



hands on our technology. It will take them two days to be within striking range. I want you and Dee on that shuttle and on your way back to Meldyernia. Go home and wait for me to call." He went through the portal with her into her bedchamber.

"You are not coming?" Kara asked turning to him and she knew she was sending out her fear to him.

"No, huntie! I have to stay here as long as possible and help save the data on the projects and help destroy the prototypes so they will not fall into the hands of the Uberians."

The Uberians are a crude race of people who inhabit the far reaches of a rather inhospitable area of the Uberia system. They are brutish and warlike in nature and are known as space pirates throughout the universe. They are not a high tech society and most are illiterate war types led by a few having technical skills. What they have, they have stolen from other races in raids and pillaging. Their very names strike fear in the hearts of most people and when they come, it is not pretty what they leave behind, stripping the planet of all valuables, manufactured resources, spacecraft and women.

They come in droves, like insects, and even the most advanced race is vulnerable, because of their sheer numbers. Once they get back into their domain, which consists of many large orbiting meteorites and a few very small planets, they become virtually invisible. They are able to hide among the meteorites for they, and only they, know the paths through them and any ships brave enough to follow them into Uberia are usually destroyed in the meteorite bombardments prominent there.

"Please, Tho," Kara begged and caught his tunic in her fist, "come with me. I have no desire to spend the rest of my life in a mourning robe."

A flash of regret flooded his face and Kara felt the deep emotional groan her words drew out of him. He drew her into his arms and kissed her deeply, not waiting for her

to initiate it. The fear and grief was so profound and overwhelming that its drain weakened her and she had to resist it.

"I will come to you, my love," he whispered against her lips. "They are preparing an escape ship to launch before the attack begins and I shall be on it." His words were promising, but not convincing, because she felt his uncertainty about it.

Kara knew he would not go with her and she knew, too, he would not allow her to stay here with him. She was resigned to do as he ordered and so she took both of his hands and held them against her breasts giving him her love and devotion in an emotion meld and encouraged him with her faith in him, calming his anxieties and fear, "Until we meet again, my love," she said softly to him.

"You and Dee get ready to go and I will call your mother and tell her you are on your way."

Kara nodded and he turned and went out. She stared at the portal realizing she may never see him again. Kara's emotions were running rampant through her and it was then that she felt the child inside her move for the first time in her abdomen. He, too, had felt the sorrow and grief that gripped Lekara. She wanted to run after Thogan and tell him his child wanted him, but she knew it would only add to his anguish, so she stilled herself, bringing her emotions under control. She had to save the life within her for Thogan. She felt Dannel's fear as she came to stand beside her. Kara turned to her, caught her hand and calmed her. "We have much to do."

They were sitting side by side in the shuttle as it raised the two G'hours to reach the galactic schooner transport waiting in orbit. Kara's mind was on Thogan and she wished with all her heart that he would be safe. She prayed that she would once again set eyes on him.

Normally, the flight of a shuttle was smooth and passengers were unaware that it was even moving. Kara

became alarmed when the shuttle began to shimmy. Then the voice of the captain penetrated the air.

"Attention Passengers! We have been caught in the magnetic tractor beam of an Uberian scoutship and we are being pulled into it. They have jammed our communications so no one knows the situation. I have not been able to break the beam with the shuttle's engines. I am so sorry. There is nothing more I can do. I advise you to remove and destroy in the atomizer all items of identification, communication, and documents of importance. The Uberians can use these items for political benefit or ransom and you will be none the better for it. In effect, we are all now prisoners of the Uberians."

Panic raced through the women and some screamed as others fainted. It was the worst information that any woman could ever hear. It was no secret what usually happens to women taken by Uberians. Kara stood quickly and shouted. "Stop! Listen to me, women of Ator Cortech. Do not panic. I will help you."

Then she looked around making eye contact with those who were looking at her, trying to calm them, doing an emotion meld and then still the fear and send calm. It was tremendously draining. "We must stay calm and do what the captain has ordered. Do it now."

Kara and Denel dumped her identification and the communicator she brought from home. She took off her rich outer garment leaving her with a flowing wrap around tunic, and shook loose her hair from its stays. Denel nervously atomized all of their things.

All the time, Kara was talking calmly, encouraging the women to not let the barbarians destroy their dignity. That they should hold their heads up proudly and represent their race with the pride of womanhood.

Then the voice of the captain came into the passenger cabin again. "We are now being pulled into the belly of the ship. I am sorry, but this is out of my hands."

"Milady Ranthera," one woman drew her attention, "what about our jewelry?"

"From now on do not address me as 'milady.' It will put me in great danger and I must ask you not to give me away as a Meldyerin." Then she looked at her beloved mating ring. The thought of destroying it was just overwhelming and she was already weakened from keeping everyone calm. She touched the ring and a tear trickled down her cheek. Then Dannel took her hand and turned the ring around so that only the gold band could be seen and folded up her hand. She looked at Dannel and kissed her on the cheek. She held her hand up. "If you wish to keep your mating band, turn it around on your finger and maybe you can keep it at least for a while."

There were loud blasts and the sound of lasers and the eighteen women gathered close. Kara sent out some more energy to keep the calm she was holding them in. Kara said softly to Dannel. "Stay with me. if I go out. I am becoming weak." Dannel took her hand and nodded.

The Uberians had begun to cut them out of the transport. Apparently the captain had fused the portal so it could not be opened from the command controls. The women were huddled together around Kara and silently staring at the laser light coming through the wall.

Kara lifted her voice and said, "I will not be able to continue to help you when they come inside. It will give me away. Try to stay together and draw courage from one another. Find a partner and hold hands."

When the side of the shuttle fell away, Kara closed her eyes and shut down her empathy. Her knees crumpled, but Dannel slid her arm around her and held her up. It is impossible to shut out all of the incoming emotion. She could only dampen it to the degree of empathetic strength. Some of the women screamed as three of the mongrel Uberians pushed into the shuttle, yelling and shouting.

Uberians are a rough looking race with a lot of body hair. Their faces make a permanent frown; their foreheads

hold a deep double crease. They have round faces and wide set eyes that are as black as a stormy night. The hair on their heads is unkempt and adds to their frightful appearance, of which they pride themselves. Their clothing is a mix and match of other races and all the men wear a shiny metallic breastplate of their own creation.

They carried a conglomeration of strange-looking weapons and their leader appeared to be the one who shouts the loudest. One very large one shouted something to them, but Kara did not understand the language and neither did the others, for they all just cowered back, as some of the younger ones squealed. His voice grated on her nerves and sent a chill through her. Dannel squeezed her hand and she squeezed back.

When the one that yelled saw he did not prevail, he then said something to the two with him and they came forward and began to push and shove the huddle toward the opening they had made with their heavy weapons. Kara and Dannel stepped out onto the cargo bay deck and found themselves in a large cargo room with rust coated walls and large metal tubing running everywhere overhead. They were shoved toward a metal door divided in the middle with sharp teeth, like a jagged seam.

As they passed through the door on the shuttle, Kara saw the captain lying on the control panel, his hat precariously rising from the side of his head. The window was spattered with blood. One of the Uberians stood by the door they were being shoved toward and pulled a lever that opened the door with a gush of air, sliding into the wall on each side.

As they were about to pass, the Uberian standing there reached out his hand with curly hair on the back of it and caught Dannel by the chin with his fingers and jerked her face toward him. Kara felt her stiffen and squeezed her hand. Then Kara, being encouraged from behind to move on, took advantage of it and pushed between the Uberian and Dannel. He then grabbed Kara by the hair on the back

of her head and jerked her to a stop. Kara squealed from the pain of her hair being pulled. She had to calm the fear that shot through her. The Urberian tilted her head back glaring at her with his black eyes. She looked directly into his eyes. He held her there for several long seconds and then shoved her on into the hold.

It was a small room with polymer fibers spread on the floor. Then the door was closed behind them and they were alone, thrown into absolute blackness. The only sound was the hum of an air vent turbine, not even the rustle of garments. No one moved or spoke. Eighteen females from middle age to young adulthood stood, scarcely breathing. The smell was of burnt fuel mingled with the fragrances of perfume that drifted from the women. No one seemed to know what to do.

Lekara was at a loss. She could not bond with the room for she could not see it. The social bond she made in the shuttle would fade slowly and she could not renew it for that required being able to see. All the women were of many human cultures and colony descendants from Ator Cortech, some she knew, other she did not.

The one strong emotion was fear and there was also uncertainty. Emotional reading was the one ability not hampered by the senses. In a group, it was the strongest emotion emanated that bombarded her. If there was a voice, it gave direction and individuality to the reading.

"Well, what do we do now?" One brave voice broke the silence and it stabbed at her nerves, but the voice bore courage.