created...

"They will burn this village, suspend `you' on a rope from a tree in the square, and shoot arrows into your body..." I smiled. Thinking of the old "saying" that a coward dies many times, but a brave man only once... We were in one of the upper rooms of the tavern, a ramshackle place that had seen its better days no doubt long before I'd been born... "On the other hand, even a cornered rat will fight, but a rat deserves more `respect' than you do," I smiled, my eyes burning into his as he seemed to shrink more now! A low rumbling of thunder in the distance like a great drum roll. I had no doubt that it would be raining here in another hour now. "You might consider confessing your sins to a Priestess if any of them are about, so that you may greet Lys with less fear then," I grinned at him, the Priestesses teaching that one is judged after one's death for how you've lived your life while living on Earth. Just "rubbing it in" a bit here, his cowardice disgusting to me, like something "unclean" that I wanted to wash my hands of here.

"Please 'leave', oh great Lady, leaveus be..." he sobbed in tears that made me wonder if he was even biologically a man here! The thought going through my mind that he'd make a good slave for some dominant mistress as he certainly wasn't any kind of a MAN!!

"Go 'hide' behind your wife's skirt, if you have one!" Carl snapped, standing up, and then suddenly grabbing "his honor" the mayor by the shirt and the seat of his britches and "assisting" him to the door in a way that left no doubt as to his thoughts!

"The Imperials are now executing any who 'resist' them," one of my "cell leaders" said, her eyes now meeting mine as I nodded. She was only the wife of an Iron Worker, but she did have "guts". Taking a swig of her warm beer, and then wiping her mouth with the back of her arm as her two other companions glanced at me. I had made up a "chain of command" system based upon "cells", each of my "cells" containing anywhere from three to about seven people who knew only their own cell leader or leaderess. I did not know the names of my own people, each who had only a "number" as a name. Such hopefully might better prevent any betrayal here.

"We expected that they would do 'that', Four," I smiled.

"Did Lani make it?" he who was Two now asked me here.

"She is 'safe'," I answered, seeing him nodding now.

"We are few, the Imperials are many," One commented.

"Then each of us will have to kill more," Carl spoke.

"Here is 'Three' now," Two commented, the man entering.

"There's an Imperial brigade coming this way," he spoke.

"Four, go check on his 'honor'," I said, Four "nodding", now getting up from the table, drawing her bodkin, testing its sharpness with her thumb before pushing it back down into the concealed sheath hidden underneath the back of her skirt. I did not "trust" the man thatmuch, and I felt it worth keeping an eye on him, especially as Princess Tara had "rewards" posted for us now. The former Queen of Sarn having few doubts as to "what" we were!

"Five hasn't made it yet, or Six either," One said to me.

"The Imperials are patrolling this area," Two pointed out.

"I can see the dust there in the distance," Carl said to me. An Imperial brigade was a force of about a thousandtotal, with a full company of Warriresses, along with Imperial Knights here. Men heavily armored and mounted on "armored" unicorns. A "shock" force used "tactically" much as tanks had been used centuries ago here. One of Darlanis' "ideas" that hadn't "panned out" all that well in the rapidly flowing sort of warfare that we were fighting now. Our Warlady, Lady Tirana Grayson, was an old "experienced" fighting woman who had seen about every military "trick" ever tried. The knights were a problem, but not a "serious" one here.

"I hopeFour is keeping a good eye on the mayor," I spoke.

"The man isn't trustworthy," Two said to me then in reply.

"He could betray us to them out of fear," Carl said to me.

"I don't want to..." I said, Four walking back in just now.

"The mayor is 'meat'," Four spoke, her eyes meeting my own, using the slang term for a dead body. "He would have betrayed us to the Imperials," she explained, "Just as soon as they rode in."

"It is 'war time'," One spoke, his eyes meeting those of Two as they nodded. Carl standing there by the window keeping watch. "And in war time traitors are executed," the man continued then. I supposed it was a good a justification for murder as any here.

"I dumped his body behind a outhouse out back," Four said.

"You did 'right'," I said to Four, seeing her nod in reply.

"There is a detachment of Warriresses now coming this way," Carl spoke, standing by the window. "An advance guard no doubt."

"We can flee before they get 'wise' to us," Two said to me.

"The rest of you flee, I'm staying," I said, aware that I'd be able to gain needed information from the Imperials posing as a woman of "easy virtue". The little ditty running through my mind that Warriresses sing on the march. That it is "better" to be a whore than a Warriress, because a whore does her "work" in bed!!

"I'll stay with you," Carl said to me, holding my gaze here.

"What I'm going to do is best done alone," I smiled to him.

"You are 'of' the Warriresses..." he said, seeing me nod.

"There are times I recollect the 'codes'," I smiled back.

I watched the woman enter, her uniform, her ornaments, leaving no doubt as to "who" she was! She was a beautiful woman, but as I looked upon her I felt as if something "unclean" had brushed my soul. There was a look in her eyes like that of a rattlesnake waiting to strike. The former Queen of Sam having a reputation for cruelty that was unusual even in this barbaric age of ours... Slipping off the rain cloak, the thunder booming in the sky now. The actions of her own people leaving no doubts about Tara Bisan.

I was working as a "barmaid", the bartender so terrified of the Imperials that he could hardly pour the drinks. My attire of a tied off blouse and a mid thigh height skirt leaving few doubts of the sort of a woman that I might be. I carried no arms, such being too dangerous in a "situation" like this where any Imperial might suddenly "feel me up". I was relying on my wits, not arms. A Warriress is "dangerous" not because of the arms she carries, but of the way that her mind works. Weapons are not too always what they seem, I might note. Beer or wine flung in a man's face will allow you time to draw his own sword, thrust it into him as he fights to see. A broken bottle can slash a throat. A fork is a dangerous weapon if you know where to strike with it. I walked over to the Imperials' Warlady, her dark eyes meeting mine like a pair of dark coals, her beauty meaning nothing to such as I here.

"What is your wish, your majesty?" I asked, setting down the tableware before her, the napkin, Tara

watching me like a deadly snake might watch, a golden wrist shield gleaming in the light of the lamps. The interior of the bar close, humid due to the rain. I noticed that she did not sit so that any might get behind her. She was a true predator, as vicious as any great cat might be...

"You know 'who' I am, Trelandarian slut?" she spoke to me.

"I know you are the Warlady of the Empire," I said to her.

"You do not seem to 'be' what you appear," she said to me!

"Times are 'hard', and one must 'do' what one must do," I quickly replied, hoping that my voice sounded steady in her ears. I was terrified of the woman, not because she was Warlady of the Empire of California, but because she was Princess Tara, who had a reputation of torturing people that terrified the bravest here! It is said that not even a stone can hold its tongue against her! "I was a tutor before the war..." I added, praying she'd believe!

"What is your name?" she hissed, reminding me of a reptile.

"Sanda... Sanda Talen," I breathed, thinking swiftly here.

"Take off your clothing, all of it, serve nude," she said.

"Please, mistress!!" I breathed, aware of her eyes so hot!

"You are not unpleasing to the eye," Princess Tara grinned.

"They are men, long on the march!" I pleaded, aware I was playing a role, that this woman was highly intelligent, deadly...

"You may place your clothing in my 'safe keeping'," Tara now smiled, the Imperial Warlady speaking in words that left no doubt that I had no choice, that I would have to serve in the nude now! "Or I will 'have' you stripped and hung by your thumbs from the rafters," Tarasaid in level tones, her words like low thunder...

Chapter Eight

"I would 'suggest', Trelandarian, that you obey," Tarasaid to me in level tones, "Just as any slave slut would obey here..." The implications being that all Trelandarian women were "slaves". That anything now "done" to any of us would not be considered as "being" a crime under the "rules of warfare" as we were not considered to be "persons" under the law, but rightless slaves. The Bajan Princess sitting there before me at the circular table like some beautiful but deadly venomous snake, that sense of "evil" that Tara seemed to radiate now filling my own soul with dread... It was almost as if what sat before me was not human, but one of the EVIL ONE'S minions sent here to Earth to advance its master's cause. Memories flooding back of old books I'd read, of Nazis... The dark complexion of the Princess, Tara being "Bajan", recalling to me here the "prediction" in THE BOOK OF LYS of the "Queen of Darkness" who

would be challenged by the "Queen of Light" for an epic duel to decide the "fate" of Mankind in the land of snow!

"As your majesty `wishes'," I answered, undoing my blouse, a blush going over me as I slipped it from my shoulders, aware of eyes upon me, of low whispers being spoken... There were none of the cat calls that would have normally occurred here, Tarabeing so feared by her own people that they too were terrified of her!!

"You have excellent breasts," Tara observed, looking at me. "Expose your nipples like the slut you are," she then added here. The blush that covered me like a wave of warmth going over me now as I stood there, aware that I would have to strip nude, serve in the nude, as naked as any slave girl, because Tara so wanted it!! A low rumbling of thunder audible through the doorway as the rain came pouring down, its odor wafting in with the humid damp air... Reaching up, I undid the golden clips that covered my nipples, my fingers shaking in terror as I opened them, revealing the intimate woman flesh beneath. Setting them on the table before Tara. I remembered how Taime liked to suck on them, his hand between my legs, getting me "wet" so that I'd be ready to accept him in me. My mouth was so "dry" with terror that I feared to even speak up!

"That skirt," the former Queen of Sarn spoke, regarding me. The skirt was designed to show off a woman's legs, its mid-thigh "height" much like the skirts that the women of the 21st Century had worn, I recalled, having once "discussed" such with Darlanis. Many women of that era having been "whores" by our own standards.

"As you wish," I whispered hoarsely, undoing the belt to it. Slipping it down over my hips, my jutting rear end... Those taut rounded buttocks of mine that so many men had found "attractive". The standards of beauty of this era "different" from those of the past, when large breasts were considered desirable upon a woman. Someone dropping a mug behind me, the crash loud in my ears here! My hands shaking as I saw her eyes burning up into my own, aware of her orders, of the fact that I would be completely nude here!!

"You would bring about thirty gold crowns on the block," the Warlady smiled to me, this former Queen of Sarn who had been "replaced" in her own husband's affections by the golden Darlanis. "More if this war was not taking place," Taras smiled up at me...

"Leave me my strap..." I pleaded, now almost in tears here.

"You will serve `nude'," Tarasaid to me, her eyes "holding" mine in a way that I knew left no doubts that I would be "such"! "And if I see you trying to `cover' yourself, you will serve in bondage like the slave girl you truly are," the Princess laughed!

I felt the man "touch" me, felt his hand caress my thigh, a shudder going through my body as I served these laughing men, the Imperial Warlady watching, Tara's dark eyes missing little here. The bartender there behind the bar having already dropped a bottle in his terror, although the man did not know "who" I was now. That I was in reality the Lady Sanda Harles, sister of the Queen of Trelendar, a high Lady of my country, one once well known too! My opinions upon political affairs having made me quite notorious in a way, as I'd held that the longer we "waited", the more "dangerous" Darlanis would become to us in her ambitions to restore a civilization that had died in blinding fire five centuries ago...

"Slut!" Taras snapped, "motioning" with her hand as I dashed over to her, one of her men at arms giving me a painful pinch on the buttocks as I stepped between the tables to reach her sitting there by the wall. I wondered what new "torment" she had thought of to make my life more miserable than it already was

here now!!

"As mistress wishes," I said, wondering if I should kneel.

"You would make a good slave girl," Tarasaid to me now.

"I would be a very poor one," I pleaded, so terrified!

"I know more about such things than you do," she smiled.

"Please, mistress!" I wept, going to my knees before her!

"You are 'property', just as your country is ours," she said to me in tones that left no doubts as to how she saw things here. "We 'own' you, all of your people, like the slaves that you are." The implications of her words seeming to echo in my ears here.

"No, no..." I wept, the tears of terror now rolling down.

"Place yourself across my table, your arms outstretched," Taraordered, now getting up, standing before me, her hand on the gold hilt of her sword. It was said by some that she was an even greater swordswoman than Darlanis, than my sister, that no one in the Imperial armies could face her and live! I shook my head in the negative, unable to speak, to "do" anything but just whisper "no"! Tara giving orders, men now coming, lifting me and putting me across the table, binding me to it so that I laid face down upon its rough hewn drink stained surface, my breasts, my so sensitive nipples now being crushed down by my weight against it! My ankles being spread, tied to the table's legs so that I laid upon it with my rear end provocatively displayed to all of them!! My freshly shaved sex displayed here between my wide open thighs.

"It is time that you gave my men pleasure..." Tarasaid now!

"Aii!" someone spoke, the swinging doors flying open, a tall golden haired woman standing there, pushing back her rain cloak, her "attire" a barbaric exotic two piece golden mesh outfit of a provocative style not seen now here for five hundred years! Her height, her attire leaving no doubt either that this was Darlanis Marden, the "Empress" herself here! The very same woman who had now "raped" half of my own country!! The men all bowing to her, Darlanis standing like a "goddess" before them... She was a bit "heavier" now, "riper", not the slim young woman she'd been when I'd known her there at the Academy, but she was still Darlanis!!!

"What do we have here, Tara?" Darlanis spoke in clear tones, the Empress being I knew a wonderful public speaker, better even than my sister. She was awesome, like a "legend" standing there before us. I could understand the "secret" of her power, why men would follow her anywhere, it being said that the Legions of the Empire would follow their Empress to the gates of Hell itself... I thought of Valkyries, of the ancient gods of Rome, of Greece.

"Just having a little 'fun'," Tara "grinned" back at her.

"She does not seem to be enjoying it," Darlanis observed.

"She's just a whore, some cheap slut," Tara retorted back.

I heard Darlanis' footsteps, the clip-clop sound she made in high heels, the sound of a woman in boots

distinctive, different. She was wearing 21st Century strap boots of a golden leather that served to "accent" her legs in a way that nothing else could. I turned my face away, praying that she would not recognize me!! "It is wrong to rape even a whore," Darlanis replied, grasping me by the hair, pulling up my head a bit to look at me. I put my face quickly to one side, away from her, hoping that after ten years she would have forgotten about me! That she would think that I did not wish to face her because of the shame I felt now!

"She's just a slut, like a million of them here," Tara said.

"We are going to need these people as 'allies'," the Empress answered, letting my head drop, then bending down with drawn dagger, cutting me free of my bonds. "Abusing them now is stupid." I grabbed for my clothes, shaking in terror, keeping my back to Darlanis, aware that I was in the midst of my enemies here. That Darlanis would doubtlessly see me hung if she learned who I was!! "We don't need any more like this guerrilla fighter we now have!" No doubt "referring" to me, the terror filling my mind as I slunk away, shuddering, shivering in terror, Darlanis standing there so tall, so "golden", so obviously the "successor" to Janet Rogers! The Empress staring at me, her eyes like AZURE FIRE I dared not meet. "This Lady Sanda Hibber who has been 'pestering' us so..." she continued on, her words seeming to echo in my ears as I knew! SHE HAD RECOGNIZED ME! SHE KNEW "WHO" I WAS, AND WHAT I WAS NOW!

I tried to slip away, holding my clothing like a shield before myself, shaking in terror, aware of what Darlanis could do!! The Empress pointing to my horror, snapping, "Hold that woman! I want to speak to her!" A couple of her men at arms grabbing me, holding me, the terror clutching at my heart so bad I thought I'd wet myself! Princess Tara grinning to herself, the look in her eyes terrifying me even more! Oh Lys, why did I ever let myself get into this situation? AND WHAT WOULD DARLANIS DO TO ME NOW!? A heavy drum roll of thunder making me think of the dirge that is played when you are being taken to the executioner's block! Was THAT what my fate was going to be? A showy "trial" for the sister of the Queen of Trelandar, then a short trip to the headsman? Would Darlanis' face be the last thing I saw before the axe fell!

Chapter Nine

"Dress yourself," Darlanis said to me, standing there before me, her own lovely attire much like that of some woman of legend. Tara standing there watching with her men at arms, a motley crew of "cutthroats" no doubt drawn from the worst criminals in Sarn. Despite whatever lofty ideals Darlanis had, it was Tara who was running this war, and she used a policy of intimidation. Of terrifying people into surrender, of burning villages, fields, of driving people from their homes, creating an "army" of refugees. People who had to be taken care of, draining further the scarce resources of that part of Trelandar still yet free of the Empire!

"Yes, your Imperial majesty..." I breathed, shuddering with terror as I stood there before her, knowing that SHE knew "who" I was! That she knew I was Sanda Hibber, Lady Sanda Harles, sister of the Queen of Trelandar, and the guerrilla leader who had been making so much trouble for her forces here behind her own lines!! My fingers shaking so badly that I couldn't get my clips on here!

"Let me help you," Darlanis spoke, taking the golden disks, slipping them through the pierced flesh, then closing them so that I was now "decent", my nipples once again properly covered. Her eyes glowing into mine, a smile curving those perfect lips.

"You are very beautiful," I said, knowing that she was.

"Beauty can be a weapon, like a sword," she answered.

"Thank you for helping me," I said, seeing her nod.

"I am not what you make me out to be," she answered.

"She's just a slut, just a cheap whore," Taras snapped.

"As I recall, you once said that of me," Darlanis spoke as I drew my blouse about myself and belted my skirt up securely here. Tara's men standing there watching this interplay between their own Empress and their Warlady, it suddenly becoming obvious to me that neither one of the two actually liked the other here at all! I thought of two cats circling, hissing, their claws extended, it being quite plain to see that Darlanis did not much care for some of the things that Tara was doing here in Trelandar! But yet, if she didn't "like" these things, why did she let Tara continue on now doing them? What "hold" did the Princess have over Darlanis? Were Darlanis' ambitions such that she'd stoop to any level here?

"Not quite in the same 'context'," Tara retorted quickly. I supposed she had no wish to settle such on the field of honor as Darlanis was a swordswoman of renown, said to be the best in all of Sarn from what I'd heard of her now over the past ten years. This interplay making me wonder if somehow I couldn't exploit it! Get Darlanis and my sister Queen Paula to the negotiating table!! Set up some sort of "deal" where Darlanis would get the "military assistance" she wanted to establish her "empire", while at the same time keeping my Trelandar free of outside political control. The major problem that I could see to this already was that Paula wanted no part of giving Darlanis any "assistance" at all, while Darlanis wanted "everything" here, not just a military alliance.* * This is of course exactly what Darlanis "got" with Lorraine in charge of Trelandar now fifteen years later. By this time however Darlanis was no longer able to dictate to anyone as she could earlier, having suffered a number of military reverses here both with Dularn and with Talon. While the reader may be surprised by how "friendly" Darlanis was towards me here in 2550, it should be noted that personal animosity between us did not occur until after the death of my sister, when Trelandar fell into the hands of Darlanis and my Free Trelandar Movement was the only force still yet fighting against the Empire of California. Also, it is my belief, "knowing" Darlanis as I did for so many years, that Darlanis was of the opinion that it might be possible to "use" me as a foil for her own objectives here. That if she could "charm" me (she just about did too) that it might help her with my sister... One should note here her actions with Lara Warsan, who became her "tool" here in Trelandar; the Empress being a woman who was quite "competent" at winning friends and influencing people as Lorraine used to say. Both of them are gone now, but I do have excellent memories of both, and both Lorraine and Darlanis were remarkable people. Both in their ways "legends in their own times". (Sanda)

"I don't think we'll be overheard here," Darlanis said, unscrewing the cap to the bottle of wine she'd gotten, the rain yet pouring down, the square before us now nothing but a pool of mud. The rain pouring down off the store's wooden awning there above. Taking a good healthy swig of it and handing it to me then, saying as she did, "It's been ten years," the implications now clear as I drank from the bottle, aware that we, "enemies", were in fact sharing a bottle of wine. "And you should have accepted the caste mark," she added then, her eyes glowing into mine here as we now stood here leaning back against the unpainted wooden wall. The store keeper having no doubt felt it wise to close his store. Imperial troops, especially those not of the first line, having a bad reputation, much like Blacks once had many centuries

ago now.

"You are putting your thesis into practice and I am mine," I said, aware that obviously she was winning, while I wasn't here! Of course, if my sister had given me the forces I wanted, then it was quite possible that the tables would have been turned here... I still felt striking at Sarn made sense, although there was no way I could do so now with the meager rag tag forces I commanded.

"Paula should have made you Warlady," Darlanis smiled back. "Tirana's competent, but she fights by the 'book'," the Empress added as I nodded. Tirana was experienced, but "set in her ways" too. That was pretty much the same problem with my sister here. Paula was quite excellent on "tactics", but lacked the long range strategic outlook that Darlanis possessed. The Empress having in her actions shown that she was willing bid hertime, wait until a situation developed in her favor before acting here. Paula's own strategic outlook seemed to be only that of a "holding action"... A belief that eventually Darlanis' society would "crumple" under the strain of supporting a war that was now bleeding it dry here.

"Only a Warriress can be a Warlady," I pointed out to her.

"It is said that the caste 'chooses'," Darlanis smiled back.

"I didn't behave much like a Warriress back there," I said. I was ashamed for how I'd behaved, for how I'd wept, especially in front of Princess Tara and her men at arms, most of whom too I suspected were drawn from the dregs of Sarnian society, the "behavior" of second line Imperial troops being more like that of an army of criminals let loose than anything else I can name here...

"Taracan 'break' almost anyone," Darlanis then smiled back.

"How did you know that it was me?" I asked. It had been a matter of a decade now. I'd been another, I was "older", with a more "riper" a figure than I'd had back when I was only nineteen. The anti-aging serums are quite effective in keeping you "young" for about the first century, but there are physical changes here.

"You have a small dark spot on the left side of your face by your cheekbone," Darlanis said, changing the subject here. "You haven't really 'changed' that much in a decade now," she grinned. "In any case I was pretty sure it was you," she admitted, seeing me nod as I stood there beside her watching the rain coming down. The few trees in the square "drooping" in the rain like old men. The air "moist", a bit "chill", the summer being almost over now.

"You will never conquer Trelandar," I said to her, aware of how "little" of Trelandar she actually held. She had conquered the northern half, but only to a depth now of about fifty miles. To conquer the entire country would have been impossible without the weapons of the past, the rifles fitted with telescope sights. Weapons that could kill at ranges of half a mile or more here...

"You are thinking of retreating to the mountains, fighting a guerrilla war," Darlanis smiled, almost as if she'd read my mind! "One that will last for years until I grow tired and give it up."

"One thing the Lorr have done for us is to balance the level of 'power' between the civilian and the military," I smiled back. In the past when firearms were in use, when there were "machines" of war, the military had the advantage, but not any more now with everyone being forced to fight using weapons of a sort that had not been in use for over a thousand years. The hewn longbow of the Peasant was quite capable of bringing down the armored Knight as he came charging in, of striking down the Warriress from her saddle, of launching flights of arrows against a marching Legion. And unlike the firearms of the

past, which required a complex industry to manufacture, the weapons of today could be made almost by anyone with simple tools. It was true that crossbows required the services of an Iron Worker, but the longbow could be made even by simple Peasants, and with practice, the Peasant could stand up against the Warrior, the Warriress, with a good hope of success. In this regard it is the ability of the people to "overthrow" the government, to defeat its forces in battle, that assures freedom. It being my belief from experience here that governments that can NOT be overthrown by their people will eventually become tyrannical despite whatever "safeguards" are put into place by laws, by "Constitutions", or by some system of "representative government" of the sort that has been tried in the past. Perhaps what keeps a Queen "honest" is the knowledge she can be taken out and HUNG!! That even she, with her armies, her men at arms, still is ruling at the consent of the people, who will decide with arms whether or not she is to continue on ruling. The example of "Mad Kathis" in Dularn being a good example of this, the people having risen up against her, and after a clash with her personal guard, dragged her from her palace and then hung her from a nearby tree!

"How long would it take before your people grew 'tired'?" I asked, standing there beside her. "How 'long' will even your own troops follow you in a war that they can never win?" I challenged her as we stood there, the low rumbling of the thunder fitting...

"You should have been Queen, not your sister," she smiled.

"I 'regret' that we are 'enemies'," I said to the Empress.

"I share your regret, more than you'll ever know," she said.

Chapter Ten

"'Dangerous' what you did there," Carl Talen said to me as I came riding in the last of the rain, the sky growing dark in the east as the sun set in the west behind the overcast. I nodded, dismounting, wet, a bit chilled from the ride, the rain having been cold, telling of the fall that would come in another month.

"It isn't something I'll 'do' again," I answered, leading my unicorn into the barn where the rest of them were now concealed. Had I not come alone, the others would have bolted out the other side out into the dripping forest, where it was likely that they would have been able to ditch any pursuing Imperial Warriresses.

"You had a 'close call', didn't you?" Carl said to me as I untied the cinch and pulled the saddle off my dapple gray mount. His dark eyes meeting mine as I now nodded quietly back in reply.

"I met Darlanis," I said, seeing the look on his face then. On all their faces as I told them what had happened to me there.

"'She' could have exploited the situation," Four said to me, her eyes, dark like mine, meeting mine as I told them the story. A tale that left no doubts in my mind what Darlanis was after...

"I think she 'believes' she is the 'second Janet Rogers'," I said. The woman who would lead us all back

to a glorious future. The time of Janet Rogers being seen by most as a "golden age" of civilization never matched before or afterwards. As a Scribe I knew better, but it was so hard to explain such things to people. Janet had been extremely "competent" at what she did, following the teachings of Lorraine Duval, but in reality she had been more a benevolent dictator than anything else, who forced people to do what she wanted them to do, whether or not they wished to or not! While there had been a great deal of economic and social freedom, there had been no political freedom under Janet despite trappings of "democracy" that she maintained doubtlessly to confuse people. The parallels between Nazi Germany and Janet's NEW ORDER are not well known, nor do even most Scribes wish to speak of such here.* * This is as true today here in 2621 as it was back then. (Sanda)

Back when Darlanis and I were cadets at the Academy we used to argue such concepts, Darlanis being a worshiper of Janet, who to her could have done no "wrong" despite what history now shows. I on the other hand looked back to America further back yet, to an era when government played but a small role in people's lives. Depending upon the few books left from the past to explain to my friend then that what she "worshiped" wasn't what she thought... Much of the "history" of the past being distorted and unreliable. There being some evidence that Janet attempted to censor what was written so that the past would be seen as different than what it was then. She however was not completely successful, perhaps due to the fact that the older books, written on paper, not on the strange disks that were used during her era, survived in part The War and the destruction that took place afterwards. A "reign of barbarianism" that is little understood even by today's Scribes.* * This is frequently mentioned in Lorraine's diaries, I should note, the Warlady having made several trips back in time, both at her own behest, and too at the behest of Tais . The First Priestess who died there on Mars of heart failure last year overseeing preparations for Mankind's colonization of that world. (Sanda)

"Whatever she `believes', she's still dangerous," Carl said to me as we sat there in the straw, our unicorns standing there. Driven by her own beliefs, her own ideology here, Darlanis was no doubt a dangerous woman, if perhaps one more "honorable" than any of the past. She believed she was destined to rule, to guide all of Mankind into a "golden age" that could "exist" only in her own imagination. Seeing herself as a "savior", perhaps as the "Queen of Light" mentioned there in THE BOOK OF LYS. Her very choice of words leaving no doubts that she was living out a delusion here.

"I've read her writings," I smiled, Darlanis having written down what she "planned" for us. This "Empire of California" that would control the entire western coastline of North America from Baja north to the snowy lands of western Canada north of Dularn. How much of a grasp she had upon reality too was another question I had no answer for. I suspected that she lived in a dreamworld. That she felt it "right" that she should be the ruler of us all! She'd even written of bringing in the Nevadas and Wyomings as a part of her "empire", savage tribes much like those who had been roaming these same areas back in the 18th and 19th Centuries now!

"A `fruitcake'," One commented, chewing on some dried meat.

"And more `dangerous' because of it," Two ventured here.

"I spoke to her, she's not `insane'," I protested back.

"She was once your friend," Four pointed out to me here.

"Perhaps she could be `reasoned' with..." I mused to her.

"She wants political `control' of Trelandar," Carl replied. No doubt Darlanis would be willing to allow us to live our lives pretty much as we wished, but we would be living with HER as our true ruler. It would

be Darlanis who would be making the decisions, not Paula, not anyone else. We would be "property" as her own Warlady had so put it. No longer truly free men or women... Living under the NEW ORDER of Janet Rogers as Darlanis so saw it.

"We'll ride out of here `tonight'," I said, aware that I had much thinking to do. I wanted to talk to my sister, get advice. To do so we'd have to cross the Imperial lines, something that would have to be done using the forests, as I'd done here before. Darlanis had been willing to allow my sister to remain "Queen of Trelandar", or so at least she'd said. The Empress being mainly interested here in being able to recruit the forces she needed for her attack upon Talon, which was her next step here, she'd said!

"`Spooky' riding at night like this," Carl said to me as we rode down a forest trail one could just barely sense before them. Our unicorns shying at the slightest movement here in the trees.

"Did it `before'," I replied, crouching low on my mount, the Moon from time to time trying to peek through the clouds above us as we headed south, back towards that part of Trelandar that my sister still yet controlled. I was thinking of what Darlanis had said to me, of what I'd say to Paula when she asked me about it. When one got past the rhetoric, what Darlanis was promising people was a social order where a "benevolent government" would see to it that everyone was "protected", although Darlanis was pretty "vague" here as to just "what" she planned to offer everyone now. So far what she'd DONE here indicated more a return to the sort of serfdom that had existed over a thousand years ago in Europe. Of Lords and Ladies on their great estates ruling over Peasants, over all the "lower castes", almost a return to a past now myth.

"You're just lucky she let you go," Carl answered me back.

"She only did so that her thoughts might be communicated to my sister," I answered, well aware of what Darlanis really was... The simple fact that she spoke what she had, behaved the way that she did indicating that she was living a life of delusions here. I would not have called her "insane", but she was a bit "touched" in a way, perhaps due to the sort of a childhood that she'd had. My unicorn suddenly shying back, half rearing as a deer or some sort of another animal now jumped up and bounded off just ahead. Forcing me to concern myself not with Darlanis, but keeping in my saddle as my mount tried to bolt back the way that we'd come now!

We were well up into the hills, away from the area where it was likely that we'd see any Imperial patrols, the resources of the Empire being strained enough now as it was to fight this war. My major concern was running across one of the larger predators, or a pack of dire wolves, as big as ponies, against which we'd be almost helpless despite our weapons in the darkness, these woods. These animals due to the war having been driven away from their usual haunts into "areas" of Trelandar that were less inhabited.

"Worth a man's neck to be riding like this," Carl observed. The other members of my force having now scattered back to their own groups, there to "lie low" until I needed them again here... Some of them on their own having carried out small operations I knew, making life even more miserable here for the Imperials, no doubt forcing Darlanis to pay more "attention" to protecting her "rear" from guerrillas, although such attacks tended to be more of an "annoyance" to her than any actual military threat as such. And Princess Tara's actions in burning villages, fields where any such attacks took place were slowly breaking down the will of the Trelandarian people to resist. Making them see "surrendering" to the Empire the only way that they could ever hope for peace now.

"Could be, if the Imperials catch us," I smiled back at him. We were technically I supposed "spies". At least Tara would have seen us as such, and she was pretty much in charge of things here as Warlady. The

position of a Warlady within a government being as much "political" as military, the Warlady being responsible in wartime for seeing to a nation's military defenses, for seeing to it that everyone did what they were supposed to be doing here. A task that Tirana did well, if not as successfully as we'd hoped...

Chapter Eleven

"Imperial patrol!" I breathed, raising my arm, Carl halting behind me as we came to the end of the woods here. A small force of Warriresses, glistening in their armor, trotting off to whatever destination had been given them. These being troops of the first line, better trained and disciplined than those before now. Perhaps sent out to scout for Trelandarian flankers, the lines of battle here being "fluid", more now mere skirmishes than battles. It was a cloudy day, with the sun just a bright spot in the sky.

"You're tougher than I'd expected," Carl grinned at me.

"Saddle sore?" I smiled, now easing myself a bit here.

"Trelandar's a big country," he grinned back at me then.

"State of South California in the time of Janet," I said.

"Back when there were 'fifty two' states," he commented, his knowledge of such things having come as a surprise to me now too. California, Michigan, and Carolina being split into two parts. I believe Carolina always was, but I'm not "sure" on this here now. Sarn being North California with a bit of Oregon now added to it. Talon is a "part" of South California, according to the old maps, lying to the south of the Mojave desert there up in the Sierras. The great climatic changes after The War having however changed much, it being said that the Earth was "warmer" before all this.

"Once people flew overall of this like the Lorr do now," I said, recalling drawings I'd seen of the aircraft of that time. I knew too of people who had attempted to build such devices, although the Lorr usually quickly put a stop to such activities... The attempt by a group of young Builders in Trella to construct a HOT AIR BALLOON having drawn a warning from them not to continue.

"I wonder how much of it was real and how much of it is just the vivid imaginations of Scribes," Carl grinned as we sat watching the patrol disappearing from sight. The safety of the trees on the other side of this cleared area half a mile further here.

"They wrote what they called 'science fiction'," I said. I had seen some of it, fantastic tales of flight to other worlds, a series of tales set upon another world much like this one is now. A "world" called "GOR", which supposedly circled on the opposite side of the Sun from the Earth. Governed by a race of alien beings called "Priest-Kings" much like gigantic "praying mantises". The novels being reprinted in the 21st Century when there was a certain "fascination" with barbaric pre-technical cultures then. The author however having a certain fascination with slavery that left little doubt in my mind that he knew something about my sex. The cultures however were surprisingly like those of Earth here in the 26th Century, and the Lorr did fill the needed role too...

"Think we've made it through to our lines?" Carl asked me as we made camp for the night, the lack of moonlight now a handicap. One can "feel" one's way through a forest at night, but it is not something I enjoy doing, and I saw no reason to be doing it now. We had found a gathering of ruins, of structures left over from a time now just legend and myth in the minds of most Trelandarians. Such are found over much of Trelandar, although only those made of reinforced concrete still "stand" at all, given the centuries. Usually, however, they are overgrown to the point that they seem to blend into the landscape, and one hardly notices them anymore. Structures made of other materials having "disappeared" long ago, although sometimes Peasants find things yet plowing their fields.

"Where are our 'lines'?" I smiled, aware that they could be almost "anywhere" now. There was no real "line" as such, just an area that both sides fought over, the war now mostly as I've said here more a series of skirmishes than any actual set battles now. Both sides had tried to "outflank" the other, although the Empire had the better of it, as they could use their navy to land forces behind our lines, much as I'd been doing behind Darlanis' lines. The major difference here being that the Imperials often found it a bit more "dangerous" than they expected, the people of southern Trelandar being well armed now and expecting such to happen here! We were getting a bit of "help" from Talon, not enough to really make a decisive difference here, but Talon was obviously well now aware of what Darlanis' plans were. The Queen of Talon was doing what she could to help, Queen Dala obviously far wiser here than Tulis of Dularn, who just sat back and watched us all fight! And while Tulis might have thought that Darlanis would "spare" Dularn because of once being a Princess of that country, her own "statements" left no "doubts" that she planned to eventually attack Dularn once she'd gotten the rest of "California" safely secured!

"And telling 'friend' from foe might be risky," he grinned.

"Something out there," I replied, seeing a movement then.

"Animal?" Carl asked, cocking his crossbow, watching me.

"Looks like it walks on two legs," I spoke, getting my bow.

"One of 'them'?" he asked, referring to those creatures who Lys never made. Those who The War "changed" into something else!

"Let's just 'hope' there is only 'one'," I said, selecting a position of vantage where I might get off a clear shot here. It was quite dark, not yet quite night, but still yet hard to see. Just the time of the night that such "things" came out to roam...

"Could have been just a Garth," Carl replied, looking out.

"Wasn't big enough, and walked different," I answered back.

"This' ought'a stop one of them," he said, referring to the crossbow, which could fire a bolt over three hundred yards here. The thought going through my mind that if there were more than just one or two we might have our hands full here with them now! They avoided humans as much as possible, but we were but two, and they were known to attack isolated Peasant homes, I'd heard here.

"Ah!" I breathed, seeing a "head" look through an opening in the ruins, the "face" like that of a man crossed with a reptile! The sort of a thing you see in a nightmare, the sort of nightmare you wake up from wet with sweat! The creature was obviously now lurking about, using the advantages of darkness to spy upon us...

"We need to get our backs against something," Carl snapped, pushing me back into the ruins, into the darkness of some "room" where the ceiling still yet stood despite the centuries passing. Some sort of containers, badly rusted, stuck together behind me. Perhaps cans of paint, of some "chemical" centuries old, I mused. Parts of the roof, lengths of rusted iron, scattered before us.

"I can shoot three, four arrows for each bolt you fire," I pointed out. Carl had to draw the bowstring back after each shot with his belt hook, and then place another bolt on the track now. One can fire such a weapon no more than three times in a minute. The crossbow was no doubt a more "effective" weapon, but speed of fire here would count for more, I felt, especially in a situation like this where shots would be at close range, perhaps in only in feet as such "horrors" came crowding in on us amidst these ruins.

"Damn!" he growled, a brief glimpse of it leaving no doubts as something moved through a gap in the rubble and then hid. The rusted crumbling remains of machines of some sort providing it a bit of cover. I wondered if it could see in the dark. Such was possible, I knew, it being believed that such creatures lived in underground civilizations there beneath the surface of the Earth. Our unicorns snorting and prancing, pulling at their halter ropes as they got scent of the "thing" now lurking somewhere before us!

"Cover me!" Carl snapped, giving me the crossbow, drawing his sword, the blade gleaming in the last glow of daylight here. Then suddenly he put an arm around me, and gave me a quick kiss!

"I'm going with you," I answered, kissing him back, setting down the crossbow. This would be a time for the sword, for steel as the Warriresses "say". Carl nodding, stepping out into the open area, among the darker lumps of rusted machinery, the glow from the sky just enough yet to see what one was doing here now. The hilt of my sword comforting in my hand as I now followed him.

"Let's see..." Carl whispered, picking up a piece of rubble with his left hand, tossing it, the "clatter" surprisingly loud. The "thing" suddenly jumping up, raising long clawed arms, more of an "animal" than anything human, some sort of club lifted up!! I reflected upon the fact that I should have kept the crossbow... Carl reaching for his dagger with his left hand, then suddenly switching arms, his throw so sudden it was just a blurred streak!

"Back!" I cried, the creature giving a horrid snarl, yanking the dagger from its body, although Carl needed no advice from me, dragging me back with him, while the creature screamed its rage!!

"It's coming!" he snapped, pushing me back, standing there, his sword at the ready, a Trelandarian Warrior defending a woman of his people, of his race against a horror from some nightmare!! The creature charging Carl as I grabbed the crossbow, Carl then thrusting out with his sword, cutting it, dodging a swipe from a club that would have knocked his head off! I yelled at the thing to get its attention, and fired where its heart would have to be, the "thung" of the crossbow drawing from it an angry roar in reply. The mutant now turning about, chasing Carl around one of the rusted machines from centuries ago, as I grabbed up my bow and nocking an arrow, fired a shaft into the dark bulk of it now! Then it seemed to stumble, and fell between the ruined machines, Carl carefully prodding it with his sword, assuring himself that it was truly dead. That we had killed this horror of the night!!

Chapter Twelve

"A real `die hard'," Carl said to me, putting his arm around me as I stood at his side, aware of how hard these things were to kill. Of how helpless we'd be against them if more of them came! The creature was I'd say here the size of a gorilla, but "scaly".

"We build a fire," I said, my voice showing my terror here.

"We could attract unwelcome attention doing so," he spoke.

"And when it is too dark to fight?" I challenged him back.

"We will make a small fire, and keep watch," he said to me.

"You kissed me," I said to Carl, wondering why I spoke now.

"And you kissed back," he pointed out, still yet holding me.

"I was once wealthy," I said, knowing all such was gone now.

"Such things are of little concern any more," he said to me.

"My son needs a father," I said, getting the unicorns here, half stumbling over some unseen object on the flooring before me. Muttering a curse under my breath that hopefully he didn't hear!

"You are rather `forward'," he observed with a chuckle now, then lighting a small candle that had been among his things here. "But I like a woman who knows her mind," he added, looking at me. The flickering candlelight doing little to dispel the shadows as I now tied the unicorns to something that hopefully would hold...

"See you can find something to burn," I "suggested" to him.

"I see that you're rather `bossy' too," he laughed in reply.

"I do want a fire..." I replied, standing there before him.

"And rather stubborn to boot," he observed, grinning at me. The thought suddenly going through my mind just now that I hadn't bathed or shaved for a couple days there while we'd been riding to the south. Which meant I'd be both smelly and sandpapery! "On the other hand you're good looking, smart, and you'd probably fill an evening gown pretty good," he said, grinning like a fool!

"Go find something that will burn!" I protested back at him!

"Not even married, and she's bossing me around!" he laughed!

"Carl, go find something to start a fire with!" I retorted!!

"Feel better now?" Carl asked, holding me close, the blanket a comfort too as the night chill came... I could hear the sounds of the forest, the night sounds, the thought going through me as to how many MORE of these "horrors" lurked out there in the dark?

"You stood facing `that' with only your sword," I said then.

"That was the only weapon I had left," he smiled back at me.

"That oil burns well," I smiled, changing the subject a bit. He'd punctured a can with his dagger, found out what it was here. We'd soaked some weeds with it, and were burning it off. There was a lot of smoke, but it was unlikely to be seen at night here.

"You're worth fighting for," he said, looking into my eyes.

"I'm not worth that much," I said, ashamed of how I'd broke down there in tears when I'd been the plaything of Princess Tara. The mosquitoes were out, and we'd run out of repellent here too.

"I like the shape of your face," he answered, running a fingertip along the side of my face, turning me so that I faced him. "The fullness of your mouth, the spacing of your eyes," he continued, his words sounding so foolish now, but so wonderful then.

"The fire's dying down," I replied, giving him a smile now. Carl tossing some dried branches he'd found on to the smoldering weeds, and dumping the rest of the oil can, the fire blazing up.

"That should take care of it for a while," he grinned to me.

"We're losing this war," I said, seeing him nod back then.

"There are places where the Imperials will never go," Carl answered. "Places where we could live out our lives together..." I knew of such places, places where people have gone to get away from "civilization". Places up in the Sierras to the east here.

"Oh!" I gasped, a woman, dressed in leather, suddenly now standing there among the shadows! A bow in her hands, an arrow nocked on the string, her weapon,her trappings all Trelandarian!

"Stand, raise your hands!" she snapped, two more joining her as we did so, these two also being armed the same now as she was!

"I am the Lady Sanda, and this is captain Carl Talen of the Royal Guard," I spoke, the three nodding, glancing at one another as they stood there with their bows half drawn. The weapons being the common composite military bow of Trelandar, not themore fancy and much more expensive compound bow such as I carried now.

"I am Sargent Marta Satel of the Huntresses," she declared, lowering her weapon, easing the bow with its arrow on the string. This being an elite force of Queen Paula's, all Warriresses by caste,who were trained to sneak behind enemy lines to harass the enemy, the idea having originally been my own, I should add here.

"We are 'losing' the war with the Empire," Marta said as she and her two companions shared our fire, the food we'd carried in our saddle bags, the three being all that was left of a force of ten who had left a week before to wreak havoc upon the enemy... Her hair blonde beneath the dark scarf that she wore covering it.

"For every one of them that we kill, two more rise to take his place," the one on her right said, the other one now nodding.

"We have but three Legions left to 'her' seven," Marta said. Darlanis was "winning", but at a price that might prove too high even for her. "Our Queen is brave, our Warlady experienced, but we need someone who can devise new ways of fighting," she spoke, her eyes burning into mine as I nodded, well aware of things now! Of the fact that many Trelandarians saw me here as our "savior".

"How many Huntresses are left now?" I asked, fearing to hear the answer. Paula had obviously been doing everything she could to "hold on" here, but it was likely that we'd have to retreat up into the mountains, fight a guerrilla war that would last years!!

"Perhaps a third of the original one hundred," I was told.

"And the 'Hunters'?" Carl asked, Marta shaking her head.

"Their Warlady is 'better' than ours," one said then.

"Tirana is good," I answered, "But set in her ways."

"If you would accept the caste mark..." Marta spoke.

"It would do no good," I answered, sitting by Carl.

"Then Trelandar is lost," one of the women said now.

"Trelandar is 'lost' only when we give up," I answered.

"It will soon be the fall of the year," Carl said to me.

"Perhaps," I answered, drawing myself a map of Trelandar.

"You are a Warlady, a Warriress," Marta said to me then.

"I will speak to my sister, see what can be done," I said.

"You were valedictorian at the Academy," Marta said to me.

"And the caste has selected," Carl said, looking over at me.

"Trelandar is my country," I said, "Even if I am a Scribe."

I wore the trappings, the ornaments of a Trelandarian Lady, royal Warriresses raising their lances in salute as we rode into the camp, my reputation having no doubt proceeded me on the lips of those who we'd captured. To the Imperials I was "TROUBLE", a whole lot of trouble, an "annoyance" to the Empress herself here. Not because of the "numbers" of my forces, but because I hit and ran, reappearing the next day perhaps twenty, thirty miles away! Warriors raising their swords, men at arms their spears and bows. It was late in the day, the sun now low in the west. It had been a long ride, and I was tired, almost "exhausted" from all of it. What in another era they'd once called "combat fatigue" long ago.

"Her majesty..." Carl breathed, Queen Paula standing there, her golden crown gleaming in the sunlight, just the same as ever.

"Hasn't changed a bit," I answered, giving him a smile back.

"Sanda!" Paula cried, reaching out with her arms to me here. She was tall, dark haired, beautiful too in a way that I am not. Not as awesome as Darlanis in her beauty, but more "regal". The long formal gown she wore was not the sort of attire that I felt the Queen of a country at war should wear, but Paula was Paula... A Queen with no heir, Paula's only child having been stillborn, a horror that the Priestesses would have never now allowed to live! After that Paula had not wished to bear any more children despite the fact that she was ruling without a heir to replace her here!

"It's good to be back," I said, wishing I'd had a bath here. I was dirty, smelly, and looked like someone who'd been fighting. Who had looked into the face of the God of War himself recently. A "freedom fighter" as I saw myself, a "terrorist" to the Empire.

"I'm sure you'll have much to tell me," Paula said, guiding me into her tent. A slave girl kneeling, knees well together as was proper. The steel collar about her neck recalling to me how close it had been for me too there at the hands of Princess Tara. That could have been me kneeling before Darlanis if she'd wanted. The furnishings here inside the tent leaving no doubts that Paula lived well despite the war. That she saw this more perhaps as a chess match than a battle for domination of a civilization now a dream in the mind of a woman. A tall, golden creature, awesome, like a goddess from some long forgotten Nordic saga of the past. That was "who" we were fighting, and losing our country to here. I visualized Darlanis standing beside Paula, and quickly came to the conclusion that Darlanis, despite her "delusions", was more a leader that men might follow in war than this silken gowned sister of mine! This Queen of Trelandar who didn't understand that one does not ride off to war in a formal evening gown. No doubt she took risks, riding as close to battle as she did, but she was not truly a "leader", not admired the way that Darlanis was now!! Making me realize with a sinking heart that we were going to lose our country to Darlanis, and it would be the fault of my sister!!

Chapter Thirteen

"Such 'dashing' adventures you have!" Queen Paula smiled to me, my sister's dark eyes glowing into mine over the golden rim of her goblet. Her slave girl kneeling there beside her, ready to be of service. Kathy was the girl's name, a pretty wench, not really a "beauty", but no doubt satisfactory to Paula. The steel collar locked about her throat a contrast to the darkness of her hair. Paula was not a woman who abused her slaves, but she did have a lot of them, and they did "everything" but wipe her ass... I knew too as Queen she didn't think anything of it here either, Paula being a woman who felt that she was destined to be a Queen. My parents had always thought "more" of her than me, Paula being the oldest, and the most beautiful, a Warriress, and now Queen. I'd always come in "second", getting the hand me downs from her. Everyone would "oh and ah" over Paula, saying how "wonderful" she was, whereas I was just the daughter introduced as an after note. A kind of "Oh, I forgot, here's Sanda, our little 'bookworm'..." The "implication" being that I was something of an embarrassment.

"Your sister is an 'amazing woman', a 'Warriress' despite herself," Carl Talen said to Paula, having found himself suitable attire for an affair like this. The evening gown I wore, one of Paula's, not fitting me too well. Paula was five nine to my five seven, and slimmer than I am here. The silvery silk was so tight it was like a second skin on me. I supposed Carl enjoyed it, as it didn't leave any "doubts" either about me now! "Outlining" my breasts, belly, and jutting behind as it did whenever I stood.

"She should bear the caste mark," Paula said, looking at me.

"At one time there was civilian command of the military," I smiled to her, drawing upon my awesome knowledge of such things. It being held by the dominant martial castes that such was a mistake, that nations should be governed by those who fight for them and not by those who stay home and make money while others die... This being based upon a "comment" that Janet Rogers used to make, her writings and own philosophy being of course well known here. Janet having "founded" the Warrior and Warriress castes in 2012. Limiting the right to "vote" to those who had served the country.

"A 'mistake' we have not repeated," Carl smiled in reply, my sister nodding, her dark eyes glowing into mine as she understood the implications of this. I knew of no nation in this time that was governed by someone NOT of the Warriors or the Warriresses. Paula was a Warriress, Darlanis was a Warriress, Tara "was" of the Warriresses even if she "violated" the caste codes at times, Dala of Talon was a Warriress, as was Tulis of Dularn, it being noteworthy that every country here in North America was governed by a woman, a woman who wore the "black" of the Warriress caste. Dularn and Talon being "Queendoms", where only a woman may rule.

"History has taught us the folly of such ideas," Paula said. It hadn't been something I should have said, but I was annoyed at the "attitude" so many of the martial castes had that no one else really "counted", that the rest of us existed just for them here! Paula having even said something to that effect after a battle as she walked among the fallen holding her gown drawn up a bit here. That those who had fallen had been "splendid"; her whole attitude one of a "superior being" more worthy than those who had fallen. "And Sanda, if you were truly now of the Scribes you would not be 'what' you are," Paula continued, sipping at her wine, her slave girl at her side. It being my sister's opinion that I should see the Priestesses of Lys and work out this "attitude" I had towards being a Warriress. Accept the caste mark, and take my "proper" place in society. She had said so many times before, ever since I'd graduated from the Academy in 2540 and then refused to accept the mark of the "sword". In private she was known to say that I was "nuts", not "right"; "comments" that had cut me to the quick.

"All that 'history' has shown us is that any group who lords it over everyone else eventually comes to 'believe' that they are the rightful masters of Mankind and that all the rest of us exist only to serve them," I answered her back. "Just as a time existed when it was believed that a white skin and blond hair made you a superior being to everyone else," I continued, aware that there were a lot of people who still believed that; the "ideal woman" still being tall, blonde, and white skinned, as many Dularnians were, as nearly all Lorr Servitors were for that matter, I knew.

"Never argue with a Scribe," Paula smiled to Carl, her eyes, as dark as mine, glittering into my own, the precious jewels of her crown sparkling in the lamp light as she moved her head, the gold of the crown itself a contrast to the darkness of her hair. Like her counterpart Darlanis of Sarn she was a striking beauty, a woman who met the ideal of beauty that most men have of Queens.

"I think Sanda clearly sees things we do not," Carl replied. "That the nature of warfare as we have known it has changed now."

"Darlanis is not 'conquering' Trelandar, she is taking political control of it," I added, aware of what had been happening here. Of how Darlanis was even now setting up her own government in the portions of Trelandar that she now occupied. Breaking our country up into gigantic "estates" covering hundreds of square miles, setting up Imperial Lords and Ladies to govern the people. The thought going through my mind that I needed to penetrate in on further, go further north, and start striking at these people! Become a "terrorist" in reality instead of just one in name now!! "We need to outflank her, move our forces

through the lower passes of the Sierras, and attack her rear, perhaps even attack Sarn if it is possible. Force her to fight us on our own terms now."

"We are fighting a `defensive war', and `losing it'," Carl said, giving me a smile. "And Sanda seems to be the only one who offers us any hope of a victory over Darlanis," he said to Paula. The hard glitter in Paula's eyes indicating she didn't like this. Being upstaged by her "kid sister" like this, this sister of hers who refused to become a Warriress, who had "shamed" our family!

"We will eventually wear Darlanis down, defeat her," Paula answered, her voice icy cold. She had "humored" me by giving me permission to do what I wished, pitiful resources to carry out my mission, and my surprising success here no doubt embarrassed her! "I see no reason to change our military tactics now," I heard her say, aware that by her stubbornness she'd doomed our own country!!

(later)

"You're as `good' as I'd hoped you'd be," Carl said to me as we laid together, the footfalls of guards patrolling the camp at times coming to my ears as I laid there beside him. A fingertip at the moment gently teasing my yet erected nipples, he having in his use of me given me much pleasure, more than Taime ever did... I had badly needed to be held, used after our dinner with Paula. Carl having been shown by Paula's own words "why" we were losing! That it was her own pride, her dislike of me, that caused it all!

"We'll find a Priestess tomorrow, and you can chain me," I said, half rolling over to face him. My neck chain would mark me as married, as a wife, his wife, as Mrs. Carl Talen, although it was the practice now for the woman to use her own first name now. With this war going on, I saw no reason to wait. We worked well together, we respected each other, and I knew that he loved me.

"Mrs. Sanda Talen," he grinned, reaching down, touching me.

"You've had me twice already, and we need to sleep," I said, teasing him, using my own hand to caress, my body yet still wet.

(thenext day)

"You may now fix the chain about Sanda's throat," the white gowned Priestess spoke, holding up her ankhs there before her now here in this little village temple that everyone had gathered at. "And let not either man or woman put asunder what Lyshas brought together..." she concluded, giving us both a warm smile. We had ridden into the nearby village, where Carl had purchased for me a lovely silver neck chain that would well serve to "mark" me here.

My husband then doing so, while my sister stood with her Warriresses. Pushing the locking rivet into place, and locking it with a tool. Marking me well as his wife, and legally as his "property" here, a bit of tradition speaking of a time now past when men actually did "own" their women much as they do a slave.* * This was during the first century or so after The War. (Sanda)

"Ride south, `enjoy' yourselves," Paula said, giving Carl a smile as she put a small leather bag into his hand. The "clink" of the coins inside it leaving no doubts as to her gift here now. My fingertips reaching up of their own volition to touch the silver links that circled my throat, marking me well as being "his".

"This is `hard' for me," I spoke to Jon Richards as he reviewed what I'd marked, the changes that I wished to have made... My old eyes moist with tears as I looked into his. Carl had been dead for fifty six

years now, having died in the rescue of Darlanis from the pirates in 2565, leaving me a widow, driving from my heart the joy I'd felt at the knowledge that Trelandar was FREE!! Reading all this I'd written so long ago bringing back memories I had buried deep in a recess of my mind I'd forgotten all about...

"You were a 'Warlady', just as 'she' was," Jon answered, now standing up and going to the window. Looking out at "her" grave. The last resting place of the Queen of Trelandar, a Warlady whose name now was a legend on two worlds. Lorraine Richards, who had been born Lorraine Duclare in France in 1949, who had died in the year 2621, who had founded civilizations, everything we now knew.

"I was just a woman good at guerrilla warfare," I said, now getting up, going to him, being "there" for him now in his loss. "I never was the fighter that she was," I added, seeing him nod. Slipping off the reading glasses that I used now for close work.

"We have twenty seven years," he answered, looking at me.

"I can never be to you what 'she' was," I warned Jon then.

"You're still a good looking woman," Jon said, regarding me.

"I'm over a hundred, and I have gray in my hair," I replied.

"You could be a 'comfort' to an old man..." Jon said to me. He didn't look that "old", I mused privately to myself just now. Jon being a couple years "older" than me, an hundred and three...

"We'll be 'together' when the 'end' comes," I said softly to him, moving into his arms, my lips seeking his as we then kissed.

Chapter Fourteen

"We'll stay here for the night," Carl said to me as we rode into a lovely little seaside village. The Pacific gently rolling its breakers up on to the shore. A few fishing boats in the harbor, the smoke of cooking fires drifting up into the clear blue sky above the colorful roofs of the gathered houses. We'd come perhaps thirty miles here now since our wedding this morning, far enough that little evidence was seen of the warfare to the north. Yet, if one looked closely you could see that everyone knew what was coming... The people on the road we'd passed heading to the south fleeing the Imperials, some perhaps thinking now of leaving the country, or seeking the safety of the Sierras to the east... The stores here in this little village now boarded up, deserted. The people on the street we passed having a "look" about them I'd seen elsewhere, the look of a people who know disaster is coming. That only a "thin line" of what now remained of Trelandar's once vaunted fighting forces held the Imperial invaders still at bay. The sun now hovering low over the Pacific making me sense that it was setting on Trelandar, hiding its face from what was to come. That we were all living under a sword hanging over our heads now.

"We are a beaten people, fleeing from an enemy we no longer have the will to face," I said, glancing about at the scene here. "Ruled by a Queen totally incompetent to command, defended by a retired old Warlady who doesn't understand 'what' we're facing." Tirana really wasn't that "old", but to one twenty

nine, a woman of ninety seemed "old", even if the anti-aging serums kept you in pretty good shape for at least a century and often times more... Tirana was a competent military commander, but more the sort of a military leader who should have been guided by a competent Queen. Paula simply let Lady Tirana do whatever she felt proper, leaving to poor Tirana every detail of fighting this war against Darlanis while she herself made a proud figure "visiting" battlefields and consoling those injured and dying. Such not being what we needed a Queen to do, especially against someone like Darlanis here now!

"There is still 'hope'," Carl answered, dismounting, helping me down from my saddle, a few idlers at the tavern watching us, a "look" about them that made me glad there was a sword at my hip. The black of Carl's attire leaving no doubts as to his caste, my own being such that it was hard to say just what caste I was now. My red silk blouse and pleated leather skirt dress any could have worn, although the sword at my hip left no "doubts" as to me now. The gleaming links of my neck chain leaving little doubt that we were just married, as did the ribbon someone had tied to the tail of my unicorn, such being often done when a couple gets married. I wore riding hose, a rich green cotton protecting my legs along with an ornate "stylish" hat, the black net veil of the "Lady"...

"You've got a 'good one' there," one of the idlers spoke to Carl, regarding me in a way that a man might regard a slave girl. "Bet she can sure give a man a good 'ride' too!" he laughed here!

"I would suggest that you learn to 'behave' yourself before your 'betters'," Carl snapped, stepping up and yanking the man out of his chair, my husband's clenched fist now before his face. None of these men were "openly" armed, but I had no doubts that they carried weapons, if of a sort that left few doubts of them!

"Don't interfere..." I hissed, the point of my sword pressing up against another's throat, his eyes now showing his terror! "And if you attempt drawing that blade you're no doubt carrying, just consider what will happen to your 'friend' here," I said to a third, who was obviously thinking of doing something "sneaky". "Unless the two of you have just confessed your sins to a Priestess and thus are ready to stand before Lys for Her Judgment." It being taught by the Priestesses of Lys that after one's death one is judged by Lys for your sins, it being the practice when a person is dying to confess your sins in a hope of forgiveness here.

"Your kind should be required by law to wear black!" the man hissed back, regarding me in a way that left no doubts here as to the thoughts that were going through his mind just then. Carl at the moment "shoving" the first man back down into his chair there against the wall of the tavern, while a couple more men stood inside the door and watched the proceedings without "interfering". A whore on the other side of the doorway grinning as she watched.

"Do you want to stay here, Sanda?" Carl ventured now to me.

"Makes you 'proud' of what we're fighting for, doesn't it?" I spoke, stepping back, slipping my sword into the sheath there at my left hip. The sarcasm in my voice leaving little doubt... I suspected that the "good" people of the place had for most part already fled. Leaving their lovely little settlement to such as these here, these predatory jackals and vultures of our country. The Imperials often hanging such from any handy tree without the "bother" of a trial, just to "clean up things" a bit, I recalled. This being one of the reasons why so many "never do wells" had fled from their own villages and towns to seek the safety of our own lines, and that part of Trelandar still under our Queen yet.

"I guess we can put our 'trust' in steel," Carl smiled back at me, perhaps suddenly aware that I was a better wife than he'd expected of me, more the Warriress he'd hoped I'd be to him now. The trio deciding that there were better places now to loaf here, scampering off like whipped curs down the

street, glancing back.

"See if you can find a room without too many mice and spiders," I smiled back, such insects in this era growing to as large as a foot wide, horrid ugly bloated things out of some nightmare! Mutations left over from The War five centuries ago between Earth and Mars. A reminder in a way too of the foolishness of Mankind. "I'll watch the unicorns and our things," I added, Carl nodding. The whore giving me another smile, a grin I didn't much like now.

"It's not the 'honeymoon' that you deserve," Carl said to me as we ate dinner, keeping our backs to the wall, our watch upon the patrons of the establishment, who looked like the sort who in a better run society would have been run out of town here. Dregs of society who were remaining behind to pick up what they could. Our short walk through the town having left us no doubts of this. The stores broken in on the side streets, the few women who yet dared to walk the streets mostly those hard eyed women with daggers at their hips, skirts almost crotch high. A few men at arms there at the bar, swilling down beer, enjoying a few days of R&R before returning back to the "lines" that stretched across Trelandar from the sea now to the foothills. Fighting a "defensive" war that we could never win, commanded by a Queen who understood "nothing" of warfare, and a Warlady who understood little of this new type of warfare, of a fluid flowing war that we were losing. A couple of guardsmen from the small force that manned the inadequate defenses against attack from the sea. Adequate enough for stopping some pirate, but totally inadequate against an invasion. Further proof in my eyes of my sister's incompetency as a leader. On the other hand Trella's far heavier defenses had been useless.

"Just being together is enough," I answered, drinking beer. I think Carl had been surprised that I'd reacted as I had, drawing my sword and keeping the two other men at bay as I had here. I'd acted without thinking, knowing it was the right thing to do.

"I'm got my 'Warrioress', even if 'she' doesn't think she is one," he answered, taking my hand and holding it then in his own.

"A woman should stand by her man," I smiled, squeezing his hand in mine. We'd rushed off and gotten married without really "knowing" that much about each other, but when one lives from day to day, not knowing if that day is going to be your last day upon Earth, then you start looking upon things somewhat "differently". At any time the Imperials could gather their forces, smash their way through our lines, and thirty miles was not beyond the distance that well mounted fighting women might cover in a few hours if Darlanis was willing to sacrifice lives for a diversion here. It was also possible that she might attempt landings from sea, a "tactic" that she'd used before, proving that while she wouldn't have made a good squad leader as we used to joke about her behind her back at the Academy, she was still a very dangerous enemy...

"I keep wondering what it's like in Trella now," Carl said, our meal hardly any "better" than military fare, I thought to myself. The meat was tough, the baked potato overcooked, not even the equal of what I'd been served many times in a Peasant's home.

"It's an Imperial city now," I answered, aware that his own family had died there as the Imperials had come swarming in, our own defenses having proved to be inadequate to the task set here. Darlanis had landed men in the dark of night, taken the forts now protecting the harbor, and then using the supporting fire of her galleys, had landed a force of men there on the docks themselves. The galleys moving in close and firing over the heads of her men. Using this force as a diversion while she then landed two smaller forces up and down the coast; crossing the outskirts of the ruins of Los Angeles (a true no man's land) to attack Trella from the rear while our forces were engaged in fighting off her force from the sea! While the Imperial losses were heavy, the Sarnian Queen was able in only a period of a day to take "most" of Trella

here. Queen Paula being able to escape only through the most daring of assaults, smashing through the thin Imperial lines at a high cost of life, but one that at least assured that we still could fight! It being likely that had Paula been captured or killed, no one in authority would have been willing to carry on the fight any more!

"Odd how 'competent' Darlanis is," Carl said, looking at me. No doubt "remembering" some of the things I'd told him about her.

"Hara Eslund was her Warlady then," I pointed out to him. I knew of Hara, who had resigned when ordered to violate the caste codes, something that Princess Tara was quite willing to do here. Well aware too that my sister's incompetence was a major part of the problem, Paula having little idea of how to fight such a war! When someone grabs you by the throat, you knee him in the groin! Paula instead had tried to fight a "defensive" war, just the type of a war that Darlanis was no doubt delighted to fight here too!!

"I've got a question for you," he said, sitting there beside me. The two of us sitting so that we faced "out" into the room. "One that I've been meaning to 'ask' ever since I first met you."

"And what is 'that'?" I asked, holding his eyes with my own.

"You and your sister are 'enemies', aren't you?" he spoke.

"She's a good Queen, but 'incompetent'," I answered back.

"She's also a very 'proud' Queen," Carl pointed out to me.

"And she will cost us Trelandar," I replied in level tones.

Chapter Fifteen

"What are you doing?" Carl whispered, seeing me there in the darkness standing by the window looking out towards the ocean. I noticed the direction of the wind, the lack of any Moon, the sky being cloudy, memories of military tactics going through my mind. I had gotten up earlier to relieve myself, noticed the wind, how it had changed, the way that the sky had clouded up, everything.

"We are seventy miles to the south of Trella," I told him.

"So?" Carl asked, only a darker shadow against the sheet.

"We have an 'unprotected flank'," I replied, looking out.

"And we've been 'holding' the Imperials..." he breathed.

"Darlanis does have an excellent navy," I replied quietly.

"And it is thirty miles to our lines," my husband ventured.

"If I were Darlanis, and I had what she has..." I mused now.

"This isn't a good place to be staying," he concluded here.

"The defenses are inadequate," I said, remembering what I'd seen of the place. Darlanis would need a harbor, somewhere where her ships could anchor, unload cargo, a "beachhead". Where she'd be able to force Paula to fight against forces front and back at the same time. My sister's present position such that the Empire had to cross open ground against well entrenched heavy armament on the further bank of a river, one deep enough that it would be necessary to swim across it against fire from the opposite bank. The river being wide enough that one could hardly shoot across it with a good bow (220 yards) while the defender had the advantage of being able to maintain a constant "fire" upon anyone crossing. No doubt the Imperials might be able to cross, but their losses would be high enough that even Darlanis wouldn't want to do it...

"It would have taken her 'time' to make preparations," Carl spoke, slipping out of bed, groping around for his own clothing while I finished dressing myself, trying to gather up my things.

"She is no doubt aware of the phase of the Moon," I said.

"The wind was from the east earlier today," he ventured.

"And it is now from the westnorth west," I now replied.

"The element of surprise would be on her side," he noted.

"It is a tactic that I would have used," I said, recalling a time long ago when I'd been helping Darlanis with her studies... Darlanis like most Warriresses seeing the ocean as a "barrier", not as a "roadway" that could be used to transport you elsewhere. Carl now striking a light, and getting our things all together.

"It's just after five in the morning," Carl said as we went out the back door of the tavern to the stables, both of us burdened down with our things, my bow, Carl's crossbow, the missiles for our weapons. The late night "chilly", a dampness in the air. The little town quiet, the only sound that of the night insects.

"I could be mistaken about all this," I said to him then.

"Better safe than sorry," he said, opening the stable door.

"Here's a lantern," I said, holding up my "lighter" here.* *This was a device much like a common cigarette lighter. (JBB)

"We'll take a ride down to the harbor," Carl said to me as he climbed up into the saddle, our unicorns not all that delighted by being awake from a sound sleep. We could always find some other place to stay. Somewhere further inland or a place on the sea that didn't offer any safe "anchorage" for enemy ships here. The defense consisted of three batteries of catapults, three such weapons to a battery, the batteries placed so that they could be used to place an enemy ship under a deadly crossfire. Trella had used similar defenses, although far heavier, with steam catapults that could hurl missiles as far as seven hundred yards. Such are completely useless on board ships, which used the more common one that is manually wound up, and can fire say about a quarter mile. The total force of guardsmen here consisting just over a hundred. Not enough by any means to fight off any sort of an invasion now.

"That sounds like a good... What's That!?" I cried, seeing a flaming missile of some sort rising up into the sky and then come falling back down! The missile having been fired from the water!

"They used those at Trella!" Carl answered my question now!* * Firebombs were known before Lorraine, but appear to have been an "invention" of Princess Tara who served as Darlanis' "military advisor" during her original invasion of Trelandar... The major reason such weapons were never in common use was due to the caste codes that forbade their use in naval warfare. It being noteworthy here that Lorraine herself never used such weapons in ship to ship warfare even although she was in possession of a more "perfected" version. She once said to me that in a way she felt it had been a mistake for her to ever develop such weapons. (Sanda)

"We can 'fight' or run," I said, feeling my unicorn move beneath me. We wouldn't be able to stop the invasion, but we might be able to take a toll of the Imperials, kill a few of them here. The fires would provide ample light for archery, along with the confusion that would be a part of things too as they came ashore. I saw a fire missile arch up into the air from the shore, proof at least that the guardsmen here were competent at their duties. That someone had been alert, awake enough here to give the alarm.

"I am of the Warriors," Carl Talen said, kicking his unicorn into movement. "You ride, give warning to our forces," he added.

"First we fight, then we ride out of here!" I answered, unslinging my compound bow, that wonderful weapon that could shoot an arrow two hundred and fifty yards. So easy to hold at draw... A couple dozen arrows in a quiver fixed to my saddle now at hand.

"It is good to have a Warriress at one's side!" he laughed!

"Sometimes I do forget that I am but just a Scribe!" I said! An alarm bell being sounded as we galloped down the street, the glow of the fires visible now ahead of us as people looked out of their windows, peering down the street at the disturbance. More of the deadly missiles rising up into the air to start more fires as people started to become aware now of what was happening here! Our own catapults answering, although it is harder to hit a ship than it is to fire towards a target that you can't miss hitting. I was puzzled as how little was being fired back, considering we had nine catapults mounted, as well as some lighter ballistaes.

"There!" Carl cried, pointing, the enemy ships visible now, darker shadows against the sea. The shore defenses here consisted of three batteries of catapults, with only one battery firing! It being obvious that the Imperials had already landed a force of men from small boats, attempting to do the same thing here that they had at Trella, obviously quite "successfully" too, I saw! I suspected that it was possible that they'd had "help", that there were "enemies" in our midst, people who "posed" as refugees, but were in reality actually now members of Darlanis' own military as well as Trelandarians who for gold were willing to betray us now.

"There are boats!" I cried, urging my unicorn forward, the craft like insects now crawling over the dark surface of the sea! Most of the harbor frontage now aflame, people running about like ants when their nest is disturbed. Dark against the brightness!!

It has always been my belief here that had we developed the "militias" that so successfully have always defended Dularn, it is very likely that there never would have been an "Empire of California". That instead we might have seen a sort of a "federation" of a sort that actually developed later on with Lorraine. Unlike earlier wars between the city states that formed after The War as Mankind gradually over the centuries

"rebuilt", Darlanis was the first to reintroduce the sort of "warfare" that was quite commonplace back in the 20th Century. The use of massive armies, the use of military conscription, of conquest and occupation that she must have learned from the history books that she read. She was a woman with a "dream", and she came close to realizing it...

"This is close enough!" Carl cried, yanking his unicorn to a halt, tying it to a hitching post, I doing the same with my mare.

"A hot time in the old town tonight!" I giggled, slinging my quiver of arrows over my shoulder while Carl fixed his quiver of crossbow bolts to his hip, cocking his weapon and loading a bolt. The boats of the Imperials were holding off, men in them now firing arrows and crossbow bolts at the docks, while their ships now maintained a steady stream of fire upon our own defenders here. Such a "fire" of course serving to "demoralize" our own people to some degree, especially those who lived here in town and saw everything they owned going up in flames. The tactical use of this being an "invention" of Princess Tara, who was perhaps more aware of military history than anyone else from what is known of her...

"Why are those boats holding off?" Carl mused, the craft beyond good bow shot, perhaps a hundred and fifty yards here. They were firing towards shore, although it was unlikely that they had much of anything to "aim" at but the entire dockside before them. The fires already set by their fire bombs lighting everything up.

"They're waiting for their reinforcements!" I breathed out! This was an attack much like the one on Trella, but now in a far smaller scale, only a few hundred men at the best, but with the exact same "tactics" here that Darlanis had used so successfully! The old basic "battle tactics" every member of the Warriors and the Warriresses knows. That double flanking movement that you use as soon as you meet any resistance that you can get around... Modified just a bit to better fit the situation here, I thought! It being obvious here that the ships had no doubt discharged most of their forces, that they were only a diversion here to draw our fire while the main part of the force came creeping in from the darkness! Tactics that left no doubts about Darlanis' abilities! The fact that the two outer batteries had been "silenced" without giving an alarm speaking well of the capabilities of her forces!* * I later learned that this was an attack using the agents of the Empire that had been "planted" in among us months before. Women posing as prostitutes, men as drifters, refugees from the north. It being Darlanis' intentions here of cutting in "behind" Paula's forces, trapping my sister between two hostile forces. It would have worked save for the fact that Darlanis had not taken into consideration here that Trelandar also had forces in "depth" yet. She also apparently attempted this with too "small" a force for fear that our spies would warn Paula of what she was up to here.

"We'll do the best we can, then get out of here," Carl said. The tone of his voice leaving no doubts as to his thoughts here. We might kill a few, but the outcome of this invasion was without doubt. Darlanis would get her "beachhead", and more of Trelandar would be lost, never to be regained as she "chewed" away at us...

Chapter Sixteen

"There's some of `them' now!" Carl "hissed", taking aim, the clatter of hooves behind us making me turn

in terror, thinking we were under attack by the enemy from the rear before I realized it would have been impossible for Darlanis to have landed cavalry...

"They're Our Warriresses!!" I cried with relief, seeing the glitter of their armor, their leader in gleaming gold, the crest to her helmet glorious as she pointed with drawn sword to where the enemy now stood awed by this sudden unexpected attack by us!! And the force following her now splitting up, racing out into the darkness to engage the Imperials in a deadly battle where quarter would beneither asked or given! Men dismounting from their own unicorns to "reinforce" those at the battery, to add their arrows and crossbow bolts to the missiles now falling upon the Imperial threat from out there! Their leader sitting there in her golden armor now barking sharp orders to her officers as men and women dashed off to reinforce those who were already engaging the foe!! Another Warriress, a high ranking officer, older, now joining as the two spoke to each other, their own escorts guarding them now.

"Who in the Holy Name of Lys is 'SHE'?" Carl breathed to me! The woman obviously capable, competent, although she was wearing a face shield that concealed her identity, made her seem martial. I knew most of the commanders, although not all of them by face.

"It can't be..." I breathed, knowing "WHO" it had to be now!

"Sanda!" Carl cried as I stepped out of the darkness, raising my arms as an escort turned with drawn bow to "challenge" me! Aware that under such circumstances I could be shot for an enemy! The commander of the force, the woman in golden armor, raising up her face shield, giving me a smile as I saw it was Queen Paula! The other woman now raising her own shield, it being our Warlady!

"In the 'thick of battle' again, Sanda?" Paula smiled to me. Carl following, the Queen's escort moving away, giving us space. The sounds of battle dying away as the last of the enemy died at the points of our weapons, while others of Paula's force now did what they could to keep the fires from spreading on further here. Lady Tirana sitting there on her unicorn regarding me strangely.

"You 'came'!" I breathed, stunned at the "change" in Paula!

"You said certain 'things' to me the other night," she said, her stallion shifting a bit under her as she drew on the reins, a blaze of fire out at sea indicating that we'd put our recaptured catapult batteries to good use, having hit one of the Imperials. This was one time when Darlanis would NOT be victorious here now! I could see the ships were firing upon the batteries, but due to the darkness it would have difficult for them to score any hits.

"I was angry," I said, remembering what I'd said to her then after Carl had left so that we might speak privately together... The comparisons I'd made between Darlanis and her, the fact that Darlanis was a "leader" in a way that my sister certainly wasn't!

"As Queen I have the ability to make laws," Paula said to me as she sat there on her unicorn looking down at me, "And I have just introduced a law of military conscription just now, drafting YOU as Warlady of Trelandar to fight for us against the Empire."

"I will advise you, but command will be yours," Lady Tirana said to me, her dark eyes beneath her helmet glowing into mine...

"And I have not forgotten everything I learned at the Academy," Paula said to me, it being obvious here that my sister was not quite as "incompetent" as I'd made her out to be that night!! The burning Imperial ship now being abandoned while the others now moved in, picking up what survivors they could from it

then. These vessels all being equipped with both oars and sails here. I had no doubts that it would be some time before Darlanis tried anything like this again, especially after a "licking" like this!

"I am not of the Warriresses..." I pointed out. Legally I had no authority to command under the caste codes, a fact I'd had tossed in my face a few times here ever since the invasion here.

"I have made you a Warriress by Royal Decree," Paula said. "Whether or not you accept the caste mark is up to you," she now added, Paula as Queen of Trelandar having the authority to make a person of any caste that she wished, something she'd done before. I was a "graduate" of the Warriress Academy, I was trained as a Warriress, and I did have an established history of leadership. My objections here to being a Warriress had to do with the "code of honor", the idea of dueling, which I was strongly opposed to. The concept of sword duels being reintroduced by Janet Rogers in the 21st Century along with all the trappings of the NEW ORDER of that time, which looked back to a social order that never existed save but in the imagination of a woman who died in the year 1988.

"I trust however that you will take an old woman's advice," Lady Tirana said to me as she sat there on her unicorn beside the Queen of Trelandar. "And not waste lives as Darlanis has done." A Warriress officer riding up, informing Paula that the last of the enemy had been "dealt with", her words leaving few doubts...

"She 'is' of Darlanis' own personal guards," Paula said, the woman, stripped, chained, kneeling there before us as I now came into the bar room of the tavern that the Queen had taken over as her command headquarters until we hunted down the last of the Imperials who had we believed scattered into the woods around here. "Undoubtedly she is 'knowledgeable' of matters that she does not wish to share with us," Paula said, her words making me shudder! The captive was blonde, blue eyed, many of Darlanis' being so...

"How much do you tell your women of what you plan?" I asked, seeing the woman's eyes, the "terror" there in their depths here. I recalled what was "done" to me by Tara, and Tara hadn't really known "who" I was either, although Darlanis had of course known. Paula's dark eyes meeting mine as she now nodded back in reply.

"She's worth fifty crowns in a good market," Carl added now as he stood at my side, the captured Imperial being a true beauty by our standards, "blonde" women being rather rare in Trelandar.

"There are 'marks' about her neck where a chain was worn," I said, looking more closely at the kneeling woman, the side of her head bruised where the flat of a sword had struck her down here. She had been married, perhaps had a husband, children who it was likely she'd never see again. I supposed she was aware of that.

"Her name is Janis Mara," Paula said, "She's a lieutenant of Warriresses of Darlanis' Imperial Guard..." the Queen now added.

"I am the Lady Sanda Talen, Warlady of Trelandar," I said to the luckless captive. "If you serve me well I will see that you are returned to your people once this war is over," I promised.

"Our Empress has spoken of you," she breathed softly now.

"We have a higher opinion of Sanda than you," Paula smiled.

"The Empress said Sanda should have been your Warlady," the captive "offered", the thought going

through my mind that perhaps Darlanis had said just that, knowing just "who" I was here now...

"Hair like gold, a silver tongue," Carl grinned at me then. No doubt believing that the woman was trying to butter me up now.

"How many were in this invasion, and was Darlanis with you?" I asked swiftly, wondering if Janis Mara would obey me here. I'd better mention here that it is common to name children after the royal family of your country, Dularn having a Princess Janis, the older sister of Darlanis. There are also a few "Janets", although it is not a "popular" name, and I've even met a "Lorraine" once, some luckless girl having gotten that name "stuck" on her!* * This was my opinion at the time these events occurred. It is often the practice of parents to name their newborns after some historical figure of the past, especially girls. I once knew a cadet who had the "name" of "Marcella", who was the head of Janet Rogers' Ministry of Communications in the 21st Century and left a book after her death telling much of "life" in the 21st Century. "Marcella Domino" herself being born in 1991 and dying in 2049 of cancer caused by her exposure to radiation from The War. (Sanda)

"We were three hundred, under the 'command' of the Empress," she answered me, looking at my booted feet as I stood beside the Queen of Trelandar. "Darlanis said it would be 'easy'..." Janis' voice now trailing off here, leaving the rest for me to fill in. I realized had it not been for what I'd "said" to Paula, Darlanis would have won another "victory", and established her beachhead! The thought going through my mind too that Darlanis' forces might be a little less likely in the future to follow her after this... We'd put a "whupping" on the Queen of Sarn like none before now! She'd lost before, but not like she had this time, not losing all to us like she had, escaping us with only a small fraction of the force she'd brought, and losing one of her heavy galleys now too! True, we hadn't gotten her, but we'd certainly chased her off in a way that left no doubts that she wasn't invincible here either! Knocking a big hole in the "legend" that had been carefully built up about her, proving that she could be beaten by Trelandarians!! "Darlanis said that you weren't any 'good' as a Queen..." she now added to Paula, I think suddenly aware that her beloved mistress hadn't been right on any of this here, that we were not the pushovers that Darlanis had been telling her people. Paula nodding, giving me a smile, the implications of this not lost here either.

Chapter Seventeen

"I once told Darlanis that war is like 'poker'," I mused to Carl as my little galley now passed in between the fortifications that guarded the entrance into Trella. The ruins of Los Angeles visible there to the north if you looked carefully... Janis Mara at the rail, perhaps aware of how fortunate she'd been here. I'd offered to return her to her Empress, using her as a token in my own plan to attempt something with Darlanis Paula didn't believe would work. Darlanis knew me, knew me from the Academy, knew my standing in the class, and I hoped here might believe that it was quite possible now that facing ME would be far different a task!!

I planned to tell her just exactly "what" I could do to her, the sorts of attacks I could launch into Sarn itself, threats I really couldn't have carried out all that effectively, as most of our navy was now either sunk, burned, or in Imperial hands now. On the other hand Darlanis wouldn't be "sure" just what I could "do" to her, but she did know that my military knowledge exceeded hers, exceeded that of Princess Tara (I hoped anyway here), and I was taking a long shot that Darlanis might think I could "do" to her exactly

what I claimed to do, even if I couldn't do it here!! We'd made sure over the last week that the Imperials knew I was now the Warlady of Trelandar, that I was the one responsible for all their "troubles" that they had with the "resistance" here...

"Don't underestimate her," he warned, the truce flag flying over our heads. My vessel was small, a single row of oarsmen on each side, the wind almost foul for us as we came into Trella's harbor under oars to the steady beat of the time keeper's drum. I could see the palace there beyond the city, Darlanis having at least done a pretty good job of patching things up, I noticed now as we came closer in towards the city, which lies to the south of the harbor for the most part here. The lesser desirable part being to the north of the harbor, and thus closer to the ruins now. It being believed with good reason that "monsters" inhabit the ruins and come out at night to steal from those closest to them. These "creatures" being much the same as the one that Carl and I killed up there in the foothills when we'd sought shelter for the night in those old ruins left over from the time before The War.* * It was Lorraine, free from the prejudices of our society, who managed to establish peaceful relations in 2570 with Queen Joyce and her people, even to defying the Priestesses of Lys. (Sanda)

"I'm an excellent trial lawyer," I answered back. In a give and take situation I'd always done well, having a quick repartee that impressed juries. I had no idea how well my abilities would work on Darlanis, but I wanted to negotiate an "end" to this war. If Darlanis wanted to reproduce the World Federation of the 21st Century on a much smaller scale, then I saw no reason why Trelandar couldn't assist her in doing so as long as it was to our own benefit. Darlanis was no "democrat", but she wasn't really an "oppressive" ruler despite whatever our propaganda claimed. Running Darlanis down on her character had in my opinion only made her less likely to be "reasonable", even if Queen Paula felt that the people of Trelandar would be more likely to fight if Darlanis was seen as being just as EVIL as we could possibly make her be. The Empress' actions in allowing Princess Tara to carry out the "scorched earth" campaign that she was doing only served to prove to the people of Trelandar how terrible Darlanis was as a person!

"I just hope you realize what is `riding' on this," Carl replied, looking out over the rail at the city spreading out before us. We could perhaps "hold" Darlanis for a while yet, but even my superior tactical skills couldn't give us a victory, not with so much of Trelandar now in the hands of the Empress unless her own people rose up against her, which I didn't feel was likely...

"I see that your sister has put her `best' in command," Darlanis said to me as we clasped hands there on the landing, the bright sunlight gleaming off the chain mail of her Imperial Guard as they stood at attention there in a semi-circle around us now. The Empress' own attire that "provocative" golden mesh that well displayed her fine figure, along with a long flowing silken cape.

"We decided to take you seriously," I smiled at Darlanis.

"You do not bear the caste mark," she breathed softly.

"It is by the decree of my Queen," I smiled at Darlanis.

"You do however wear `black'," the golden beauty smiled now. My attire consisting of a black silk blouse and matching leather skirt. The sword at my hip however was mine, a good serviceable weapon if not as ornate perhaps as the one that Darlanis carried. Carl just behind me with Janis Marathere standing at his side.

"Further warfare will gain either of us very little," I said to her, looking up now into her eyes, Darlanis being three inches taller than I was, her spike heeled boots making her taller yet. That was, I knew, a part of her "power" over others, the fact she was tall enough that for most people it was necessary to look up

at her, Darlanis in her boots standing about six feet one here. These being the golden leather "strap" boots I mentioned earlier, the criss crossing straps serving to accentuate a woman's legs...

"I am prepared to negotiate a settlement with your sister," Darlanis answered me, her eyes glittering into mine as the breeze moved strands of her golden hair there beneath the headdress she wore. "All I ask is an oath of loyalty to me as her Empress..." The likelihood of that being about as great as Paula deciding to give up her crown to become a dockside prostitute here at Trella.

"What Janet Rogers gave us was a 'federation', not an 'empire'," I pointed out to her, speaking in tones meant to be overheard. Darlanis' own advisors standing there among her guards. "A 'federation' of Sarn, Trelandar, Dularn, Talon and Baja would be a good first step to rebuilding what once was," I said to her. "It is also possible that we could bring in the barbaric tribes, the scattered peoples of the north beyond Dularn," I added then. "Establish a system of 'equality' between nations now unknown..."

"Lorrainedid what I could not," I said, looking up at Jon. Darlanis at that time had still been too arrogant, too "sure" of herself to listen to reason. Too much in love withher own dream of what never could have been. "For fifteen more years she would fight wars that she never could 'win'," I said, seeing him there by the window, the sun almost gone now in the west as night fell. That had been the tragedy of Darlanis, of the dream she once had.

"You were a 'Warlady'," he said, standing there by the window looking out at the grave. That was something few knew now... I'd only held the position for a couple months, and most believed it was just an act of "desperation" by my sister. Darlanis naturally did what she could to see that was what was written of me. Trying to "discredit" me in the eyes of the people of Trelandar so that I would not be a "threat" to her rule of my country then.

"Lorraine was a 'better' Warlady," I said, getting up, going to him, putting my arms around him. She had the "mindset" of the Warriress, which was something I'd never had. The caste codes had "meaning" for her in a way that they'd never ever had for me. Oddly enough I see her best as a great naval commander, another of the cut of Horatio Nelson, something I think she "proved" for all time back there in 2566 when she took the Huntress up against the North Star. Against the legendary Maris Marn of Dularn, said by many to be the greatest who ever stood upon a quarterdeck. It is true that the battle proved to be a stalemate, but it did in its way prove thatLorraine was the greatest there ever was here.

"How 'much' did she 'get' from you?" Jon suddenly asked me! "How much of the 'legend' is really hers, and how much is yours?" Jon no doubt aware thatLorraineand I were extremely "close"... That the objectives that I'd sought in 2550Lorrainehad finally won there twenty years later with the establishment of a "community" of nations running north from Baja to the cold wastes south ofAlaska. Not a "federation", or an "empire" as Darlanis had so once dreamed, but more an "understanding" between Queens, between the Kings of the Nevadas and the Wyomings, that war was no longer the "answer" to problems.Lorraine, although in title aWarlady, was in my eyes more a "Peacelady", her very activities in bringing us all together ample proof here of "what" she truly was...

"She 'knew' in 2566 'what' I'd been," I said, looking at her last resting place. "I think however that she saw 'things' in a different 'light' than I did, that she wished to prove to Maris that even though she could kill, she did not wish to do so then." That is perhaps a part ofLorraine that few have ever understood. "She was a Warriress, she wore the caste mark, believed in the caste codes, in the sword at her hip, in her own skill, but yet I see her now as being a person who wanted to give us all a better life, as a woman who was trying her best..." I spoke to Jon then.

"Let us hope that those of your caste there on Mars preserve her memory, speak the truth of what she was, of what she tried to do for all of Mankind," Jon said to me as I stood close. In 2648 the Earth would be destroyed as a abode of life, dragged out into the icy reaches of outer space, but upon another world, records would be kept, and men and women would speak of one who once was.

Chapter Eighteen

"This could be your sister's again if she is 'reasonable'," Darlanis said to me as we walked through the palace of Trelandar, the lovely tapestries on the walls, the corridors much the same. The golden haired Empress herself much like some exotic dream... Part no doubt of the "power" that she seems to exert over males. With us was another woman, one who wore a short red leather skirt and a clinging green silken half blouse, a woman who I suspected was more of a "friend" to Darlanis than any other might be here. A woman with reddish brown hair, bluish eyes, a busty figure that left few doubts as to who she might be here too... Lara Warsan!! That famous Trelandarian prostitute some called the Queen of Sex.

"An 'alliance' may be 'acceptable' to Paula," I ventured. I had no real idea of what Paula would agree to, my sister's pride something that might well stand in the way of any agreement here. She was not a person that I would have wished to have as a "client", but just now I was more interested in seeing what Darlanis' offer might be, considering the "difficulty" she'd have in taking over Trelandar now that I was Warlady. Darlanis being well aware now that I'd been the one responsible for all her "troubles", it being likely that a certain amount of "pressure" might be placed upon her to come to some sort of "terms" here rather than continue on fighting a war that could drag on for years if I so wished. Unlike warfare in the age of firearms, war in our time was more a matter of "will", of a determination to fight. Arms were not a matter of factories, but of small tools, of blacksmith shops, not great industries that were "vulnerable" to attack from an enemy. A longbow can be made by any with skill and a good sharp knife. Part of a Warrior's and a Warriress' training is making "such".

"Talon is my next 'objective' after Trelandar," she stated.

"There is no 'defense' against air attacks," I pointed out.

"A matter of 'training'," she smiled, her eyes meeting mine.

"Your forces will spread out, shield themselves," I smiled.

"And return fire with our bows, our crossbows," she added.

"I would suggest negotiating with Queen Dala," I smiled.

"She is not likely to be 'agreeable'," Darlanis smiled.

"You do set an excellent table," Carl said to Darlanis as we ate, there being just about everything there anyone could wish... Even those iced pickled herrings in sour cream sent from Dularn. This last being a delicacy I'd only sampled a couple of times before, as it is expensive to ship perishable foods kept in ice all the way down from Dularn, a matter my sister once so pointed out. A duo of slave girls, both strikingly

beautiful, serving us here. We were dining with just Lara, Darlanis' "friend", Princess Tara being off somewhere, Darlanis said, tending to the war. Her own comments implying that so far as she was concerned, she'd be just as happy never to "see" the woman again. She also seemed to be a bit more "friendly" towards me than I would have expected her to be, considering that I was a serious "threat" to her own dreams. A woman, a slave, gently plucking on a lyre there in the corner, a small fire in the fireplace against the "chill" of the evening. Little having changed here in the royal palacesave its occupant.

"My friends live well," Darlanis smiled back, her eyes glowing into his. A slave girl, blonde, beautiful, refilling his own goblet at a nod from the Empress. The wench briefly clad, wearing just enough to cover her breasts and conceal her behind here. The dress of a gauzy material that "hinted" at what laid beneath. "And my generosity is well known," Darlanis added, smiling at me. "You were my friend at the Academy, my only friend," she added, a cold hand claspng my heart as I realized what she was up to now!

"I didn't think you were that 'impressed' with what I did," I spoke, keeping my voice level, keeping my "attention" upon her. The slave girl whispering into Carl's ear, and caressing him now!

"I'm a married man, and I love my wife," Carl spoke in low tones to the blonde, pushing her away, this ploy of Darlanis having failed to have the effect that the Empress had hoped for now. The girl glancing at her mistress in a way that left no doubts...

"You are a better Warlady than Tara, than Hara was, or your Tirana is," Darlanis answered, sipping at her wine as if nothing was happening now. I had no doubts she would have made an excellent court room attorney, especially with the "style" she had... "Your grasp of military tactics is awesome, and you also have an ability to 'see' what others do not," she pointed out to me here. It being quite "obvious" here just "what" she wanted from me now. Lara's eyes glowing into mine as she sat there across the table.

"I have no doubts that I would be well rewarded for my troubles," I smiled back, recalling the "term" one might apply here. I had no idea whether or not Darlanis' "Empire" was practical or not, but I had no doubts that she was a serious threat to freedom loving peoples everywhere here on the coastline of North America.

"The Warlady of the Empire of California will be rich beyond her dreams," Darlanis spoke, her eyes burning straight into mine. There being no "doubt" anymore as to what she wanted from me now.

"I am not of the Warriresses," I pointed out, thinking rapidly of something "neutral" to say here. Aware that Darlanis was no doubt aware of that fact, which as Empress she could of course overcome by royal decree, just as my sister had done for me here.

"Being a Warriress is 'more' than having the caste mark on your wrist," Darlanis smiled, extending her arm, showing me hers. A local anesthetic is used, the mark itself being a "brand" of a stylized sword, somewhat resembling the Cross of the Christians with the point of the "sword" pointing outwards towards an enemy. "It is a matter of 'attitudes', of the way one so 'sees' things."

"I would not be 'Warlady' of Trelandar now if you hadn't invaded it," I spoke, sipping thoughtfully at my wine as I thought of what to say next. "I am not a professional fighting woman..."

"I 'see' myself as a 'liberator', not as an 'invader'," she replied, her words like the purr of some great and dangerous cat. "Freeing your people from the oppressive rule of a government who paid them little 'heed' save to tax them for its own luxuries... A government that was quite willing to ally itself against Sarn." Darlanis apparently speaking here of an attempt by the King the year before to make a military alliance with the Queen of Dularn. An action that I had much applauded even if Queen Tulis of Dularn

had not been interested in forming such an alliance with us then, a mistake I suspected Dularn itself would eventually now pay for.

"Perhaps the people of Trelandar could vote on the issue," I suggested with a smile, aware of the "predator" that she was too. "Both you and Queen Paula could go about like 'politicians' once did long ago and try to convince the people of Trelandar which of you would be able to give them the most," I continued on to her.

"I see you have not forgotten your ideals," Darlanis said.

"Of a constitutional republic like Dularn," I grinned back.

"Democracy does not guarantee good government," she smiled. "The United States of America before Janet Rogers was 'not' well governed, in part due to the Democratic Socialist Welfare Party." Its economic collapse in 2007 A.D. having been the major reason why the American people elected Janet Rogers as their President. * * The actual name of the political party was the "Democratic Party", but due to the fact that Janet Rogers always referred to it as the "Democratic Socialist Welfare Party", this is the "name" that it is known by today here in the 27th Century. Lorraine in her writings refers to it by its proper name, but this is not the name that is now in general use today. It is also "known" as the "Jackass Party" due its party symbol being a jackass... That of Janet Rogers was called the "American Party" and had as its party symbol the Phoenix, a mythical bird reborn from its funeral pyre. There was also a "Republican Party", whose "symbol" was the elephant, which was supposed to be a wise animal that never forgets. It was primarily a "conservative" political force, often referred to here in Janet Roger's writings as the "me-too" party. (Sanda)

"A 'mistake' caused by extending the vote to all," I smiled, my husband sitting here listening, admiring Darlanis' slave girls as they went about their duties. Their attire briefer than most, designed I suspected to keep a man's mind off of much but S-E-X! Their movements, the ways that they carried out their tasks leaving no doubts in my mind too that they'd been trained to do this. Darlanis is quite a bit more "intelligent" than most give her any credit for being, perhaps due to her beauty, and I had no doubts that a part of her "power" here was due to "tricks" such as this.

"With 'rights' comes 'responsibility'," the Empress smiled. That had not been clearly "understood" in the past when the Democratic Socialist Welfare Party was in charge of things back then. When the "leader" of the Party had been Hillary Rodham Clinton... A woman far to the "left" politically, who believed that despite the fact that "socialism" had failed wherever it had been tried, that it still could succeed if only given "another chance" here! * * The basic "concept" of "socialism" for those not of my caste is that everyone puts into a "common pot" whatever they produce, and then takes back out whatever they now need in turn. It is a very "appealing" philosophy to many people, and for a very short time reappeared here in Trelandar back in 2570 before our beloved late Queen then crushed it like the deadly political viper that it is. The concept fails when you realize that people always "want" more than they are ever able to earn, that it destroys all "incentive" to produce more as one is no longer "rewarded" for hard work, but instead finds that the "drone" who produces nothing yet is given the products of someone else's hard labor just for being "there". This may also explain certain aspects of life on Mars which were written about by Lorraine in some of her diaries. Lorraine having written that civilization on that world was virtually stagnant, a comment that others who have visited that world have made too. It being quite likely as Lorraine has related that all scientific progress on that world was actually "due" to the work of the Women who were "rewarded" for their work by better food and living quarters, by "awards" of various sorts they took pride in, the wearing of precious jewels much like any Earthly woman might.

"I do not wish to rush you," Darlanis smiled, lifting up her goblet for her slave girl to refill it. "But I think

my offer is not 'unreasonable' if you love your country as I believe you do," she "purred", her eyes holding mine in a way that left no doubts. "I do not wish to destroy Trelandar as Taraseems so eager to..." Lara Warsan smiling at me, her eyes holding mine as I now nodded.

Chapter Nineteen

"How 'bad' is it really?" Carl asked as we were shown to a room for the night and the slave girl then took her leave of us. The glow of the lamp she'd left for us doing little to dispel the gloom I felt knowing that Darlanis had left me little choice now.

"She can be 'defeated', but the 'price' that the people of Trelandar will then pay in turn is something I don't even want to think about," I answered back, standing there by the window looking out. "Our best hope here now is to try to cause her so much troubles back in Sarn that she's forced to retreat from Trelandar to 'protect' her own territory from us," I explained, seeing him now nod as he turned back the bed and checked around for spiders. It was now growing late in September, the autumn having come, and while it would remain "warm" here in the lowlands for months yet, I was well aware that military operations higher up would be not that pleasant now, especially as we could have to move up high up into the mountains to be able to sneak on past her own patrols. And "tactics" of the sort I'd been using before, while "annoying" to the Empire, really hadn't had much military effect here yet.

"Maybe we need to find an ally somewhere," Carl ventured.

"Perhaps Queen Dala will listen to me..." I mused in turn.

"There..." Carl now muttered, getting the fire started now, the light of the flickering flames reflecting here off his face.

"With Talon's help we could push Darlanis out of Trelandar," I spoke, squatting down beside him, picking out the wood to burn. "And by now Dala's got to know that Talon's 'next' after Trelandar," I spoke, straightening up, having heard such from Darlanis. The Empress' comments leaving no doubts that she was already now considering the tactics she'd use in an attack here on Talon now. While Talon would not be the "pushover" that Trelandar had been, the people of Talon now being "organized" into defensive militias much as those of Dularn, the ultimate "outcome" for little Talon would be such that little would be "left" of it even if they were successful in keeping Darlanis from taking the country over here!

"Dala wouldn't 'help' before," Carl pointed out to me now. She was willing to sell us military supplies, but that the limit.

"Then we'd all better get used to being 'Californians'," I smiled back, seeing him nod back as we got undressed now for bed. "Get used to paying taxes to Darlanis to pay for her wars here."

"Your Queen won a 'minor' victory over my forces two days ago," Darlanis said to me as we joined her for breakfast the next morning. Her words coming as a surprise as I knew she would not be saying such to me unless she had a very good reason to do so. "Some of my commanders have grown a bit 'careless'," she added...

"You got your nose `bloodied' up near Cluro, didn't you?" I smiled, being well aware of what had "happened", it being obvious that Paula had managed to swallow her pride and take my "advice". The Imperial forces having grown used to the fact that they didn't have to pay too much attention to protecting their flank now. My sister having struck with an reinforced brigade at night after crossing the river further east where the Imperials didn't keep such a good watch. A number of swimmers having crossed first at night to deal with the thinned out Imperial guards at that point. I'd worked out the plans carefully with Paula and Tirana before leaving to come speak to Darlanis, hoping it might impress Darlanis enough to get her to negotiate some sort of a settlement now.

"It will not happen again!" Darlanis snapped, her temper now showing in the hot blaze of fury I saw there in those azure eyes! The slave girl hovering near by shrinking back in terror here now as Darlanis then slammed her fist down heavily against the table! Leaving no doubts that we'd been more successful than I'd hoped.

"As you said yesterday, I am a better `Warlady'," I smiled.

"You `mind' your mouth or I'll...!!" Darlanis snarled back!

"Or you'll run me through with your sword?" I smiled at her as the Empress sat there, obvious not at all happy at this news!! I didn't see Lara anywhere about, but I supposed she had things of her own to take care of. Being the "favorite" of Darlanis no doubt gave her a certain "power" here that she could exploit too.

"One victory does not win a war!" the Empress snapped at me. Her very manner indicating that Paula had indeed done very well! Better than I'd hoped for, although Paula was obviously competent at military command, especially in doing a task like this here... This "hit and run" raid at night upon an Imperial Legion. "I'm ordering Taraback to take direct command of the front now." Darlanis snapped, it being obvious that Paula had indeed struck the Imperials a blow that had "shaken" them. That had left them well aware that they were not as invincible as they'd previously tended to believe. Perhaps even doubting that victory would be "theirs" as their Empress had been promising them all along here! That perhaps she'd also lied in saying that "Lys was with them"! * * The German soldiers of World War One were told by their government that "God was with them" in this. (Gott Mit Uns) (J.B.B.)

"I'm sure Paula would agree to `reasonable' terms," I said, perhaps pushing my luck here, considering how Darlanis felt now! "We would still like to live in peace with you," I said to this golden haired beauty whose "dream" suddenly didn't seem so likely now as it had even the night before... I recalled Paula there at the seacoast town of "Fisher's Landing" where she'd actually repulsed an invasion attempt by this very same Empress now sitting there before me. Remembering how "competent" Paula was there on her unicorn, giving her orders, directing her forces. I knew she had gotten high marks at the Academy, but I'd never considered in all the years she'd been Queen of Trelandar that she was a fighting Queen, a Queen who might also well command Legions in battle.

"I'm sure you would like an early start back to your lines," Darlanis answered in an icy voice, obviously furious at me here. It did not seem likely now that we were about to enjoy breakfast.

"She's not going to let something like that `happen' to her again," Carl said to me as soon as our little galley got under way, Darlanis having been "polite" at the end, and that was all.

"The `shoe' is on the other foot now," I smiled back at him, waving to Darlanis, who didn't bother waving back at me here now. It was a lovely early fall day, the sun warm, the breeze pleasing as it came

off the Pacific. The steady beat of the drum keeping time for the oars "stirring" in a way to my soul, as if deep down inside there was truly perhaps a Warrioreess living deep there inside. A few white clouds gently drifted across the sky as we now worked our way out from Trella's harbor, meeting the first heavy roll of the open sea as we came to the opening that led out into the Pacific ocean. The captain now barking his orders, the lateen sail being raised now on its stub mast. The oars being slid inboard as we switched over to drawing the power of the wind, the painted eyes of our vessel now looking on towards the south. The movement of the deck beneath my feet bothering me but little now.

"We're coming into port now, your Ladyship," the captain of the little galley said to me as I sat there talking with my husband here in the small stern cabin that had been put at my disposal while aboard. "There's a welcoming committee for you too."

"I suppose I'd better wear my hat and veil," I now smiled.

"All hail our new Warlady, Lady Sanda!" the mayor now yelled to everyone, the people now gathered giving out with a good cheer as I stepped up on to the dock. Carl making sure that I got off the galley safely, his powerful grip almost dragging me up on to the dock. The mayor, who obviously enjoyed a good meal from the looks of him, now ordering the trumpets played in my honor here. The thought going through my mind that there might be something to this custom of veiling, as it did hide the stupid grin I had!! His honor then announcing in loud tones that the town was going to be named after me, hereby being known as "Sanda's Landing"...

"I am deeply honored," I answered, not knowing what else to say here. It being obvious that news had reached here of what my sister had done to the Imperials, and no doubt she'd given me all the "credit" for planning it, even if I hadn't taken part in it!! "But thanks should be given to those who fought here, who died in battle so that you might live in freedom," I said to them. Aware that had it not been for what I'd said to Paula, Darlanis would now have her "beachhead" here, and her ships would be here in the harbor right now discharging her troops upon Trelandarian soil as they gathered to follow their mistress in her conquest of us now. It was "true" that there were other places she could land forces, but Darlanis had needed a spot fairly close to her own lines, not a second invasion point that we could bottle up without trouble. The people of Trelandar were starting to realize that we had no where to run, that we had to stand and fight, not just rely upon our own military to defend us. Militias were being formed in the villages and towns of Trelandar, even if such activities were not being encouraged by the government, but because more and more of the people of Trelandar recalled that LADY SANDA recommended it!! My letters to the newspapers of Trelandar having borne fruit now.

"But had not Lady Sanda, our Lady Sanda spoke the truth, regardless of 'cost' to herself, we would all be kneeling as slaves before the Bitch of Sarn," the mayor declared in loud tones here. A number of men and women, armed with swords and bows, "raising" them up in salute, their attire leaving no doubts that they were not a part of the regular armed forces of Trelandar, but militia! "It is Lady Sanda, our Warlady, who saved us all from Darlanis!!" The cheering that rang out at these brave words making my eyes wet with tears as I realized it might be possible we could defeat Darlanis in war, if not the sort of a war that she expected here!

Chapter Twenty

"It's hard to believe how much has 'changed'," Carl said to me as we strolled the streets of Sanda's Landing, the entire town now "different", the armored Warriors and Warrioreesses leaving no doubts that they were serious about keeping Darlanis at bay here. A week ago I'd been only a guerrilla leader, fighting against the Imperials in a battle that everyone admitted was hopeless. I had tried to point out to people that we could defeat Darlanis if we stood together as one nation against her. That we had to "rely" upon ourselves, not upon the "government" to defend us here now. "Statements" that had not in the least endeared me to my sister. It was getting dark now, the sun having set, the night coming...

"Paula has recollected the fact that she is a Warrioreess," I answered as we paused to look out at the last of the sunset now. A prostitute strolling on by, a sword at her hip, although most of those now carrying them had little knowledge yet in their use. People were taking instructions, others practicing their archery, the Iron Workers hard at work making arms for everyone now. We were also learning that those who wished to live in peace must be prepared at all times to fight for peace, not depend upon others to give it to them. A few even were questioning our "political system" now, whether or not we wished to place so much POWER in the hands of any one person, in a Queen who could make mistakes. Some spoke of how things were done in Dularn, in that far land to the north from where Darlanis had come so many years ago now. Of a political system where people had a "say" in things, although I was well aware that Dularn was not as "democratic" as people now believed, or perhaps more likely wished to believe that it was...

"It's like there's suddenly 'hope' again," Carl said to me. Only the week before I'd noticed how the people of Trelandar had seemed to have "given up", lost hope of our ever winning the war against Darlanis, something that the Imperials themselves too had believed, that their own Empress had believed before suddenly she had found that Queen Paula of Trelandar was still a "Warrioreess". We'd won two victories against the Empire, the first against Darlanis herself in a bloody nighttime battle I'd been "witness" to. The second being the attack upon the Imperial Legion at Cluro by Paula, an attack that had taught the Imperials we weren't licked by any means yet. That we had LEADERSHIP, and a new WARLADY who was a far better "tactician" than any on the Imperial side here.

"Darlanis is stubborn, she won't give up her dreams easily," I said, aware of what the Empress of California was truly like. In a way I felt sorry for Darlanis, knowing what I did about her. She was not an "evil" person in the same way as Princess Tara, I knew, Darlanis being a person who believed that she acting in the best long term interests of all Mankind. That she was indeed the "second Janet Rogers" that Mankind had spoken of for centuries. The woman who would give Man back what he'd once had long ago in an age that is really more myth and legend than anything else...

"You seem to feel 'sorry' for her," Carl said to me, sensing my mood as the darkness came, the patrolling figures of our own forces guarding this port hardly "visible" as the stars came out.

"She is the 'way' that she is because she's been 'hurt' so much in her life that she wants to 'strike out' at everyone," I said to him, remembering what it had been like as her friend then at the Academy. The snide remarks made behind her back, the vicious little jokes that would be passed from hand to hand, some of which I'd been on the receiving end too for being her friend. "Comments" of the sort like "Does she 'taste' good?" and such so. And now it would be "personal" between Darlanis and me, my knowledge of military tactics against her long range strategic plans.

"We'd all be a lot better off if 'she' was dead," he said.

"And the world would be the 'less' for it..." I replied.* * Darlanis was not the evil person that I tried to her make her out to be while I was head of the "Free Trelandar Movement" I organized after the death of

Paula and Darlanis' resulting takeover of Trelandar. I also know too that a lot of what she was blamed for was actually the work of Princess Tara, who was truly a demon from Hell itself in both "fact" and in her reputation... On the other hand I naturally wanted people to believe in an evil Darlanis, in a Darlanis who did "horrible things" to people when I myself "knew better". As Darlanis once said to me a long time ago, "Sanda, if you were my friend, I'd hate to have you as an enemy!"

(later)

"I guess its back to `making war'," Carl grinned to me as we got ready for bed, carefully avoiding mentioning that Paula had warned me earlier here that Darlanis would not "yield" on her demands for us. That my voyage to Trella had been a waste of time.

"Back to making widows and orphans," I smiled, undressing.

"Sometimes I wonder about you, Sanda," he grinned at me.

"Any `doubts' about me as a woman?" I asked, now nude.

"None at all," Carl grinned, taking me in his arms.

"It is nice to be `wanted'," I smiled, kissing him.

(thenext morning)

"Who is it?" I growled as the pounding came on the door, the gray light of dawn just peeking into the window here, Carl rolling over, grabbing for something to cover himself, getting out of bed as I wondered WHO would be bothering us this time of the day? My husband going to the door, unbarring it, the door now swinging open, then much to our surprise Queen Paula came strolling right in! The landlord grinning at me like a stupid fool might do too!

"Damn `modern' women!" Carl muttered under his breath, Queen Paula giving me a big friendly grin as she sat on the edge of the bed looking at me. Carl shutting the door, Paula grinning back.

"I've been married," Paula smiled, Carl then nodding back.

"You got Darlanis very `upset'," I smiled, Paula nodding.

"I expect she doesn't feel so `confident' now," she spoke.

"She was sure angry enough at Sanda," Carl now added here.

"My sister has good taste in men," Paula grinned in reply.

"And she's the Queen of Trelandar!" Carl laughed in return.

"We took them by surprise before they could get out of their tents," Paula said as she sat there telling of what had happened. "Taking out their sentries as we did certainly did pay off here." This having been a task that I'd assigned to the Huntresses and those who were skilled in woodcraft, in sneaky activities of all sorts, Paula having recruited at my suggestion a force of those who in more common terms were not of a "sort" we commonly used in warfare. Those who had fled from Trella just ahead of Darlanis' guardsmen. Poachers, footpads, people who "sought" the darkness.

"We have to keep up the 'pressure' on Darlanis, force her to spread her forces out, while we concentrate ours for attacks," I said to her, such being simple "tactics" of hit and run warfare. We couldn't stand and fight with Darlanis' forces, something we'd been taught ever since the invasion early this spring, but we did have the ability of operations with a friendly populace supporting us, while Darlanis in turn had to face hostile people wherever she turned, thanks in part to what Princess Tara had done now. It was true that Tara terrified people, but on the other hand she also made "enemies" of the people, and had taught them that they had no choice now but to support us against the Sarnian invaders.

"Going to be cavalry work, not infantry work," Carl pointed out, wiping his face after shaving. "Hitting the Imperials where they are 'unprepared' for attack, the very sort of 'warfare' that Sanda here has been carrying out for since they invaded us now." Paula nodding, her dark eyes meeting mine as I nodded in reply, aware of the lives that would be lost, most cavalry being women.

"Darlanis could smash through our defenses, our lines," Paula said, no doubt well aware that we were the "weaker" here now. That any time the Empress was willing to sacrifice the lives, we could be defeated in open battle, if she so wished it to be here. She would lose thousands of lives, if not tens of thousands, but it could be done, and I suspected she might eventually do so now. In her boots I would have made landings all the way up and down the coastline, forcing Trelandar to fight a war we couldn't win.

"It will 'cost' her dearly," I answered, my sister nodding.

"And 'weaken' her to the point that we can win against her," Carl said, getting dressed, buckling on his weapons belt here. I supposed it would come to that eventually, a "war" that would be like some of those written of in the old books, wars where no one had really "won", like World War One. We'd beat Darlanis, but at a "price" that Trelandar would be paying for a generation, with broken families, children who would have only dim memories of a father or mother, some even who would be without any parents now. I wondered too if the country would survive, or would it "revert" back to what it had been before? Without a strong central government Trelandar would once again become not a "nation" as such, but more like what the nations of Europe had once been long ago.* * This is of course what actually happened after Darlanis' conquest of us here in 2550, although it was done "intentionally" to keep us weak, thus making us less of a threat. Trelandar not being "reunited" as a nation until 2565 under Queen Lorraine. Thus for fifteen years there was no actual central government as such, although there was a sort of "national administration". (Sanda)

"Victory will be ours," Paula spoke, seeing me nod in reply.

"And may Lyshave mercy upon us all," I spoke to them both.

Chapter Twenty One

The rain was "cold", a fall drizzle that chilled one to the bone, the wet grass through which I crawled now soaking me to the skin as I worked my way up to the brush behind which Carl had hid himself. The Imperials on sentry duty no doubt thinking more of getting under shelter than so concerning themselves

with whatever laid out there in the "darkness" of this miserable October night. We were quite high up, in the foothills of the Sierras, our task being to teach the enemy that no where he went was there safety. The dark boles of the trees only dark shadows here in the night. The Imperial encampment itself just barely visible before us now.

"Must be fifty of them," he whispered to me, well aware that we were outnumbered by almost two to one here. A dark figure now slithering through the grass towards us, Marta Satel, my faithful officer, who had in the last month seen so many die in battle...

"We have the 'advantage' of surprise," I whispered back now, aware too of how many had died following their Warlady's command. I tried never to "close" with the enemy, my task here being more to "harass", but even so often we took casualties, paying with my own people's lives for the souls of the Imperials we sent to Lys.

"Should have been a whore," Marta whispered, crawling up. It being a classical joke among Warriresses that it is better to be a whore than a Warriress as whores do all their work in bed.

"Too fucking far for your bows," Carl muttered to us then.

"About a hundred, hundred and twenty," Marta ventured now.

"Fear can be as much a weapon as a sword," I pointed out.

"We need to kill them, not just 'scare' them," she breathed.

"Those you can hit, you can kill," I hissed, not in the best of moods. "We will surround them on three sides, shoot arrows into their camp. They will not be able to see where the arrows are coming from, only sense that they are surrounded on three sides by a foe whose numbers they have no way of 'knowing' here." I suspected that terror would do the rest. Those who charged us we could shoot, those who fled we could hunt down if we wanted... If I'd had larger forces I would have posted archers hidden in the path that those escaping would take, but my force was far too small for me to be able to do this now. Although we were killing far more of the enemy than they were of us, the odds seemed to be such that no matter how many we killed, there were always "more"! It was a lot like killing insects. You never seemed to win here!

"Hold your fire until I give the signal," I breathed, the crossbowman next to me nodding. The crossbows would shoot further than wouldbows, but their rate of fire was far slower too. These were the more common military crossbow, drawn by belt hook, and didn't shoot a bolt even as far actually than my compound bow would shoot arrows. It is possible to fire such weapons from a prone position, but you must roll over to recock the weapon then. On the other hand it is hard to shoot a bow from prone and aim well, the usual requirement being here to kneel while shooting if you are using the usual composite military bow or a compound like mine, which is quite rare, although Darlanis thinks highly of her own, which she has used to such effect that there is a sort of a legend about her, it being claimed that she could shoot arrows to a range of three hundred yards, which is I suppose possible here. Darlanis being a very strong woman, strong as many men might be. * * The compound bows designed by Lorraine perhaps represented the most advanced ever designed with their oddly shaped design, which allowed the use of an arrow shorter than normal, a lighter arrow which could be shot further. Darlanis once shot a number of arrows a number of years ago to a distance of about three hundred and fifty yards (light target type arrows) with a compound bow of Lorraine's design drawing about 85#. Lorraine herself used a compound drawing 70# and could often shoot three hundred. (Sanda)

"Now!" I cried, drawing the arrow back to my cheek, releasing it, the missile only a blurred streak lost in the darkness... My people firing, yells of surprise from the Imperials leaving no doubts that they were being awoke from sleep to find themselves under fire, which tends to add to one's confusion in such cases!

I saw a man hunch over, grab for his leg, obviously hit. I could see others running about, my second arrow firing off here. One could not aim effectively at such ranges at individual targets, but such barrage fire was extremely effective never the less against an encampment of this nature, especially at night! The crossbowman beside me rolling over, hooking his bowstring to his belthook, getting a foot into the stirrup and straightening his body, drawing the string back to the catch. My third arrow now being shot as I knelt there on one knee beside him, another woman, only a shadow in the darkness, firing there on my left as I reached into my quiver for a fourth. Under such conditions as this I can fire an arrow fairly well aimed about a dozen times a minute, with the maximum "cast" of my bow being about 250 yards.

I saw a group of Imperials dash out from the camp towards us, making targets of themselves, several falling to arrows as we shifted aim, the enemy of course having little idea of where we were. Our weapons, unlike those of the past, having no "muzzle flash" to guide the eye of the enemy, a "point" that was clearly brought home here to Lorraine herself when Carol Simmons lead the attack upon her estates in 2567. One of the few times when the famous Warlady found herself being "out generated" by another... Tactics that for all I know Carol might have learned from me too! My activities in this war against Darlanis having been carefully studied by those who knew they might someday have to fight here.* * As has been noted elsewhere, the Free Trelandar Movement was in "communication" with Dularn, and knowledge of my methods and tactics were known to the Dularnians, who used me as an "example" in their own militia training of what to "do" when invasion came. I should write here too that I obtained many of my tactics from old books written back when firearms were in use, and adapted these to our own tactics based here upon the use of bows and crossbows.

Lorraine's poor performance as commander of the Athena when she "lost" to the North Star and the North Wind were due more to her anger at being "outwitted" by Carol Simmons as the Athena was not a good choice. In this it was more a matter of her opinion of Carol that counted here, as Lorraine felt "insulted" that she, Warlady of the Empire of California, could be so humiliated by a woman like Carol here! Carol having burned several of Lorraine's first rates, as well as having made a successful attack upon Lorraine's estate from the forest to the south after making a landing further southwards here. It is "ironic" too that Lorraine died there only feet from the same "place" that Carol led her attack from, the outlaws that attacked us having used the same tactics to a degree that Carol had then. What perhaps separates me from Lorraine, or Darlanis here too was that both of them were personally "courageous" in a way I never was or never will be. They were both truly of the Warriress caste, they both planned to die with swords in their hands, and both of them wished to die too in battle, not in a bed of age or disease. In a way they were both "legends in their own time", and I recall that Lorraine said when she learned of the death of Darlanis that a thousand years hence her name would still be honored among Men. Just as I know Lorraine's will be now upon a world a dot of light in the nighttime sky. She and Darlanis were two of a kind that will never be seen again. Legends of a world that once was... (Sanda)

"Die!" the man screamed, taking my arrow from only feet away into his chest, staggering back in the darkness, falling, another now running up as I dropped my bow to whip out my blade. Greeting the steel of his sword with mine as we engaged now in a deadly duel there in the darkness, his blade cutting my right arm as we fought furiously before my slash to his throat put an "end" to this bloody battle here! The Imperial trooper staggering back, the woman next to me now putting an arrow into him just to "make sure" as more came out of the darkness like some flock of ghosts!

"Keep 'firing' on them!" I yelled, dropping my sword to grab for my bow, the cut on my forearm

stinging, bleeding as I grabbed another arrow and got it nocked on the string. Something going "zip" over my head as some Imperial crossbowman chanced a shot... Others now fleeing, running off into the darkness away from us!!!

"I haven't been `married' to you that long that I want to start looking for another wife," Carl said to me as he bandaged my wound. Fortunately it had been across the top of my arm, and although the blade had cut me to the bone, it wasn't "serious".

"My swordsmanship is rusty," I admitted, knowing it was.

"You're taking too many `risks'," Marta said to me now.

"If we `ease up', then Paula has to face these," I said.

"And when you're killed?" Carl retorted right back at me.

"Then you fight on, see that Trelandar remains free," I replied, shivering in the cold, aware of how close it had been now. Thinking of how "easy" it would be to change my tactics, stop doing the things I was doing, stop taking the risks that I was now. Leading this little force of mine in these attacks upon an enemy who seemed to come swarming over our country like some plague...

Chapter Twenty Two

"Dangerous what we're doing," Marta said to me as we huddled in our blankets, a tiny fire serving more to cheer us than warm. We were far to the north of our lines now, up into the foothills there east of Thistle, with the Sierras further yet to the east. It was now getting noticeably "colder", especially at night, with frosts soon to be expected here at these heights as we came into the last of October and moved into November. The war itself had become a stalemate, our tactics having served only to allow us to hold what part of Trelandar we had left, while Darlanis consolidated her power over the rest of it. On the other hand Darlanis was having "troubles" of her own as we'd learned from the prisoners of war that Paula had taken here. While those of the "black castes" were still loyal to her, she was having trouble with her own men at arms, at those who formed up the ranks of her Legions. Men terrified of going on patrol, meeting up with us at night... Stories told of Warriresses who rode out never to be seen again.

"You didn't have to come along," I pointed out to her here. Her golden hair making me think of Darlanis for some reason now.

"You're our Warlady, I feel `responsible'," she answered.

"We'll be all right," I replied, aware of the risks here.

"We'll be a family," Carl said to me, aware of our mission.

"Yes," I said, thinking of my son, knowing there would be an "adjustment" that would have to be made. Taime was dead, and I was remarried, another man's wife now, "Talen" now, not "Hibber". Carl was a

Warrior, not a Scribe, a man of a different "culture". His own family, his wife, his daughter, had died there at Trella. I wondered what I would say to my mother in law after this time.

"I'm going alone," I said, pausing there at the edge of the woods, there being no evidence of anything out of the ordinary... No patrolling Imperials, just the fields, trees here and there.

"Sanda..." Carl said, looking at me, aware of the dangers.

"It's 'better' if I do it this way," I said, seeing him nod. Marta Satel sitting there on her unicorn, our animals showing in their appearance, their coats that they were hardused, something I feared that someone more "observant" than most might so notice. The little house ahead having been one belonging to friends then. Our own manor near Thistle having been taken by the Imperials who sought to destroy everything they could of our own upper classes. Replacing them with Imperial Lords and Ladies loyal to Darlanis.

"Good luck'," Marta said, her eyes meeting mine as I nodded and then kicked my tired dapple gray into a trot across the open fields towards the house sitting there all by its lonesome here. I carried no weapons, not even the dagger most free women carry. The sun shining brightly in the sky, although the air was "cool". I was tired from the long ride, from sleeping on the ground, not at my best, my hair needing brushing, a bath something I needed. My dress a woolen blouse and a leather skirt, common enough sorts of attire that I'd draw little notice from anyone about here now.

I saw Jerry stand up, look at me, at this woman he'd not now "seen" for months, this woman on her dapple gray mare he'd ridden with his mother's comforting arms around him. The dog beside him growling in warning, the hair standing up on the Boston Terrier's back. The puppy having been a gift of my sister's two years ago. His dress like that of any Trelandarian boy, jacket and trousers. Obviously he'd been hard at play, perhaps "pestering" some ants, one species of which now grows to be several inches in length...

"Mother?" Jerry breathed, perhaps not "believing" his eyes, then running up to me here, Trouble (his dog) at his side barking at me. His dark eyes looking up into mine as I leaped down, took him in my arms, hugging him to me, my eyes wet with emotion as I held him to myself, to my no doubt by now rather smelly self. It had been a long time, "longer" for a boy like him than an adult. I had no idea of what my parents had told him, of what he knew of me save that I was fighting for our country against the Empire. My hand stroking his hair, my eyes moist with tears as I held him to me. "You were gone SO LONG..." he breathed out, clinging now.

"Sanda? Is that you?" the woman spoke, peering out at me, making me think of an owl, bringing back memories of years ago... We'd been friends long before Taime and I grew "serious" about each other, before I went to the Academy to become a Warriress as my parents wished, before I fought that duel that taught me of "realities" I'd never faced before. Mrs. Hibber still the "same" as ever, still the same Katherine Hibber I'd known for so long. Still the old Scribe who had told me so many tales of long ago. Who had tutored me, taught me how to read, write, do figuring... She was getting touches of gray in her hair, no doubt from all of what had happened here, her dark colored dress seemingly fitting. She'd married quite late in life, having been up in her seventies before she finally decided to allow her own neck to be "chained".

"My parents? Are they here?" I asked, standing up, holding my son, my unicorn searching the ground looking for something to eat. The Boston Terrier looking up at me, cute as only a Boston can be, the royal dog of Trelandar dating back to Amethysta here.

"You'd better come in, there is 'much' you should know," she answered, her tone of voice leaving few doubts of things now too! Nor did the black silk she wore about her neck chain either here! The mark of a wife in mourning, one who has been freshly widowed!

"The Imperials demanded from us 'everything', even our own daughters for their pleasure," Katherine spoke, her voice level, almost emotionless here as she sat across from me. "Your father stood before our people, his wife there at his side, and told the Imperials that only the minions of the EVIL ONE Himself would do such things..." she continued on here. "He was truly of the Warriors, even without a sword at his hip as usual." I could see the scene in my own mind, my father there. My mother tall at his side as always, loyal, faithful... No doubt aware of "what" they faced. "That Warlady of theirs, that Tara Bisan, ordered her men to shoot, to kill! Saying that she would teach us the 'folly' of resisting!" she spoke, her eyes glittering as she told the tale. Tales I'd heard elsewhere of Tara's activities, the woman like a Nazi from the 20th Century. The interior of the house warm, comfortable, bringing memories of my own childhood, of a land where war was something that men spoke, tales of derring do, while the black clad women who wore their neck chains smiled at each other. Their children playing together quietly while the adults talked.

"Your daughter?" I asked now, having written her of Taime's own death in battle somewhere to the south of Trella four months ago. One of my people having delivered the letter I'd written so she'd "know" even if I'd not been able to do so in person due to the war. My arm protectively around my son as I sat there on the sofa, seeing Katherine shaking her head now in the negative. The dog "dozing" on the carpet, but yet alert, itsears moving a bit. A house where generations hadlived, died, a century or more now. Katherine's parents had lived here, died here some decades ago.

"A slave girl in their brothels, if Dia is not dead by now!" the widow snapped back, her eyes burning with fury into my own!! The girl had been fifteen, but I supposed they hadn't cared any. Rape and pillage having been common wherever Imperials went here. "Damn the soul of Darlanis to Hell! Let her live for eternity as a slave girl of the EVIL ONE, lick his claws as she so deserves!" The EVIL ONE being pictured in THE BOOK OF LYS as being a horrid looking being much like a gigantic spider, a thing of many legs, each tipped with claws much like those of the legs of a Lorr...

"You can come with us, help us fight," I said to her.

"Take your son with you, teach him to hate," she said.

"And you?" I asked, seeing her eyes, the madness in them.

"Take him, go, leave this place," Katherine said, getting up now. The dog barking, going to the door, running ahead of her, a "warning" that not everything was as it should be now. Saying to me then, "Your mother's sword is in the closet there, get it..." A glimpse out the window through the curtains leaving no doubts!

I stood waiting behind the door as Katherine Hibber opened it, the booted feet of the Imperial trooper thumping on the steps as he came climbing up, thudding across the porch, followed by his two companions. Men in helmets, chain mail, brutal men, just the sort that would follow "The Queen of Darkness" as some now so called Tara, referring to the fact she'd once been Queen of Sarn.

I came spinning around the door, pivoting on my left foot, my mother's beautiful slim sword, a blade of stainless steel five centuries old, there in my hand as I thrust, driving up into his throat, cutting, piercing, his outcry only a strangled gurgle... The second man leaping back, going for his sword, but too slow, a quick thrust finishing him as Carl had taught me to me to do, my once "rusty" skills with a blade now only

a thing of the past. I met the blade of the third, the clash of steel swift and deadly. Catching his blade in mine, twisting, "thrusting" as Carl taught!

"Your mother would be proud of you," Katherine smiled then. My son standing there wide eyed, looking first at the dead men, and then at me, the look on his face speaking much of things now.

"If any learn..." I breathed back, thinking of her here now. What the Imperials would do to her if they learned of this here. It was for this reason that I carried poison, a swifter death...

"Drag them into the woods, leave them for the 'beasts'," she answered, "Let their souls face the judgment of Lys," she added. "No doubt they have not seen a Priestess for some time," she said to me with a grin, it being held of course that Lys' judgment of your soul will be far more strict if you ignore the Priestesses.

Chapter Twenty Three

I walked around the house, waved the sword I held, hoping that they would see, know that I was safe. That long slim blade that had belonged to my mother, that she'd worn there at her hip. A different sort of weapon from that I usually carried, this more a rapier than a slashing weapon, a blade forged by men now dust. Made of a steel alloy that not even time could destroy, rustless, made to be handed down from generation to generation, from mother to daughter. I thought of my mother, tall, black haired, truly a Warriress in a way I never could be... I saw then the answering flash from the forest, and a moment later, saw them riding forth.

"My husband Carl Talen, Marta Satel of the Warriresses," I introduced them to Katherine, remembering my mother, the way that she'd been truly of the Warriresses in a way that I never could be. More like Paula in some ways, the caste codes having "meaning" for her in a way that they could never be for me... Jerry moving to my side, putting his arm around me as they then dismounted, the bodies of the Imperial troopers leaving no doubts of things. Or that they had died at the hand of Trelandar's Warlady. It had been a "classic" ambush, simple "Academy" tactics. Surprising an unprepared enemy, as I'd so often done here lately.

"The sword..." Carl said, aware that I hadn't carried one.

"My mother's," I answered, the blade like none other now.

"She is 'worthy' of it too," Katherine spoke, Carl nodding.

"We have ridden long," I said then, Katherine smiling back.

"You are welcome to share my table and stay the night," she smiled back. In the morning we'd head back towards that part of Trelandar yet under the control of Paula, three days hard riding. I'd take Jerry with me, and we'd be a family once this was over.* * I still believed at this time that we'd eventually win against Darlanis, as we had fought her to a stalemate south of Trella. I was aware that we lacked the numbers to win any substantial "victories" against her Legions, but I felt that a long campaign of

"harassment" would eventually bring Darlanis to the peace table. As it turned out however, Darlanis did have other "alternatives". What she did was an act of desperation, but it did work. (Sanda)

"This entire area is under the domain of Lady Lana Daris," Katherine Hibber said as we sat there at the table, the bodies of the Imperial troopers having been disposed of where it was likely now that little suspicion would fall upon my former mother in law should the Empire wish to determine what happened to them here... It was getting late, the sun soon to set as we ate our dinner together. "We're 'lucky' that she's of Trelandarian birth, and not really one of 'them'," Katherine continued on here, saying that Lady Lana had done a lot to see to it that the worst of the Imperial abuses came to an end. Her husband Lord Daris of Sarn, was a "power" in the new Imperial Senate, one of enough authority in any case she claimed to make his own wife a "power" in the area. Lana was said to be both "beautiful" and an awesome swordswoman, one perhaps even a "match" for such as Darlanis and Tara, we were told. Well "liked" too by most of the people living here. The lamp there on the table lighting up her face as she spoke, my son sitting there listening to us all. Trouble sitting there by his chair, the Boston Terrier hoping for a tidbit off his plate here.

"Then we won't make any 'troubles' for her," I smiled.

"How much of 'this' is yours?" Carl asked me then.

"A 'part', all south of Thistle," I smiled back.

"It all belongs to the Daris' now," Katherine said.

"Thanks to Darlanis and her ambitions," Marta retorted.

"Lady Lana has asked us not to 'resist'," Katherine said.

"Lady Lana is an 'Imperial'," my officer swiftly retorted.

"She has done everything she can for us," Katherine replied.

"Makes the people easier to 'govern' that way," Marta said, the implication of her comments here something none of us missed.

"Standard tactics for control of slaves," Carl pointed out, his eyes holding mine as I nodded thoughtfully back in reply now. Lady Lana was a "competent" overlord, better than most Imperials.

"First you let them 'feel' the whip, then you 'reward' those who 'kowtow' to you," I explained, seeing Katherine nodding then. Darlanis was noted for using such tactics, I might mention here. * * Her "relationship" with Lara Warsan may have been such. On the other hand Warsan was also helpful towards my own F.T.M. (Sanda)

"You are so 'beaten down' that someone like Lady Lana seems like a 'savior' to you when really she is only just another Imperial overlord," Marta Satel spoke. The tone of her voice leaving no doubts as to her feelings in this matter. I supposed that it was possible that Lady Lana was everything she was said to be, as not all Imperial lords and ladies were evil oppressive overlords, but one does not speak well of the enemy even if the enemy isn't as EVIL as what your own propaganda makes them out to be here... * * A good example of this are the two books that Bob Simmons wrote about their adventures in the 26th Century which show Lorraine in a different "light" than what her own writings indicate. (Sanda)

"Regardless of what you think of her, she's at least better than 'most' of them," Katherine retorted, perhaps correctly here. I supposed that could be "possible", judging from my own "experiences" with Darlanis, who was not in my opinion an "evil" person. Excessively "ambitious", perhaps not completely "sane", Darlanis was still a person that it was actually hard to truly hate here. She didn't herself "abuse" people, she did have a well developed sense of "morality" in a way, which we tried to downplay with our own propaganda here, while the Imperials of course played it up. To them she was "The Queen of Light", whereas we saw her more as being The Queen of Darkness, fighting here on the side of "EVIL". "Gott Mit Uns", I mused, recalling the old saying centuries ago. Both Paula and Darlanis claimed Lys was "on our side", although the Priestesses of Lys did not support either Queen's claim here.

"We are at 'war' with these people," I said, aware that many Imperials probably were good husbands, fathers, the Warrioreses that we shot down from ambush no doubt were good wives, mothers. It is always best in warfare to see the enemy as the ENEMY, those who are the minions of the EVIL ONE, His own evil spawn sent here to Earth to carry out war, killing, rape and pillage against you. Then when you shoot your arrows, your crossbow bolts, you do not feel as if you are killing a fellow human being, someone who has been a father, a mother, a person who might be not "evil" at all. In World War One the "enemy" were called "Huns", in another war later on in that century they were called "VC", and later yet in the 21st Century during the great wars in the Middle East they were called "Slams", based perhaps on their religion of Islam. * * This parallels the "opinions" that many people had of the Lorr, who were seen as "Bugs", which is probably "why" The War of 2047 took place. The Lorr of course seeing us much as we saw them... It is always "easy" to see the "enemy" as being "subhuman beasts" of one sort or another, as being without honor, without morality. Without the least shred of human decency, without any compassion. This last was used against the Imperials by my sister, and also I did the same with my Free Trelandar Movement, which depicted them in terms of brutal oppressors, as exploiters of the people of our country, whereas the reality was of course quite different. Some Imperial overlords were "despicable", while others did everything that they could make the lives of those who they ruled "better". Darlanis herself was never the evil person we made her out to be, something that the Empress reminded me of a number of times, much to my own discomfort as I was very much aware that she was right! On the other hand Princess Tara was all I said she was... (Sanda)

"Perhaps some of them are not our enemies." she pointed out. I supposed it could be true, but one did not "admit" such things.

"All Imperials are our 'enemies'!" Marta Satel snapped back. To Marta the only "good" Imperial was one that she'd just killed. She didn't mutilate the dead or steal from them as some, but she hated with a deep burning hatred that left no room for feeling...

"They are no 'different' than we would be had our Queen followed the same path that Darlanis has," Katherine Hibber smiled. I was well aware that Trelandarians had done a number of things I had no wish to discuss, such as the killing of wounded and such. The torturing of prisoners, the raping of captured enemy women... We also executed those here who betrayed us by helping the enemy. In some people's eyes we were to be as feared as Imperial troops! Taking our vengeance upon those who had turned against Trelandar.

"You aren't going to 'win' this argument," I said to Marta.

"I'll start cleaning up," Katherine smiled, getting up.

"I'll help," I spoke, smiling at my son sitting there.

"Someone's coming," Katherine spoke, the dog barking.

"Damn!" I hissed, peeking out through the curtains.

"That's Lady Lana!" Katherine spoke in awe quietly.

"We'll take her by surprise," I said, drawing my blade.

"Don't hurt her!" Katherine breathed, going now to the door. Carl and Marta withdrawing and taking my son with them into the kitchen. Hopefully Lady Lana had not noticed "anything" here... I did not wish to kill, but I knew it could become necessary now as I heard her boots clumping on the porch steps, heard her step to the door. My palm damp around the hilt of my mother's sword.

Chapter Twenty Four

"Good Evening, Widow Hibber," the attractive Imperial spoke, stepping into the house, no doubt aware of the odor of food here. Her further comment a gasp of shock as I put my point to the side of her neck, her eyes going wide now as she turned to look at me. Her black tunic, hose and weapons the mark of the warrior woman.

"I am Lady Sanda of Trelandar," I spoke in level tones here, the tip of my blade pressed in warning up against her jugular. I supposed that Lady Lana Daris would know "who" I was here. Katherine closing the door behind her, my blade pressed up against Lana's throat in a way that left no doubts of what I might do...

"I pray Lyswill have mercy on my soul," Lady Lanaspoke, a weak smile on her lovely lips as she waited for the deadly thrust that would take her life. She was a beautiful woman, a delight. A lovely brownette, hazel eyed, about 5'7", with a "figure" that would have brought forty gold crowns in any proper slave market.

"She does not wish your life," Katherine Hibber said then.

"Oh..." replied the Lady Lana, now seeing Carl and Marta. I supposed she could draw the proper conclusions from all this now.

"We should be able to get a good 'ransom' for her," Marta said, regarding the Lady Lana Daris, her voice "unpleasant" here. Marta having no love for any Imperial, even onelike Lady Lana.

"No," I spoke, coming to a decision, lowering my point.

"But, my Warlady..." Marta protested, surprised here.

"As you noted, I am the 'Warlady'," I smiled in reply.

"You came after your son," Lady Lana now said to me then.

"'Smart' as well as beautiful," Carl grinned back at me. It was obvious that Lana knew "more" about me than she should have.

"A patrol is 'missing'," Lady Lana answered, standing there. The gold links of her neck chain gleaming there in the lamplight. No doubt she had a pretty good idea of what had happened here... And of what could also "happen" to her if we wished to do so now. She was quite "feminine", more so in a "way" than I am, and I had no doubt that she'd bring us excellent price in any slave market. Not that I would ever do such to a woman without good reason, but Lady Lana was well aware of the fact that her "side" was doing just that to Trelandarian women, and that we did the "same" too.

"My mother killed them, all three of them!" my son spoke.

"I was trained as a Warriress," I said, Lana nodding.

"Do you wish me to strip?" Lana said, standing there.

"We'll let you go as soon as we leave," I smiled to her.

"I'm glad you don't live up to your 'reputation'," she said. The Imperials depicting me as a blood thirsty terrorist who made war upon anyone, including helpless women and children, a Warlady who executed her own people for any "submission" to the Empire..."I suppose however you'd feel better if I wasn't wearing these," she smiled, reaching down to unbuckle her ornate weapons belt.

"I believe you are a woman of honor," I now smiled back.

"Darlanis is an 'idealist', a woman who 'believes' that what once existed can in some form once again exist," Lana said to us as she stood there drying the dish I'd just washed, Marta putting away while Katherine stood and watched. The scene I supposed so utterly "domestic" that you would have never thought that we were all actually "enemies", that Lady Lana was an "Imperial", a woman who under other circumstances any of us would have gladly killed. She was a mother, with a son several years younger than my Jerry. A baby just recently "weaned" from the breast, Lana had told us.

"A 'fruitcake', living out her own 'fantasies'," Marta said, referring to Darlanis. "A 'nut' who has killed thousands of people, 'innocent' people... Like those of the past like Hitler, Stalin, Mao, that Iranian..." Referring here to some historical figures I'd told her about during our past conversations.

"Our Empress is a woman who wishes only the best for all of Mankind," Lana smiled back as she took another dish from me then. Lady Lana a woman that I found it very "easy" to like, to admire. "And we kill only those who resist us," Lady Lana then explained. That was the usual Imperial's line of defense to such questions. Along with the idea that we provoked them into a war with us now.

"People do have a right of self defense," I pointed out. I was aware that this right was "honored" only in Dularn, where the law actually stated that no free person could be disarmed but by a court of law for criminal activities. Even the American democracy of the pre Janet Rogers era had outlawed guns, depriving the people of the right of self defense. It being held at that time that there was no legal right despite clear Constitutional Law to the contrary for the people to be allowed to keep and bear arms.* * Lorraine's diaries go into detail into these matters. (Sanda) While their government maintained that depriving people of their rights would make society "safer", history shows the opposite, I should mention. Even that of Trelandar under Darlanis when outlaws became far more common due to the people being "disarmed"...It being "illegal" then for any not a part of the Imperial forces to "possess" arms, a policy that did not change until quite later on when it became obvious to Darlanis herself what the results of this

policy were, even her own Lords and Ladies opposing it then. Lady Lana being one of the leaders in the movement to restore to the people of Trelandar the "means" of defending themselves from the criminals and outlaws that were so commonplace after the war. Pointing out to her Empress that criminals, outlaws, and "terrorists" (like me here) were able to obtain or make weapons, while the "honest" people were "disarmed" by these useless futile laws.

"A point well taken," Lana smiled, her hazel eyes meeting my own. I liked her a lot despite the fact that she was an "enemy". I could see why Katherine had said what she had about the woman. "But yet I think in the long run we will be better off with someone like Darlanis ruling us than the sort of monarchs we've had."

"Queen Paula is a far 'better' ruler than Darlanis!" Marta snapped, putting away the last of the dishes as Katherine watched us. My son sitting there in the living room talking to Carl now. "And you invaded Trelandar, we didn't invade you!" she continued here, raising an issue that we'd been raising all along here now. It was true that we'd done things that had "provoked" Darlanis, such as seeking an alliance with Dularn against her, with Talon, Darlanis claiming that she'd been "forced" to "act" as she had so that her own country, her own people wouldn't end up on the short end of things. That the war she was fighting now was preventive in nature, not a war of aggression as we maintained that it was. There had also been an "incident", a "misunderstanding" there at the border that had cost lives, created a build up of tensions... A pirate too that we should have turned over to Sarn, but didn't.

"And does anyone but Paula have a 'say' in things?" Lana retorted, the Imperial Senate being "modeled" upon that of Dularn, with membership in it limited only to the "black" castes, just as it was now in Dularn. Although at least there everyone who was a taxpayer had a right to vote, whereas in the Empire only those of the Warriors and Warrioreesses had such a right. This being based upon the laws of Janet Rogers' World Federation, which had limited the right to vote to those who had served in the armed forces. Military service at that time being open to all, I might mention. The caste system we've got having come into place after The War. "Did anyone have a say in things beside your own King?" she asked as I drained the water from the sink and dried my hands, recalling how Paula would smile, that arrogant smile I so much remember even yet so many years after her death. The idea that she was a Queen, and that I didn't know anything about warfare at all now.* * The same accusation was made against Lorraine, who many people saw as being stubborn and bull headed, unwilling to "negotiate" a settlement to a war that no one wanted there in 2567. My action in doing so as Prime Minister of Trelandar was I felt "right" despite the fact that I'd gone directly against Lorraine's wishes. She admitted however that I'd done the "right thing", even if it was something that could have caused a constitutional crisis here in Trelandar as I did exceed my own legal authority as Prime Minister; only the Queen having the authority under the law to make treaties with foreign powers. I acted however upon the basis of doing what was "best" for my country, not pleasing Lorraine here. When Lorraine returned aboard the Athena after having been beaten in battle, that legendary battle so many have written of, which I feel only proves that Lorraine too was human, that she could make mistakes, I told her that I was willing to take the consequences of my actions, and if she wished my life, it was hers to take...Lorraine's answer being that Trelandar was fortunate to have such a Prime Minister as me, although she hoped in the future that I'd think a bit more before "pulling any more damn stunts like this!" I miss Lorraine a lot, the talks we had, the ideas we shared, the good times that we had together the last fifty six years. (Sanda)

"Yours is an army of conquest, not of liberation," Marta replied as she stood there listening. "You have not come to make life 'better' for the people of Trelandar, but to extract taxes." Those of the Empire being much higher than before, serving to pay for Darlanis' great armies, the cost of fighting this war here... The people of Trelandar were paying a high price for their "liberation" from their own government, and this woman was a part of the Imperial administration I realized, regarding the Lady Lana. "I'm not saying that you yourself are 'evil', but that the cause which you serve is 'evil' despite whatever your

Queen now says."

Chapter Twenty Five

"A lovely night," Lady Lana smiled to me as we stood behind the house, the stars shining down upon us, Mars bright in the sky there to the south. It was a bit "chill", but such is to be expected at this time of the year. Nothing of course like Dularn, where it snows in the winter, where smaller lakes do freeze over. The climate having changed from what it was before The War here.

"I wish you weren't an `enemy'," I said, looking at her.

"I keep wondering what I'd do in your place," she said.

"You'd fight just like I have," I said, sensing her nod.

"It is said that you do not bear the mark," she answered.

"I do not believe in `dueling'," I answered in level tones.

"Because of that classmate you killed," Lana said, touching my arm, standing there, her eyes dark pools in the starlight now. I supposed she would have known about it, as the incident was now well known thanks to the papers, and the fact that I was the sister of the Queen of Trelandar. "In a duel that `shouldn't' have ever happened," she continued, no doubt knowing about the affair. We'd all been drinking, and the boys we were with had been eager to see women fight, to see some swordplay between Jani and me. I had not wished to fight her, but when she cut me, I slashed out with my blade, not thinking, and inflicted upon her a "death" I'd never wished to give. It had been my anger, my thoughtless act I felt that had taken her life, all because of our stupid dueling!

"`Honor' is onething, and `dueling' is another," I replied. To me there was no relationship despite whatever anyone claimed. One was either an "honorable" person or you weren't, and dueling had nothing to do with it so far as I could see here, the concept of dueling dating far back into Mankind's history... In the 20th Century it was outlawed as "uncivilized". Janet Rogers reintroduced it in the 21st Century as a part of her NEW ORDER. A society whose cultural baselaid in a "past" that perhaps never was. A society order designed by a woman who was a "misfit" in her own society, a woman who saw things differently than did anyone else.

"You have killed people in battle?" Lana now ventured to me, no doubt knowing here what the answer would be. War in my opinion is more a matter of self defense, of defending one's country.

"That's different," I retorted, uncomfortable with this. In battle you are killing "strangers", a nameless foe, the "enemy". It's more like hunting, fighting an animal that can attack you... Like meeting up with a dire wolf, a Tigon, or say a Garth here. You either kill them or they kill you. That's all combat is too. Kill or be killed. Withwhoever is the better "hunter" winning. "Skill" no doubt plays a part too, but less than you might think.

"You are good with a sword?" she asked, her face only a pale shadow in the darkness, her attire only a darker shadow blending in with the darkness. The thought going through my mind that if we blackened our faces we'd be almost impossible to see at night. The thought now making me grin to myself as I realized it was the sort of a "thought" that a Warriress might have. Thinking about how to kill others in combat while staying alive yourself here. How to use disguise, cover, the darkness of night as a "friend".

"Upper ten percent of my class," I answered quickly back. I am a competent swordswoman, but that is about "all" I can claim.

"I'm a Princess of Swords," she replied, "Which is 'why' my husband married me," she added, "Although he prefers his slave to his wife," she continued on, leaving no doubts about things now.

"We'd better get some sleep," I smiled, giving her a hug. It was chilly, the stars bright, the Moon soon to rise now too.

"I hope someday we can truly be friends," she answered.

"I too," I smiled back, wondering if I'd live to see it...

"We are 'caste sisters'," she continued as I opened the door into the kitchen. The others in the living room talking quietly.

"I'm not of the Warriresses," I answered. We did not share "caste" as such. I was a Scribe, she was a Warriress. She wore the mark of the sword on her wrist. I did not. I was a civilian who fought because her country was invaded, not a "professional".

"In your heart is burned the mark," Lana smiled back at me.

I listened to the soft night sounds that came in through the partly open window, the measured breathing of my companions, the even breathing of my husband there beside me. Tomorrow we'd ride to the south, traveling through the foothills, watching for Imperial patrols, ready to fight our way through if such became necessary. Lady Lana was sleeping with Katherine, with only her word of honor as a bond. Marta had said that if she awoke with her throat slit she'd know just "who" to blame for trusting that Imperial. All three of us had lost loved ones to the Imperials, Marta a husband and baby son, Carl a wife and daughter, and me both my parents and a husband. All because of Darlanis' ambition to make herself into another "Janet Rogers", her delusions that I feared would eventually end in the destruction of us all here... Leaving both our countries in ruins, ripe pickings for Dularn or perhaps even the nomadic barbarians who lived across the Sierras.

(the next morning)

"Whatever happens, you have a 'friend' here," Lady Lana said to me as I drew the girth tight around my dapple gray's belly, my mare shifting a bit, swishing her tail back and forth against the flies here in the barn. The sun rising up over the mountains to the east. Jerry at my side, Trouble sniffing at Lana's boots. I nodded, aware of Carl, Marta standing there listening to us, well aware that I no longer saw Lana as an "enemy", even if she served Darlanis and I served Paula. She had also given me certain military information that left no doubts as to her "sympathies" here. Information that could have cost Lana her life had Tara learned.

"Just remember what I told you," I warned, seeing her nod.

"I'll be careful," Lana smiled, standing there before me.

"It is called 'aiding and abetting the enemy'," I warned.

"And I am a 'legitimate' target of your forces," she noted. I had "forces" of my own operating somewhere in this area of Trelandar, and they would kill this lovely woman and be proud to do. And if I warned them not to touch her, then word would eventually reach the ears of Tara or Darlanis and they would execute Lana as a traitor. Just as we executed traitors to our own cause here... I didn't much envy the Lady Lana Daris, a woman who was by birth a Trelandarian, but who was by marriage now serving the Empire...

"I'm going back, check our back trail," Marta spoke, turning her unicorn, her bow strung, arrows in her quiver at her saddle. It was now the middle of the day, Jerry quiet as he clung to me, Trouble running along at our side, the short legged Boston being able to keep up as long as we didn't trot our mounts here for any period of time. Otherwise the dog would have to be carried in a sack I'd brought for that purpose, with just his head stuck out.

"We'll 'halt' here, move our mounts into the brush," I said, turning my unicorn, Trouble running ahead of us into the woods. I didn't believe that Lana would betray us, but Imperial patrols were known to follow any "fresh" trail they found, a tactic I'd encountered before, which is why I used the "tactics" that I did. The element of surprise having been so far enough to win the day, especially against Darlanis' "second line" troops, which is what we faced here, not her "first line" which faced our own lines...

"At least it's a nice day," Carl said to me as we dismounted and led our unicorns into the brush where they would be hard to spot by riders on the trail. My greatest fear here was dogs, but so far the Imperials hadn't considered using animals, perhaps due to the fact that it is difficult to train a dog not to go chasing after a deer when one jumps out in front of you... The sunlight peeking down from between these moving boughs up overhead, moving fluffy white clouds drifting across the azure blue, the soft and soothing rustle of the leaves pleasing to the ear. It was "warm" enough that there was no need for a jacket, although the night I knew would be an entirely different matter at this time of year.

"Trouble!" Jerry called, the Boston now dashing off, my son running after the dog, forcing me to get up and follow him here. Afraid he might get lost in these woods chasing after the dog. A dog who I think he loved more than he did me, as boys often do.

"Jerry!!!" I breathed, trotting, the dog suddenly barking.

"Mommy!" Jerry cried, hearing those horrid snarls then!

"Run back to Carl and Marta!!!" I snapped, now catching him. Trouble barking in a series of sharp barks, obviously harassing a beast of some sort, and I shuddered at the sounds that came to my ears, aware that only one animal makes such "sounds", a GARTH!!! "I'll get Trouble!" I told him, shaking him, his eyes dark pools. His hair loose, tangled, in need of cutting, just a boy of five. The sharp barking of the dog and the answering deep hissing roars of the beast the Boston Terrier was annoying leaving no doubts...

"I'll... I'll get you your bow!" Jerry said, turning, running back to the others. Trouble obviously able to keep his distance from the horrid reptile, a creature like some dinosaur from the distant past. A sort of a "miniature" Tyrannosaurus Rex...

Chapter Twenty Six

I moved swiftly, but quietly through the woods, using the boles of the trees for "cover", guided by the sounds ahead of me. The sharp barking of the BostonTerrier , the horrid growling and hissing roars of the Garth that Trouble was now harassing. A dog tends to do things that no one with reason would attempt, but the BostonTerrier is a very "protective" dog despite their size, and they will harass dangerous animals far larger than they are here. Trouble weighed about eighteen pounds, and a Garth goes twelve to fifteen hundred as a rule, standing eight to ten feet tall. I should note here that they are not a "hunting" predator as such, but more a scavenger, being too slow to catch a deer or such. On the other hand you cannot out run one, and they are man eaters...

"Oh Shit!" I breathed, seeing the scene before me, the black and white BostonTerrier standing there barking at the Garth, the LARGEST GARTH I'D EVER SEEN! THE DAMN THING ELEVEN FEET TALL!!! The creature advancing on the barking dog, then suddenly turning, whipping its heavy powerful tail around, snapping it almost like a whip at the dog! The tip of the tail striking Trouble, sending him flying through the air, his "yip" leaving no doubts here too! The dinosaur then charging its tormentor, the dog limping off on three legs as best he could now, dodging among the trees with the horror close behind him, the great reptile ponderous, slow, obviously very old. Trouble obviously was in a whole lot of trouble!

"Lys!" Carl breathed, suddenly at my side, Marta with him. Jerry standing there, his eyes dark pools of horror as he saw it.

"Shoot it, mommy, shoot it!" he pleaded, seeing the Garth chasing after the little black and white dog, Trouble having bitten off far more here than he could handle! "Shoot it Mommy!!!"

"Be Quiet!" Marta snapped, clamping her hand over his mouth!

"Maybe this..." Carl breathed, raising his crossbow then. I knew how "inadequate" even it was against such a horror as this!

"I'll get its attention!" Marta snapped, handing me Jerry.

"Mother..." he "breathed", looking up at me, his eyes wet. Marta stepping forward into the clearing and nocking an arrow to shoot. The bow was mine, a much better weapon than what she had. In comparison to the standard military arm it was equal to one of eighty pounds draw in penetration, but peaked here at fifty five. I'd let her shoot it a couple times, the bow much impressing her.

"She is a brave woman..." Carl said, Marta drawing the bow, the arrow streaking out between the trees, the Garth roaring with fury as the arrow buried itself perhaps two feet into that great scaly body. The great reptile turning, charging as Marta shot a second arrow into that horrid scaly greenish body, the thing like a nightmare as it came trotting on towards her, a creature that no hand held weapon of this era could have ever "stopped" here...

"Marta! Run!" Carl snapped, Marta getting off a third shot! The Warriress turning, stumbling to our horror on a root! Going down as Carl took aim, fired his bolt into the horror's neck now! Trouble limping

towards us, barking in tiny pitiful yips at it!!!

"NO!" I screamed in horror, seeing Marta draw her sword as she laid there, the great head coming down as she thrust up into it, the dinosaur, the Garth seizing her in its jaws, raising up its horrid head, its jaws closing on her body as she struck at it with a fist, the fangs, three inches long, already driving deep!! Her scream of agony a high pitched squeal as the jaws now closed!

"SANDA!" I heard Carl yell as I dashed forward, my mother's sword in my hand, the dinosaur before me, Marta in its jaws, the great chest seeming to fill my vision as I thrust into it with both hands, the blade sinking to the hilt. The heavy slam of its forelimb against the side of my head sending me sprawling almost senseless, the creature now turning, one of its great clawed feet lifted to smash down upon me, Trouble there nipping at it, drawing its attention, Carl facing it with drawn sword, jabbing it... The horror dropping Marta's body, bloody, her eyes yet open, seeing, the blood now spurting from her like a punctured wineskin. Trouble dashing in to sink his teeth into it, a great clawed foot coming down, crushing him to a horrid pulp as Carl thrust deep. My vision blurring, everything going dark as I saw the dinosaur stumbling, and then going down with a terrible thud to the earth less than a dozen feet away! The great scaly body twitching, kicking for a few seconds before death finally overtook it here.

Jerry came running to me, trying to help me up, Carl going to Marta and placing his sword in her hand. Closing her fingers about the hilt. The blood pouring from her body as he held her, the blood running from her mouth as he whispered to her the "last words", telling her that she would be gathered into the arms of Lys, that her courage, her bravery here would wipe out any sins. Trouble only a crushed little bit of bloody fur, my eyesight now so blurred that I could see little. The pain and wetness leaving no doubts that the claws of the Garth had cut my scalp, the blow having fortunately been glancing, and no doubt poorly aimed here. Jerry sobbing, clinging to me as I got an arm under myself, now half rolling over as Carl stood up, looking down at Marta there.

"I can ride," I said to Carl. Without shovels we had no way of burying Marta, and I had no intention of leaving her body for the beasts. I'd also collected the crushed remains of the dog. We would find a Peasant's hut somewhere, bury them both properly. Jerry just standing there, watching, numb with shock, with loss. Fortunately the claws had not cut my face, but it would be time before my hair grew out to cover the damage the forelimb had made when the dinosaur had struck me. And far longer before I would be able to "forget" what had happened. I did get my son another dog here, Bostons being common here in Trelandar among the upper classes, but the "memory" of "how" Marta Satel died is still yet burned into my memory even now after seventy one years have gone.

"I'll be glad when this damned war is over," Carl said then. I thought it a fitting epitaph for those who had died this day...

"She was a Warriress among Warriresses," I said, standing there in the twilight, the Peasant, his wife and family watching. Carl at my side, my son clinging to me, his eyes wet with tears. We had dug a grave, adequate for Marta's body, and laid upon her breast the crushed remains of a little dog who had been so brave. I had buried her weapons with her, as is felt proper, so that she might greet Lys in the afterlife as a Warriress should, standing proud before the Mistress of All, the Giver of Life Everlasting. She had died with a sword in her hand, as she would have wished it to have been, died in battle, fighting against a foe, even if the foe had not been human, but just a big dumb stupid animal, a dinosaur created by the atomic radiation of a war five centuries ago. A war between Mankind and an alien species from far off... "And although Marta has now passed on to stand before Lys, yet in our memories she will live on, and inspire us to greater glory," I spoke, the Peasant and his family nodding, perhaps in their own way understanding the meaning of what Marta had done for us all.

(a week later)

"It is 'good' to see you again, sister," Queen Paula said to me, taking my hands in hers, her dark eyes seeking the truth in mine as I smiled back. To her Marta's death would be but one of many who had died in this war with the Imperials. A part of the risks that one took in battle, in this war that we couldn't win. That Darlanis couldn't "win", that could drag on for years now to the "ruin" of two nations until the barbarians came to finish it. Carl standing there with my son, who had seen Paula before, although I don't think he quite understood just "who" she was here. Jerry knew she was a Queen, but he didn't really understand just why she was so far more "important" than his own mother was here. I would find him a puppy, a little "pug" boy or girl, another dog to grow up with him, to share his adventures as a young man here.

"Is there any truth to the rumor I heard?" I asked her then.

"Darlanis has asked for a 'truce'," Paula answered me back.

"There is 'more'?" I asked, looking into Paula's dark eyes.

"There have been 'violations' of the 'caste codes'," Paula said, her attire, her look leaving no doubt that she was a Queen. "Darlanis has stated that we have made war on non combatants..."

"She is certainly more 'guilty' of that than us!" I retorted, well aware of some of the things that Tarahad done here now! The burning of villages, the execution of anyone who she thought might be a danger to Imperial ambitions, the slaughter of people who the Imperials "claimed" had in some way tried to resist them! True, I knew of no case where Darlanis had actually ordered "anything" like that herself, but she was Queen of Sarn, Empress of California if you accepted her claims here, and "responsible" for everything too that Princess Tara as her Warlady now did here! I certainly didn't believe that the Imperials had any claims here! "Any impartial jury would find her guilty as Hell of 'violations' of the caste codes, of the rules of warfare," I continued on now. "And as a lawyer I can tell you that 'justice' is on our side..." Paula nodding, her golden crown beautiful against her dark hair. I thought it "fitting" too that Paula was the Queen of Trelandar.

Chapter Twenty Seven

"Damn lot of Imperials..." Carl breathed, squirming up next to me as I laid there concealed by the darkness, my form fitting black attire, my masked face making me only a darker shadow there in the night. The town before us barely visible in the dark, the Imperials having been taught that there was no safe place now for those who served the beautiful Empress of California as Darlanis called herself. That the "terrorist Warlady of Trelandar" might at any time come stalking you like a nightmare to take your life! The Imperials now stayed as far from trees and brush as they did just because of me, of the "tactics" that I'd developed over the last weeks. Tactics that had driven Darlanis herself to helpless fury from what we'd learned from deserters and prisoners of war. * * It is noteworthy here that Maris Marn used these very same tactics against us in 2567 with a certain degree of modification. I suspect that Carl related to her something of what we'd done during the war between Sarn and Trelandar, and she then later on put this knowledge to good use against us. Also, it appears that the "assault" led by Carol Simmons against

Lorraine's estate may have been based upon these same tactics, as I'd planned to make landings against Imperial estates had the war continued on. (Sanda)

"'More' to kill..." I whispered back, an arrow nocked on my bowstring. Watching the sentries pacing back and forth. Most of them crossbowmen armed with the common military crossbow, not the expensive and rare weapon that my husband used so effectively... Such arms reaching out no more than about 220 yards at the best, with an effective aimed range perhaps a third of that. They are usually drawn by means of a belt hook as the rule, I might note, the rate of fire being about three bolts a minute with practice.

"Spooky doing this without cover," he breathed, as invisible as I was here. The night was totally dark, cloudy, only the few lamps the Imperials lit providing any light at all here. Our objectives here was the same as usual, that is to harass the enemy.

"Just keep down, and remember that moving objects are far easier to spot than those that don't move," I pointed out. These new tactics of mine, of sneaking into small villages and towns to engage the enemy while he slept serving more to "demoralize" him than to actually inflict casualties. When the enemy is taught to fear you, to be terrified to go to bed at night not knowing when an attack will take place, then that enemy is much less dangerous in the military sense. Less likely to be willing to take risks. Eventually morale and discipline fail, and the army is worthless.

"Warrioress..." Carl breathed, the woman on her unicorn now passing by us no more than perhaps fifty feet away from us here. Both of us lying perfectly still, aware that any "movement" would give us away, cause her to give a warning. Our greatest "danger" here being that someone might stumble over one of us by accident. On the other hand we could certainly spot the enemy before they could spot us, as any who sits around a light cannot see well for some period of time after looking into its flame. It was hard to aim weapons at night, most people tending to shoot poorly, I'd noticed here too, especially those armed with bows, there being a tendency by the Imperials to just pour out volleys of arrows now. Not that we shot any better, but we did have a target to "aim" at when we shot, and terrifying the enemy can be as effective in the military sense as inflicting casualties upon him. Especially if you have a policy of welcoming deserters as we did, something I'd dreamed up that really infuriated Darlanis with us even more now! And with the militias we now had, Darlanis couldn't punch through our lines like she could before and hold the ground that she had!

What was now raising our hopes of eventual victory was that Darlanis was having "troubles" back home in Sarn, the cost of the war having made numbers of people question the wisdom of it all!! So far she still had the support of the upper classes, but those who bore the brunt of the fighting were getting tired of things!!

"Sentry," Carl breathed, taking aim, shooting, the man crying out as he fell, more Imperials now dashing out from the darkness to stand peering out from the town. A couple falling then to our arrows as my force let loose a volley at a range of better than a hundred yards. Lucky shots, as it is nearly impossible to hit someone at such distances with the simple bows many of us had now, a fact that the Imperials themselves were becoming aware of now too in setting up their own camp sites, no archer being able to shoot an arrow beyond a furlong (220 yards) save but with a bow like mine. And while I could reach out to about two fifty, and Carl's crossbow a bit beyond three hundred, most of my people had just simple hand hewn bows of ash, which did have their "limits" here. Heavy siege crossbows can reach a quarter mile, but such arms are heavy and have a slow rate of fire unsuitable for military usage. On the other hand such arms can be effective weapons of assassination, and of long range "harassment" attacks.

"Warrioresses!" Carl warned, the women riding forth, their long metal shod lances held low while the

Imperial troops behind them launched volleys of arrows over their heads as a "covering" fire. As they had little if any idea of "where" to shoot, such acts on their part tended to be of little effect, although those inexperienced in warfare found them terrifying enough in battle. While it was possible to be "unlucky" enough to be beneath such a volley, the simple drift of the arrows tended to be such at night that most of the time the volleys were just a waste of time here.

"One `less'..." I breathed, getting up on one knee, drawing, releasing, the woman crying out as my arrow transfixing her body. A second Warriress wheeling her unicorn around, then falling as another arrow from somewhere took her in the body. An Imperial, braver than most, stepping out to take aim, Carl firing, dropping him, the Dularnian crossbow effective at ranges quite surprising.

I gave the signal then to withdraw, the Imperial officers in their crested helmets giving orders, restoring order to the camp. There were too many of them to fight, but we could teach them how dangerous Trelandar could be here to any foe who dared invade us! Hopefully then Darlanis would give up this war, leave us alone...

"Thomson didn't `make it'," the woman said to me, her face a pale shadow in the darkness now that we'd removed our masks. She was a Warriress from Queen Paula's own guards, a capable woman, but not the equal of Marta, who had been "better" at this here. We had two others with minor flesh wounds from Imperial missiles. Most of my force consisting of sturdy woodsmen, Peasants, people who knew the trails, the paths, how to stalk game, and now MAN...

"`He died for Trelandar'," I replied, my voice "loud" enough that those with me could hear... I wondered how long it would be before I too died for my country in this seemingly endless war... The Imperials had not tried to follow us into the woods. We had taught them the folly of that in the past months, in this warfare that was now more like that of a war fought long ago in a land of myth and legend. Of a place called "South Vietnam" in a time now itself only well known to those of my own caste. The guerrillas had "won" that war, I knew. Could we win this one against Sarn? Against that golden beauty who called herself an "Empress" now?

"And `how many' of `them' did we kill?" someone protested. I'd run into this before, especially when we took losses and it was impossible to determine whether or not how badly we'd "hurt" the enemy. I knew we'd killed at least several of them, but even so it was hard to explain to widows, widowers as to "why" their husband, their wife would never be coming back home. Why a son or less often a daughter had died choking to death with an arrow through their necks as I'd seen happen. Why should they follow a Warlady who seemed to bring death to all who followed her here...

"We fight until Trelandar is `free' of them!" I answered.

"Lys, I grow tired of war!" Carl whispered to me as we laid together, sharing the same blankets. We'd made love, but it was not as "good" as it had been before, perhaps because we were both tired, almost "exhausted" emotionally from all we'd been through. I was a "living legend" now, one whose name was "cursed" by some, and "praised" by others. That "LADY SANDA" Darlanis "denounced", that Paula praised, that Princess Tara had offered "rewards" for. "We keep killing them, but they keep coming," he muttered to me. It was like a nightmare from which you couldn't awake, the way it appeared, battle after battle, day after day, kill a few here, a few there, ambush a patrol, a wagon train, launch a volley or two of arrows into an encampment at night. Strike hard and run fast!

"Darlanis can't keep this up," I said, holding him to me. I knew we were slowly "winning" this war, that Darlanis was losing, that we were destroying her "dream" of a Empire of California, a dream of a 21st Century social order that never could be again... It was almost "personal" now between Darlanis and me,

the Empress having taken personal command of her forces, doing what she could to keep the morale of her forces up despite everything I did now.

"And if something happens to you?" Carl challenged me back.

"You will take command, or let Paula do so," I answered...

"You are a Warriress now, not a Scribe," he said to me.

"Someday there will be peace," I promised, kissing him.

"I want a daughter of you," he said, holding me close.

"When I have `time' to be a `mother'," I answered back.

Chapter Twenty Eight

It was cold and rainy, the sort of "weather" that one might expect in the middle of winter here so far south, but I supposed in a way befitting considering everything that had happened here. Under a flag of truce Darlanis had come with her retinue, the Empress having worn a heavy cloak over her brief golden mesh... I stood beside my sister in her golden armor, Paula in her own way just as "impressive" I thought as was her golden haired nemesis. In a couple more weeks it would be Christmas here, a holiday that dates so far back that its origins are now quite lost in legend.* * Lorraine states in her diaries that the Priestesses of Lys are "responsible" for destroying the knowledge of the origins of this holiday, which she states served to celebrate the birthday of a religious leader born some twenty seven centuries ago. (Sanda)

Despite a good night's rest I was exhausted emotionally from all I'd been through these last few weeks. This almost constant fighting that had perhaps in its way forced Darlanis to come now. Carl with Jerry there among those behind us as we stood waiting.

"She's got Tarawith her," Paula "breathed" in a whisper.

"Figures..." I breathed back, feeling the "chill" through my uniform, the chain mail heavy on my body. My own crested helmet marking me as being the Warlady of Trelandar. As Paula was without "issue", there was no proper heir to the throne, a point that had been raised by a number of people, although I supposed it was of little importance as the military would be the ones to decide who would be King or Queen should my sister ever fall in battle.* * Darlanis' killing of my sister in a duel and her offer to the black castes of Trelandar of total and complete amnesty tended to destroy any hopes of effective resistance against Imperial rule. While some people did see me as being my sister's "heir" in a way due to my position as "Warlady" at the conclusion of the war, it should be noted as I was not actually a Warriress it would have been impossible for me to have ever legally become the "Queen" of Trelandar even if Darlanis had permitted such to happen. On the other hand with Lorraine here it was a matter of finding someone who "inspired" the people, who had the "reputation" as Lorraine did, and who if it became necessary, could even fight Darlanis in a face to face duel to the death with good hopes of winning such.

While I had no doubts about Lorraine's "sympathies" after having talked to her, I did feel that it would be reckless on my part to "involve" her in things until I'd gotten everything ready. And while I will admit that her emotional reaction to all this threw me for a "loop" as it did everyone else, I still felt she was the right woman for the job, as certainly no one else could have done it. She was a woman with a great deal of "depth" to her, and what you saw on the surface did not necessarily reflect her true feelings... In my conversations with her Lorraine expressed the opinion that Darlanis was a "user", that she'd exploited Sharon's feelings so that she might win Sharon over. Lorraine even saying to me after the affair with the crossbowman that she wondered if Darlanis had been "responsible", which made more "sense" at first than the idea that Princess Tara was responsible, as she turned out to be here. I doubtlessly read "more" into Lorraine's "conversations" with me than what Lorraine herself "intended", but one must remember here that Lorraine did have "feelings" for Darlanis, even if there was a time too that she didn't like Darlanis very much. And Darlanis in turn had "feelings" for Lorraine, as has been brought out here in Lorraine's first two books, which were based upon her own diaries, but also written somewhat later on when the relationship between these two women was quite different from what it had been earlier on here. It might be noted here too that for a long time Darlanis hated me, as is quite obvious when you consider some of her own acts and comments... Due to our relative positions she had to be "polite" to me, but she made no "bones" about the fact that I was not someone she liked. I also have no doubts here that had Tara's agent succeeded in his attempt to poison Lorraine, that Darlanis would have amassed the evidence to convict me of regicide, as is shown in Lorraine's own diaries and book, where it did appear too that I was responsible. I was under a lot of stress (being pregnant and just widowed) at the time, and having Lorraine seem to turn on me too was the last straw, breaking me down emotionally as has been related. (Sanda)

"I give you greetings, Queen of Trelandar," Darlanis spoke, the Empress' hair wet, hanging, giving her a bedraggled look now. She was obviously wet, uncomfortable, "chilled", and I could see her "shiver" as she stood there with Tara just behind her. I reflected to myself too now that she didn't look so "imperial"... That she looked far more like any woman does who is cold and wet. She looked "tired", as if she'd had but little sleep lately here.

"And I so give you greeting, Queen of Sarn," Paula retorted, we of Trelandar having never recognized Darlanis' "empire" here. To us she was the Queen of Sarn, and in our eyes she still was... If she wanted to call herself the "high mucky muck" that was "up" to her, but to the government of Trelandar she was Sarn's Queen.

"I'd `swear' this is Dularn, not Trelandar," Darlanis spoke, holding her cloak about herself, obviously wet and chilled here. The steady drizzle wetting me, cold as it soaked through my own clothing, making me realize too how Darlanis must be suffering. The temperature was probably in the fifties, and with this rain I had no doubts that it felt even colder, the wind being from the east, which is always a "cold" wind in the winter, I might note.

"It is usually `warmer' here," Paula answered in level tones as I stood beside her, Princess Tara's dark eyes missing little. The very "look" of the woman making me shudder at what I knew of her. Tara having gathered for herself a "reputation" for vicious cruelty that had not been rivaled since the time of the Nazis... As Darlanis' Warlady she was my counterpart, and the two of us in a way had been "rivals", although Tara had not proved to be quite as "capable" as a Warlady as Darlanis had doubtlessly hoped here. She tended to make more "enemies" for the Empire than "friends", and driving people from their homes, taking their daughters as slave girls, and burning Peasants' fields didn't make most people see Darlanis as being anything more than another Attila the Hun! As a matter of fact, I suspected that part of the "success" I had in recruiting people to fight against the Empire was due to Tara!

"Somewhere out of this rain," Darlanis spoke, Paula nodding, turning, then leading the way to the tent set

up there behind us.

"I am winning this war, despite your violations of the caste codes and the rules of warfare," Darlanis said as she faced Paula there inside the tent we'd had set up... A slave girl, clad in a heavy woolen tunic, being of service as so needed. Princess Tara standing there behind Darlanis staring at me, perhaps recalling that she'd once had me in her own hands, and hadn't known it too!

"We have not violated the codes or the laws of war," Paula spoke in icy level tones, well aware of the Imperial propaganda. My actions in carrying war "behind" the enemy lines having been a matter upon which Darlanis' people had seized as proof of things. Stating that none of my "terrorists" wore uniforms, that they in fact were not a part of the Trelandarian military, but in fact in truth were "recruited" from the "criminal elements" of Trelandar here! It having been a part of my assaults a couple times to actually disguise my forces at times as Imperial troopers, so that we might better fool the enemy here. While such methods were "technically" I supposed a "violation" of the rules of warfare as they presently existed, they were often "used" in the past, especially in the time of Janet Rogers who Darlanis so "admired". In any case I felt that we were morally justified in doing so if you stop and consider some of the things that Princess Tara did here.

"Killing 'non combatants', burning villages, all are 'violations' of the caste codes, the rules of warfare," I pointed out. "And we have hundreds of eye witnesses to such 'acts'," I added. "You launched a war of aggression against us," I continued. "In any court of law I believe an impartial jury would find 'you' far more 'guilty' of such matters than us," I said, Darlanis grinning at me, while Princess Tara on the other stood there frowning now. I didn't really believe that Darlanis was the "guilty" party, but as commander in chief she was the one legally responsible here...

"You are responsible for her acts as commander in chief," I heard Darlanis say to Paula, who nodded, well aware of the laws.

"As she 'is' for the actions that Tara has done," I quickly pointed out to my sister, feeling that if Darlanis wanted to play "lawyer" here against me she was quite welcome to try doing so! I had no doubt that if it came down to it that Darlanis had been guilty of allowing Tara to do a number of things that were in violation of "both" the caste codes and the rules of warfare, especially as I had ample "eye witnesses" to what Tara had done here. "One" being my own former mother in law, whose own daughter had been taken by invading Imperial troopers as a sexual plaything...

"It is 'unfortunate' that she is not a Warriress," Darlanis answered, her eyes like glittering cold jewels burning into mine. "Then this matter could be resolved by cold steel as it should so be," Darlanis continued on, her voice emotionless, utterly level. There being no doubts as to the implications of things here too!!

Chapter Twenty Nine

"It was an act of 'desperation' upon Darlanis' part," I said to Jon as he read over what I'd written so long ago here for Lorraine. Technically there had never been any doubt of the fact as such that Darlanis was guilty of allowing Tara to do things that were in violation of the caste codes, the rules of warfare

here. Darlanis was losing the war with Trelandar, and she knew it too.

"So she challenged your sister to a duel, killed her, and in that way WON what she could not win any other way," Jon smiled in reply, his dark eyes holding mine as I nodded thoughtfully back.

"Paula was a proud woman, perhaps too 'proud'," I replied.

"She could have challenged you..." Jon pointed out to me.

"I wasn't a Warriress," I smiled, remembering it all here.

"I keep remembering what Lorraine once said," he said to me.

"I'm an old woman, with gray in my hair," I pointed out now.

"You're not as 'old' as Lorraine was," Jon said to me then. I supposed it was true. Lorraine had been "old", gray haired at the time of her death, although still yet in fairly good shape. By the standards of her own time she'd been about seventy or so. By ours she'd been an "old" woman, who most felt "ready" for Lys.

"She and Darlanis are 'together' now," I answered, the tears flooding my eyes as I remembered the two of them together. They had been the stuff of which legends are made, it having been said that the two of them together had once stood up against a Legion. In later years I'd grown to "admire" Darlanis for her wisdom, for her own moral code, for what she'd become in later years here... I remembered her as she had been, tall and "golden", although in the last years before her death the signs of age had started to show on her face, in the way that her body started to give way to the ravages of time despite her best efforts to avoid it. She'd been a woman like no other I'd ever known, "different" in her own way from Lorraine, who was more introspective, whereas Darlanis had been of a sort who saw things in a way that few others had...

"No doubt giving Lys Herself a 'hard time' if I know them," Jon said to me, taking me in his arms and holding me against him. We lived upon a doomed world, and now its last heroes were gone. The legends would live on, but not upon this green Earth of ours. My son Jerry was gone now to Mars with his wife Phara, of whom I had once thought so little of, just because of the fact that she had been the daughter of the blacksmith there upon this estate. Sara was living in Sarn, and Marianne, my youngest, was on Mars. Working with the Women of that world to prepare it for Mankind.

"And just 'what' do you mean by that?" Paula snapped back, no doubt as well aware as I of the "implications" of things here.

"Isn't it 'obvious'," Darlanis "retorted", standing there in her gold, her cloak now drawn back. An inch or so taller than even my beautiful sister, who was two inches taller than I was... "And under the caste codes, I ask redress for what has happened." The rain wet canvas over her head hanging down from the supports, its odor of dampness trapped too here inside Paula's lovely tent. The words seeming to echo through my mind as I understood it now! It was true that my sister had once been a "Queen of Swords", but that was years ago, and although Paula's skill with a blade was awesome, I knew too of the skills that Darlanis had possessed at the Academy... Having fenced enough with her to realize that I'd never be in the same class as such women as these two before me!!

"When?" Paula asked, standing there, her eyes holding those of Darlanis. Her hand on the golden hilt of

her sword, no doubt aware of the fact that only one of them at best might survive it! That the fates of two nations was at stake here in this matter... And should she die in this "duel", Trelandar would be lost to us.

"Now, outside...", Darlanis snapped back, slipping off her cloak to stand before us here in her beautiful golden mesh. I understood too why she had looked as she had, "knowing" what she "faced" here. Darlanis was proud of her skills, but Paula had an awesome reputation, one that no doubt might even give Darlanis a bit of pause in considering the outcome of any possible duel now. It was, I suspected here of Darlanis, a desperate attempt to gain with her sword what her Legions could not give her, thanks to me.

"A `moment'," Paula answered, turning to me then as I stood there stunned by all this, aware as never before of what the outcome could be if Paula was to die at the point of Darlanis' sword in a duel that would perhaps decide the fate of millions here... Darlanis taking Taraby the arm, guiding her then from the tent.

"It's all my fault," I said, my eyes growing wet with tears. The "challenge" had actually been directed at me, but because I was not a Warriress, Paula would have to fight in my place here. And although I knew Paula was awesome with a sword, I also knew of Darlanis' "skills", and I feared much then for my country now.

"You would be no `match' for her," Paula said to me softly.

"Are you...?" I breathed, aware of Darlanis' awesome skill.

"Your big sister has always come through, hasn't she?" Paula said to me, giving me a hug. "And after I kill her, we'll be rid of the damn bitch, and this will be the end of all of this now." My sister then wiping my eyes with a cloth and suggesting that I have a bit more "confidence" in her. The slave girl then helping her out of her armor and helmet so she stood in just a tunic and hose before us, Paula then rebuckling her sword about her waist. I felt love, a deep love for this sister of mine I'd once envied. She was truly and rightfully the Queen of Trelandar in every way!

"No doubt `this' is the best way," Paula spoke to a shivering Darlanis, the drizzle coming down like an icy mist on us all. The two women drawing, facing each other, their long slim swords gleaming in the gray light from above. Both carried weapons made in the 21st Century, the long slim rapier like blade favored by those who have been dust now for centuries. Blades like the one my own mother had carried, the one that I now wore at my own hip. As Paula's "second" I stood away a bit from the crowd, closer in, as now did Princess Tara, who was Darlanis' "second" in all this. The two of us nodding, and then giving the orders to begin here.

The "attack" was swift, the movement of the blades a blur to my eyes, the swift clash of steel bringing back memories of long ago. I'd seen Paula win her "gold" there in Trella as a teenage girl, and I had fenced with Darlanis enough times to know about what she was capable of doing. Princess Tara standing there with a smile curving her lips, as if she was pleased by all this here. She would "win" whatever happened, as Darlanis only child was but a small young girl who could not be Queen for many years yet. It was also within the realm of possibility that my sister and Darlanis would both inflict fatal wounds upon one another too here, which would leave Tarain control of things on her side. With me in "charge" of Trelandar until a new monarch could be selected now to govern us, to carry on this war to its final conclusions.

I watched Paula slip her way past Darlanis' guard, saw the red of blood there on the Sarnian Queen's skin, saw Darlanis now seem to shake her head, return to the attack, forcing Paula back. To my eye the

two women were extremely closely matched, with Paula in my opinion being the swifter of the two, but Darlanis in a way perhaps the more "skilled", the more "professional" at this. She was also more "experienced", as Paula had never fought to the death with anyone, while Darlanis had done so several times here. Paula was a champion fencer, but Darlanis was more the "killer".* * While Darlanis could always give Lorraine a good fight, it has always been my "opinion" that she would never have been a "match" for Lorraine in an actual duel, something I think Darlanis knew. It would have been a toss up between Tara and Paula, although it is likely that Janet Rogers in her "prime" would have matched Lorraine from what Lorraine herself writes in her diary for the year 2570. As I've mentioned, I did fence with Darlanis at the Academy, and she was never in my opinion quite the equal to Lorraine, perhaps because she lacked the true "killer" instinct that Lorraine had. Both were "violent" women, but Lorraine was more so here. (Sanda)

I was aware of those around me, but nothing seemed to matter now but this "contest" fought out before me. Two crowned Queens, heads of their respective countries, fighting here to the death in this cold miserable drizzle as hundreds now stood and watched. Paula fighting with that beautiful "style" she had, tall and slim in her gold trimmed tunic and hose with the gold stripes down the sides. Brunette against a blonde, Trelanian against Dularnian, Warrioress against Warrioress, with the death of one the only end now to this battle for a whole country! Everyone standing there quietly, watching this, the only "sound" the rasp of steel as their blades again met and clashed in a deadly gleaming dance.

Once again Paula's point slipped through Darlanis' guard, it seeming to us watching that it was only a matter of time before our Queen killed theirs, and put an end to this war we'd fought! I felt sorry in a way that Darlanis would die, that such a beauty as her would die here in this place fighting another of her own caste, of her own station in life, and for "what"? To try to relive a dream that had died over six centuries ago in solar fires? The red blood now "staining" Darlanis' skin leaving no doubts...

"Don't kill her, Paula, please don't kill her!" I breathed, knowing that Darlanis had "miscalculated", that in picking a duel with Paula she'd picked on someone whose skill was superior yet!

THEN SUDDENLY "IT" HAPPENED SO SWIFTLY THE EYE COULD HARDLY FOLLOW!! DARLANIS SUDDENLY THRUST OUT, TAKING PAULA'S BLADE IN HER SHOULDER, AND DROVE HER POINT RIGHT INTO PAULA'S OWN CHEST!!! My sister stumbling back, dropping her sword, and then falling into my arms as I dashed to her, conscious of nothing but that my sister had been the one who had lost this duel to Darlanis here!! Paula's dark eyes holding mine for an instant before a soft gasp escaped from her lips and she went limp then in my arms, DEAD...

"It's all over, Sanda, it's all 'over' now..." Darlanis spoke as I held my sister in my arms. The blood running from the Empress' wounds. Her eyes like a blue fire now burning into mine. "And I'm sorry too it had to be this way..." The drizzle pouring down upon us all "fitting" I thought then as I looked up at her.

Chapter Thirty

"Leave us," Darlanis spoke in level tones to those about her as I stepped into the tent that had been provided for her use. I felt "numb", stunned by the events of this afternoon, the death of my sister at the sword blade of this woman sitting before me. It was still raining, the day "gray", chilly, "miserable" for any

who had to be outside in it. A fitting day for what had occurred here in this place. It was growing dark now, the day at an end, our nation conquered. Now a part of the "Empire of California". The sun was "setting" upon us all, with Darlanis now our monarch.

"You have won," I said, standing there, looking at her, the Empress who had "won", the woman who had killed my sister. I saw her "nod", her eyes, like beautiful blue jewels, gleaming into my own. "Not by force of arms, but by exploiting the caste codes." Once again it had been these stupid caste codes I so hated now...

"'You' gave me no other choice," Darlanis answered me back, her eyes burning into mine as I nodded, understanding her words. I had beaten her, forced her to act as she had to save her cause. Her left arm in a sling to ease the cut muscles in her shoulder.

"It's all over now," I spoke, thinking of the funeral that we would hold tomorrow. My sister had died as a Warriress, with a sword in her hand, as she would have wanted it to be here too. I wondered if I could ever understand such people, their thinking in these matters. They were not "civilized" by my standards, but more like "throw backs" now to a time before the dawn of history. The very "ideals" of the caste based upon the ideas of a Lorraine Duval, who Janet Rogers had so worshiped. Cursing us with a social order based upon the idiotic fantasies of a social misfit.* *This was the way that I felt about it at the time. (Sanda)

"I am not 'vindictive'," Darlanis answered, sitting there.

"I will not serve you," I said, holding her eyes with mine.

"Tara is 'competent' at what she does," Darlanis answered.

"There will doubtless be need for attorneys again," I spoke. I'd thought of going to Talon, placing myself at the "service" of Queen Dala Dai, who was "next" on Darlanis' list of "conquests" here, but I was sick of war, of killing, of the entire mess here. My tactics were well known, and others could take over my tasks. Someone would eventually defeat this golden haired "empress", I consoled myself here. Dularn perhaps, if Talon failed to do so. If not them, then the Nevadas or the Wyomings would finish this.

"I suppose that there will be," Darlanis nodded back at me.

"There is a Lorr Servitor, your Imperial majesty," the captain of her Warriresses interrupted here, sticking her head into the tent. Such women "served" the Lorr, much as slave girls here on Earth served their masters. "One whose name is Aurora," she now added. The Empress nodding, glancing up at me for a second.

"I am finished here," Darlanis answered. "Send her in now." Aurora now entering the tent, a jade eyed blonde, her height, her slimness, her silvery attire, the "size" of her chest leaving no doubts as to what she was. Such women are human only in form...

(the next day)

"We honor a Queen who was, who stood for what was right, who honored the codes of her caste, who put the welfare of Trelandar 'ahead' of her own," I spoke, reading from the prepared text I'd written here earlier. The body of my sister, in her regal attire, covered by a shroud, lying there on the bier before me now. Those before me standing there, the sun shining, the sky clear. Darlanis in her finery to one side, watching, now our Empress in reality. Our ruler, our Queen, our monarch, head of our government.

Earlier this morning the nobles of Trelandar had formally announced their allegiance to the Queen of Sarn, thus ending the war that had taken place for the last nine months. A war that we had won but for Darlanis' exploitation of the caste codes here... The High Priestess of Trelandar stepping forward, raising her arms in a prayer to Lysthat the Mistress of All would look upon Paula's soul with mercy, and grant her everlasting life with Her. My husband there at my side, my son Jerry standing there clasping my left hand in his right, aware that "aunt Paula" was no more...

I took the torch from the Warriress, the sunlight gleaming off her armor, her helmet with its crest, and lit the bier, the flames shooting up, hot, bright as the lamp oil burned. Such had been Paula's wishes, that her body now be burned after her death. The fire hot, making us step back from it as the smoke rose up into the cloudless sky above, marking the end of a Queen of Trelandar. The end of a free nation now subject to another's rule.

"Not 'much' of a Christmas, is it?" I said to Carl as we watched Jerry unwrapping the presents I'd bought for him there in Thistle a couple days ago. I was "wealthy" so far as money went, having inherited as mine everything that had once belonged to my sister, and as the last of the Harles clan here now, I was still one of Trelandar's famous noble names. The manor I'd been born in was gone, burned, but we had moved into the house that Katherine had lived in before her death a week ago when word had come. That Trelandar was now a part of the Empire of California, that Darlanis had "won" despite our best efforts to stop her here. My former mother in law had walked into Thistle, plunged her dagger into an Imperial trooper's heart, and died from another's blade. She had left a note saying that she no longer wished to live in a Trelandar ruled by the "likes" of Darlanis, and that hopefully by the time of her next incarnation the country would be free again!

"We're at least alive to enjoy it," my husband pointed out, perhaps thinking of so many others who had died during this war. Of Marta Satel, who had died there in the horrid jaws of a Garth.

"The same attitude that slaves might have," I retorted now.

"We're 'better off' than nearly anyone I know," he answered.

"Our 'mistress' is 'kind'," I replied, my voice unpleasant.

"She is 'beautiful'," Carl grinned, a comment I didn't like!

"Maybe you'd like to lick between her legs then!" I snapped! The anger showing in my voice. I hated the woman, this Empress!!

"Sanda!" Carl breathed, surprised no doubt at my anger here. It was the first time since our marriage that I'd snapped at him. Jerry looking up at us, aware of the change in my voice here now. His new puppy, a little "pug girl", Mischief, busy tearing up the paper that I had used here to wrap his Christmas presents in now. The puppy having been one of a litter that Paula had picked out.

"I'm just not 'myself'!" I answered, going to the window and looking out, the fire in the fireplace a comfort against the cold of this December 25th, the year 2550 as Man once measured time... The woman now riding up on her unicorn not even registering in my mind for a second before I realized that we were going to have a visitor here! Mischief stopping her paper tearing to stand alert there on the carpet, the three month old puppy showing her breeding. The Boston Terriers, despite their small size, being excellent watchdogs. Carl looking at me standing there, no doubt now aware that he'd said things to me that he never should have here.

"I didn't mean to 'upset' you, Sanda," Carl said to me then. I knew that, but just now it seemed everything touched a "nerve". That the slightest comment about Darlanis brought back memories.

"Lady Lana is here," I said, going to the door, glad to see her, to see a friend after all that had happened in the last two weeks. True, she served the Imperials, but that didn't matter to me now. We were all Darlanis' subjects, from the lowest Peasant tilling his tiny clearing to the highest nobles in the land now. Mischief running across the carpet to stand at my feet, her cute little black and white pug face looking up into mine as I picked her up so that she would not run outside when I opened the door. Lady Lana's riding boots clumping on the porch as I drew it open. Her light woolen jacket, black stylish hat, veil, befitting here.

"I just learned that you returned," Mrs. Daris smiled to me, her hazel eyes sparkling into mine as I forced a smile back then. "I'd wish you a 'Merry Christmas', but I can understand how you must feel right now..." she continued, giving me a friendly hug. Petting Mischief on the head with a gentle caressing hand then. The Boston Terrier squirming so in my arms, eager to be put down.

"It is 'hard', especially for Sanda," Carl said to her now, Jerry standing there looking up at the black clad Imperial Lady. The sword at her hip reminding me of Darlanis' weapon laws here. Of the fact that we were "slaves", not "free men", only "slaves" being disarmed by law. Something that had been commented on by a number of people, it being held by most scholars that freedom and the right to keep and bear arms were two sides of the same coin.

"I have my bow and my sword," I said, meeting Lana's eyes.

"I will issue you a 'permit' for them," Lana smiled back.* *There is a note here in my manuscript written many years ago by Lorraine which reads: "Definitely not a 'dumb blonde'. Must have known more about the past here than I thought. Will have to ask her about this 'Sullivan Law' next time that I see her."
(Sanda)

Chapter Thirty One

"It must be 'hard' for you after everything," Lana said to me as I poured her some eggnog, Carl having added a little whiskey to it here which gave it a bit more "punch" than otherwise... It was a pleasant day, temperature not that "chilly"; a typical winter day here in Trelandar, just chill enough that you needed to wear a jacket or a heavy woolen tunic if you went outside now. There was snow in the mountains, visible there upon a clear day from the back door, from the kitchen windows when one looked out. The peaks of the Sierras white against the deep blue of the sky.

"It's over with now," I answered back, my tone bitter here. My sister was dead, her ashes scattered, and Darlanis was living in her palace there in Trella already making plans for her invasion of Talon in the spring when the mountain passes would open. I did not envy those of Talon, knowing what "awaited" them here. On the other hand perhaps Queen Dala knew what to expect now too. She had the winter to prepare, to make ready for Darlanis' invasion in the spring. Force her to fight her way into Talon here. Darlanis too had her problems back in Sarn, the expense of this war having cost the people of that

country much. Then there were the Montanas, a smaller tribe who served as a "buffer" between the Nevada to the south and the Wyoming to the north. They'd been an endemic problem for several years now to the east of Sarn.

"She didn't really 'win'," Lana spoke then, looking at me as we sat there at the table. My husband reaching out for a cookie. I'm not that much of a "housewife", but I could do a few things, and such "domestic" chores helped take my mind off of things now. Off the memories now of what had been, of the hopes I'd once had.

"Doesn't matter, she's 'got' what she wanted," Carl replied.

"Maybe you were 'right' all along," Lana spoke to me then, sipping at the eggnog, Jerry playing with Mischief on the carpet. The little puppy "tugging" for all she was worth on an old sock.

"The woman who invented the codes died six centuries ago," I answered, thinking of Lorraine Duval, of the pictures I'd seen of her in some of the old books. A tall stern featured brunette, a woman who had shared her dreams with another. A woman who in her way had also changed the entire course of history from what it no doubt would have been had neither her or Janet Rogers ever lived. Changing the course of history from "neo-socialism" under Hillary Rodham Clinton to "neo-fascism" under Janet Rogers instead here.

"According to the writings of Janet Rogers Lorraine got the idea from the writings of another, a man called Robert Heinlein," Lana pointed out, obviously well educated here for a Warriress. She was also the sort of a woman who had a very surprising depth. "And it was the fact that everyone could 'vote' that spelled the doom of liberal society before the election of Janet Rogers," she continued on, obviously having read up too on the history here.

"Dularn allows anyone who pays taxes to vote," I replied.

"But only a Warrior or Warriress can hold office," Carl added, well aware no doubt of the political makeup of that society. His first wife having been as I've noted here, from that island.* * We learned through experience that perhaps this was the "best" policy after all, especially after the "trouble" we had with Les Hawkins in 2570 and that agent of Princess Tara's here. (Sanda)

"History shows the consequences of allowing true democracy," Lana added now. The United States of America had eventually gone bankrupt due to the fact here that the number of social parasites eventually increased to the point that no society could continue. At the end the number of people on "welfare" had reached proportions where the cost of maintaining them had eaten up most of the national budget, leaving very little for anything else here now. "No one with any sense believes that the common people should be allowed to have a say in affairs," the Imperial aristocrat said. Even in Dularn, which was as "democratic" as any society in this era, the majority of the people did not have a vote, I knew here. One had to be a property owner, pay taxes on it, to be a "voter". Own a business of some sort, produce a good or service here now.

"Five centuries has 'proven' us right," Carl smiled at me.

"Democracy was a failure for the same reasons that 'socialism' was a failure," Lana commented. "The people of the past believed that they could 'vote' themselves all sorts of 'benefits', none of which they would ever have to 'pay for'..." The national bankruptcy of the United States of America in 2007 a historical fact that led to the ascension of Janet Rogers as their dictator.

"From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs," Carl smiled at me. That was the basic tenet to socialism, to the concept of "liberalism" itself once you carried it out all the way. "And why work hard if you cannot reap the benefits of your labors?" my husband grinned, enjoying this here. That had been the downfall of every socialist society there was, the ultimate "downfall" of the democratic liberal welfare state in the 21st Century, its "replacement" by the neo-fascist NEW ORDER of Janet Rogers in 2011. A social order based upon the ideas of Lorraine Duval, who perhaps saw what few others ever saw here.

"It seems 'funny' now reading all this," I said to Jon as we sat together on the sofa reading the old manuscript I'd written back so many years ago for Lorraine. I'd been honest in what I'd put down on paper back then, even if some of it was embarrassing.

"It must have been a 'shock' to meet Lorraine there in '65," he smiled back, "Find out she wasn't what you thought she was..." The memories flooding back of that day, of the concerns I'd felt. I'd been afraid of her at first, fearing what she might be here. Sensing that this was a woman like few others, truly a Warrioress in the full sense of the word, a woman who had been born into the caste even if the caste itself had not even existed back then! I felt that Lorraine was hard as tempered steel, not a woman anyone might "cross" and live. The sort of a woman who leaves no living enemy behind her... A woman of LEGEND once again in the FLESH...

"Did you know 'what' she was?" I asked, recalling how they had first met there on the blood stained deck of the Ronda, a Bajan slaver when the pirate Tarkas had fallen for her "trap" here.

"Not at first," Jon answered me, recalling old memories from fifty six years in the past. "She was 'different', a woman who stood out from the others. Not beautiful, not even very feminine as such, but I remember looking into those deep dark eyes of hers back then and thinking to myself that she was like no other ever could be. That I wanted this woman, no other, for my wife then. She was a 'comfort', the sort of a woman you could rely upon..." I nodded, remembering seeing them together, how he always seemed to be at peace with her, how he seemed to understand her "moods".

"She was truly a 'legend'," I answered, remembering her. A woman who had once fought a Lorr hand to hand, who had walked the sands of an alien world, who had lived in two separate eras of time, a woman who "saw" as few others did... That was Lorraine.

"All the 'legends' are 'gone' now," Jon said. "Carol, Amethysta, Darlanis, and now Lorraine." Queen Maris was getting old and set in her ways, Sela was Queen of Talon now, and Sharon was Empress with Darlanis dead and Artemis now disappeared somewhere. Freydis had died in a hunting accident some years ago, and her husband was an ineffective King whose country was falling apart.

"I remember Carol when she was dying from that 'disease'," I answered, recalling those few weeks there so many years ago. I'd seen Lorraine weep when Tais had returned her to our time, Carol's death having effected her greatly. Yet, I also remember the brownette as she'd once been, standing there in the hot sands in the arena beside her husband. I'd always envied Bob that way, it being so obvious that Carol was utterly devoted to him and he to her. They were closer by far than I've ever been to my husbands. Lorraine having told me one time that she believed that not even death itself could ever destroy the relationship between the two.

"Reminded me of Lara Warsan in a way when she was younger," Jon said to me. "Different sort of a sexuality to her, though." Darlanis had hated the woman, although for different reasons than Lorraine. In any case Carol was the sort of a woman few women would have "liked", perhaps because of her own

innate sexuality.

"Now they're all gone, living only in our memories," I said to him as we sat together. It had been an epic era, an "era" of brave deeds, of daring do, of battle on land and at sea, some I'd been witness to. I remembered the attack by the North Star when I'd been aboard my little yacht... The ballistae bolts tearing their way through my hull. The hopeless attempt I'd made to flee a woman who'd wronged. The golden haired beauty who I'd once informed as she knelt before me that Lorraine had picked her out to be her own intimate slave, that her mistress was a lesbian... So terrifying the young Dularnian that she'd stolen a small sailboat from the estate and then sailed it all the way up to Dularn. All because I hated the young slave girl for being "blonde", for being beautiful, for being everything that I could not "be" then to Carl. She'd only been a slave girl, but I'd so wanted to hurt her. To make her suffer, all because Carl had seen her as being an attractive woman, an intelligent woman with whom he might discuss matters, while I'd grown hard and bitter over the years now.

Chapter Thirty Two

"What are you planning to 'do' now?" Lana asked me as we sat there. I was trained as an attorney at law, and I supposed that I probably should try to reopen my practice, although I'd have to read up first upon "Imperial Law", which would be the "legal system" under which the people of Trelandar would now have to live. I had enough money to last us for years, but I couldn't see that sort of a "life" for myself. We needed something to keep us both occupied, a legal practice for me, or something "administrative", while Carl by profession was a fighting man, a Warrior by caste.

"I don't really know right now," I answered her honestly, worried too if the day would come that Darlanis might decide that it was too dangerous to let me live considering what I been here. If she did so, I considered it likely she'd have me assassinated. On the other hand she'd been quite "benevolent" with Lady Tirana, saying that the old Warlady deserved the honors she'd been given, giving her a small estate just to the north of Lady Lana's here.

"I have no intentions of fighting for Darlanis," Carl said.

"I need someone to run things for me," Lana said to me then. "Someone to take charge of my security forces," she added here to Carl as he nodded back in reply... Lady Lana actually having a small military force of her own, one of around a dozen men here. She also was over the commander of the "occupation" forces, but they were not really a part of her own forces here as such now. "People who are my friends," she smiled, seeing us both nodding.

"Sounds good to me," Carl said, "How about you, Sanda?"

"I think it's just what we need," I smiled back then.

"What do you think of the estate?" Lady Lana Daris smiled as we ate dinner, a slave girl waiting to one side to be of service. I had to admit that her cook could do a lot better than I could! Carl doing ample justice to a meal better than I could have made! We had roast turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, gravy, carrots in butter sauce, the sort of a dinner that I remembered that my own mother used to fix, although

she did have a slave girl to help... Jerry already stuffed, playing with his food, sneaking bits down to Mischief, who was already learning how to "beg" as dogs so do.

"Impressive," I smiled, recalling all that I'd seen here. I had judged from the map that she controlled an area of about nine hundred square miles, with the estate itself on the northern half on the territory, a "chunk" being taken out for the land on which the Warrioress Academy laid here to the south east. Her husband, Lord Jan Daris, now living in Sarn, a member of the Imperial Senate, being one of the high Lords of the Empire. From the comments that Lana had let slip I suspected that their marriage was more in "name" only, such often happening in cases such as this. He had married Lana for her "looks", for her skill with a sword, for her caste, but she was just a "showpiece" to be "flaunted"... Left back on the estate while he "sport" with his slave girls.

"You have a lot of heavy forest to the south," Carl said.

"Outlaws haven't been a problem `yet!...' Lana replied.

"No central government," Carl answered, regarding her.

"I can hire more men at arms," Mrs. Daris answered.

"I'll take care of that for you," Carl smiled back.

"There hasn't been a problem yet, has there?" I asked.

"There will be pretty soon now," my husband warned then.

"Darlanis is recruiting everyone she can get," Lana said.

"Her weapon laws are the `problem'," Carl pointed out now.

"I don't understand," Lana asked, sipping here at her wine.

"During the war both sides took anyone willing to fight," he explained, "And some of those we took into our armed forces were those who were one jump ahead of the law when we recruited them." The Empire had done the "same", especially with its "second line" troops, many of whom were no doubt drawn from the criminal class.

"During the war I trained people in `guerrilla warfare', and some of those I trained may be willing to apply what they learned not against Imperial troops, but against estates such as this..." I added now, well aware that I had considered making such raids. And it was likely too that such people would not be handing over the weapons they had to the Imperial occupying forces either now. "For all practical purposes laws are only `enforceable' when the majority of the people consider them right and proper," I added. This was not the case here, as I felt Lady Lana knew quite well. Darlanis was ruling a people who hated her guts, her occupation. People who needed only a "leader" to start a resistance movement. The "situation" here was quite "unstable", and Darlanis knew it.

"We have `sowed the wind', and we may `reap the whirlwind'," Lana answered, the words seeming to bring back old memories now. "And any who is skillful will not be long without a weapon here," she now mused thoughtfully, no doubt aware as a Warrioress of how "easy" it was to make weapons, use those weapons to take a better weapon from a dead enemy. Such having been a part of our training. As our instructors at the Academy told us, we were "dangerous" not because of our weapons, or our skill in their

use, but because of the way that we thought, the way that we saw things... This was not clearly understood until the time of Janet Rogers, who was the first to realize that "knowledge" can be "dangerous". That someone trained or knowledgeable in the arts of war even if they are disarmed by law will not be without weapons for long... * * The best "example" I know of this is the action of Lorraine in disarming two police officers in the 21st Century by taking them by surprise using advanced Warriress tactics that they were totally and completely unfamiliar with. Neither of them knowing of course just "what" they were actually facing here now... (Sanda)

"Darlanis will 'need' those forces she is now using to occupy Trelandar when she attacks Talon next spring," I pointed out. Lana nodding thoughtfully, "aware" of I think here the first time just how "unsafe" things could get for a high born Imperial Lady. Right now she had a force of a full battalion to back up her own personal military with, but she wouldn't have that for very long. Not when Darlanis started "needing" those men for her own uses...

"You ever seen 'combat' yourself?" Carl ventured to Lana. I should mention here that this was something I'd never asked her. I supposed she had a military "rank", but that didn't mean much.

"Only the aftermath," Lana answered, not "comfortable" now.

"No 'field experience' then?" my husband quickly asked her.

"My husband is a good friend of Darlanis..." Lana answered.

"We're not trying to 'imply' anything here," I said to her.

"I'm not really a 'fighter' like you two," Lana answered, obviously quite uncomfortable with this line of questioning here. The fact that she was a Princess of Swords did not imply that she was truly a "fighting woman" in the same way that another might. There is a considerable difference between skill and "mindset".

"You seemed brave enough the time I captured you," I said.

"I have my 'pride'," Lana replied, her hazel eyes holding my own darker orbs as I nodded back. Understanding much about her. She was of the Warriress caste, but really no more a Warriress here than I was. "I'm a major in the Imperial military, but that is just a 'rank' that I was given as a part of being Mrs. Daris."

In the fifteen years that I knew Lady Lana Daris before her death in battle aboard the Ronda, the "opinion" that I formed of her then was that she was a very nice, sweet person, but not what one would call a "fighter" as such. Her husband treated her as a "possession", a lovely piece of property, almost like some slave. She was skilled with arms, but not "warlike" in her personality. She was a Warriress by caste, but lacked the "mindset" of one...

While Lorraine relates that she reminded her a great deal of Carol Simmons, I didn't see that the two were actually all that much alike save in height, eye and hair color. Carol was harder featured than Lana, had a somewhat fuller and more muscular body. Bob's wife also had an earthy "sensuality" about her Lana didn't.

In Lorraine's writings it is remarked by the Warlady that she had "feelings" for Lana, but she never allowed these feelings full rein for fear of what Princess Janis might have said had she found out. While I do not know of any lesbian relationship that Lorraine ever had, there being nothing in her diaries to indicate

such, it is true that she saw other women sometimes in a sexual way, as is obvious when you more closely read what she wrote now. On the other hand she felt that such relationships were "wrong", even if she did feel something of a sexual attraction at times...

A final note here: The diaries indicate that Lorraine did plan to someday have them translated and published, but I suspect that she simply never got around to carrying out her plans here. After the "death" of Darlanis and the earlier deaths of Amethysta and Lady Tirana, both of whom died of simple old age as such, she seemed to lose "interest" in things, in further "adventures" of the sort that she'd carried out when younger. In the last few years of her life Lorraine seemed to me to have lost much of the awesome vitality that had made her the legend that she'd become. She was "old", and she once said to me that she'd lived out her life and it was time that she "made room" for a new generation...

Chapter Thirty Three

"Interesting ruins," Carl said, sitting there on his unicorn with the sunlight dappling the ground around us as it sparkled in down through the moving boughs overhead. The structure at first glance appearing to be more of a "hump" overgrown with vegetation than anything else until you noted it had once been a home here. A home made to survive anything, made to last here for centuries.

"According to what I've read, this was the home of Marcella Domino," Lady Lana said, referring to a woman of the 21st Century who had left us a book now telling of her life back in that time. She had also referred to a Bob and Carol Simmons, close friends of Janet Rogers, who she said had lived in this same "earth home" all their lives before their deaths in 2033, Marcella herself having died in the year 2049 AD of a cancer caused by radiation. She was a TriVid "personality" earlier here in the 21st Century I might note for the curious who have no doubt never heard of her. Marcella's hair bleached blonde like mine according to her book. * * At this time here I was wearing my hair "bleached", a "style" that was quite "popular" in Trelandar here at the time. (Sanda)

It was a pleasant day, middle spring, the year 2552, Jerry off to school now, learning his "3 R's", while his mother and her husband had settled in as "employees" of a lovely Imperial Lady. The people of Trelandar having "adjusted" to the fact that they were now the subjects of Empress Darlanis, who at this moment was leading an attack upon Talon, one I suspected would be a failure. Her battles against the Montanas last year had accomplished "little" in the long run, the Montanas themselves having now "merged" with the Nevadas and the Wyomings, two far more powerful groups.

"Want to take a look inside it?" Carl asked, dismounting.

"There could be dangerous animals," Lady Lana answered.

"Sanda?" my husband asked, looking up at me there now.

"I'll go," I said, glad for my mother's sword at my hip.

"Fascinating..." I said, Carl holding up the torch for me. The flicking light reflecting off the sword in Lady Lana's hand. The house had been ransacked centuries ago, but it was obvious to me that there were still

things here of interest to my caste now.

"When you think of all they had..." Lana spoke quietly here.

"Were they better off?" Carl asked, looking about the room. That was a question I knew had been debated by Scribes ever since civilization had been reborn in the Twenty Second Century. Those of the past had no doubt possessed "more" than we do now, but did they enjoy life any more? One cannot measure "happiness" as such by how "much" people had then. By the clothing they wore, or by the sort of entertainments that they had then. We live closer to nature now than they did, and our own "entertainments" are doubtlessly far "simpler" than theirs were. On the other hand we perhaps "understand" what they did not. That the nature of Man is not something easily altered or changed as they once so believed. That things such as "honor" and keeping one's word are important. That criminals must be "punished", and severely or crime will become so rampant that people will not dare to walk the streets. I know Janet Rogers tried to "turn" the course of history, and to a great extent she succeeded in doing so, but the war between Earth and Mars cut short what could have been, leaving only speculation as to what Mankind might have accomplished in centuries to come.* * There would have been no starships so beloved of science fiction writers of that era, as such are forbidden by the Guardians of the Universe for good reason. However, I do believe that Mankind and the Lorr would have been able to live together in peace had wiser heads prevailed after the death of Janet Rogers. It is "obvious" that Domino Tremaine was unable to maintain the sort of "control" over the military that Janet so maintained... (Sanda)

"Hmm," I mused now, looking at a little china cat there on a shelf that still stood despite the centuries that had passed, the little figurine dirty, dusty, but yet a reminder of those who had once lived here so long ago. First the Simmons, then at the end a dying woman, gripped with pain as she wrote her last words now. Finally ending her life with poison when the pain grew too great. Leaving a daughter, who carried out her mother's last wishes in a society where the sword decided then whether one lived or died ...Where strong men, armed, took as "wives" those women who pleased.

"This is a place of `ghosts'," Lana said, looking about, no doubt uncomfortable here in this place, in these ruins we'd found here in the forest a dozen miles or so from the manor house now. Here and there one could see where animals had made their beds, a number of marks on the walls speaking of earlier human residents. Initials and "dates", some dating back even to the 21st Century.

"Let's `go', Sanda," Carl said, the china cat still sitting there as it had no doubt for centuries, much to my own puzzlement as such items are frequently taken by children when they explore. On the other hand these ruins were not in a part of Trelandar now muchly "inhabited", not even by Peasants, I should also mention, it being held by some here too that these forests were "cursed" by mutated horrors of a sort that had never been blessed by Lys.

"Have you heard the `news'?" Lana exclaimed as I greeted her return from Thistle where she'd gone with Carl and several of our men at arms to do some shopping. "Talon has defeated Darlanis!" Carl grinning at me, no doubt delighted here at Darlanis' defeat. The newspaper Lana gave me then as our retainers stood listening in awe leaving no doubts that this had indeed been the case here. That Darlanis' dreams of glory, first halted by the barbarians on the other side of the Sierras, had been destroyed by those of Talon! The "costs" to Talon had been "high", even higher than that "paid" by the people of Trelandar, but little Talon had finally defeated the Empress of California in battle, although at a cost that had left no doubt thousands homeless; more children without any parents! According to the paper Darlanis was retreating from Talon, this tall golden woman who had sought to rebuild what had once been!! Beaten by the bravery of Talon's own Warriresses on their great birds, women who risked their

lives for their Queen.

"She wasn't 'invincible' after all," Carl grinned at me now. He was Trelandarian, and still saw Darlanis as being an invader. As the invader we'd beaten in a fair battle but for the "codes".

"I feel sorry for her in a way," I said, looking up at him.

"Maybe Lana is working you too hard..." my husband grinned, Lady Lana nodding, neither of them understanding how I felt here.

"Look at the ship, mother!" Jerry said as I sat there on the end of the dock beside him, letting him try his luck at fishing, it being a hot middle summer day, the sort of day good for doing simple things like this. A day to soak one's feet in the ocean here in the little bay that the estate used for its harbor. The heavy Imperial trireme obviously was coming in towards us now... Its ornate gilt, the flags it flew, the symbols on the sails left no doubts either. I'd seen that "crown and stars" symbol before! Mischief standing there, alert, her ears perked up, her body so motionless that one could have so thought her a stuffed dog here. The sun bright on the gentle swells as the ship now came closer like some great prehistorical monster from a time now only myth.

"That is Sarnian Queen, and Darlanis is aboard her," I said, aware that the trireme was apparently coming into our little bay. The news having been that Darlanis planned to make a series of visits to various Trelandarian estates, no doubt to insure that she still had control of Trelandar after her losses in Talon now. A couple of our slave girls standing there watching, the collars locked about their throats gray bands against their tanned skin. A barked order from me sending them both running to the manor now to warn Lady Lana that we could expect a very "royal" visitor...

"Is my veil right?" Lana asked, making last minute adjustments to her clothing. I no longer bothered veiling myself anymore, but Lana of course had to due to her social status here. I did wear a hat, mostly to keep the glare out of my eyes, but now I saw such things as being little more than just a pretense here. The boat now coming over the swells towards us flying a smaller version of the impressive "Tarl" flag that Darlanis had adopted as a symbol of the Empire of California. The flag right now no doubt a bit of an "embarrassment" to her considering everything.

"You look just fine," I assured her, holding on to Jerry. I had my hair bleached golden blonde, and I doubted that Darlanis would recognize me, as I didn't look much like I had back then. I'd put on about ten pounds, having been haggard and thin there at the end of the war, not the curvy "delight" that I'd become.* * I wore my hair "blonde" from the time we moved on to Lana's estate until only a few months before the time of her death. Carl always liked me as "blonde", but when I started to have problems with my hair, I had to quit, and return to my own color. (Sanda)

"Be sure that your men give the proper 'salute'," Lana spoke to Carl then, this visit by her Imperial highness having thrown the entire staff into an uproar, our slaves (female) all gathered to one side, while the field slaves (male) were in their sheds... My husband nodding, pointing with his sword to a man, having him step back a hair so that the formation might be perfect for HER.

"Swordsalute !" Lana snapped, drawing her blade, extending her arm, the blade lifted up over her head as Darlanis stepped up on to the dock, the gold of her hair bright here in the sunlight. I held my own up, aware of Carl's men doing the same as Darlanis now came striding towards us, a blondish little girl at her side. This being Princess Anna Marden, Crown Princess of the Empire...

Chapter Thirty Four

"At least we don't have to eat dinner with `her'," I grinned to Carl as we ate our own. Mischief by the side of my chair, her dark eyes looking hopefully up into mine... Darlanis had merely glanced at me for a second, no hint of "recognition" in her eyes. I hadn't even been "introduced" to the Empress, which suited me just fine as Darlanis wasn't exactly anyone I much cared for now. Hopefully Lana would keep her wits about herself and avoid any mention of me, as Darlanis might have a justified concern here as to how I might exploit the defeat now of her own forces by Talon. There had been a few isolated "incidents" over the past couple of years that indicated that not everyone in Trelandar accepted the current state of affairs, and there had even been a few who had spoken of me as being perhaps Queen Paula's rightful "heir" here!

"She's `lost face'," Carl said, seeing me nod back in reply. There were a lot of people who knew that Darlanis had only "won" Trelandar by exploiting the caste codes, by tricking Queen Paula into fighting a personal duel with her over fictitious accusations. Her defeat here at the hands of Talon's military a further proof. She had been fought to a stalemate by the nomadic tribes of the plains on the other side of the Sierras last year, and now she'd lost the war with Talon, no doubt a great blow to her hopes here.

"And more `dangerous' because of it," I pointed out to him.

"Her next `move' will be to the north," Carl mused to me.

"Attempt to take Orgon from Dularn," I smiled back at him.

"There are those in Orgon who would support her," he said.

"Can I be excused?" Jerry asked, sitting there at the table.

"Sure, but stay away from our `guests'," Carl warned him. I was well aware that he knew that Darlanis had killed "aunt Paula" in a duel, and while I'd tried to teach him not to hate Darlanis, he did see her as being some sort of a "criminal", if one that it was impossible to ever bring to justice here due to her position.

"I will," Jerry promised, Mischief going off with him now.

"He's a good kid," Carl said as my son dashed out the door, the Boston Terrier following at his heels, utterly devoted to him like only a dog raised from a puppy can be to a young boy here... "You're a good mother too, a good wife," he grinned back at me. "'Good' with a sword," he added, Lady Lana having taught me a lot of things I hadn't known. I wasn't a "match" for her as yet, and I probably never would be, but I could give her a good fight now.

"As good as the slave girls?" I teased, there being a couple who were sexy delights, although most were just ordinary women of a sort that you might see walking the main street of Thistle now. I took some pride at being "good in bed", at keeping him "happy".

"That's a nice doggie you've got," the blondish girl said to Jerry as Mischief followed at his heels, the dog well trained to obey, and to stay at his side even when there were others around.

"She's pretty good," Jerry admitted, aware that the girl was a "guest" here on the estate and had to be "treated nice" even if she was just a girl and thus a lower form of life inferior to any boy. "Name's Mischief," he added, the girl smiling in reply...

"Your parents live here?" the girl asked, standing there. Her attire leaving no doubts in his mind that she was with that "woman" that his mother didn't seem to think all that much of. A warm smile from the girl making him feel that whatever the adults thought of things, the blondish girl certainly wasn't an "enemy".

"My mom's Lady Lana's assistant, and my dad is over the men who guard us here," Jerry answered, looking into the deep blue of a lovely pair of eyes. He didn't much care for girls, but this one was pretty nice, if obviously "dressed" so she couldn't have any fun. The girl being dressed in a style like he'd seen in the books that his mother had. Not as a child, but more as an adult.

"I'm Anna," the girl said softly, giving Jerry a shy smile.

"My name's Jerry," my son answered, the Princess nodding.

"My mom's Darlanis," Anna said, giving him a smile back.

"I... I guess you can't help that," Jerry answered her.

"There's a lot of people who don't like her," Anna said.

"Like my mom," Jerry admitted, the Princess nodding back.

"Here's my mom now," Anna smiled, Darlanis strolling over.

"And whose little boy are you?" Darlanis asked, Mischief not too delighted with the woman, and expressing her opinion in a low warning growl not to come any closer. The Empress' long flowing cape here no doubt was the problem, as Mischief didn't like such.

"Oh, oh!" Carl breathed, motioning me to the window then.

"Jerry's apt to tell her she killed his aunt!!" I breathed, going to the door, calling to him to come here right now, leaving Darlanis and Anna standing there, Jerry running to me, the Boston running ahead, while the Empress took her daughter and walked off back into the main entrance, her arm protectively about the girl.

"So that's Darlanis!" Jerry said to me, his eyes wide. I'd over reacted here, but I didn't want Darlanis to know that I was living here, especially considering some recent events here now. "She's beautiful," he added, "Even if she did kill aunt Paula."

"We're going to have to tell him the whole story some day," Carl said to me as we prepared for bed that night. "When he's old enough to understand the caste codes, affairs of honor here." I knew too that Carl wanted to make a Warrior out of Jerry, something I wasn't very comfortable with. He'd said I was too "protective" of the boy, that I wanted to "shield" him from life now.

"There's nothing glorious or glamorous about war," I snapped back, slipping off my clothing, my tell tale

dark eye brows ample evidence here that I was not truly a "blonde" despite my hair color. "Or about fighting duels," I snapped, angry now despite myself. I knew it wasn't his fault, how "touchy" I'd become now.

"Never said that there was," Carl answered, standing there. "Personally I'd rather make love to you any time," he grinned...

"Well, hopefully we won't see 'her' for a while," Lana said to me as we watched Sarnian Queenraise anchor, head out to sea.

"I wonder how she 'justifies' to her daughter some of the things that she's done," I answered, my hand on Jerry's shoulder.

"Probably doesn't discuss it with her, I expect," Lana said.

"I'm going to ride into Thistle," I said, Lana "nodding" as she sat there on the veranda watching our slaves hard at work, my husband gone off somewhere here with several of our men at arms after we'd seen the last of Darlanis, hopefully for a long time.

"Just don't be 'out' after dark," she warned, smiling back.

"I've lived around here all my life," I smiled, trotting off then, it being a dozen miles here from the estate to Thistle. Two hours riding time if you're well mounted as I was here. It being my intention to purchase something "frilly", the sort of attire that a woman might wear for a lover, or dress a slave in. A broad brimmed hat serving to shade my features from the sun...

Thirsty, I rode off the road seeking the stream that I knew ran a few hundred yards away, letting my unicorn push through the brush, in through the trees, the shade pleasing given the heat of the sun. The long slim sword of my mother's at my hip a comfort. The Imperial occupation troops tending to be drawn from the very worse of our society, men who abused their authority whenever it was possible to do so. The number of rapes in the last year here enough to leave no doubt as to the sort of men Darlanis employed. And most of the time their officers would just laugh whenever a complaint was made, it being obvious that to them we were little better than "slaves" whose only purpose was to serve their needs. So far there had been no organized revolt against Imperial rule, but I'd cautioned Lana that if this state of affairs continued as it was the people would eventually rise up against their Imperial overlords. And this time Darlanis would not "win" either here...

"It's still a lovely country," I mused to myself as I squatted there at the edge of the brook and dipped a cup into the cool water. The soft rustle of the leaves in the trees, the songs of the birds, the chatter of the squirrels, all bringing back good memories of when I'd been young, filled with joy at being alive. When the world seemed as "young" as I was, and filled with lots of "opportunity" for a young and ambitious Warriress to be then. Now I was depressed a lot of the time, aware that I, once a proud haughty high Lady of Trelandar, was just a glorified "secretary". That I, once a Warlady of Trelandar, now worked for the Empire of California and its "representative" here now in this part of Trelandar, the Imperial Lady Lana Daris... Not that I had anything against Lana, who was a good person in every way, but yet she was still an Imperial overlord, a representative of Darlanis here...

It was with such thoughts going through my mind that I heard the outcry of a young woman nearby, the LAUGHTER of men mingling in with her cries! The sounds leaving no doubts in my mind now!! That some of Darlanis' damn troopers had found a woman to rape...

"ByLys!!! Not This Time!" I snapped, slipping my bow from its sheath, several arrows held ready to hand on the quiver here. The fury building up to a rage that nothing could have stopped!!!

Chapter Thirty Five

Drawing upon all my own hard won skills, I crept carefully through the woods, guided by the sounds of the woman's outcries, the rough laughter of the men as they tormented their victim now! With an arrow nocked on my bowstring and murder most vile in my heart, I swore now by all that was holy that this time these men would "pay" for their crimes, and I'd be judge, jury, and "executioner"! Normally there is no death penalty for rape, castration being the usual practice carried out here, but just then nothing but their deaths would have "satisfied" the lust for blood I had!

Peeking out from behind a thick tree trunk, I saw three Imperial troopers with a young woman, one no more I thought than in her early teens. Her clothing torn, ripped as she fought them... She was just a low caste girl from her attire, but she was a woman of Trelendar, and just then I recollected too that once I'd been a Warriress of Trelendar, even if I'd never had the "mark". The men in their helmets and chain mail obviously here Imperials! Part of the "occupation force" that Darlanis had left in control.

"Bastards!" I screamed, getting their attention, the first to take my arrow looking up in surprise, his companions much to my surprise now throwing their hands up into the air in surrender as they stood there, the sobbing young teenage girl at their feet weeping, clutching at her torn clothing. "Die for your crime!" I screamed, shooting again, the man clutching at the arrow, falling to the dirt. His companion going to his knees, begging for mercy! The fury so hot in my body that it felt as if I was on fire!

I stepped out into their little clearing, the troopers' unicorns standing there watching us, the girl and her pair of buckets leaving no doubts that she lived around here somewhere. That she was one of the thousands of people here who lived under the rule of Lady Lana, who controlled all of this part of Trelendar.

"Stand," I said to the kneeling trooper, standing there, an arrow on my string, the girl's dark eyes like liquid pools looking into mine. She was dark haired, like most Trelendarians, and in her terror looked even younger than what she probably was now. "Die like a man for your crimes," I spoke, the trooper blubbing in terror, shaking his head, aware I held his life in my hands...

"Who are you?" the girl breathed out, holding her clothes to herself. She would have been worth say about fifteen gold crowns in a good market to a "thoughtful" master who might buy her with hopes for what she'd become in a few more years now. The fact I had killed two Imperial troopers no doubt highly impressing her.

"I am a Trelendarian," I spoke, regarding them both here. I could kill the man as he knelt before me, but that would not satisfaction for what he and his kind had done to my fair country... I bent forward, watching them both, and yanked the arrows from the bodies of those who I had killed, one apparently not yet dead from the low outcry he made as I yanked the arrow from his body.

Then shifting my bow to my left hand, I drew my sword, that long slim blade forged by a civilization

now but legend, and put him out of his misery, as I might a wounded animal I'd shot here. Keeping an eye on the two, "trustful" of none in a situation like this. The girl was simply terrified of me, but the Imperial I'd suspected was thinking of how he might take me by surprise here. Stepping back a step, I set my bow down on the dirt, my mother's sword firmly in my grasp, the sunlight peeking through the leaves above casting spots of light upon the ground before us. I could hear the call of a bird in the trees somewhere, the chuckle of the brook as it swirled around a rock, the buzz of insects as I now straightened up, my eyes never leaving those there before me.

"Draw," I hissed, motioning with the point of my sword here. The trooper suddenly grinning to himself, having obviously little idea of what skill with a blade that a woman might have here now. The man whipping out his own sword, and slashing out at me then. I parried his inept thrust, made a quick riposte, and then cut him with my point before he even knew what I was up to here now!

"Huh!" the trooper growled, rushing in at me, forcing me to sidestep his attack, my parry and thrust more than he could handle here, as once again my point pierced his skin, my attacks being to that part of his body not covered by his chain mail here.

"You are going to die when I wish you to die," I said to him in tones that left no doubt that I knew fully well what I was doing here. "And you are going to wish that you never came to Trelandar, or attempted to rape any of its women," I spoke, forcing him back with a series of attacks that he had no answer to here.

"You do not wear the black of the Warriress," he noted.

"We are not required to wear black," I pointed out to him. I then drove him back until he stood before the bodies of his own companions, and there with a swift clash of steel I slashed his throat with the keen tip of my blade, sending his soul into the afterlife, no doubt to now face the justice he properly deserved!

"Who are you?" the girl asked, standing there looking at me.

"I am a Trelandarian," I answered, seeing her nod in reply.

"Perhaps Darlanis did not 'win' after all," she said then.

"Wars are not always fought between armies," I pointed out.

"There was once one very brave who fought for us," she said.

"Perhaps I made a mistake in 'retiring'," I said to her now.

"I have seen nothing of what happened here," she said to me.

"There have been 'outlaws' reported in these parts," I said.

"I will tell them that if they ask me about it," she smiled.

"These damn Imperials and their taxes!" the shopkeeper muttered to me as I looked over his wares there in Thistle an hour later. The ride had been enough to settle my nerves, although I was well aware of the uproar that would occur once the bodies of the three troopers were found. No doubt Lady Lana would feel the need to send out forces to hunt down these "outlaws" guilty here of killing three innocent men only now doing their "duties" here. I did not believe that she would find anything, nor would my Carl

hunt very hard either for such "will of the wisps" as these were. For these mysterious outlaws that gave the Empire so much grief.

"It costs a lot when you lose a war," I pointed out to him.

"Ay, `that' it does," he muttered, wiping his brow, the air hot here in his store as I looked for something I might wear now. The thought going through my mind of "what" certain people would have said had they known the sort of attire I sometimes wore when Carl and I were alone, and Jerry had put to bed earlier on here.

"More than it does when you win a war," I grinned at him.

"Lord Daris is coming to `visit'," Carl said to me as we ate dinner that night. I'd met him the year before when he came down from Sarn to see his wife, a heavy set man, much like a boar that walked on two legs. Truly an "Imperial" in his attitude, utterly "different" than Lana, who was Trelandarian by birth, and in many ways, attempted to rule us as kindly as she could here now. Jan Daris on the other hand saw us as "serfs" to do Imperial bidding.

"Oink, oink," I grinned, remembering how the man had looked at me like I was one of his slave girls. Carl frowning at me now as Jerry stared at the "sound" that I'd made here. I'd have to talk to him, explain that we had our little "secrets" we kept...

"We aren't in a position to irritate anyone," he said to me.

"We're all proper subjects of her Imperial Highness," I said in reply, the "sarcasm" showing in the tone of my voice here now.

"What's `gotten' into you tonight, Sanda?" Carl said to me.

"I had a chance to recollect a few things," I smiled back.

"A slave girl would blush to wear that..." Carl said to me as he laid there on the bed, the windows open to let in the air. The lamp turned down low so that the room was mostly shadows now.

"Its purpose is to `accent' a woman's body," I smiled back, the teddy being designed to accent one's figure, not conceal it. It didn't leave much to the imagination, I should mention here.

"Turn around so I can see all of you," Carl grinned at me.

"I see I am thought `desirable'," I teased him back here.

"You should be `collared'," he grinned back, regarding me.

"I do wear `this'," I said, touching the chain about my neck that marked me as being a married woman of less than three years. Next year would be time for one of gold, and thought of having a second child, one that would be truly both ours, although Carl's attitude towards Jerry was one of father to son despite the fact that Jerry was actually the son of one now dead over two years...

"You're different since you came back from Thistle," he said to me as I joined him on the bed, covering him with my body now. "More `alive' than you've been in a long time," he observed here. Our kiss was long and deep, my tongue flirty, a raspy wet tease.

"It's good for me to get out upon occasion," I smiled back.

"You're going to be a good `ride' tonight too," he smiled.

"I'm always a `good ride'," I smiled, feeling his touch.

"You aren't too `accessible' down there," he observed.

"It `unbuttons'," I pointed out, undoing the buttons.

Chapter Thirty Six

"There are three Imperial troopers missing from the company based at Thistle," Lana said to me the next morning, word having apparently reached her from their commanding officer. Her hazel eyes holding mine as I nodded, well aware of the implications... "It appears that terrorism is now a problem here in this area too despite `everything' I've done to try to prevent it," she added, well aware too of the problems that other Imperial overlords were having. Only this estate and Lady Tirana's to the north, which was under Lana's administration, having been free of such as yet. The Empire might be able to occupy Trelandar, but the people of Trelandar did not see Darlanis as "anything" but a hated invader. The rounds of jokes that circulated about Darlanis and Imperials in general leaving little doubt as to how the people felt here.

"You've done everything you could to prevent such," I said, well aware that her authority over the military was limited, this being the major reason why the troopers felt that they could "do" as they wished. Their officer seeing all Trelandarian women in terms of slave collars and whips, feeling that we were all rightless slaves despite Darlanis' own rhetoric to the contrary here.* * It should be stated here that Darlanis herself did not tolerate such abuses, but she tended to listen too much to Princess Tara, who of course told her that all these accusations were lies. In this regard it is noteworthy that Lara Warsan had a considerable influence upon Darlanis after 2555, making the Empress more aware of the abuses that were taking place... Darlanis was sincere in her wish to make a better life for people, but she had bad advice from Princess Tara and others close to her who wished to exploit the people of Trelandar for their own purposes. Lara Warsan made a considerable change in Darlanis, letting her "see" for herself what life was truly like here for the common people. As head of the Free Trelandar Movement I denounced these actions by Darlanis as mere "window dressing", although they did tend to improve life for people despite my attempts to show otherwise. I am not proud now of some of the things that I did back then, something Darlanis pointed out to me many times, but I was fighting for my country, and I considered the end "justifying" the means here. I am glad that in the later years together we became good friends. That we could each forgive the other for what we'd done. (Sanda)

"We should be safe here," Carl said, aware of "who" was responsible here for the deaths of the three Imperial troopers, my husband no doubt uncomfortable with the thought that he was married to a woman who could kill without any remorse as I had here. That to me the "war" had never ended despite Darlanis' "victory".

"I hope so," Lady Lana answered, smiling at her son Brian. The boy now three, having been but a baby

when we'd first come to the estate after the end of the war. Four years younger than my own Jerry. Still a "baby" in a way, while Jerry was starting to become a young man now, losing his fear of thunderstorms and such things that are a part of growing up. Such as the one last night that had been a humdinger of a storm with the winds and all here. I was feeling "odd" this morning too, almost as if I was pregnant again, which I knew was almost impossible given the effectiveness of the implants now commonly used. I'd had these feelings before lately, as well as noticing that I was gaining weight and starting to develop a bit of a belly here. Could I be pregnant now?

"Something wrong, Sanda?" Carl then asked, looking at me.

"Don't feel so hot," I smiled, feeling a bit nauseous.

"Maybe you're pregnant," Lady Lana grinned at me then.

"That isn't likely," I answered, knowing the odds here.

"We'll take a trip into Thistle and find out what is wrong," Lana answered, her hazel eyes holding mine as I nodded back now. We had a veterinarian on the estate who treated both the animals and the slaves, as well as some of the local peasantry here, but I had little confidence in her abilities at anything complicated. She was of the caste of Physicians, but not truly a "Physician".

"You're pregnant," the Physician smiled at me, "About three months at least, I'd say," he grinned at me, adding to the shock as I laid there with my skirt pulled up over my hips, naked now below the waist as he finished making his examination of me here.

"I'm implanted, and the implant is up to date!" I protested, disbelieving that I could be pregnant now with my implant here...

"All I know that about six months from now you are going to be a 'mother'," he smiled back, regarding me sitting before him. "I can make a test to see if it's a boy or a girl, but you're most definitely pregnant, and there's absolutely no doubt about that."

"I don't understand," I breathed, looking up at him here.

"Happens every once in a while," he grinned back at me.

"I guess Carl will be happy," I replied, forcing a smile.

"How long you've been married?" he asked me here, aware that the silver of my neck chain meant that I'd been married for less than three years. As a rule one is required to wait until the three years are up before having children, although dispensations are allowed. In my case I wouldn't have any choice in the matter as it was obvious that Carl and I were starting our family just a bit sooner than we were planning to do. I might mention for any who are wondering here the "thought" of having an abortion never crossed my mind, such practices being almost unknown in this era. I know that such things were commonplace at one time, but so was the practice of human sacrifice and other now barbaric practices. Had this happened when I was single and the man did not wish to marry me I would have given the child to people who could raise a child properly, but the "idea" of destroying a perfectly healthy baby, one not defective in any way, has always been "unthinkable" to me. Certain not something that I would ever have done here...

"Less than two years," I admitted, our second wedding anniversary several months off yet, Carl and I having gotten married on the third of October in the year 2550, or 503 A.W. as is more commonly used

here by most people not of my own caste. I didn't see why it really mattered now, as obviously I was pregnant, and that was it and there wasn't anything we could do now but be happy for the child to come, even if he or she hadn't been "planned" as is usually the case now a days with the implants all women wear once they enter puberty. As I was not menstruating, the implant was working apparently, but somehow I'd guess that I ovulated despite the implant, and thus got pregnant without knowing.

"And your name is Mrs. Sanda Talen?" the doctor asked, making a notation in his records. I supposed I'd get written up in a medical journal somewhere, but just now that didn't matter any where near as much to me as the fact that I was with child now!!

"You said I'm now about three months pregnant?" I asked him, sitting on the edge of the examining table, slipping my strap on. I hadn't much enjoyed being so examined, the doctor having treated me much as he might have some slave girl. For this reason I tended to prefer women Physicians when such became necessary now.

"Maybe closer to four, but you aren't very swollen yet," he answered, turning about to look at me standing there before him as I adjusted my clothing and buckled my harness on about myself. "You seem to be in good physical condition, and you're not very old, so there shouldn't be any problems that I can see here now."

"Then there shouldn't be any 'problems'?" I ventured, aware that if I was going to be a mother again, it would be wise now to "prepare" for that fact. Find a good mid-wife, and have a talk with a Priestess so that she could attend me when the time came.* * I was also a bit concerned here about whether or not the baby would be normal, as you will recall here my mentioning earlier that my sister once gave birth to a stillborn monster, a "thing" that never would have been allowed to live. It is also because of this that most people took pains to avoid the ruins from the past that dot most all of North America here and there. (Sanda)

"Well, what is 'wrong'?" Carl said to me as I stepped back out into the waiting room where he'd been waiting with Lana here.

"You're going to be a father," I smiled, enjoying his look of surprise at my words. "I'm about three, four months pregnant."

"Guess I'm more of a 'man' than I thought I was," he smiled.

"And there can be no 'doubts' about her," Lana grinned here.

"I need to talk to a Priestess," I replied, seeing them nod.

"You aren't planning on 'doing something'?" Carl protested.

"Certainly 'not'!" I snapped, angry he'd even think I might! What "kind" of woman did he think I was? The fact that I knew a lot about the 21st Century didn't mean that I believed in it now! I certainly didn't believe in their practices of aborting unwanted babies just because the women of that time were careless about their contraceptive usage. About who they slept with, had sex with, many of the women of that era being almost like prostitutes in their attitudes judging from what was so written by novelists.

"That will be fifteen silver eagles," the doctor spoke, interrupting this conversation much to the relief of all here... A conversation that none of us ever wished had gotten started now!!

Chapter Thirty Seven

She was old, this High Priestess of the temple here at Thistle, the gray streaking her hair leaving no doubts of that here. But yet her eyes were bright, and her smile warm as she ushered me into her office there off the main portion of the temple where the people worshiped. Where stood the golden ankh, the symbol of Lys, the Giver of Life Everlasting, before dozens of candles as a few women knelt quietly here and there seeking the "peace" that could be had no where else. The occupation of our country having made many turn back to the peace and comfort that only Lys gave.

"You are 'troubled'," she spoke, guiding me to a chair and then seating herself in another, her desk there to one side of the room. A view through the window showing the Sierras there in the far distance like dark clouds rising up there on the horizon. Her long white gown, her golden ankh, the "mark" of a Priestess.

"I didn't expect to become pregnant right now," I told her.

"You are well off," she observed, my attire ample "proof".

"I've only been married for less than two years," I said.

"Is there 'love' in your marriage?" she asked me in reply.

"Yes," I answered back, having no "doubts" about Carl here.

"Then I fail to see that there is a 'problem'," she replied.

"I became pregnant by accident," I said to her, aware that I did not have the usual dispensation necessary for childbirth now. That I was technically in "violation" of the laws regarding such.

"It has happened before," she answered. "The 'failure rate' of the drug we presently use is about one in ten million or so." The thought going through my mind that while it might be "funny" to everyone else, it didn't seem all that "funny" to me just now! "Given the population of Trelandar, a woman finds herself in your situation about once every decade or so now," she continued here. "The last one was a prostitute down in Trella," she grinned now.

"I don't find it 'amusing'," I said, seeing her nod back.

"Perhaps you'd better tell more about yourself," she said.

"I think you will make a fine mother," the High Priestess said to me, giving me the paper that "certified" me as legally a "mother to be" now. Her eyes glowing into mine as I nodded back. I could only hope that the child growing this very moment inside me would be perfect, that it would not be a "thing" like my own sister had given birth to, a horror that never could have lived!!

"Boy or girl?" Carl asked as I walked up to him, Lady Lana having gone off somewhere else, having

said that she wanted to talk to the captain of the occupation forces here in Thistle now.

"I didn't ask," I smiled, hoping it would be a girl here as I already had a son. We had discussed it some time earlier, it being Carl's wish to have a daughter who might complete our family, two children being the usual family size allowed, although due to the war, the Priestesses were allowing more to have three.

"It doesn't really matter that much," he smiled back at me.

"You'll have to treat me a little more gently," I teased.

(Some six weeks later)

"Senator Jan Daris, Mrs. Sanda Talen," Lana said, introducing us as his ship laid there at anchor just off the shore here. Her husband now grinning at me, his eyes roaming over me in a way that such a man might so view a slave girl for possible purchase. I've met such men before in my life, often among the high castes.

"I trust you keep your husband 'happy'," he grinned at me, a frown going over Lana's attractive face as she stood there listening to all this. No doubt well aware that her marriage was in "name" only, that he loved his own slave girls more than her now. He was a big "boar" of a man, much like a boar hog would be if it was possible to say dress one up in clothes and have it then walk around on its hind legs. "You're a good looking wench," he then added, apparently not noticing here that I was also pregnant now.

"He has no cause to complain, and he treats me too as a wife should be treated," I retorted, not much caring for this "boar"!! He reminded me a lot of some cartoons I'd seen a few years ago... A big pot belly, a face that only a female pig could have loved. How he'd ever gotten a woman like Lana to marry him was a question I couldn't answer, and I didn't dare ever ask Lana either!!

"That's good," Senator Daris laughed, then going on to greet another, the thought going through my mind that at least I'd been a lot more successful in love than Lady Lana Daris had ever been! The day was hot, dry, late August, and I was starting to "swell" now quite noticeably, it being apparent that I'd been a bit further along in my pregnancy than I'd originally thought I'd been.

"How are the slaves doing?" Lady Lana asked as I came walking up from the sheds with the overseer, the sun just setting now in the west, the hull of Senator Daris' ship just visible against it as it now laid at anchor about three eighths of a mile distant.

"As usual," I answered, aware of the "weight" of my belly.

"Leave us," Lana spoke to the overseer, the man leaving.

"You have something personal to discuss," I said to her.

"He 'purchased' me," she said, standing there before me.

"An 'arranged marriage'," I answered, knowing of such.

"My father 'needed' the money," Lana spoke, explaining.

"Does he love you at all?" I asked, pushing it here a bit.

"I'm a `trophy', something to show off," Lana answered back.

"You do have legal rights under the law," I pointed out now.

"The `law' means nothing to someone like him," she answered.

"And he's of the sort who gets `revenge'," I answered back, aware that to him she was his "property" and that was that here.

"Well, at least I `live well'," she grinned back at me then.

"You do `deserve' better," I spoke softly, touching her arm.

"I'm a Trelandarian, not an `Imperial'," she said to me now.

"I know that," I replied, wondering what she was getting at.

"You rode in to Thistle the day those troopers were killed," she smiled, their bodies having been discovered by some children. The bodies had been attacked by animals, and there hadn't been that much "left", I understood from what I'd heard of the affair. Their weapons had been taken, and their unicorns had disappeared. The Peasants of Trelandar are a crafty lot, well aware that those of any national government are more often "enemy" than "friend".* * As Lorraine once said, "Government is more often the `problem' than the `solution'." She was however an exception to the rule. Perhaps the finest Queen that Trelandar has had, I feel. (Sanda)

"I'm no match for some three men in a fight," I pointed out. Next to her I was the finest swordswoman on the estate, but Lana no doubt was thinking of something else than sword fights here... She was no doubt aware of my skills at archery, more importantly my proven skills at ambushing an enemy, cutting him down to size.

"You are of the Warriresses even if you don't bear the mark of one," she spoke softly, her eyes holding mine as I nodded now. "And if Trelandar is ever to be `free' again we are going to need you to lead us," she continued on, my look of "awe" I assure you not at all faked now! "You, the Lady Sanda Harles of Trelandar."

"Your sword is sworn to Darlanis," I pointed out to Lana. I should mention here that to a Warriress such matters are thought to be of importance, part of the caste codes by which they live.

"And what has she ever done for any of us?" Lana snapped.

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"I'm just a slave girl in his eyes!" Lana wept to me then.

"Then you should learn the wiles of the slave girl," I said. It being held by many that a man loves his slave girl more than he did his wife because the slave girl like his dog never caused him even a bit of trouble, never talked back, or did any of the many things a wife often does to annoy and irritate her husband. "'Make love, not war', as the saying goes," I smiled now to her.

"I feel like a slave girl when we make love," she replied.

"A man also values a woman who can make intelligent conversation, who is well read, cultured," I pointed out to Lady Lana. I supposed her marriage had little to offer but wealth and a "title", but Jan Daris wouldn't be here that "long", I pointed out.

"Lady Sanda Talen, Queen of Trelandar," she grinned at me.

"We'll speak on this later," I said, seeing her nod back.

"Maybe Darlanis' 'hold' on us isn't as quite as 'secure' as she thinks," Carl said to me as I told him of what Lana had said.

"She just wants 'out' of a bad marriage," I explained back.

"By starting a guerrilla war with the Empire?" he grinned.

"There are those who would help us," I pointed out to him.

"We don't have a leader to 'inspire' the people," he mused. "Not that I don't think you wouldn't make us a good Queen..." he quickly added as I stood there, "But the Warriors and the Warrioreesses would not follow a woman who was not of their caste here." Bringing up the same "issue" that had raised such problems for me in the past, especially when it was known that I'd actually been raised as a Warrioreess, had gone to the Academy, and then had refused to accept the "mark of the sword" after my own graduation!

"Then 'who' would you suggest?" I asked, looking at myself in the mirror, wondering when the baby would come, the "swell" of my belly leaving no doubts that I was most definitely pregnant... "Lady Lana, Lady Tirana?" I ventured, both being Warrioreesses. I remembered my sister, her height, her beauty. She had been truly a Queen... It would be hard to find anyone who could match her. There was Princess Janis of Dularn, Darlanis' older sister. She was blonde, "beautiful", if not as awe inspiring as Darlanis was.

"It would take someone like Janet Rogers, the real one," he answered thoughtfully back in reply as I walked over to the bed and stretched out beside him. "Or this 'Lorraine Duval'," he now added, referring to the woman who had "started" it all long ago.

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"I feel like a slave girl when we make love," she replied.

"A man also values a woman who can make intelligent conversation, who is well read, cultured," I pointed out to Lady Lana. I supposed her marriage had little to offer but wealth and a "title", but Jan Daris wouldn't be here that "long", I pointed out.

"Lady Sanda Talen, Queen of Trelandar," she grinned at me.

"We'll speak on this later," I said, seeing her nod back.

"Maybe Darlanis' `hold' on us isn't as quite as `secure' as she thinks," Carl said to me as I told him of what Lana had said.

"She just wants `out' of a bad marriage," I explained back.

"By starting a guerrilla war with the Empire?" he grinned.

"There are those who would help us," I pointed out to him.

"We don't have a leader to 'inspire' the people," he mused. "Not that I don't think you wouldn't make us a good Queen..." he quickly added as I stood there, "But the Warriors and the Warriresses would not follow a woman who was not of their caste here." Bringing up the same "issue" that had raised such problems for me in the past, especially when it was known that I'd actually been raised as a Warriress, had gone to the Academy, and then had refused to accept the "mark of the sword" after my own graduation!

"Then 'who' would you suggest?" I asked, looking at myself in the mirror, wondering when the baby would come, the "swell" of my belly leaving no doubts that I was most definitely pregnant... "Lady Lana, Lady Tirana?" I ventured, both being Warriresses. I remembered my sister, her height, her beauty. She had been truly a Queen... It would be hard to find anyone who could match her. There was Princess Janis of Dularn, Darlanis' older sister. She was blonde, "beautiful", if not as awe inspiring as Darlanis was.

"It would take someone like Janet Rogers, the real one," he answered thoughtfully back in reply as I walked over to the bed and stretched out beside him. "Or this 'Lorraine Duval'," he now added, referring to the woman who had "started" it all long ago.

Chapter Thirty Nine

"We have much to be 'thankful' for," Lady Lana spoke as she sat there at the head of the table, dressed up in all her finery. Two slave girls hovering near by waiting to be of service to us. The table before us loaded with food, all expertly prepared here. Lady Lana living perhaps as well as any Queen might so do here!

"Thanksgiving, a holiday supposedly celebrated based upon a legendary celebration that took place now nine centuries ago," I smiled back at the Trelandarian aristocrat. Early in the Seventeenth Century I recalled now, thinking of oddly costumed men and women, of firearms perhaps less "effective" than our own weapons. They had fled an oppressive society to found their own here on this continent, sailing across the Atlantic in a ship hardly able to make such voyages. Inferior perhaps to Dularnian raiders now! Those swift two masted schooners now being built there in Arsana that Darlanis was complaining about. Making those who she ruled think that there was no alternative here but for war with Dularn.

"Whatever..." Lana answered, giving me a smile in return. I was very much "pregnant" now, greatly swollen, the child due the next month, perhaps about Christmas, the doctor had predicted... I wondered what the Pilgrims would have thought of our society? They had worshiped a different "god" than we did, the TRUTH as to the Mistress of Things having been unknown until the early 21st Century when Nancy Ann Kerr had "founded" the Priestesses of Lys. Little was "known" of the woman save that in earlier life she had been a famous figure skater, having once skated in the Olympics.* * Lorraine met the FOUNDER in 2571 when First Priestess Tais had her teleported through time to the 26th Century. Nancy Ann was instrumental in the "transporting" of Princess Ta-she-ra far back into time, perhaps even to the Fifth Century AD as is believed... According to Lorraine's diary for that year, Ta-she-ra was "depressed" over an "incident" with Black Lady and she felt that she would be better off perhaps living out her life in the past as a simplenative American woman, which she doubtless did. Lorraine notes that there is a very old legend among the Nevadas of a woman, a "witch woman", who "predicted" many strange and "awesome" things, including Lorraine notes, THE END OF THE WORLD! (Sanda)

"You sure have a lot of food, Lady Lana," Jerry piped up. I supposed there was enough there before us to feed a dozen people. No doubt the slave girls would get their share when we were done.

"One wants for little," Lady Tirana smiled, being our guest. I thought of the "conversations" we'd had, Lady Tirana "agreeing" with me that we had but little chance of kicking out the Empire. Our only "hope" here being that Darlanis would start a war with Dularn, one that she could not "win", and that would "encourage" Queen Tulis to now seek "allies" wherever she could so find them.

"I made arrangements for Thanksgiving turkeys to be given to everyone who works for me, and for everyone to have a good meal," Lana smiled back, her eyes meeting mine as I nodded back then. A sudden "cramp" going through my abdomen making methink for a moment that I had gas cramps, but then I remembered how it had felt when I'd given birth to Jerry, and I knew what was happening now!

"I believe I'm having labor pains," I spoke, meeting my husband's eyes as he nodded, well aware of the "problems" just now with the holiday and everything now this far from "civilization".

"I'll ride for a Priestess," Lady Tirana smiled, pushing her chair back. "And I trust your veterinarian is 'competent'," she grinned then to Lana. It being a two hour ride to Thistle... I had already made arrangements for the midwife, so there was no real problem there although she might not care to come just now!!

"Sorry for ruining everyone's Thanksgiving dinner," I said, lying there in bed, the "pains" coming more often now. The midwife giving me a gap toothed grin, obviously having neglected to care for her teeth. Carl sitting at my side, holding my hand. I saw Jerry peeking through the door, holding Mischief in his arms. Despite the chill in the room I was sweating, well aware of what laid ahead for me. When I'd had Jerry I'd had a Priestess, and I had permitted her to take over my mind so it had not really been all that bad giving birth... Lana had given me a shot, but it had done little to me so far, and such drugs were not something a person would take without a great deal of caution, especially as they might have an "effect" upon the baby now trying to get out. Better that I endure the pain as best I could than harm my baby.

"Lana, take Jerry," I said, seeing her nod. I had no desire for him to see me when the pain got bad. A woman giving birth is not something enjoyable to watch. He'd seen one of the dogs here giving birth, so he knew here about what was going to happen now. I'd told him earlier that there was a baby growing inside me, a little girl, it had been found, who Carl and I had named "Sarah". That when Sarah grew "big" enough she'd come out from between my legs, from that "mouth" that I had that was made for the purpose. He knew that a man and a woman "did something" together to make a baby, but I felt such was something here I might cover later on when he was a little older and could better understand such then.

"The Priestess is here," Lana said, the Priestess coming in then followed by Lady Tirana. The old Warlady "grinning" at me, no doubt well aware of how I was feeling, Tirana herself now being a grandmother. Her granddaughter Keri being nine to Jerry's seven. The Priestess giving me a smile I didn't much match then.

"Look at my ankh," the Priestess said, sitting down on the bed beside me, her dark eyes glowing into mine, her white gown a contrast to the darker "olive" of her skin. "Think of the Goodness of Lys, think of how you would like to go to sleep safe and warm in Her Arms... Think of how 'sleepy' you are getting," she said to me, holding the ankh there before my face as I got became sleepy, feeling so "tired" I could hardly keep my eyes open now. * * Lorraine's notes here read: "An interesting description of the sort of post hypnotic suggestion used by the Priestesses of Lys." It being Lorraine's early belief (back in 2565) that the power of the Priestesses of Lys was based solely upon their "monopolistic" use of various

techniques of hypnosis. While she denounced such in her own diaries, it is noteworthy that she herself believed it was necessary to place such powers under strict control. (Sanda)

I was aware that people were moving about, that things were happening to my body, that I was being positioned for childbirth. But now with the Priestess controlling my mind, I no longer felt pain, the discomfort that I'd felt before. I could sense a sort of "pressure", a feeling of something trying to pass out from me. A sensation of being "stretched", of a sensation of "movement". I could hear voices, those of the midwife, of the Priestess, the comments of Lady Tirana as she sat there watching all this, Carl holding my hand, wiping my forehead, whispering encouragements to me, although I didn't feel there was that much of a problem here. Everything being something like a dream with nothing really real!

"Push, Mrs. Talen, push," the midwife said to me, looking in between my well opened legs, there obviously being something here passing out of me, something "stretching" me to the limit, I felt as I did as "asked", the Priestess too now looking down at that part of me, as if something was happening there I didn't know of!

"It's 'coming'," the midwife muttered, looking up at the Priestess, a sheet over me concealing from my own eyes what was now happening down there although I could feel something passing!

"She's... OUT!" the Priestess spoke, the midwife reaching in between my legs, between my thighs, lifting up a baby, wet and bloody, a soft cry coming from her as she took her first breath!!

"Our daughter," Carl said to me as I held Sarah to myself. I had but only a little milk as yet, but that would come, I knew. She would bebrunette like us, the sparse hair leaving no doubts.

"Life goes on," the Priestess said, taking the gold coin my husband gave her for her services to us. Sarah was a fine little baby girl, healthy, perfect, perhaps a future Warriress, although I was not too overly "delighted" with the idea of raising both my children to eventually become members of the black caste. My husband then paying off the midwife, who gave me another gap toothed grin before leaving. Lana now coming in with Jerry, who looked at the new baby with suitable awe. It being obvious that his mother's "belly" was now gone down and here was the baby I'd told him earlier that I'd been carrying right there inside me...

"You have a baby sister now," I said, giving him a smile.

"How about a puppy next time?" he suggested in return.

"Maybe we can let Mischief be a mother," Carl suggested.

"Better 'her' than me," I grinned, glad that it was over.

Chapter Forty

"I don't know..." Lana protested as we stood together at a "dockside" street corner in Trella. Our disguises such that none would have recognized us here. Lana did make a pretty good looking blonde,

especially with her eyebrows "bleached" so that none might suspect her own true "color". Before us the headquarters of the Prostitute Guild for the Empire of California, run by Darlanis' own "favorite", Miss Lara Warsan, aka "The Queen of Sex". It was early spring, the year now 2553, time to "hatch" my plot. To put into action the ideas I'd developed here over the winter.

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"I feel as if we're walking into Hell to 'confront' the Evil One," Lana answered, her hazel eyes meeting mine through the mesh of her veil. Her beautiful gold hair glistening in the sunlight. Like me she'd worn a broad brimmed hat to shade her from the sun, her black silk blouse and matching skirt leaving no doubts here. I wore quite similar attire, posing here now as an Imperial Lady. My milk heavy breasts held securely by a nursing halter so that they would retain their shape after little Sarah was weaned here.

"It is the desire of any true Warriress to die with a sword in her hand," I pointed out as we walked up to the entrance then. This part of Trella, which is a beautiful city, not one where any women of our social class usually ventured without armed escort. The more "desirable" sections being further in towards the east. The city being built so that the dockside area is the lowest part of it, with the better sections higher up with the palace beyond.

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"And 'who' wishes to see her?" the woman retorted quickly.

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"I seldom receive so 'august' a visitor," Lara smiled as she closed the door behind me, the head of the Prostitute Guild taking my hand in hers. Many of my class would not have cared to have touched flesh with a woman like her, but I didn't "object". The short red leather skirt and green silken half blouse leaving few doubts that this was a woman well aware of being fully female in a way that few are. She was armed, sword and dagger, and had a reputation of being quite competent with such arms, I knew too. Her reddish brown hair and gray blue eyes, sensual mouth leaving no doubts that this was a woman that any red blooded man might so desire. Whether she was as "capable" as her reputation "implied" was something that I supposed added much to the legend of "Lara"! She could read and write too, I noted, looking about her office. I suspected that a lot of people had underestimated this woman...

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"You're Lady Sanda, Paula's sister!" Lara breathed, bowing a bit, obviously well "impressed" here by my own true identity now. I could tell that she had little if any understanding of the uses of perfume, as she smelled like a lilac brush does in the spring!

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"Darlanis didn't exactly give you a 'choice', did she?" I smiled back at her, well aware from my own sources of information here now how things had been. Whether or not Darlanis had played Lara for a "patsy" I didn't know, but it was obvious that things had "worked" in such a way that Lara owed everything to Darlanis. In any case Lara's organization was a useful "tool" to Darlanis, one that I felt might also be used against Darlanis if I was able to "convince" the lovely Miss Warsan here that serving me was not only the wisest choice, but the only "choice" that she had here!!

"I would have ended up a slave girl but for her," Lara said, now guiding me to a chair and then taking one for herself here. I was well aware of what the charges had been, and considered it in the realm of possibility that it had all been a plot by Darlanis to get Lara to throw her support behind the Empire... One of my sister's "failings" having been that she saw the common people of Trelandar in terms all too "common" among the old aristocracy. And to her a woman like Lara would have been beneath any notice.* * A month or so after Darlanis' invasion of Trelandar Lara was arrested in Trella for "conspiracy against the crown", and after an amount of "mistreatment" by Imperial troopers, was brought before Darlanis nude and in heavy chains. Princess Tara urged that the Trelandarian be sentenced to beheading, but Darlanis refused, saying that the charges against Lara were "trumped up" by someone eager to get rid of the famous prostitute and her attempts to organize the prostitutes of Trella into a guild for their own protection from the various sorts of low lifes who preyed upon them. Speaking as an attorney at law I would say that there is considerable circumstantial evidence that it was all a plot by Darlanis to put Lara into a frame of mind where she would do anything that Darlanis wanted. Darlanis' own writings indicate otherwise, but I should note that in her youth Darlanis was not a woman who let anything ever stand in the way of her own ambitions... (Sanda)

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"Ever consider what would happen to you and your 'Guild' if someday the people of Trelandar rise up and kick Darlanis 'out'?" I asked, wishing to get to the "crux" of the matter with her now. "You probably could save yourself, but 'those' who followed you?" It being common knowledge that the Guild existed only because of Darlanis' support of it, the power of her military to protect it.

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"I will 'do' whatever you ask, Lady Sanda," Lara "breathed", leaving no doubts in my mind now that I'd "won" this "game" here. It had been all a "bluff" on my part, but Lara hadn't known that!

"For a 'Free Trelandar'," I spoke, standing, drawing my long slim sword, raising it. Lara doing the same with her own then. * * It may be noted that Lara "claimed" that she played no "role" in these matters until Lorraine arrived on the scene. The truth of course is quite different, but Lara admired Darlanis, and it's quite possible that she didn't want to lose her friendship here. I did terrify Lara, but her "loyalties" were towards Darlanis...

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"I can't go against Darlanis!" Lara pleaded, terrified here.

"In this world some are 'winners', and some are 'losers'," I smiled back. "Those of us who are smart play our cards right..." Lara's obvious terror now making me smile to myself at the sight. "And don't think for a moment that Darlanis can save you from my organization," I "added", well aware that Lara might possibly go "running" to Darlanis like a little girl to her mommy after this. "And even if she can 'protect' you, not even her Legions can ever protect your 'sisters' in the 'Guild' from my forces," I grinned.

"I will 'do' whatever you ask, Lady Sanda," Lara "breathed", leaving no doubts in my mind now that I'd "won" this "game" here. It had been all a "bluff" on my part, but Lara hadn't known that!

"For a 'Free Trelandar'," I spoke, standing, drawing my long slim sword, raising it. Lara doing the same with her own then.* * It may be noted that Lara "claimed" that she played no "role" in these matters until Lorraine arrived on the scene. The truth of course is quite different, but Lara admired Darlanis, and it's quite possible that she didn't want to lose her friendship here. I did terrify Lara, but her "loyalties" were towards Darlanis...

Chapter Forty Two

"About a hundred yards," Carl breathed, peeking out from between the buildings. The Imperial men at arms here at their ease across the square sitting there enjoying the warm night, and some drinks. The Moon was nearly full, giving us a quite ample light for this task of sowing fear and terror among the "enemy" here...

"Lana should be in position now," I breathed back to him, my bow held ready in my hand, an arrow nocked on the string. These men were a part of the Imperial occupation force here at Thistle. A "force" of around fifty, a small company or oversized platoon.

"A good night for it," Carl grinned back, the row of storm clouds now approaching the Moon about to over it over in minutes. I could see lightning flashing in them, the low rumble of thunder reaching my ears. There was an odor of rain too now in the air.

"'Wait' until I shoot," I answered, giving him a kiss before creeping off into the darkness here between the buildings to the place that I'd picked out earlier as the best place for doing it!

I raised my bow, taking aim. I needed to "miss", but close enough that it would seem that the miss had been merely due to a lack of "skill" with the weapon. I could just hear the sound of the men's voices mingled in with the night sounds of crickets and such. The row of storm clouds even closer now to the Moon here. The wind picking up, raising a bit of dust in the town's square.

I could just see the blackened arrow in the moonlight as it flew forth, rising up and then falling back to "thunk" against my target, that being the building just over the Imperials' heads...

For a second there was no "reaction", then someone stood up and pointed, another getting up, two more "thunks" leaving utterly no doubt that they were under fire! The men scattering for cover, while I took the wisest course and got quickly away here!!

"What's all the 'fuss' about now?" Lady Lana asked, striding into the room, Carl and I following her, thunder rumbling behind us as darkness swept over Thistle, the Moon hidden by the clouds.

"We were fired upon!" a man exclaimed, a burly sergeant now taking down reports. "Fortunately they missed in the darkness!"

"It must be these 'terrorists' we've been reading about in the newspaper," Carl ventured, standing there beside his Ladies, although my actual "identity" was known to only a few in Thistle. "This 'Free Trelandar Movement' that I've been reading about..."

"What's the problem here, Sam?" the unit's officer barked as he came striding into the room, a crash of thunder seeming to announce his arrival as the storm came. "What's the fuss about?"

"There was an attack by 'terrorists'," Lady Lana snapped. "No doubt by this 'Free Trelandar Movement' we've been hearing about," she continued on, sounding very much the outraged "Lady". "And I live a dozen miles from any military protection!" she now added in hot tones that we'd carefully rehearsed here earlier on.

"You have your own men, and these 'terrorists' are few," the officer retorted, no doubt annoyed as we planned by Lana's tone. "The Empress is supposed to be in Trella in a few days, and you can 'ask' her what can be done here," he continued on, telling us news of course that we all knew of here. No doubt well aware of the fact that there wasn't anything Darlanis could do either now!

"And when I'm murdered most foully by these 'terrorists', my husband I assure you will have much to say about this 'affair'!" Lady Lana snapped back, surprising talented as an actress here... "And I can assure that my husband, Senator Lord Daris, will have much to say when he finds out that his wife and his only son here were killed in their own home by these 'terrorists' you can't do a damn thing about!" Lana continued on here doubtlessly much to the officer's discomfort. "I'm going to 'arm' my own people, all of them, so that I can sleep safe in my own bed at night here..."

"Dowhatever you see 'fit' to do," the man snapped back, his tone of voice leaving no doubts as to his feelings here either!

"I'm also going to have my 'Scribe' here write letters to all the newspapers requesting that the Imperial government take 'action' to deal with these 'terrorists', even if it means arming those of Trelandar who are 'loyal' to the Empire of California." Lana continued on, acting very much like a spoiled Imperial Lady!

"I'm sure you will be safe in Thistle tonight," the officer answered, his voice hard, his eyes burning into Lady Lana's as a sharp "crack" of thunder announced the onset of the thunderstorm. "And in the morning I will give you an escort back to your home."

"That was some 'act' you put on!" I laughed to Lady Lana as soon as we were alone, Carl grinning at the attractive brunette who I knew well that he found quite attractive, my husband being a man who like many did have something of a "roving eye" here...

"No doubt he was considering the 'pleasures' of collaring me and putting the whip to my body to teach me better manners," she smiled back, walking to the window, looking out into the storm, a bright flash of lightning silhouetting her figure for an instant.

"He will carry word to his superiors, and eventually everyone will believe that there is a powerful terrorist movement here in Trelandar when in fact there is nothing of the kind," I said. Carl giving me a quick pat on the buttocks, cupping them through the flesh warmed leather of the softly tanned skirt that I wore.

"There have been 'incidents' here and there," Lana said.

"And any future ones will be blamed on the FTM," I smiled.

"Like 'democrats', we'll be 'blamed' for everything," Carl grinned, his arm around my waist. It being a historical fact I'd related to him one time that Janet Rogers had "blamed" the Democratic Party and its cohorts for every problem that America had. Saying that America would have never gotten into the "troubles" that it had without the insane policies of the "Democratic Socialist Welfare Party", the name by which she gave it, the "name" by which it is also now known by most people of this era here...

"Must be 'hard' for a woman alone like that," I whispered to Carl as we made love as "quietly" as we could while Lana slept on the other side of a hanging drape from us, such being now commonly used in rooms like this to divide them here between the sexes.

"You're probably 'better'," Carl whispered, kissing me then. The thunderstorm now dying away in the distance over the Sierras. "And you've got a 'heat' to you that she doesn't," he added then.

"You seem to know a lot about her," I teased him back here.

"A man can 'tell' when he observes a woman for a while," he told me, opening my thighs and then mounting me for his "ride"... The thought going through my mind that hopefully my implant would not "fail" again or I'd start having more "family" than I wanted!

"The Princess is dead," Lady Lana said to me, coming into my office and dropping the newspaper on my desk. "There was a ship wreck the same night that we made our attack there in Thistle," I listened to her add, the tone of her voice almost as if we'd been "responsible" for the loss of Princess Anna at sea when Sarnian Queen ran into a rock in the storm then and ripped herself apart. "There will be a month of mourning," Lana added, the memories now coming back to me of little Princess Anna, who I'd seen that time when Darlanis had visited the estate. "And despite whatever you 'think' of Darlanis, I hope you can find it in your heart to join with me and everyone else in prayer that Lys will be merciful..."

"Oh Lys, we beseech your mercy for Princess Anna Marden, who was swept away from her mother's arms into the cold depths of the sea," the Priestess spoke as we all knelt there on the ground before her, free and slave, rich and poor, high caste and low. My baby girl in my arms, the very "thought" of what Darlanis must be going through now almost enough to make me forgive her for everything she'd ever done. The flag on the staff at half mast, Carl with his men to one side, while Jerry knelt there beside me here. I could feel the hot heat of the sun in the sky, the clear azure spotted here and there with white fluffy clouds. The forest to the south of us dark, forbidding in its own way. Even if Anna's life preserver had held her up, the coldness of the water, the roughness of the waves would have eventually taken their toll... * * As is known, Anna was rescued by a patrolling Lorr spaceship and taken to Mars where she was raised by Aurora, Darlanis' true mother. There is much about this affair that has never come out, although Lorraine's diaries do go into considerable conjecture as to things. It being Lorraine's belief here that Aurora was disappointed in how Darlanis led her life, and decided that she was an unfit mother to raise Anna. The "role" of Raspa in all this is unknown, although it appears she may have had a "claw" in it.

Chapter Forty Three

"We have 'visitors'," Jon said to me as I looked up from reviewing the story that I'd written so long ago here for Lorraine. The rooms of the manor house old and "familiar" after all these years, as were the grounds that brought back so many "memories". It was easy to live in the past, deny "what" was coming in twenty seven years, putting an end to everything that existed on Earth. Some I knew had fled back in time after having their memories altered so that they would not alter what was to be. Eric and his lovely Sequoia had spoken of doing that, of seeking safety in the past, perhaps in the "Trelendar" of Queen Amethysta's own time. As perhaps Darlanis' own daughter, Artemis, had once sought it in her unauthorized flight backwards in time, back to the 1980's... The crime rate in the cities was increasing despite the best efforts of the guardsmen and those of the black caste to stop such. Others tended to live for today with little thought of tomorrow. * * One could draw "parallels" with our society of today. (J.B.B.)

"I came as 'soon' as I could," Empress Sharon Duval smiled, her eyes holding my own as I nodded back. Lorraine had been her step mother once long ago, back in a time, a land now but legend. Although sought by many suitors, Sharon had never married, and as Queen of Orgon, had stepped into Darlanis' shoes after her death. Blonde, blue eyed, she was truly a worthy successor to Darlanis.

"She 'died' as she would have wished it," I smiled in reply. Lorraine had been a woman who had been so very much a Warriress, a Queen like none that Trelandar had ever known before her too...

"She was truly of the Warriresses as few ever were," Sharon answered, putting her arms around me and drawing me "close" here. "But yet a leader too who 'saw' what so few ever could see here."

"Like old times," Carl said to me as we halted for the night in a small clearing, the sun just setting here beyond the trees. It was chill, being well into the fall, late October I might add.

"I hope Sarah will be all right," I said, worried about having weaned her as early as I had, it being the usual practice not to ever wean a child before their first year, some mothers nursing even longer, sometimes as long as eighteen months. Lana doted on Sarah, and I knew she would be in good hands if the worst was to happen here and neither of us ever returned to the estate.

"I worry about the fact that Warsan knows who you are," Carl said to me as we unsaddled our animals and secured them to trees, a few last rays of the setting sun lighting his face as he spoke.

"Fear will keep her 'honest'," I smiled back at my husband as I now set my saddle and equipment to one side. Lara knew little about me save for what she'd heard others claim they "knew".

"Darlanis could someday put two and two together," he noted.

"A coward dies a thousand 'deaths', a brave man but once," I smiled back. I had no doubt that Darlanis would have me beheaded if she ever found out just "what" I was doing, but first she had to catch me, and the tactics I was using would make that just as difficult as possible for her. While she might be able to trace me to Lana's estate, proving that I was the person "responsible" was another matter entirely, as I was sure she was aware of too. * * It should be mentioned here that Darlanis sought a "Lady Sanda Harles" which was the "identity" I used during this time, my plan being to confuse the Empress as to just "who" I was. While I was "known" in Thistle to a certain degree, it was believed by Darlanis' people that "Lady Sanda Harles" was yet another person, this being done by having Lady Lana "pose" as me several times. I did however take whatever "precautions" I could, being well aware of the "risks" that I was taking, which is why so few on the estate knew that I was actually "who" I was, or that I did have a title. While this amazed Lorraine, it should be pointed out here that in a society such as ours without any "mass media" my face was known to only a few, and while many may have "heard" of me, few actually "knew" me as such. My parents' manor having been six miles to the south of Thistle, nearly twenty miles from the estate here. As an adult married woman I'd lived elsewhere, so few people from the area ever met me, although many had heard of my name. (Sanda)

"I keep wondering what sort of a world our children will inherit," Carl said to me as we sat together before the small fire. The smoke rising up into the star sprinkled sky beyond the trees. I was aware that it would take years and years to free ourselves. And even then we would need "outside help", say from Dularn here. Weapons and supplies, the "makings" of another resistance force.

"There have been movements like ours in the past," I spoke.

"We lack popular 'support' among the people," he said to me.

"The people of Trelandar support us, they only fear what it will mean to rise up against Darlanis' Empire," I smiled in turn. Princess Tara had burned villages, and put thousands to death as a part of her "scorched earth" tactics that had proved so effective. She had broken the "will to resist" among the people for the most part, but I did not think such "fear" would be effective forever. We might not be able to "resist" in the military sense, but with my studies of terrorist tactics of the past I thought it possible here that we might be able to make life so "unpleasant" for Imperial forces of occupation that Darlanis might consider withdrawing them and relying upon her Lords and Ladies to hold Trelandar now. Especially if she was involved in a war somewhere and "needed" to use all her forces in the war, which would happen if she ever had to fight Dularn, a country ruled by a very "competent" Queen, and with a political system that trusted its own people with "arms". A country far "different" than Trelandar... * * This she did in 2555, when she got involved in a war with Dularn that dragged on for years, coming to an end only in 2565... The Lords and Ladies of Trelandar being given responsibility for the country, which did give me more of a free hand here. (Sanda)

"I still feel uncomfortable about it," Carl said to me as he held me close, the warmth of the blanket "comforting" against the chill of the night. "About killing people from ambush and such."

"'Ambushing the enemy' is a part of warfare," I pointed out.

"In a 'declared' war," Carl answered, looking out into the darkness of the night, the boles of the trees only darker shadows now as the light of the fire dimly illuminated those close to us. "What we're doing now is 'terrorism' according to the 'codes'." The howl of a dire wolf making a cold chill go down my back.

"I am Paula's sister," I pointed out, Carl nodding back.

"And you feel that you 'represent' Trelandar," he agreed.

"Can you think of anyone who could?" I challenged him now.

"You could never become Queen," he pointed out, something we had discussed dozens of times before. The law was clear that no one but a Warriress could become a Queen, or a Warrior the King. Such things went far back in time, even back to the era of Janet when it was held that only a "citizen" could hold public office. This no doubt being the origin of the Warriors and Warriresses. Also the "weapon laws" that still yet existed today in Trelandar. In Sarn, and to a lesser extent in Dularn and Talon. It being a well known fact too that in the 21st Century the "possession" of firearms was "limited" by law to those who had become "citizens". That only those who had served in the armed forces of the NEW ORDER could bear arms or vote, a policy much like that of Dularn, where militia service was "required" of all those who live there.

"I'm not interested in becoming a Queen, but in freeing Trelandar from the 'clutches' of Darlanis," I quickly retorted back. The people could decide for themselves once we got rid of Darlanis and her Empire of California what sort of government to have!

"I've always been glad I married you," Carl said to me then. "Life is never boring with you around," he grinned, kissing me...

"What!!!" Carl breathed next to me as the light blinded us, a great gleaming saucer nearly brushing the

tree tops floating over us, our unicorns snorting and pulling at their halter ropes! The craft then passing on, perhaps drawn by the glow of our fire, the Lorr having instruments that can detect such things, I knew here.

"Our `masters' checking up on us," I grinned back at Carl.

"Damn things could give a man `nightmares'," he grumbled.

"We're just lucky that one didn't come creeping up on us to see what we were doing here," I pointed out. Being awoken from a sound sleep at night to look into the horrid insectoid "face" of a Lorr from a few feet away is not an "experience" anyone would ever want to "experience", although I've "heard" of it happening. The Lorr being able to move almost soundlessly on their six legs.

"We meet again," I said, taking her hands in mine, her husband standing there watching us, perhaps none too happy now here. He was a burly darkman, broad shouldered, with bulging muscles, a man who worked with iron, pounding it into any desired shape.

"I knew `you' would never `surrender'," Four said to me.

"Our Queen is dead, but we shall elect another," I said.

Chapter Forty Four

"There is one thing that `puzzles' me," Four said to me as we sat around their rough hewn table sharing a bottle of a rather "cheap" wine and the sort of a dinner that is often served by the common people of Trelandar. Meat, rice, and vegetables all mixed together with a sort of "gravy" and cooked in a hot skillet on a cast iron stove. Her husband none too happy about us being here. Perhaps more due to "what" I represented, a reminder of the past.

"And what is `that'?", I smiled at the attractive brunette. It was growing "late" in the day, the ride from the estate having been long, a matter of two days, or some fifty odd miles here... A distance that those of the past might have traveled in only an hour or so here on their marvelous "freeways", the ruins of which still could be seen here and there in parts of Trelandar dotting the landscape. Four's children, a boy and a girl, elsewhere now.

"Why you use your own maiden name?" her husband explained.

"It is a `name' known all over Trelandar," I smiled back.

"And one `known' to Darlanis," Four now pointed out to me.

"Sometimes the best `disguise' is no disguise at all," I now smiled back. My "tactics" here being based upon a book written a number of centuries ago, back in the 19th Century to be exact... Sometimes the best way to "hide" something is out in plain sight.

"Darlanis is 'nothing' compared to 'that'," Four said to me as we watched the glowing tiny "rock" that was Deimos go racing across the western sky lighted by the rays from the setting sun. The Lorr starship that circled our world every hundred minutes in a polar orbit at a height about three hundred and fifty miles so that every portion of our world could be observed by those on it. I'd been told once by a Lorr Servitor that the telescopes aboard Deimos could actually pick out individual human beings in a mass. That their ships could detect any sort of life in forests below, the proof of this having been our "visitation" the night before.

"The Lorr do not 'interfere'," I pointed out to her in turn.

"They keep us subject to their rule. Deny us the technology once ours," she answered, her dark eyes holding my own in reply. "Force us to live as people once lived thousands of years ago..." The anger showing in her voice as she stood there facing me now.

"We made war upon them," I said, such being taught as being the truth, although I often wondered if it was really "true" now.

"So it is written in books, told by your caste," she smiled.

"The Lorr are not of 'concern' to us," I pointed out to her.

"We're as much their 'slaves' as we are Darlanis'," she answered back, standing there, the speck of light that was Deimos now disappearing to the south beyond the trees behind their home.

"Let's take a walk," I suggested, changing the subject here.

"My husband is opposed to my doing anything now," Four said to me as we took a stroll down a path that led into the forest. "He feels that risking our lives again would be fruitless now..." There were, I knew, a lot of Trelandarians who felt the same way. Those who preferred to "wait", to see what happened in the future.

"You don't have to 'fight', all you have to do is make life miserable for the Imperials," I pointed out. Granted there was a "degree" of "danger" in all this, but if we all just sat on our hands Darlanis would "rule" Trelandar until she died of old age!!

"I just don't see what 'good' it will do..." she protested.

"Then just organize people, encourage them to make bows," I retorted, the "tone" of my voice no doubt betraying my feelings. "Write letters to newspapers, do things to annoy the Imperials."

"It is forbidden to make 'weapons'," she pointed out to me.

"Their 'law', not ours," I snapped back, seeing her nodding.

"You are a 'Warrioress', I am but the wife of a blacksmith," she answered. "You know the sword, weapons, how to fight wars."

"I am but a woman learned in books," I pointed out to her.

"We are 'few', and they are 'many'," Four said to me then.

"We are `many', and they are `few'," I retorted right back. The occupation forces totaled only three Legions, thirty thousand men and women, whereas the population of Trelandar was at least fifty times that here. Darlanis had never "conquered" the entire country, only that part of it that laid below the Sierras, and I was well aware that even then she mainly ruled only the cities... It had been more Trelandar's centuries old laws against the common people having weapons that had cost us our freedom, not what Darlanis had been able to do to us with her Legions. And my own fault for agreeing to surrender after Paula's death when we were actually winning against Darlanis, slowly but surely. True, the war would have dragged on for many months further, but I was sure that in the "end" we would have pushed her forces back into Sarn.

"You are truly a `Warlady'," she answered, standing there.

"We're wasting our time with these people," Carl said to me, his dark eyes meeting mine as we rode the next day into a nearby village, the Imperial flag as usual flying from the flag staff in the square. A "reminder" if any was necessary that we lived in a country now under occupation. The sky cloudy and promising rain.

"You want to `give up' and go back to the estate?" I asked.

"I don't see what `good' we can do here," he answered me.

"You are a `Warrior of Trelandar'," I pointed out to Carl.

"Our Queen died three years ago," he retorted as we came to a halt there before the hitching rail. "Darlanis rules us now." The implications of his words leaving no doubt as to his thought.

"Maybe she did `win' after all." I answered as we dismounted and tied our unicorns to the rail. The tone of my voice leaving no doubts as to my feelings here. "Not because she won the war," I continued on, "But because none of us `valued' freedom enough." The thought going through my mind that we were like the people of America of the pre Janet Rogers era, who did not "concern" themselves with the actions of their government when they could have. People who "voted" for the politicians who promised them "more", not for the one who placed the welfare of their country first... Those who did not understand that the right to keep and bear arms is the foundation upon which all other "rights" must be so based.

"She's not an `evil' woman, despite what you think of her," Carl replied standing there, a prostitute leaning out of a window over our heads looking down at us. The distinctive neck band of the Prostitute Guild leaving no doubts as to "what" she was here. "Perhaps that's the greatest trouble we have in getting people to risk their lives to resist her," he continued on as we stood outside, a chill wind from the east blowing off snow capped peaks. "They may not like seeing their country occupied, but on the other hand Darlanis has been intelligent enough not to irritate people enough that they will rise up against her," he now explained. "People may `complain' about the new Imperial taxes, but yet they do take a certain degree of pride in what Darlanis has done now." The Empress having done a number of things that left no doubt she was not like those aristocratic monarchs who had proceeded her... It was her own popularity among the people that made it difficult to oppose her, to stir up the people enough to make them want to fight. There were enough who were "annoyed" by her actions, but on the other hand she was also crafty enough to make herself appear to be a "friend of the people", even to borrowing ideas that must have dated back to the time of Franklin Delano Roosevelt...

"Find us a room," I answered, standing there, looking up and down the square, considering tactics, what could and could not be done by a professionally trained fighting woman good with a bow. One who had

knowledge of the weapons of the past, including those hardly ever mentioned in even the history books my own caste had.

"Those 'violate' the EDICT," Carl said, looking at the pipe bomb filled with black powder. Powder hadn't been too much of a problem here, but making fuses had been a bit difficult at first.

"I'm working on 'that' problem too," I grinned back at him.

"I shouldn't have said what I did," Carl said to me then.

"I never thought 'Four' would give up," I answered back.

"She believes our cause is hopeless," my husband answered.

"It 'is' only if we believe it is so," I smiled back at him. "Janet Rogers 'changed' the entire course of history from what it would have been had she not lived, or met with Lorraine Duval..."

"You're about the same 'size' and height as Janet Rogers," Carl answered, regarding me. Janet's figure had been "different" than my own, but surviving photographs of Janet did indicate that we looked much alike, and I felt too that we also thought alike.

"Perhaps I'm her reincarnation," I then grinned back at him. It being taught by the Priestesses of Lys that one goes through several incarnations before becoming "worthy" to be gathered into the loving arms of Lys where your soul is then merged with Hers. It is said that individuals vary, and that none can predict what the "decision" will be when one then faces Her judgment at death. The Priestesses also saying that it is not a matter of "good" or "evil" as we know it, but more a matter of what you "believed" to be "good and evil", which is of course quite something else here. They go on to say here that "good" and "evil" are "subjective", not "objective" as is commonly held by most people. That what is "good" in one case may not be "good" in another, that what is now "evil", or seen as "evil", may later on prove to be the "good"... And that what was felt to be "good" may later on prove to be evil as history has shown us in a number of circumstances in the past.

Chapter Forty Five

"It's time," I whispered, shaking Carl awake, the room cold, the fire having died down there in the stove at the interior corner of the room. Our third floor room being on a back corner of the building as I had so wished it, with a window overlooking the roof tops of the buildings to the north. The headquarters of the Imperial occupation force for the village a few doors down. Before dark I'd carefully studied the area, wearing the black wig and different clothing so that no description of me would be all that accurate now. I'd also made a purchase of a gallon of lamp oil, which I'd use. I was becoming quite the "firebug", a rather skillful arsonist. Fire is a very useful weapon for a terrorist.

"Trouble with you, you never let a man get a decent night's sleep," he grinned, well aware of what I planned to do here now. The form fitting black wool coverall, what those of the past may have called a "jumpsuit", serving to better conceal me from view. My bleached hair hidden beneath a dark hood that

also served to conceal my face, leaving only my dark eyes visible beneath it. I wore special boots, with soles designed to "grip", a dagger at my hip, a sword being too cumbersome for this sort of "work" here. My compound bow, my blackened arrows in their rack ready for use.

"Get dressed, get our unicorns ready," I answered him back.

"I just hope you know `what' you're doing," he said to me.

"Maybe someday I'll be Queen of Trelandar," I smiled back.

"More likely `dead'," Carl growled, getting his clothes on.

"That's `possible' too," I grinned, teasing him a bit here.

The breeze from the east was like the icy breath of death as I crept to the chimney, loaded down with my pipe bomb and my full gallon jug of lamp oil. Checking things out as best I could in the darkness, I then poured a good portion of the lamp oil out on the roof top, doing it slowly here so that it wouldn't run off. I then lit the fuse on the pipe bomb, lowered it quickly on a bit of string I'd brought for this purpose, and quickly poured the rest of the lamp oil on around the area. Placing a fused igniter in the middle of the wetted area, this last making me a bit nervous as it was quite possible that I might ignite the oil before I was able to get clear, although lamp oil as a rule is not really all that "touchy", being more like a "cooking oil" might be here. The fact that I was flirting with death, a horrible death, always in my thoughts as I quickly retreated to the position I'd picked. My experiments with explosives, which I'd done without the knowledge of Lana, had been done some distance from the estate, there in the thickest of the forest where none was likely to find out.* * Unlike Lorraine, who manufactured nitroglycerin, actually built a cannon, made napalm by the gallon, my work here was based more upon making small amounts of black powder, which I used in pipe bombs of surprising effectiveness due to the surprise I was able to obtain. I also made vinegar and baking soda bombs, which were much less powerful, but which could injure unlucky troopers here. These being made so that the vinegar, held inside a fragile glass tube there inside the pipe itself, would be released if the pipe was smacked hard against something and then left to then explode. While the Lorr were no doubt well aware of this violation of the "EDICT", they were just as "helpless" as Darlanis at putting any stop to it even with their awesome technology and virtual control of the Earth. Perhaps due to the fact that I was well "aware" of "how" they operated, and made sure to keep things secret. (Sanda)

Lying just over the other side of the peak of the roof top, I heard a rather muffled "THUD" as my pipe bomb exploded inside the headquarters, a number of surprised yells leaving no doubt as to the weapon's "effectiveness" here exploding in their chimney.* * The formula for black powder is potassium nitrate, charcoal, and sulfur in ratios of six parts potassium nitrate, four parts charcoal, and one part sulfur. NOTE: THE BELOW AMOUNTS WILL YIELD TWO POUNDS (THAT'S 900 GRAMS FOR YOU METRIC USERS) OF BLACK POWDER. HOWEVER, ONLY THE "RATIOS" OF THE AMOUNTS OF INGREDIENTS ARE IMPORTANT. THUS, FOR TWICE AS MUCH BLACK POWDER, DOUBLE ALL QUANTITIES USED. PLEASE BE "CAUTIOUS" WHEN DOING THIS AS BLACK POWDER CAN BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS AND WILL IGNITE FROM ANY SPARK. MATERIAL REQUIRED -----LARGE WOODEN STIRRING SPOON CLOTH, 2 FT. SQ. FLAT WINDOW SCREENING, 1 FT. SQ. HEAT SOURCE WATER, 3 CUPS ALCOHOL, 5 PINTS (ANY KIND) SULFUR, POWDERED, 1/2 CUP (FLOWERS OF SULFUR, AT A DRUG STORE) 2 CUPS WOOD CHARCOAL, POWDERED, 3 CUPS POTASSIUM NITRATE, GRANULATED, (SALTPETER, AT DRUG STORES) 2 BUCKETS, BOTH 2 GALLON, ONE MUST BE HEAT RESISTANT PROCEDURE: -----1. PLACE ALCOHOL IN ONE OF THE BUCKETS. 2. PLACE POTASSIUM NITRATE, CHARCOAL, AND SULFUR IN

THE HEAT RESISTANT BUCKET. ADD 1 CUP WATER AND MIX THOROUGHLY WITH WOODEN SPOON UNTIL ALL INGREDIENTS ARE DISSOLVED. 3. ADD REMAINING WATER (2 CUPS) TO MIXTURE. PLACE BUCKET ON HEAT SOURCE AND STIR UNTIL SMALL BUBBLES BEGIN TO FORM. CAUTION: DO NOT BOIL MIXTURE. BE SURE ALL MIXTURE STAYS WET. IF ANY IS DRY, AS ON SIDES OF PAN, IT MAY IGNITE. 4. REMOVE BUCKET FROM HEAT AND POUR MIXTURE INTO ALCOHOL WHILE STIRRING VIGOROUSLY UNTIL ALL OF IT IS MIXED IN WITH THE ALCOHOL. 5. LET ALCOHOL MIXTURE STAND ABOUT 5 MINUTES. STRAIN MIXTURE THROUGH CLOTH TO OBTAIN BLACK POWDER. DISCARD LIQUID. WRAP CLOTH AROUND BLACK POWDER AND SQUEEZE TO REMOVE EXCESS LIQUID. 6. PLACE SCREENING OVER DRY BUCKET. PLACE WORKABLE AMOUNT OF DAMP POWDER ON SCREEN AND GRANULATE BY RUBBING SOLID THROUGH SCREEN. NOTE: IF GRANULATED PARTICLES APPEAR TO STICK TOGETHER AND CHANGE SHAPE, RECOMBINE ENTIRE BATCH OF POWDER AND REPEAT STEPS 5 AND 6. 7. SPREAD GRANULATED BLACK POWDER ON FLAT DRY SURFACE SO THAT LAYER ABOUT 1/2 INCH IS FORMED. ALLOW TO DRY. USE RADIATOR, OR DIRECT SUNLIGHT. THIS SHOULD BE DRIED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, PREFERABLY IN ONE HOUR. THE LONGER THE DRYING PERIOD, THE LESS EFFECTIVE THE BLACK POWDER. CAUTION: REMOVE FROM HEAT AS SOON AS GRANULES ARE DRY. BLACK POWDER IS NOW READY FOR USE! A PIPE BOMB IS MERELY AN IRON PIPE CAPPED AT BOTH ENDS WITH SCREW ON OR BETTER YET WELDED ON CAPS, A HOLE DRILLED FOR THE FUSE IF A BLACK POWDER BOMB IS USED. A VINEGAR AND BAKING SODA BOMB IS FAR LESS POWERFUL, BUT CAN BE MADE BY ANYONE. THE CHEMICAL REACTION BETWEEN THE TWO MATERIALS PRODUCES A GAS THAT WHEN TRAPPED INSIDE A PIPE WILL EVENTUALLY BUILD UP TO THE POINT THAT IT WILL BLOW IT APART. FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN SUCH THINGS, THERE ARE STILL YET AVAILABLE A NUMBER OF GOOD BOOKS WHERE SUCH INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED. (We may assume our heroine got hold of one) (author)

Then suddenly before me the roof over the headquarters burst into flame as the lamp oil caught fire, the flames shooting up as I positioned myself there on the roof, exposing as little of myself as I could, holding my bow in an almost horizontal position. Someone running out from the building, yelling, my arrow taking him in the chest I thought, dropping him sprawled in the street!! Leaving no doubts here that this was indeed a "terrorist attack"!

Having made my "point" here, I felt it wise to depart the scene. A number of people in rooms about the square now looking out, the flames of the fire lighting everything up quite nicely. Drawing the first of a crowd as people came running up, someone now ringing the alarm bell for the fire pump as others ran off to get those responsible for putting out such fires. While I could have picked off another Imperial or two, I saw no reason to do so now as my purpose here was instill fear in the occupation forces, not try to kill them all, which I could not of course do anyway!!

I jumped down on to a second story porch and then scrambled down the wooden stairway to the ground, Carl coming up now in the darkness with our unicorns, releasing mine as I vaulted into the saddle and grabbed the reins, kicking my mount in the ribs as we sent them racing off into the darkness as fast as they could run!

"Some day you're going to get killed doing that," Carl said to me as we halted our animals after a quarter mile's run, the reflection of the fire in the distance reflecting in his eyes.

"Lady Sanda Harles has struck again," I smiled back at him. Yourstruly having gained quite a "reputation" as a "terrorist".

"We'd better ride," he suggested, something I felt wise. We would spend the rest of the night in the forest, and head out in the morning back to the estate, having made our "point" here now.

Chapter Forty Six

"Didn't Darlanis attempt to investigate?" Sharon Duval asked as she looked up from the manuscript that I'd been editing here. Her eyes, reminding me much of those of Darlanis, meeting mine...

"She was chasing a 'will of the wisp' that didn't exist," I smiled back. "Lady Lana had it set up so that no one would ever suspect the truth of what I was doing," I explained to Sharon now as she nodded thoughtfully. "There were several 'others' too who pretended to be me, so that even Darlanis' spy network using the prostitutes of Lara's 'Guild' did her but little good here now."

"And most Trelandarians at that time had little love for her in any case," Sharon "agreed", no doubt now drawing upon memories fifty six years in the past. Now in her seventies, Sharon still was a beautiful woman, although not the awesome beauty that Darlanis herself had been. "Too, I suspect the fact that 'you' were too 'obvious' perhaps made Darlanis believe that someone else was impersonating you, using your maiden name for their purposes..."

"I am very well read," I smiled, seeing Sharon nod. Darlanis was not a well read person, and in a battle of wits mine was obviously the superior although the Empress was "quick witted", a useful trait no doubt for any of the Warriress caste to have...

"I 'worry'," Lady Lana Daris said to me as we spoke together in quiet tones by the Christmas tree that we were decorating now. Her son Brian was with Sarah, both watched over by a slave girl. It was a pleasant day, rather "chilly", but not that bad really. Carl and Jerry had gone into Thistle to do some "shopping" here.

"We are at war, and when at war, risks are taken," I smiled.

"You are more the 'Warriress' than I who bear the mark," I listened to her say, the "comment" making me smile to myself now. Her bravery and courage was something I'd always admired in her.

"They are looking for someone hiding in the woods, leading a band of outlaws," I answered, knowing that was how most people in Trelandar now "thought" of me, a carefully waged plan that had so far sent the Empress' forces on a number of wild goose chases...

"There are those in Thistle who know 'who' you are," Lana said, reaching up to place the star there on the top of the tree.

"Making me even more 'safe' as the Imperials believe now the woman who has taken my 'name' is hiding in the forests," I said in reply, placing the ornament I held on one of the tree's limbs. Those of the past once used electric lights on their Christmas trees, but that was a part of the technology now

forbidden to us.

"You are playing a dangerous `game' with a `woman' who will stop at nothing to maintain control of Trelandar," Lana answered.

"All Darlanis can `do' to me is lop my head off if she takes me alive," I replied, aware that she would doubtlessly do so now. There was already a reward posted for "Lady Sanda Harles" dead or alive, wanted now for "crimes against the Empire of California". I had written a letter to the largest newspaper in Trella pointing out that my name was well known, and that there were a lot of women in Trelandar who "met" my description, women who might very well be impersonating me for their own purposes here. This being my way of course of throwing Darlanis' own people off my "trail"!

"She'll do `more' than just lop off your head," Lana spoke, standing there with a Christmas tree ornament in her hand, speaking a truth that I didn't like to think about if I was ever taken alive. Darlanis wouldn't do the torture herself, of course, but I had no doubts that Princess Tara would be "delighted" to do so.

"I shouldn't have `involved' you as much as I did," I said.

"I just feel that our cause is hopeless," Lana said to me.

"We must be `patient'," I said, seeing Lana nod back now.

I watched Jerry take "aim" with the little bow Carl had made for him, the arrow here a bit low, hitting just below the target. It was a warm late spring day, with Lady Lana now gone to Trella. He doted on the boy, teaching him the ways of the Warrior, something I wasn't all that pleased with, but could do little about. Carl always pointing out that it might take decades to free Trelandar from the "clutches" of Darlanis, and my son might have his own role to play here. Sarah was walking a bit now, and had to be carefully watched, keeping me a bit more "busy" than before... We had plenty of slave girls about, but many weren't trustworthy. I thought of buying one for ourselves, but that would not be all that "fitting" with the nature of my position here on the estate.

"Hi, Mrs. Talen," Phara Holt said to me, walking up to watch Jerry shoot an arrow, Phara being a couple years younger than my son. A nice girl, but not the sort of a girl that either Carl or I would have ever wanted our son to get "serious" about here now. The daughter of the blacksmith, she was an intelligent girl, and pretty enough, but I'd been a high born Lady of Trelandar, and my husband was of the Warriors, the highest caste there is, and nice or not, Phara Holt was not the sort of a girl here for Jerry now!

"Hi, Phara," I smiled, keeping an eye on Sarah here. It was a nice warm spring day, the year now 2554, and I was thinking of how "little" I'd ever been able to "accomplish" here so far now. Granted, there were "incidents" here and there, and it was quite obvious that not all Trelandarians accepted the Imperial occupation of their country, but so far we hadn't been able to really "do" much of anything effective against those who ruled us here.

"I wish I could `read' like you do," Phara now said to me.

"It takes years to learn," I said, not wishing to encourage the girl. I suppose it was "mean" on my part, but that was the way that I felt about it. I was a high caste woman, my parents having been titled, and of the black caste, and this girl was a daughter of an Iron Worker, who himself could not read or write.* *

There is a note here by Lorraine: "Parallels the racial prejudices of my own era to a surprising degree." I can only say that I had much to learn, even if I believed in "democracy". (Sanda)

"Jerry sure 'knows' a lot," Phara said to me then, her dark eyes looking hopefully up into mine. Her attire commonplace "attire" for a seven year old girl, her dress the worst for wear. I considered "shooing" her off, but knew it would only make the matter "worse" if I did so. And telling Jerry not to see her any more would be even a worse move on our part, Carl and I knew too! Hopefully Jerry would meet someone else eventually, hopefully one of higher caste than Phara Holt, and that would be the end of it! She had a younger brother, Stan, who I'd seen a time or two here.

"I am of the 'Scribes'," I smiled then, seeing her nod back. I had taught Jerry to read, giving him "easy" books to get him started, and now he could almost handle adult level books here.

"Why are people 'different'?" she asked, standing there.

"People 'are' what they do best," I answered quickly back.

"Was it always 'so'?" Phara asked, the picture of innocence.

"There was a time long, long ago, when things were different than they are today, when people could fly in the air like birds do, when they could travel as far in an hour in a device called an 'automobile' as we might riding from dawn to dusk," I replied. "When Men, like the Lorr, could even travel to other worlds..."

"You must be very wise," Phara breathed, standing there. I saw in her eyes a pleading, as if she wished to know more of it. She was a very "likable" little girl, but I objected to the sort of relationship that was being formed between her and my own son.

"Hi, Phara," Carl said to her, Jerry there now at his side.

"Did these people who did all these things have 'castes' like we do?" Phara asked, Jerry grinning at her from beside Carl.

"Naw, that was only after 'Our Lady' died," Jerry said now, using the impressive title by which Janet Rogers was once known. "Before that anyone could 'be' anything they 'wanted' to be," he added, Phara giving him a smile that left few doubts of things...

"That girl is 'trouble'," Carl said to me as we sat there overlooking the estate, Mischief as usual having run off with the two children. "And while I know you say its just 'puppy love'," my husband continued on, "Still it worries me seeing them now." To Carl Jerry was now as much "his" as Sarah was, perhaps "more" in a way because he was a boy, the only "son" he'd ever have now.

"He's nine and she's seven," I smiled. "They'll both 'outgrow' it," I assured him, although I wasn't so sure here anymore. "They're both just children," I added, seeing my husband nodding.

"They play together, and they're together all the time," he answered. "And you are a high born Lady of Trelandar," he added. "The sister of a Queen of Trelandar, and once its Warlady too..." His dark eyes meeting mine as I now nodded thoughtfully in reply.

Chapter Forty Seven

"Can you throw it that far?" I asked, knowing that I couldn't do so. The bottle held a pint of lamp oil with a cotton wick to serve as the "fuse". It would smash upon impact with anything solid, causing the oil inside to go splashing out to catch fire. Such a weapon is "modern" in one sense, and "primitive" in another, having first been invented in the second of the great wars of the 20th Century. I feel however that the concept is "older" yet than that, and may very well relate back to an era long before...

"You light, I'll throw," Carl whispered back at me then. He would have to throw it over the top of the roof so that it hit in the street before the headquarters of the occupation forces here. The night moonless, lit only by a few stars among the clouds now. The middle of summer, the year 2554, the location a village some seventy odd miles from the estate, north of the ruins of Los Angeles. The shadowy figure of the woman with me now slapping at a mosquito. Her husband at her side, heavy set, broad shouldered, held his bow ready, a younger woman, their daughter, late teens, with another. All three of them sweating, nervous, as is common.

"I trust your men are in position," I said to him, lighting the fuse, Carl throwing with practiced skill, the bottle with its flaming wick now arching over the building to fall upon the other side. I then tossed the burning match on to the oil I'd poured a minute earlier on the rear of the building, the flames shooting up as we leaped back into the shadow, waiting for their reaction!

I saw the door come flying open, my arrow taking the first man in the chest, the next leaping over him to take Carl's arrow, his beloved crossbow too slow of fire for tasks such as this now. An arrow from our companions poorly aimed, wounding, the Imperial stumbling, a fourth drawing his sword, taking another's arrow... Yells from the street leaving no doubts as to what was happening as the Imperials emerged to meet our missiles, to die this night.

"We 'struck', and hard at the enemy tonight," I said, my hat and veil concealing my features to some extent, my black wig also serving to help "confuse" anyone as to just "who" I was here now. The people of the village standing there, the burning building well lighting things up as others now worked to put out the fire. I wore the black of the Warriress, the sword at my hip the same blade that my own mother had carried into battle many years ago. There had been no survivors, nor had we given quarter to anyone. As a rule I did not attempt to wipe out an entire garrison, but this time I'd had the forces, and I wanted the enemy, Darlanis herself, to know that I did have the capability of doing so now!

"Didn't seem at one time that we'd ever be doing 'anything' like this again," Carl said to me as we sat around the campfire. Last night we'd hit, and hard at the Imperial forces, actually to the point of wiping out a little garrison of about fifteen men. Lady Lana and Lady Tirana sitting there quietly watching us both. The men at arms with them men that we knew that could be trusted. Who knew how to keep their mouths shut about our little "trips". Our two Ladies on one of their "shopping trips" as such women do.

"The Imperials are no longer being seen as 'invincible'," I smiled back, looking into the dancing leaping flames of the small fire we'd built, not so much for heat, but for its "company" now. "We can't beat them in battle, but we can 'terrify' them," I said thoughtfully. And with Darlanis' ambitions, she could not afford to reinforce her occupation army here in Trelandar without drawing down forces that she needed elsewhere to fight her wars now.

"We could keep doing this for years without ever accomplishing anything," he pointed out. We were an "annoyance" to Darlanis, a serious bother to her in some ways, but so far I'd not had any success in recruiting forces "large" enough to "do" anything. With a hundred Warriresses now I could have gone from village to village wiping out Imperial "occupation garrisons", but I didn't have a hundred Warriress, or even a "trained" force of any kind! And untrained civilians with home made bows, while effective in a way, could not be expected to stand against any regular military force in open battle. I could kill the enemy, one by one, but in the long run I was accomplishing nothing, and both of us knew it!

"You have `doubts', don't you?" Lady Tirana said to me as I stood there looking out into the darkness of the forest. I liked the old Warlady, although she was unfamiliar with "warfare" of the sort that I now practiced, a war without armies, or flags, or any of the ordinary trappings that seemed so important to some.

"We need a `leader'," I replied, looking into her dark eyes. I'd thought a few times of what it would be like if we had someone like Darlanis, blonde, beautiful, a woman who could stand before an army of men and inspire them to march into battle, to die for her cause. "And I can never be the `leader' we need here..."

"You led us once to `victory', and you can do so again," she answered, putting her hands on my shoulders. "And we will win." I was glad she thought so, as I didn't think we'd ever do so now. Not unless something now happened to Darlanis and the Empire fell into the hands of Princess Tara, who lacked Darlanis' "charisma".

"When Paula was alive there was `hope'," I said, seeing her nod back. Paula had not been Darlanis, but she had been Queen of Trelandar, a tall beautiful woman, who could lead the people too. While not unattractive, I was not a beautiful woman, nor was I of the Warriresses, which also created problems of its own here...

"Perhaps we need to offer the people of Trelandar `more'," Tirana said, walking to a tree, leaning up against it, the flickering light of the campfire reflecting in her eyes as I nodded in agreement, well aware of "what" was needed to inspire the people.

"There was the American Revolution," I said, Tirana smiling. That was more "legend" now than fact, but I knew it had happened. I know of the "Bill of Rights", that document that had played its role in the establishment of a society once admired by all then.

"Democracy would never `work'," the old Warlady smiled back. That was something everyone believed now, something that was even in a way taught to children, written up in books by my own caste. Janet Rogers had said that "democracy" was a failure, and everyone believed it because SHE had said it. But was the "democracy" of the 20th Century the SAME as the sort of "democracy" that the men of the 18th Century had visualized for the new United States? Or was it a perverted version produced by the Democratic Socialist Welfare Party which had controlled the country before Janet?

"We need to `do' something..." I retorted to Tirana now.

"Such things do take time..." she smiled back at me then.

"Arsana," I said, turning away to smile at my husband, my son standing there at his side while little Sarah held on to me. Lady Lana with her own son Brian standing there at the rail. The capital of Dularn just ahead now as the ship changed its tacks, a cloud covering the sun suddenly placing us all into its shadow.

The dark forested island there before us as far as one could see. Those who had taken passage here now gathered at the railing as the crew busied themselves in making the necessary preparations, a small galley coming out to tow us in as is commonly done here. Such craft usually rowed by convicted criminals, castrated men, a practice that has much to recommend it, this Scribe may note now.

"Dangerous what we're doing," he answered, Lana nodding. We were supposedly upon a vacation, but if Darlanis had her spies on the job, there was a danger that she might learn the truth here. Then there would be no doubts as to "who" was responsible for all her "problems" in Trelandar. Nor that "Lady Sanda Harles" was me despite all my "tricks" in blurring the identity of the leaderess of the Free Trelandar Movement enough to confuse Darlanis' spies.

"Dularn must know that she has `allies'," I answered back, the cloud moving away from the sun, its heat again burning down. The arms of the bay opening up before us as the ship came into it now, exchanging signals with the fortifications, the city beyond.

"We don't know here if Darlanis will carry through with her threats," Lady Lana replied, her hazel eyes glowing into my own. It was early summer, the year 2555, and Darlanis had been casting eyes upon the Orgonian territories to the north of Sarn, lands in fact that were parts of territory claimed by Dularn as its own...

"Tulis is having trouble trying to smash the `rebels'," Carl interjected, these same "rebels" being actually Darlanis' people. Their activities to a good part being based upon the same sort of stuff that the Free Trelandar Movement was now doing to Darlanis. Such was upon everyone's lips, as was the thought that finally at last here Darlanis would challenge her own mother to a war that I felt neither could win, not Dularn, not California. And the sort of "trickery" that Darlanis had used in Trelandar would not work again, especially not against an old and "experienced" Queen like Tulis was, a woman who had once been Warlady of her own country.

Chapter Forty Eight

"Jerry, you see that Warrioreess?" I asked, pointing out the woman in her chain mail and helmet to my son as we stood facing the Royal Palace of Dularn. Jerry nodding back, squinting a bit in the bright summer sunlight. She appeared to be a non com, one in charge of the other two now on duty at the gate. The "hustle and bustle" here about the royal palace enough I thought to confuse any of Darlanis' agents who might be keeping an eye on us. In any case they would be more likely to be watching me here now.

"That one standing there?" my son replied, smiling up at me. The bright sunlight gleaming off her armor as she stood watching. She was a "busty" wench too, I could tell even through her armor.

"When I go into this store to shop, I want you to go to her, talk to her, and pass this note to her," I said, Jerry grinning. "And if she wants you to go with her, `go' with her as she asks." My son nodding, aware that his mother was not like other mothers.

"I wouldn't have thought of `that'," Lady Lana said to me in a low voice as she looked over some fabrics there in the store, a woman, blonde like many Dularnians, watching us from the counter. My

husband back at the place we were staying with the children. Arsana really not being that much different from any other city.

"I keep thinking of 'what' I'd 'do' in Darlanis' boots," I nodded back, standing there before the table of fabrics, watching my son go running across the street, dodging among the wagons, to run up to the Warriress there on duty before the gate. Whether or not Darlanis suspected me was something I didn't know, but as I'd been the "Warlady" of Trelandar for a few months, I considered it quite possible that I was under suspicion despite my best efforts to throw the Empress off the trail with my "trickery". Any competent investigator could have found where I now lived, if they wished to expend the effort, and I assumed too that Darlanis would be leaving no stone "unturned" in her efforts to put an end to these annoying attacks that I was making against her forces.

"I think you should 'lay low' and let others take the risk," Lana answered in low tones, lifting one roll of fabric to look at another. "There's no doubt in my mind that Darlanis suspects you are the one guilty here of making so much 'trouble' for her now." Lady Lana having her own sources of "information" here, I'll add.

"Why hasn't she 'acted' then?" I asked, aware that Darlanis was an "Empress", and "above the law" for all practical purposes. If she wanted someone dead, all she had to "do" was give an order and it was done, and you were "meat in the crate" as they so say.

"Maybe she doesn't want a 'martyr' now," Lana ventured back.

"Jerry hasn't come back yet," I said to Lana, the tone of my voice leaving no doubts as to how I felt just now. The woman on duty there, one of three, having taken my son inside the Palace.

"They would never harm a boy..." Lana "assured" me in reply.

"I shouldn't have done it, Carl," I said to my husband as I paced the floor, stopping now and then to glance out the window. The colorful capital city outside holding little of my attention.

"I'm sure Tulis wouldn't harm him," he now answered me back.

"He's right, Sanda," Lady Lana added, watching me pacing. A sudden knock on the door making us all jump, so nervous were we!!

"I was watching..." I breathed, going to the door, opening it, the woman standing there as "Dularnian" as any might so be... A big broad shouldered blonde, a "Warriress" by her very looks! Wearing the tunic and hose that is "common" for both sexes here. A broad brimmed hat, pulled down low, concealing her face here.

"The Lady Sanda?" she spoke, her hand on her sword hilt.

"I am," I spoke, knowing she must be from the palace.

"I am from the Queen," she said, her eyes meeting mine.

"I've been 'hoping' we'd meet," Queen Tulis said to me as my son stood at my side, the Queen being as I'd always pictured her. Her daughter, Princess Janis, Crown Princess, there at her side.* * Darl Jord was elsewhere at the time, which perhaps was for the best as he was a traitor to his country in cahoots with Princess Tara. The "betrayal" of Princess Janis in her secret trip to the little landlocked country of

Talon was undoubted his act. (Sanda)

"Your political system has always fascinated me," I smiled. While Dularn did not extend the right to vote to everyone, there was no doubt that the people of Dularn had more "say" in their governance than did the peoples of any country to the south here.

"We trace our heritage back to the 'founders'," Janis said, her steel gray eyes meeting mine as I nodded back in reply. The reference here being to the American Revolution of 1776, not the NEW ORDER of Janet Rogers there early in the 21st Century... "To George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Hamilton," she explained with a smile, "Not to Janet Rogers, that 'neo-fascist' dictator."

"Darlanis is a threat to peace loving people everywhere," I spoke, being well aware of the threats she'd made against Dularn. Tulis nodding, the precious jewels of her tiara gleaming bright.

"The enemy of one's enemy is one's friend," she smiled.

"I found your 'tactics' quite interesting," Queen Tulis said as we ate dinner, her daughter nodding, content to listen here... "Enough so that they are being 'taught' now to our militias," she added, her eyes holding mine. She was a hard featured woman, not a true beauty, but a woman I felt truly worthy of being Queen of Dularn. In her Darlanis would find an opponent far tougher than Queen Paula had been, a Queen who knew what it meant to "command" an army in the field, Tulis having been the previous Queen's own Warlady. This the infamous "Mad Kathis" who the people had hung!

"It is always best to strike an enemy where he does not 'expect' to be struck," Janis spoke, the Crown Princess also being the Warlady of Dularn. She was more attractive than her mother, but no match either in beauty for the awesome beauty of Darlanis. That was a part of Darlanis' "power", her looks, the way that she could stand before men in her golden mesh like a mythic goddess. My sister had been a striking beauty too, but different, not like Darlanis had been. Nor with the delusions that Darlanis had now.

"Darlanis was always a 'dreamer'," Tulis spoke thoughtfully. "Even as a little girl she was 'different' from my other children," the Queen mused, staring beyond me to scenes only she saw.

"Here is the estate, and 'here' would be a good place for a small ship to anchor," I said, pointing out the place on the map I'd drawn. Over the years I'd carefully explored the coastline to the south of the estate, there being a small hidden cove that could conceal a vessel from view. It was not an ideal place, being a fair distance from the estate, but it was well hidden here. There were also other landing points I showed Tulis, places that could be used to place small landing parties on shore in secret.* * This same map later came into the hands of Maris Marn when she became Queen of Dularn, and was also used by Carol Simmons in her landing when she took her force from the North Star through the forest to attack the estate from the south. The North Star then attacking from the sea in a coordinated assault against Lorraine. Destroying a good part of the Warlady's own navy here... (Sanda)

"At least we'll face the headsman together," Lady Lana said with a grin when I told her of what had transpired here with the Queen of Dularn. It being quite likely that before another month that a state of war would exist between Dularn and the Empire of California. A "war" that no one but Darlanis really wanted now!!

"A pair of very lovely 'traitors'," Carl grinned at us two as we sat there in the tavern having a drink before retiring for the night. Jerry being old enough and "mature" enough now to be able to keep an eye on Brian and Sarah, at least in my eyes here.

"You're as `involved' as we are," Lana grinned back at him.

"I will be content to die the death of a Warrior," he said.

"Her name was `Tori Wells'," Jerry said to me as we watched Arsana grow smaller in the distance, our ship now sailing south. The sky was cloudy, promising rain soon to come from the north.

"Who was `Tori Wells'?" I asked, the name meaning nothing.

"That guardswoman who took me to see the Queen," he said.

"She told you her name then?" I smiled, standing there.

"She was real nice, told me a lot of things too," he said.

"Perhaps someday you'll see her again," I smiled back then.

"She's married, her husband's a Physician," he smiled. "Got a baby daughter too," Jerry added, giving me a grin as I nodded. " Kind'are minds me of Phara's mom," he added. Mrs. Holt being a rather busty woman with reddish brown hair, I recalled here then. The blacksmith's wife being the cook for the estate's slaves. "Phara will like hearing about all my adventures here in Dularn."

"I'm sure she will," I answered, not all that delighted now, wondering here if Jerry was old enough to understand that his mom was a woman who had "secrets" that had to be "kept" to ourselves. Things that weren't be told to one's little "girlfriend" here...

Chapter Forty Nine

"Good," I said, looking at the Dularnian sea captain as I regarded the weapons that had been unloaded now from his raider. For the last five years the Empire of California and Dularn had been at war, in a war that seemed to go on year after year to the growing weariness of the people of both Dularn and California. I now took but a minor role in things, the Free Trelandar Movement seeming to have a life of its own, one aided and abetted both by Dularn and to a lesser extent by Talon. The night lit only by a few stars shining down, and by the shaded lamps we'd brought now. The towering trees surrounding us like monsters lurking about us. This area of Trelandar being believed by many to be "haunted"... There having been claims of seeing "glows" in the woods and such.

"I hope you can put these to good use," he smiled back then. The new Dularnian crossbow, now in general use, was the finest of weapons, capable in good hands of killing men at a hundred yards. His name was Miles, and he was considered one of Dularn's "best".

"Darlanis is our common enemy," Carl smiled from beside me.

"Let us pray that Lysis with us," Miles smiled back then.

"Gott Mit Uns," I smiled in turn, seeing his puzzlement.

"Everything go well?" Lady Lana asked, waiting up for us. Jerry sitting there by himself, which surprised me considerably the time of night that it was, my fifteen year old son looking up at me in a way that left no doubt in my mind of a guilt here now! I was tired, exhausted from being up all night, it being dawn in another hour, and from the nervous strain that I was under here. The knowledge that Darlanis was doing everything she could to put a halt to my activities, to finding out "who" I was and kill me!! Only the "protection" that Lady Lana gave me allowed me to do all I was doing, and I had no doubts from what Lana had told me that Darlanis was now suspicious that I was indeed the one she sought!

"There were no problems," I said, my voice level, Lana now nodding, well aware of things. Of the risks we all were taking. Even disguised as I'd been, veiled, wearing a dark wig, it was a certainty that sooner or later I'd be identified or that there'd be a "trap" set for me by Darlanis' forces. Another risk was the fact that we were using the Daris estate for a base of operations and if Miles or one of the other Dularnian sea captains was ever captured, the fat would really be in the fire for all of us then!

"We'll talk when you get up," Lana smiled, then taking her leave of us. I had to admire her courage, the fact that she was willing to risk her life for a cause that would gain her little. Although the war had finally forced Darlanis to withdraw her own 17 3 5 occupation troops from Trelandar, we were no better off than before here with their "replacements" drawn from among the people, many of who were of a sort little better than those of Darlanis. And the Lords and Ladies of Trelandar were just a "big" a problem for my Free Trelandar Movement as had been the Imperial troopers. The country itself starting to "revert" back to what it had been before the time of Queen Amethysta, when it had been "broken up" into little "states" each ruled over by some brutal "warlord"... * * This lack of "unity" was a problem even when Darlanis first invaded us, and may explain why we couldn't fight here effectively. It wasn't until Darlanis landed forces elsewhere that the nobles of Trelandar woke up to the fact that they too were now "threatened" by Darlanis, not just King John and my sister, the Queen... Darlanis of course favored a "disunited" Trelandar, and did her best to see that the country was broken up into more easy to control "estates", each almost like a little country itself. (Sanda)

"Time for a few hours sleep," Carl said, yawning, Jerry getting up, approaching me as I stood there at the door after Lana had exited. His eyes holding mine as I now nodded to Carl here. "I'll check on Sarah before I turn in," he added as I now nodded, aware that this was a time I wished to be "alone" with Jerry...

"Do something you shouldn't have?" I smiled back at Jerry, fearing what the answer might be knowing his "relationship" with Phara Holt which neither Carl or I had been ever able to "break". My son having a hang dog look about himself that left no doubts.

"Phara and I did it," Jerry whispered, blushing a bit now.

"She's only thirteen!" I breathed, knowing that while Phara might be thirteen, she had more a "figure" than most sixteen did! And she was a girl who knew that she was female too. Certainly a girl who was very much aware of the "looks" she received from men here on the estate. She was a short skirted delight, dark haired and dark eyed, a wench who any mother might fear, I should add...

"She was a virgin," he said, not meeting my eyes just then. "And she wanted me to be the one," he added, leaving no doubts. I'd even tried "using" the slave girls on the estate to break up this relationship, but nothing I did seemed to help matters here! For a horrid few seconds I even considered the thought of selling the girl to some slaver, of kidnapping her, giving her to a seacaptain like Miles to be sold in Dularn! Just to get rid of her!

"I want you to think of what it would be like to be married to a woman like her, to come home every day to a wife like her," I said, "Having children by her, knowing that she was low caste," I continued on here, aware that I could never "win" this either.

"What she `is' as a person is a lot more important than the fact she's a blacksmith's daughter," Jerry answered me squarely.

"Carl wants you to become a Warrior," I said to him then.

"Phara's not stupid, she knows a lot," Jerry retorted now.

"I just want to warn you what this could lead to," I spoke.

"You don't really `believe' in what you say, do you?" Jerry said to me then. "This talk about `democracy', about all people being `equal' is just all `talk', isn't it?" he said to me then. He knew of my "activities", of the ideals for which I stood for. My hopes for a free Trelandar, modelled upon Dularn's democracy.

"I just don't want you making a `mistake' you'll regret," I said, aware that Phara Holt was not the sort of a girl that I now wanted to see as my daughter in law. Not that I didn't like Miss Holt in a way, but she was not a suitable wife for my Jerry here!

"Trouble?" Carl asked as I climbed into bed beside him, a "hint" of the dawn to come just visible now through the curtains. His face a pale shadow with two darker pits where his eyes were.

"Phara seduced him," I said, that being my opinion of it...

"Maybe we should go have a talk with her parents," he said.

"Just make more `trouble' if we did," I answered, knowing it would. Phara was really a "nice" girl, but she was just not the sort of a woman that I wanted to have for a daughter in law here.

"Mrs. Talen?" Phara Holt spoke, stepping in front of me as I came from speaking to Lana about what had occurred the last night with captain Miles and his cargo sent to me by Queen Tulis here. The sun hot on my shoulders as I stood there facing the teenager.

"Yes?," I answered, thinking of what Lana and I had said. I didn't much "envy" Lady Lana, especially not with a baby still at her breast, something that might well "color" Lana's thoughts too as she considered what would happen to her if Darlanis found out. Carl was with Lana a lot, which was to be expected as he was the head of her men at arms, the force that "protected" our estate, a force now scattered so that all portions might be "protected", it being believed that "terrorists" from the Free Trelandar Movement might strike at any time, or such had been reported to Lana now. He'd also gone with her the times that she went to impersonate me to better throw Darlanis' agents off our trail. It being our own belief that the Empress was becoming aware of this deception now.

"We need to `talk'," Phara begged, breaking into my train of thought here about what could happen if Darlanis got wise to us. "I know what you think of me, but I do love your son," she said, the thought going through my mind that she "reminded" me in a way of Lara Warsan. And no doubt she possessed the same "talents"...

"What is 'done' is 'done'," I answered, standing before her, the tone of my voice leaving few doubts as to my feelings here. "You are 'both' still yet children," I continued on, holding her eyes with my own as she nodded. She was a pretty girl, with the promise of a "ripeness" to herself that any woman might now envy. She was wearing a summery costume of a half blouse and skirt, the skirt "short" in the current style for girls in their teens here. I would have appraised her at about thirty crowns on the "block".

"I have not told my parents," Phara said in a pleading tone.

"Jerry and you do not share caste," I said to her in reply.

"He has spoken much to me of what you believe," she spoke, a cold chill going through me as I realized how much she might know now. Apparently Jerry had shared everything with his beloved... "And although I'm too young to fight, I hope to see the day that the people of Trelendar elect you Queen, Lady Sanda," she smiled. Her dark eyes looking into mine as I nodded, suddenly "cold" with the thought that the girl could betray me, all of us to Darlanis!

"I believe you are intelligent beyond your years," I spoke.

"You will be a good and wise Queen," Phara Holt said to me.

"When the time comes, be a good wife to my son," I replied.

"I will be," Phara promised, adding, "You can 'trust me'..." Running off then, as provocative as any slave girl on the estate. Her words seeming to "echo" in my mind as I stood there stunned.

Chapter Fifty

I was aware of Miss Phara Holt's perfume as she pressed up against me there behind the outbuilding, feeling the warmth, the feminine curves of her voluptuous figure. The two of us now hiding in the shadows as their three men at arms strolled on by. My "future" daughter in law, if my son survived this war, would be a woman who would draw stares and wolf whistles wherever she went. She was now eighteen, the gold ring on her finger "marking" their engagement before Jerry went off to war, proud of the caste mark now burned into his wrist that marked him as being of the Warriors. The military conscription that Darlanis had introduced had left no choice, the Empress needing every young Warrior and Warriress she could get her hands on in this fruitless battle in Orgon now. The irony of Jerry fighting for Darlanis infuriating!

"Been doing this for fifteen years now," I smiled to Phara, stepping out from behind the outbuilding, drawing the arrow back, my missile only a brief second ahead of Phara's, whose busty figure made it necessary for her to wear a leather bra beneath her outer clothing. Someone having said of Phara that she was a "wet dream walking", which was a pretty good "description" of her too! The remaining man fleeing in terror, my second arrow dropping him before he made fifty feet, so such had my archery become over the years due to constant practice, my lovely compound bow still as "good" as ever although I'd had to replace the string and cables.

"Wish I could have been with Jerry," Phara said, another arrow now nocked on her bowstring as we dashed through the scattered trees to the manor house ahead. The thought going through my mind that I should have spent more time teaching Phara how to use the sword she now carried. While I had "accepted" Phara as a future daughter in law, Carl had not, his sometimes rather open "hostility" towards her leaving no doubts as to his thoughts now.

"Watch it!" I snapped, yanking Phara to one side as an arrow came zipping from the manor house, it being obvious that we no longer had the element of surprise in our favor here anymore now! Phara and I returning fire, while others of our force circled in, it being my intention here to set fire to the place if I could... Free their slaves, run off their livestock, and in general commit just as much MAYHEM as I could now before then retreating to the safety of the forest where our unicorns and horses awaited us.

"Just keep shooting..." I heard Phara whispering to herself, no doubt feeling the terror of one's first time in battle, of the thought that you might die here in this place, that you might be sent on to your next incarnation with your whole life yet ahead!! I felt "good" about Phara, despite whatever Carl felt about her.

"It's on fire," I spoke, one of our fire bottles having done its work, the glow of the fire already visible now as Phara shot off another arrow, her aim only "fair", but about what to be expected considering this was her first time to see real battle. I wished to force Darlanis to divert forces from the front in Orgon back to Trelandar, take the "burden" off our Dularnian allies... We were "terrorists" now in the true sense of the word, but this was "war", and I saw no reason now to hold back for doing that I had determined would be the most effective in fighting the enemy. Forcing these Imperial Lords and Ladies to use their authority in the Imperial Senate to make Darlanis divert forces she now badly needed in Orgon back to Trelandar to "defend" what she'd thought she'd won now fifteen years before! And with the bigger Dularnian raiders coming out of Arsana, the Empress would have her hands full in trying to "defend" a coastline that couldn't be defended!

"Oh..." Phara breathed, an arrow going "thunk" in the tree behind which she stood, someone having just made a lucky shot. A second of hesitation, then I saw her return fire, it being obvious to me that despite her "breeding", Phara was a true fighter! A man running up to me, almost taking my arrow before I "recognized" him as being one of "us", telling me that the slaves were being free and the livestock being run off there into the forest.

"PULL OUT!" I yelled, another arrow going "zip" on past me, Phara standing there looking at me, her eyes gleaming in the glow of the fire from the burning manor... Then dashing off with the others as I followed, running a zigzag course to avoid arrows. Once again the "Lady Sanda Harles" had struck a blow for freedom.

I watched Maris Marn, beautiful, blonde, and "collared", go strolling down the path, the sensual sway of her buttocks beneath her shift leaving no doubts in anyone's mind that she was female. She was a "beautiful" woman, Senator Daris having paid fifty good gold crowns for her, but Lana had quickly decided that Maris was better off on the estate than as her husband's latest plaything. Save for her green eyes, she could have been a sister of Darlanis in facial features and figure, although she was more intelligent, and in my considered opinion, not a slave we should have around. Warriresses in my personal opinion making dangerous slave girls as I'd pointed out to Lady Lana a number of times since she came back from visiting her husband in Sarn with this blonde in tow...

Lady Lana had gone off this morning with some men to pursue a dire wolf we believed had been "responsible" for killing one of our cows. Carl had been sent to Trella on estate business so she had taken huntsmen, Foresters, as befitting the nature of things. Carl being a skilled huntsman, who often got a deer

for us here.

"Slut!" I growled here to myself now, watching the Dularnian girl, Maris being a "flirt", like many slave girls, but one who had picked my own husband to flirt with, much to my annoyance! I was aware of Maris' caste, of the fact she was a Warriress, and skilled with the sword, which also made her into one "dangerous" blonde! The only saving quality she did have was that she doted on Mara, now six, Lana's daughter, although Mara in turn was getting much too friendly with the slave girl, which might be trouble later on now if things continued. Also, I was worried about Jerry, about Darlanis' latest attempts to crush the Free Trelandar Movement... I was not in a good mood, especially with Maris strolling around the estate like she practically "owned" it here! The woman being treated for all extents like she was an employee!

"Blonde, beautiful, and 'trouble'," Phara Holt said as she walked up, having seen the slave girl strolling by like some hip swinger, as those who followed Lara's profession were called now.

"Now I could think up a way to kidnap her and sell her..." I mused, Phara nodding, sharing my thoughts without any "need" here for words. We were close, closer than ever now, I might mention.

"Lady Lana thinks highly of her," Phara pointed out to me.

"Lady Lana doesn't know 'what' she is," I growled back now.

"Her step mother was a commodore in their Navy," Phara said.

"And she was a 'favorite' of Darl Jord," I added icily now.

"That 'figures'," Phara answered, giving me a big grin here.

"We'll swing around and check that ruined house," I suggested to the men at arms with me. We'd been out all day searching for Lana, for any evidence of what had "happened" to her and her men after the return of their unicorns to the estate last night!! The sun now getting low in the west, with darkness only a couple of hours off. While we were safe enough in numbers, I was aware of the tales told by the Foresters, those who hunted these woods. Tales of creatures neither man or beast, but something "else". I had been told that Garths had been spotted, and they were not the sort of an animal too that anyone wished to meet up with either!

"Must'arun into outlaws or 'something'," a man grumbled as we rode through the woods, the trees towering up there around us, sunbeams sparkling through their limbs to illuminate the ground. "Maybe these 'terrorists' that got everyone so upset," he added, putting the thought in my mind that there could have been some sort of a tragic mistake with Lady Lana being shot for an enemy!

"There's a unicorn!" I breathed, spurring mine to a gallop. The animal Brian's, a fine animal, the best that gold could buy! The unicorn tied to a tree, the ruins of the earth home now just a "hump" covered by vegetation. Its survival over all these long centuries having amazed me, although the Ancients could build in ways that we of today cannot, of materials we no longer can make.

"You'd better be careful, Mrs. Talen," one of the men warned as I dismounted by the entrance, drawing my sword as I did, there being little doubt in my mind that Lana's son had come to harm...A cold chill going through me as I pushed aside the rubble and entered, the bodies lying before me leaving no doubts now, nor as I saw the scene there did I doubt what had happened here. Brian had found the dire wolf, but his crossbow bolt had not killed it in time. The "remains" of the other men, Foresters according to

their tunics, apparently having come to their end I noted not by the fangs or claws of an animal, but from a sword! It being obvious here that this place had been a hangout of outlaws, who had killed Lana's own men and taken her captive, perhaps to sell as a slave once they had sated their lusts upon her! The light inside was too dim to tell very much, but it was obvious that swordplay had taken place here. Only the lack of the bodies of any enemy puzzled me, as not even Darlanis herself could have faced Lady Lana and three of her men in a contest of swords and survived it!

Chapter Fifty One

As we rode back to the estate, I pondered what I had found, the wounds on the three Foresters leaving no doubt that they had all indeed been killed right in a group, with the killing attack having been made to their throats, the "mark" of the true master. That Lana had been spared indicated that they had been men, most likely outlaws, although the placement of the bodies puzzled me. If one faces a superior force, you form a circle facing outwards, but the positions of the bodies was wrong for that here. And I'd also noted that the pattern of wounds was more like that only one swordsman would have given, which made it utterly impossible, as no one who had ever lived I knew could have faced Lady Lana, a Princess of Swords, a champion fencer, and three of her men too!! Even Darlanis' legendary skills wouldn't have been enough here...

"They were killed by 'something' that cannot be killed," one of the men at arms muttered to a companion, "'Something' that is not human, a 'thing' against which no sword would be a defense."

"Nonsense!" I snapped, turning in my saddle to regard them. "They were 'killed' by outlaws who took Lady Lana as a captive." At least there had been no doubts here about the death of her son by the fangs of the dire wolf, which I'd determined to be female. I would have rewards posted for Lady Lana in the hope that someone might be willing to sell her back to us if they purchased her off some slave block, although I didn't give much for this if she was sold in Dularn or Baja, or worse yet, down there in Mexico.

"There are 'things' here in these forests," one of the men retorted, "'Things' that Lys never made or blessed, that fear the very light of day!" he went on, much to my disgust and annoyance. The setting of the sun making us all nervous as we rode back to the estate, none of us wishing to be in these woods after dark!!

"What are you going to 'do' now?" Phara asked as I made the arrangements for the burial of the bodies. For the funeral we'd hold for Brian, who had died bravely here facing a deadly enemy. I'd sent a rider to Lady Tirana, letting her know what we'd found there in the ruins. The "loss" of Lady Lana also meant that I'd have to be extremely careful, as I no longer had my "cover" here. The sun having gone down, leaving only a rosy glow in its place there over the gleaming Pacific as night fell over North America.

"I'm going to have to write a letter to her husband," I said in level tones, feeling "exhausted" from everything I'd been put through here, the sight of Maris Marn annoying me even more then! Only the way that little Mara clung to her making me realize that I had another task here, one I wasn't looking forward to either!!

"You didn't have to come," I smiled, aware of the dangers of riding at night, Lady Tirana Greyson giving me a grin in reply as she stepped into the manor's living room where I'd been waiting. I was tired and exhausted from everything, but my nerves were so taut that I knew attempting to go to bed now would be futile too! I tried to "explain" things to Mara, but without success, finally giving up and letting the girl go to bed in Maris Marn's arms! I didn't like the Dularnian slave girl, but at least she was a good substitute mother for little sixyear old Mara, and I felt that I was at least lucky that Lana had provided Mara with the woman...

"Our `chances' of getting Lady Lana `back' aren't good," she said, her husband pouring her a drink and then one for himself as he stood there watching us. I knew little of him, save that he'd once been a Warrior of renown many years ago, being considerably older than Tirana herself, who had recently celebrated her ninety fifth birthday. "Especially with this war going on," she added.

"You might consider `pirates' instead of outlaws," her husband spoke, old Charles Greyson now giving me a thoughtful smile. "Perhaps they made a landing and sent an expedition inland here."

"Makes sense," I mused, now sipping here at my own drink.

"Something doesn't, however," Charles Greyson said then.

"What do you mean?" his wife now asked, sitting there.

"A fight like that and no dead enemy bodies," he said.

"Maybe they took them with them," knowing better here!

"Lana was a Princess of Swords," Lady Tirana mused now.

"And she kept up her skills," I added, seeing her nodding.

"The Foresters were killed by throat wounds," I said now.

"Few foes, all true masters of the sword," Charles mused.

"Lana and her men have missile weapons?" Tirana asked me.

"We found her bow," I said, wondering here about this now?

"Perhaps `what' they faced was not human," Tirana ventured. Her words bringing back the conversations of the men at arms now.

"Then why didn't we find Lana's body too?" I challenged her. Men might not kill a woman, but some "thing" most likely would!

"Be careful, we don't want to destroy any footprints!" Lady Tirana snapped, the men at arms, both hers and mine, nervous even in their numbers, the torches that we'd made to explore the ruin. The smoke of the torches rising up to stain the ceiling overhead. Her husband there at her side, looking on, studying the old ruin.

"Here," I said, bending down, studying the marks I'd found.

"A woman's high heels," Lady Tirana said, the marks fresh.

"They're not Lana's," I said, studying them carefully now.

"Doesn't make any sense," I said to Lady Tirana standing in the marks, it being obvious that the Foresters and Lana had been fighting ONE WOMAN! The woman had apparently had a "companion", but the marks and the position of the bodies left no doubts now! "No human being could face Lana and three of her own men here..."

"There are 'marks' of a struggle here," Tirana then replied. We'd found those, the marks of where two people had struggled. I wondered if that "explained" things. Could it be that Lady Lana had been captured by someone when she entered here, and her men had rushed in and had been killed by whoever was hiding in here?? This made sense in a way, and the thought suddenly occurred to me that there was ONE WOMAN who might very well be able to fight and kill three men! The Empress! Were these Darlanis' footprints? But why would Darlanis kill? Unless Lana had ordered her men to kill the Empress? Then perhaps this all could be explained then! And why would Darlanis be "lurking" here inside these ruins now? Nothing made any sense! Darlanis might have arrested Lana, but "if" she had, she certainly would have by now also come for me!

"I don't think we can learn any more," I said to Tirana.

"Perhaps only Lys knows," the old Warlady smiled back.

"I've got some 'news' for you," Carl said, giving me a kiss as he stepped on to the dock, the men in the boat now unloading here the items that he'd been sent to Trella by Lana to purchase. A row of storm clouds on the horizon now speaking of bad weather, the captain of the coaster no doubt eager to get well out to sea. "Seems 'unbelievable', but there is evidence that it could have happened," he continued, "And it does explain a certain mystery." Giving me a grin as if to tease me with what he had to say here.

"Lady Lana was taken by outlaws," I interrupted him, little interested just now in some fantastic tale he'd heard in Trella.

"The 'wounds' were to the throat?" Carl repeated, his dark eyes holding mine as we watched the last of things being unloaded and carried off to be stored by our slaves, both male and female. A number of our men at arms watching, making "comments" as usual about Maris Marn, who I'd put to work as the slave slut she was.

"Yes," I answered, standing there, the ship's boat now being lifted back aboard. The captain wasting no time in filling his sails and tacking out to sea, to get distance between his ship and land for the storm now threatening, the sky black in the west as the wind started to pick up now, blowing the leaves, the dust.

"That was the way that 'she' killed, I heard," he said then.

"Who?" I asked, recalling he'd been starting some tale here.

"The 'woman' who took over the Ronda, a Bajan slaver," Carl said to me. "Who slew eight or nine of its own crew according to what the first officer claimed, including the ship's captain."

"A slave revolt?" I smiled, "visualizing" how it could be.

"They fished out this old woman and a beautiful blonde girl out of the sea just north of Trella, both of

them talking 'funny' and both dressed in styles like out of some costume ball," Carl continued. "The old woman seized a sword and started killing the crew like some wild creature, so swift and fast that only one was able to even touch her with his blade," my husband explained now.

"Against an entire crew?" I ventured, knowing this was just a fantastic tale concocted to deceive, as not even Darlanis would have been able to do such a thing against a dozen armed men! One might kill three or four, but eight or nine? "That's a 'story'!"

"I think it 'happened', at least Darlanis believed it," Carl answered. "Especially as the first officer claimed that the woman's name was 'Lorraine Duval'," my husband grinned at me. Lorraine Duval, the woman who had taught Janet Rogers the political philosophy later called the NEW ORDER, who had supposedly in a way founded the Priestesses of Lys, who was "responsible" in a way for everything that had happened, had "disappeared" in 1988 with her step daughter, a lovely blonde teenager over the ocean in her airplane, "Black Lady", under "mysterious" circumstances.

"And Darlanis?" I ventured, wondering what her "involvement" was in this? Darlanis having been in Trella the last I knew of.

"Went rowing out of Trella at maximum beat," Carl grinned.

Chapter Fifty Two

"Is it possible?" Carl asked as we walked back to the manor house, the fresh grave there beside the house with its ankh drawing his notice just then, forcing me to explain Brian's death. I felt "odd", as if nothing was "real", as if this was all a dream! I knew of the great "silver bird" that had come flying out of a thunderstorm over Sarn a century ago, a "machine" of the past now somehow transported into our own era. It being known that one of the after effects of The War of 2047 had been warps in space time.

"The ruins in the forest could have had 'meaning' to her," I mused, recalling what I knew of Lorraine. There had been a Bob and Carol Simmons who had lived in the house, then after their death in 2033 the house had been purchased by Marcella Domino, a friend of Janet Rogers. She had been its last "legal" owner now.

"The first officer tried to sabotage the Ronda," Carl spoke. Was it "possible" that Lorraine, in command of a vessel she would have had but little "understanding" of, put in here on the coast? Did she find the ruined house, she and Sharon Duval, to be surprised inside it by Lady Lana? According to the writings of Janet Rogers, who wrote much of Lorraine, the woman had been in the eyes of Janet at least the greatest fighting woman of all time!! And had the three Foresters of Lana's discovered Lorraine, was it possible that Lorraine killed the three of them without thinking? She would be like a wounded hunted animal, vicious almost beyond comprehension. Ready to kill anyone she thought wished her harm! Torn somehow from her own time to ours, she would be terrified of us, especially after what had happened on the Ronda, it being my belief that the captain had wished to enslave her step daughter. Such would have triggered off the "killing rage" that Janet had written about, turning Lorraine into the most fearsome of "predators", her awesome intelligence and fighting ability like none no one had ever known. But yet she hadn't killed Lana, perhaps due to the fact that Lana was a woman, and also perhaps due to Lana's own

skill with a sword being enough to hold Lorraine momentarily.

"You said that Darlanis went tearing off after the Ronda," I said to Carl as we walked into the manor, the thought occurring to me that not all was lost, that Lana still lived if the prisoner of Lorraine, who doubtlessly here was fleeing towards Dularn. Lorraine wouldn't have "trusted" Lana, but she would have learned from the slave girls aboard the Ronda the political situation, it being without doubt that she would have seen Dularn as "safety"! * * I did not of course know about Princess Janis here. (Sanda)

"I'm a Warrior, not a Scribe, but wouldn't Lorraine be just what Darlanis would need to make people submit to her Empire?" he asked, the living room showing the feminine touch of Lady Lana... A cold chill going over me at the thought. Lorraine was a legend in our time, a "combination" of George Washington, Jefferson, and everyone else. The woman who had altered the course of history! It would be like having to face Darlanis with Janet Rogers standing at her side! Darlanis was Darlanis, but Lorraine Duval... The very thought frightened me. And Lorraine was one of the most intelligent women who had ever lived. A student of military history, of tactics, of military strategy like none of her own time!

"Darlanis is 'incompetent', but Lorraine..." I breathed, the wind blowing the trees, a branch breaking off, hitting the manor. If Lorraine reached Dularn, it would be the "end" for Darlanis. For all her ambitions, her "claims" to be a second Janet Rogers.

"If she has Lana..." Carl spoke, picking up a figure here.

"She will not 'trust' Lana," I said, my husband nodding.

"She's not likely to 'trust' Darlanis either," Carl said.

I sat on the end of the dock, my feet in the water, Mischief at my side, the Boston now "mine" in a way since Jerry had left. She was not a "young" dog any more, even with the anti-aging drug the veterinarian had given her, but she was "company", and just now I needed companionship of a sort that only Mischief had here. The Boston Terrier sitting there beside me, warm and furry, her little black and white body bringing back memories of another... "Memories" of fifteen years, of battles fought, won, lost, of the eventual futility of my own attempt to "free" Trelandar. Now all was in the hands of Lys, in the decisions that a woman who should have been dead for six centuries would make. If Lorraine made it to Dularn, sailing a ship she would know little about, through waters controlled by the Empire of California, then there would be "hope" again. Lorraine would be like having Janet Rogers, like having George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, all the rest of them all rolled into one. She would be tall, stern featured, her eyes dark as coals, her hair perhaps even darker than my own was. And there could be no "doubt" she was the greatest swordswoman of all time, a woman who could face Darlanis in a duel and kill her!

Due the nervous strain I'd been under the last couple weeks, Carl and I had suddenly found ourselves at odds over things that normally neither of us would have paid the least bit of notice... And that damn Maris Marn, so "golden", those eyes like emeralds, a face so patrician that you thought it was a Queen's, was again flirting with my husband, behaving like some "alleycat" in heat! My world was falling apart with Lana gone, with my concerns as to what Lorraine would "do", assuming Darlanis didn't get her first!

"Troubles?" Sarah asked, walking out to me, little Mara at her side, forcing me to put a smile on my lips I didn't much feel just then. Whatever happened here now, I knew that Sarah would be safe, Phara having promised me to look after my daughter here.

"Maris got her dress 'dirty'," Mara ventured to me then, her dark eyes meeting mine. Her appearance so much like Sarah's at her age that one would have thought the two to be sisters here... This bringing up

a horrifying thought that Mara could be Carl's daughter, not Lord Daris! Lana was young, vital, and Carl was a handsome man, AND THE TWO OF THEM WERE TOGETHER A LOT WITHOUT ME! COULD MY HUSBAND HAVE BEEN LADY LANA'S LOVER ALL THESE YEARS NOW?

"Grass stains," Sarah grinned, knowing the "implications".

"Everything will turn out O.K. in the end," Carl said to me as we ate dinner together, Sarah sitting quietly eating her meal. My daughter's words coming back to me again as I looked at Carl.

"You always did 'like' blondes, didn't you?" I said to him.

"Thinking of bleaching your hair again?" my husband asked.

"You always liked Lady Lana a lot, didn't you?" I retorted.

"What are you getting at?" Carl asked, Sarah listening now.

"Not now, 'later'," I said, telling Sarah to finish eating.

"You're 'breaking up' under the 'strain' of all this," Carl said to me as we sat there with the dirty dishes between us both. I'd unburdened myself of all my pent up emotion, accusing him of taking Maris Marn into the woods and "using" her, of having been Lady Lana's lover for years, and the father of six year old Mara!

"It's all TRUE, isn't IT! " I snapped back, tears coming now! "You've been betraying our marriage for years with Lana, and now with a damned slave slut who reminds you of your first wife!!" I screamed, sobbing, slamming my fist down on to the table! Smashing the plate beneath it, the blood coming, my hand cut, bleeding as I leaped to my feet, everything so blurred before by my tears! Carl getting up, coming for me, my fury burning hot as I struck at him, and then dashed sobbing from the kitchen, running out the door into the night, aware of nothing but how I'd been betrayed!!

"I just hope 'that' is what it's supposed to be," Phara whispered to me as I stood there watching, the heavy trireme now putting down a boat as it exchanged a coded series of signals here. I was surprised to see such a vessel, a heavy first rate warship.

"They have more to fear," I said, still yet "angry" at Carl. The night dark, cloudy, ideal for secret operations such as this. For landing supplies, weapons to a resistance movement, others of the "Free Trelandar Movement" here, although none knew I was the Lady Sanda, the most "wanted" woman in all of Trelandar here now! An officer jumping from the boat, taking the hand of a Peasant. Here we were all "equals", and one's caste meant next to nothing. The mosquitos were bad, keeping us all jumping, slapping at them.

"Is there one who can carry a message to Lady Sanda?" the Dularnian asked, his uniform leaving few doubts as who he was. I quietly put my hand out, letting him now put the message into it.

"Do you know anything about 'Lorraine Duval'?" I asked then.

"She is in the hands of Darlanis," he answered in tones that left no doubts that all was lost. "And our Princess is dead..."

"Take me with you," I whispered, drawing him away a bit. I had nothing left to live for here, not after

Carl's betrayal now. "I'm the Lady Sanda Harles," I breathed, throwing caution to the winds now. His sudden intake of breath leaving no doubts. "I'm not bad in bed either," I purred, pressing myself up against him.

"Your throat is chained, and I am a man of honor," he said.

Chapter Fifty Three

"You are 'good in bed'," Jon said to me as we laid together propped up, reading over what I'd written here so long ago now.

"I'm glad you were a man of honor," I said, kissing him.

"It is bad news?" Phara Holt asked as we mounted up for the ride back to the estate. I would sleep in one of the guest rooms and let Carl have our own quarters. I supposed my only option in the long run was a divorce, difficult after a marriage as long as mine had been, especially with children, the Priestesses frowning on such things. Lana was dead, having died in battle aboard the Ronda in the battle against the pirate Tarkas of the Seahawk. A battle that had left no doubts as to Lorraine's abilities to command. Darlanis would no doubt make Lorraine "Warlady" of the Empire of California, and her first task would be to rid Trelandar of the Free Trelandar Movement, pitting me against her in a match that could have but one outcome, especially against such a woman!

"We've lost everything..." I said, knowing there was no way that I could explain to Phara what it would mean to oppose such a woman as Lorraine. "Darlanis won Lorraine over to her side now." To me it was like "seeing" Paula die all over again, knowing that after all the fighting, the killing, the deaths, we'd lost here.

"We've only 'lost' when 'you' give up," Phara said to me. I supposed that was true. Lorraine would be an awesome Warlady to fight against, but my tactics would still "work" against her just as effectively as they had against any of Darlanis' commanders... We'd have to be a lot more "careful" than we'd been, but I felt it would still be possible to continue to fight against Darlanis.

"I suppose you're right," I said, knowing that she was now. I was a damn good Warlady, even if I didn't bear the caste mark. And if it came down to it, I felt that my knowledge, experience, would be the match for even Lorraine's awesome capabilities now!

"Another thing," Phara now said to me then as we rode along.

"What's that?" I asked, slapping at a mosquito here in the darkness, the trees only darker shadows bordering the trail here.

"It hurts to see Carl and you like this," she said softly.

"A slave girl I can accept, but Lana?" I protested here.

"Don't `sully' her memory with this," Phara said to me.

"Lana's `dead'," I said, standing there, seeing his eyes in the light of the lamp I held as he sat up in bed. I was tired, emotionally exhausted from everything I'd been through, ashamed too of myself, my own acts. Of throwing myself at Jon Richards.

"You were the `only' one I ever `loved'," he said to me, the tone of his voice I felt speaking the truth. Lana had been more a "change of pace", a woman who was "needful" of a man's "touch". Maris Marn perhaps more a plaything that a man might sport with.

"We have a daughter to raise," I spoke in level tones. "And a country to free from the clutches of Darlanis," I added then... I could not forget what had been done to me, but we both had our own duties to fulfill, responsibilities we couldn't shrink from. I feared however that it would be a long time before I could feel sexual desire for him again, especially after all he'd done now.

"Looks like Darlanis didn't get her `way' after all," Phara said to me, talking about the latest news. The Lorr having come and taken Lorraine Duval to Mars with them, no doubt fearing with good reason what the woman from the past might do here. Lorraine of course being "knowledgeable" about technologies unknown today. My "troubles" with Carl here having drawn me closer yet to Phara. Carl on the other hand also seeming to "resent" Phara even more. Maris Marn being careful to avoid me, to keep out of my way here. With Lord Daris having committed suicide the estate was now Mara's in the legal sense, but just "who" would get it was a good question that none of us knew the answer to. Lord Daris also had relatives, and I supposed eventually the courts would get around to giving it to one of them to hold in guardianship for Mara now. In any case I was taking care of things, and would do so until I was replaced by another, whoever that person might eventually be.

"She's also without a Warlady now," I pointed out to Phara.

"I keep fearing that I could be a widow before I'm a bride," she answered, a justified fear considering how things were now. Jerry wrote about once a week to her, and a letter now and then to me, mostly about how life was going up on the Dularnian front. He was a noncom now, in command of a ballistae squad, which at least got him out of the front battle lines. On the other hand the Dularnians used tactics based upon my own from years ago, and there was always the danger of raiding forces striking from the flank and rear, something against which there was little defense.

"There is a `glow' of fire from Lady Tirana's estate!" the man at arms spoke, shaking me awake. "The sky is lit up there!" There being no doubts in my mind that her manor had caught fire!!

"Saddle mounts, we'll ride!" I snapped, getting out of bed, naked but for a brief nightshift that slid up over my hips now. The man nodding here, his eyes for a brief moment dropping down.

"We have slave girls better looking than me!" I snapped!

"The bodies are Dularnian," Carl said, looking up at me. I knew that much, that it had been a raid from the sea, that Lady Tirana had been taken, her husband killed, her livestock run off. Her slave girls seized, and the buildings burned. Tactics that I had once suggested to Queen Tulis, to Princess Janis years ago...

"We made a pact with the Evil One, and this is it," I said, my voice bitter. The Dularnians had done what they were ordered to do by Tulis, attacking estates from the sea to draw Darlanis' forces away from the front, easing the pressure upon themselves.

"I'm scared, mother," Sarah said to me as we sat discussing the events of the night, the dawn just breaking here in the east. Mara with her, with Maris Marn quietly sitting there to one side.

"We're a lot 'bigger' than the Greyson estate," Carl smiled.

"You should post men, well hidden, to watch the sea," Maris suddenly spoke. "Keep more of your force 'alert' at night," she now added, her eyes like glittering emeralds meeting Carl's here. "Also consider that ships can land a force almost anywhere along the coastline, and effective attacks can be launched overland..."

"Too bad she's an 'enemy'," my husband grinned back at me.

"I'm going to try to get a few hours sleep," I answered.

"There's 'trouble' between you and dad, isn't there?" Sarah ventured as I had a late breakfast or perhaps now an early lunch. The fact that we no longer slept together perhaps proof of this.

"It's nothing that you need to worry about," I now smiled.

"It's over that 'Dularnian', isn't it?" Sarah retorted.

"She's just a slave girl, nothing more," I answered.

"To Mara she's a 'mommy' now," Sarah said to me.

"There are ships rounding the point!" the man cried, running up to the house, my first reaction one of terror considering what had happened here to Lady Tirana here only a few nights before. "Two big schooners, a couple'a triremes along with some merchantmen!" the man now continued, this "settling" my nerves a little as he stood there panting, the day being hot, dusty, mid summer.

"Find my husband, have everyone 'gather'," I snapped, giving orders, aware that we were going to have "visitors" very soon...

"Ship is the Squala," I said, lowering the telescope, giving it back to Carl. The Imperial flag now flying over its main mast leaving no doubts of what had happened. It had been the Squala that had attacked Lady Tirana's estate, killed her husband, taken her as a slave. Even though its loss to Dularn was painful, in a way I was now glad it had been taken by the Empire of California.

"Lowering a boat now," he answered, it being my duty to meet those off the ship, the thought going through my mind that my own career here might be coming to an end if the Empire had sent out a new Lord or Lady to take control of the estate for little Mara. The sunlight glittering off the water making the boat seem like some insect as it came crawling over the water. Mara with Maris there on the dock waiting to greet whoever was coming ashore, the slave girl's own behavior such lately that I was just itching now to whip her. To remind her that she was still yet a slave girl.

"I'd better go meet it before Maris does," I grinned back.

"Wench does 'put on airs'," Carl grinned, seeing me nod.

I reached out, let her take my hand, the Imperial Lady's eyes dark behind her black net veil as she climbed up from the boat, a broad brimmed hat shading her from the sun's glare. Her "grip" was such that there could be no doubts that she was of the Warriresses. The black silk of her stylish dress expensive, her trappings ornate, as befitting a high Lady. She was tall, slim, hard muscled, her hair black as coal. Not a woman any would call beautiful, but attractive in a way. That was my first impression of a woman who has altered my life in ways I'd never thought now.

"I am Mrs. Sanda Talen," I said, wishing I'd had time to do myself up better, this woman obviously being my new mistress now!

"Lorraine Duval, 'LadyLorraine' according to Darlanis," she answered, lifting her veil, her piercing dark eyes meeting mine!

Chapter Fifty Four

"And that was your first impression ofLorraine," Jon said as he set down the manuscript I'd written now so many years ago.

"I remember 'her' standing there, the sun glittering off the water, the smell of the ocean, people shuffling around in the boat, the Squala out there at anchor, just as it was yesterday."

"Let's take a walk," Jon suggested, the sun now setting.

"It was 'here'," I said, standing on the dock, the dock itself not the same one, as that had been burned back in 2567 here. But the position in relation to the water was the same, and in my mind's eye I could still see the Squala, now only a memory, there at anchor. See the other ships, Seahawk, Sarnian Lady, the fat merchantmen that had been escorted by her and another trireme...Lorraine standing there on the dock in silk and leather, veiled, the sunlight glinting off her hair. Her eyes like coals as she lifts her veil. Eyes that seemed to see right into my very soul.

"There's a ship coming in this way," Jon said, breaking into my train of thought, my memories of a time now fifty six years in the past. Of a woman whose last remains nowlaid buried on this very estate. A woman who had been truly a living legend, a woman born in the year 1949, and who had died here in the year 2621. A woman whose name would live in the memory of Mankind forever, one who had in her own lifetime changed the course of human history.

"Steam frigate," I answered, seeing the smoke. I had to use glasses for close work, but I still could see well at a distance.

"Dulie from the looks of her," Jon grinned back at me then.

"It's been a long time," Queen Maris smiled as she took my hand and stepped up on to the dock, the sunset beautiful, the red and orange lighting up the sky, the ocean reflecting its beauty. She was no longer a young woman, widowed these many years, Prince Paul, her husband, having died in battle against an invading army from across theRockies, her daughter soon to leave for Mars now. We were a dying

civilization, living on memories, awaiting death while our children made a home for themselves on another world.

"She died as she would have so wished it," I said to Maris.

"She was a 'Warlady', but she brought us 'peace'," Maris answered, taking Jon's hand in hers. A thought now going through my mind that once long ago this very same woman and Jon had been lovers, just as she'd once too been Carl's mistress so long ago.

I watched Maris Marn (she had kept her maiden name) kneel down at Lorraine's grave and say a brief prayer for the soul of the famous Queen and Warlady, one who I was sure Lys would gather up into her arms when her soul stood before Her for judgment. Jon putting his arm around me, holding me close as Maris prayed. My eyes moist with tears as the memories now came flooding back.

"I will be Dularn's last Queen," Maris said to us as we sat there in the living room sharing drinks, the room in its way yet reflecting the taste of the woman whose bodylaid buried outside. "Let those who are 'young' go to Mars," she spoke, seeing us nod.

"And in their books they will read of those who once lived," Jon said, perhaps thinking here of Lorraine, of others we'd once known. Of Darlanis, tall and golden, like a goddess from a time of myth. Of brave men and women who had stood in battle. Mars, despite its name, was a peaceful world, a world without nations, without wars, even without the sort of violence we still knew...

And with this I will close my story, hoping the reader has not been too "disappointed" with me, with what I've written here. There are of course "unsolved mysteries", such as just "who" was Mara's father, but such things only those long dead could answer. Jon and I will live out our lives here, translating the writings of Lorraine, seeing that her thoughts are published, transmitted to Mars so that they may survive the end of our own green Earth.

(Sanda)

Postscript

I felt the manor "shudder" in the hurricane force winds, the trees soon to come crashing down as the ocean came smashing in to shore, the water already having come up half way to the house as the Earth entered its final hours of life. The sounds of Doomsday like no storm I'd ever known as I felt another earthquake, a "warning" that the time was not far off when all of this would be destroyed. Most of the outbuildings were gone now, the last of our retainers having fled towards the mountains, seeking a safety that could be found only aboard a spaceship. Outside Black Lady rocked and shook in the gusts as the winds grew stronger, waiting for me to take her up on her last ever flight as our world died beneath... A heavy crash of thunder like the detonation of some explosive. The sky filled with lightning, nature on a "rampage".

I had decided to die with my world, where my memories were, where the bodies of those I'd known now laid, Jon's next to his beloved Lorraine, my last husband having died now two years ago in 2646, his

heart having stopped in his sleep as he laid beside me. Taking a last look around, the manor shaking in the wind, I forced the door open and stumbled outside, the wind tearing at me. A last look at the graves beside the house, a tree breaking off as I leaped aside as best I could, the terror clutching at my old heart for a moment making me "young" again, not a hundred and twenty eight as I was, my hair now all gray, my face wrinkled up.

I stumbled towards Black Lady, fighting the wind, feeling it tear at my clothing, bits of spin drift from the ocean like rain. My sword at my hip, the same blade my mother once carried so long ago in an age when men believed that the Earth would be forever. Black Lady was "old", her piston rings in poor shape, making her burn oil, foul spark plugs, but she would take off one more time. Carry me aloft into the sky, allow me to report by radio to the orbiting spaceships what I can see, the clouds such that I will have a better "view" of things than they will here, I'm told now. There are other spacecraft in our atmosphere, but I will "help".

"One more time, old girl," I said, forcing open the door and climbing in, the black Beechcraft Bonanza the last of her kind. The engine started right up, thanks to the fresh spark plugs I'd put in earlier, its steady roar a comfort as the wind whistled by the windshield. The double barred cross of Lorraine painted on the fuselage now faded with time, the action of wind and rain... A last memory of a woman now but only a "legend" upon two worlds.

I applied more throttle, Black Lady now rolling away from the ship's cable I'd used to hold her from being blown backwards, the wind now so strong that I need only draw the wheel back a bit and we are at once airborne, actually drifting backwards for a moment before I pushed in the throttle and allowed Black Lady to seek again the sky for the last time. A shuddering going through the airplane as we climbed, the ground falling away, the heavy clouds racing across the sky like I'd never seen before, the sea now beneath me like nothing I've ever seen either, the waves being I'd guess some fifty feet to sixty feet in height. Smashing into the cliffs south of the estate, throwing up spray perhaps a hundred yards or more into the air, the airplane hardly moving against the wind despite my airspeed of a hundred miles an hour.

I then pushed the throttle in all the way, hoping the engine would hold together for just a few hours, Black Lady now racing along the sea coast on towards Trellatan at an airspeed of a hundred and ninety miles per hour, although my ground speed was far less. My flight actually crab wise, almost sideways in this hurricane! Beneath me I could see the sea smashing into the land, in places now flooding inland where the ground was lower. The fisherman's huts and all such all ready gone, washed away. Even inland, the wind had already destroyed much of Man's works, a test of it by pointing the airplane into the wind and throttle back indicating that its speed was just over a hundred ten miles per hour here.* * I was making regular reports by radio to a spaceship. (Sanda)

I thought of the ruined house once belonging to the Simmons that had played such a role in all our lives, aware that it too would finally be destroyed when the tidal waves came as they soon would. The changes in the Earth's rotation, its orbit about the Sun as it was torn away from, all would spell the "end" of Earth.

I could tell as the minutes passed that I was losing ground speed despite my airspeed indicator registering a steady 190 mph. The trees of the forest now breaking off, falling over, the rain coming, the lightning flashing in the sky overhead terrifying me. Its heavy thunder sometimes deafening, not at all helping an old woman whose hearing was none too good anymore anyway. I wore my reading glasses low on my nose, letting me see to fly and at the same time bringing the airplane's instruments into clear vision.

Then I was flying over roiled water, the ocean having broken in here, my ground speed obviously lower

now despite the best efforts of Black Lady's engine. The spaceship I was reporting to informing me that the wind was now up to a hundred and thirty... The thought going through my mind that eventually it would become strong enough that Black Lady would no longer be able to fly into it and I'd then be blown inland, over the mountains to my eventual doom when the alcohol was finally drained from the fuel tanks. If lucky I might be able to make a landing somewhere flying into the wind, and perhaps survive for a few more days if the earthquakes and everything else didn't get me. I had with me too the means of ending my own life, that famous drug that the Priestesses have given people for centuries, a drug that is gentle, painless, and eases you across the "barrier" between life and death. Unlike those of the distant past, I had no fear of death, knowing that only one's body dies, while your immortal soul continues on.

I flew over what remained of a village I'd once "ambushed" a small garrison of Imperial troopers in so long ago now, the wind having smashed most of the houses, the buildings into rubble now. It was starting to rain, the rain striking the fuselage like hail as I flew towards Trella, wondering how "much" would be left now. A spaceship somewhere further out to sea reporting tidal waves, a final convulsion of the Earth as she destroyed all Man had made.

Some people here and there would survive for a time, those in the mountains, or on the plains beyond, but then it would grow cold, colder as the life giving Sun became only a speck of bright light in the sky... The temperatures would fall, fall lower than they had even during the Ice Ages of the past, and eventually all would freeze, even the air itself eventually becoming solid until the Earth was frozen solid colder than ice, now a world of death.

I heard on the radio the report of a tidal wave striking Dularn, of waves washing over the island for a mile inland, even larger tidal waves coming that would no doubt destroy everything. Queen Maris would die with her people, as would Sharon, our beloved Empress, and our own Queen Gayle of Trelandar. Perhaps in Talon there would be survivors huddling with Queen Sela, although it seemed likely that Talon might survive perhaps a bit longer to face the bitter cold, the freezing temperatures of outer space.

"My groundspeed is noticeably 'slower' now," I reported, the wind having picked up a bit more, perhaps close to a hundred and fifty here, the trees below mostly now broken off in such gusts. Black Lady was hard to fly in the super hurricane force winds, it taking all my skill to keep her flying as the updrafts and downdrafts bounced me about inside her. "Few trees still stand," I added, the scene one of desolation, broken trees, smashed houses. My groundspeed now hardly faster than that of a racing unicorn, even with my airspeed indicator reading a full one ninety here... "Don't know if I'm going to be able to make it to Trella or not."

I could see the beginning of the ruins of Los Angeles, the ocean now invisible in the rain beyond, a large "crack" in the earth below leaving no doubts as to the earthquakes taking place. Beyond would be Trella, my groundspeed now down to no more than thirty miles per hour, Black Lady bucking in the horrible winds, her airspeed indicator still reading one ninety to one ninety five now, my fuel consumption such that it would be exhausted in less than six hours now, although I did not think I'd be able to stay aloft even that long now with things the way that they were!

At a groundspeed no faster than that of a galloping unicorn I now approached Trella, or what now still stood of the city, the portion closest to the ocean already flooded, although the royal palace still stood there overlooking the doomed capital below. I thought of Gayle, who like me had a radio, and was reporting in a calm voice what she saw, a "vision" of her there in my mind as I saw the tidal wave sweep over the city, the water smashing down the yet standing buildings, the water sweeping towards the palace in an unstoppable tide. Queen Gayle's last words, "MAY LYS HAVE MERCY..." the last that I heard as the palace fell in the waters!

"Losing you, Sanda!" I heard on my radio, the static now cutting everything out as I brought Black Lady around into the wind, the airplane hardly moving now over the ground as I saw the second tidal wave hit, leaving Trella only a memory I yet held... "Sanda! Radar is showing a *****," the static drowning it out! I was climbing now, Trella only roiled waters beneath me as Black Lady sought the sky like a dying bird, the lightning flashing all around me, the radio only static roaring and screaming in my ears before I shut it off. I knew what laid ahead, and it would be a fitting end, I thought, perhaps better than any other I knew of!!

THEN I SAW IT, THE MOVING GREENISH GLOW SEEMING TO REACH OUT TO ME, AND AS THE AGONY CAME, I THOUGHT FOR A SECOND THAT THERE WAS ANOTHER THERE IN THE AIRPLANE WITH ME, A TALL BRUNETTE, HARD FEATURED, HER FACE SET IN GRIM DETERMINATION AS WE FLEW INTO IT!! MY SENSES SPINNING AS THE GLOWING GREENISH LIGHT SURROUNDED THE AIRPLANE, THE ENGINE YET ROARING AS THE AGONY RIPPLED THROUGH MY OLD BODY, MY HANDS SHAKING ON THE CONTROLS AS LORRAINE'S SPIRIT THERE BESIDE ME NOW GUIDED BLACK LADY ON HER FINAL LAST FLIGHT...

"Ain't no body ever going to 'believe' any story like this," old widow Perkins grinned at me, setting down the book I'd wrote. Peering at me over the wire rims of her glasses, her hair as gray as my own, her wrinkled features leaving no doubts as to her age. Her attire common in this society still strange even to me. "Everyone knows that this 'airy plane' of yours couldn't exist," she continued, Black Lady having drifted off with the wind when I had made my landing a short distance from the little settlement here, the airplane no doubt having eventually sunk in some storm. It was now the year 1851, the mid Nineteenth Century. The Californian Gold Rush having brought ships, men, women of "easy virtue" as is said in this society where Queen Victorianow rules an "Empire" growing so huge that it is said it will now span the world. Where to the east, across the continent, men argue the rights and wrongs of slavery, and will eventually fight a great war over it.

"Perhaps it is just as well," I smiled, aware of the dangers of altering what is to be... I may live for a few years yet, my health being quite good, but none will ever believe that I was in fact born in the year 2520, lived until the year 2648 in southern California, and flew an airplane built in the seventh decade of the 20th Century now back to this, the fifth decade of the 19th!

"Well, at least you're pretty good 'company'," she laughed, the old widow being well off, and no doubt I kept her entertained with my stories of a society that would not exist for centuries. "Even if you can't be no hundred and twenty nine," she concluded, my birthday due now in a few days if my track of time was right.

"Perhaps that's all that's really 'important'," I smiled.

I awoke from a sound sleep, widow Perkins there in the other bed snoring softly to herself, the night sounds coming in through the open window beside me. The memories flooding back of hearing such sounds in another land, another time. The shadowy figure in black standing by my bed one I immediately recognized even after so many years had passed, that tall brunette I'd so admired once.

"You will soon be with me..." Lorraine now said to me before disappearing from view, her words leaving little doubt of things.

The End

(The Lady Sanda Harles of Trelandar)