

EMPIRE'S CHILD

From Darkness a Daughter

By Robert Lydford

The air was filled with raucous laughter; yelling and cursing filled the air as the smell of meat, most of it cooked spilled out into the corridor. It was just another Friday night at the Targ-pit, the Station's Klingon Bar Gaudy red hued lanterns hung almost haphazardly from the wooden ceiling beams. The walls, floor and ceiling had been lined with Kronos stone; alcoves lined the walls each held a marble statue of a great warrior from the Empire's long and bloody history. The Inquisitor entered the room, his style of dress having more in common with that of an 18th Century Dandy, than an explorer taking a stroll through a Klingon bar. His high topped riding boots and long black embroidered frock coat with its lace cuffed and cravat fronted shirt were not the attire the Targ-pit was used to. In fact the Inquisitor looked to be easy prey for the predatory Klingons present, but something in his bearing appealed to the primal part of the Klingon brain. It said 'DANGER KEEP YOUR DISTANCE!' He moved slowly towards the bar, He'd found that his time with L'Sar, she had given him a useful insight into the warrior race, and though he hated to admit it, a taste for the Ku'lush, a substance that verged on being an almost toxic 160 percent proof Klingon liquor. He ordered a bottle and paid with his Station Credit-swipe. The Klingon Bartender watched as he produced a small silver cased pocketknife and flipping up a blade he started to fastidiously remove the wax seal around the bottle cap. Je'veQ the Barkeeper placed a small tankard before him. The Inquisitor smiled as a pair of Klingon Marines watched him as he pulled a lace handkerchief from his sleeve and started to wipe the rim of his tankard.

He poured his drink as he approached the hallway that led to the stage, a place where on most nights Musicians, Verbal Historians, Poet's, Actors and Storytellers plied their craft. But tonight was different. Tonight an Orion girl danced seductively to the sounds of a three piece band, the Drumming was loud and almost hypnotic as this near naked green0 skinned beauty gyrated in a teasingly vivacious manner, guaranteed to hold any man's interest. The Inquisitor drank from his glass as his mental conditioning allowed him to tune out the coarse verbal attentions of the thunderously rowdy Klingons that sat and stood around him, jostling for a better view. Order was maintained by two of the biggest warriors he'd ever seen the larger of the two was K'rahm, he stood almost seven feet tall in is boots and wore a heavy marine stab-vest over his armour. Dressed alike and almost as tall stood Val'maH, both carried the lethal looking metre long brass tubes of their Force-pikes. Their bearing told all those present, that any trouble caused, would be almost as short-lived as its perpetrator.

Ke'reth clapped politely, as the last garment of pale yellow gauze thin cloth fell from the dancers body, the cheering and catcalling became louder, as she performed a series of slow gyrations, flips and turns, her hands and feet moving through the exercises for Mok'bara. (The Klingon Martial art.) The Inquisitor recognised some of the forms from L'Sar's exercise regime aboard

his Tardis. He hadn't seen the Klingon Ambassador enter the room; he certainly didn't expect the room to fall into near silence as Ke'reth carried a large Targ-hide case to the stage. The Orion woman collected her clothes from the stage and left via the rear of the stage. Beside him stood the petite form of Kana, Ke'reth's Chief Engineer. She pulled a small Micayah wood flute from her belt as Ke'reth opened his case and took out his Khem'letch. (A type of Electronic harp, named for the region from which it came.) A few seconds passed in near apprehensive silence as they set up their instruments. Was this the same raucous crowd? He wondered. Ke'reth tapped the microphone as a woman in a long red evening gown of an obvious Klingon design stepped forward. Ke'reth introduced her as Lady Meisha, Arguably the Empire's finest Soprano. The Inquisitor felt the air temperature change, as the walls of the bar, of which he'd first assumed to be solid stone rolled back on concealed casters to allow all those within the bar to witness the event. He smiled as L'Sar and b'Sel wandered in, bringing with them a somewhat cautious looking Romulan Ambassador. It was only the second time to Ke'reth's knowledge that the Romulan had entered this bar. Ke'reth toyed with the idea of introducing him to his Black-Dagger Marines. But felt somehow, that b'Sel would never forgive him. Meisha stepped forward as a pair of drummers and the Krayl Horn player rejoined them on the stage. 'The Battle of Kemah.' She announced as the band struck up a lively tune. The Song was a safe and traditional first choice, telling of one of Kahless's early victories. Her voice soared like a Kesh-hawk in flight. Even the cheering, though lively, seemed to the Inquisitor's ear to be positively restrained. She spoke again, as she whispered something to Ke'reth that the Inquisitor didn't quite catch. 'Ode to a Blade.' She said with a smile, as the band struck up a curiously haunting tune, this time it was sung in Federation standard, for the benefit the non-Klingons present.

Ke'reth raised his hand to an elder warrior who sat the corner alcove nearest the stage; a hardwood cane had been propped against the side of his table. Even through the haze of lights which now tinted the room with a warm honey coloured glow, Ke'reth recognised K'taal. As the band played Okarra's lament a Terran man and a Trill woman with short cropped black hair moved to a table near K'taal's. A table that had been reserved for Admiral Jat, Commander Steven Woods, her First Officer and several other Federation officers. The Table next to them held b'Sel the Romulan Ambassador K'hellenbeck, and Madia Amme the Bajoran Ambassador and several of her aides. 'Sorry we're a little late, Ambassadors, Admiral, Commander.' Dr Bashir said Quietly. 'It's just that Dax here insisted on introducing me to half the Klingons in the bar.' Ezri Dax may have looked like a young looking woman, but she'd already lived nine lives, and more than 350 years. She shrugged, making herself comfortable as they ordered their drinks as the band played a relatively quiet instrumental piece. 'So many Klingons, and I think that Dax here, must have known at least half of them.' She grinned coquettishly.

'Julian! You're embarrassing me.' She joked.

It was as the band finished of their second set of the evening, that a young Klingon woman stood up and raised her Disruptor pistol. She then fired it at Ke'reth from point blank range . . .

--- PART TWO ---

A blue-green bolt of energy blasted the top of Ke'reth's Khem'letch, clean off, scorching the wood charcoal black as the taut strings twanged, causing an ear splitting whine from the Amplifier. She raised her Disruptor to fire again. K'rahm jumped a table as he planted the Force-pike at the base of the woman's spine causing her to spasm as she fell. It seemed like only a split second later, that Dr. Bashir was by her side. 'Back-off! Give her some air!' Bashir yelled. A number of Klingons had drawn the weapons; as a cacophony of raised voices and rampant confusion ensued. Commander Woods nodded to the Admiral Jat as he moved briskly towards the stage, and turned the dial on the Amplifier up to full volume, he then whistled into the microphone causing a scream of Feedback. It seemed to freeze the activity within the room. 'Okay People, Sit down, shut-up, and listen!' If you've drawn a weapon without being a member of Station Security, you have around thirty seconds to put it back, before my patience runs out and I start busting people! It's your choice, sit down, or you'll end up in a holding cell!' A number of Klingon and Federation Security Officers had joined him on the Stage; their Phasers and Disruptor rifles panned left and right across the crowd. He patted the nearest man on the shoulder, as he turned to Bashir. 'What the hell just happened?' He asked, a note of sarcasm evident in his voice. Ke'reth knelt beside them. 'That's what I'd like to know Commander.' Bashir said, felt for the pulse-point at the side of neck. As he did so, he gasped as he noticed a row of something that looked like Trill spots, they were also evident at the side of her ridges which were soft, and lacked definition.

Later in the Stations Sickbay Doctor Karen Michaels tapped her screen as Ke'reth walked in. 'Well Ambassador, I'm not sure if Congratulations are in order, or not.' Ke'reth fixed her with a look, which made her feel a touch uncomfortable and caused her to step back, something Feral, reflected in Ke'reth's eyes. Then it softened, as if it had never been there. 'Sorry if I scared you Doctor, what was it you wanted to see me about?' Karen sighed. 'I've never been shot at before Ambassador. But I think that I can see an even bigger shock in your future.' Ke'reth's eyes narrowed.

'Spit it out, Doctor, it's been a tough night.'

'The girl who tried to kill you, is your Daughter.' Ke'reth looked at the Bio-bed and its sleeping occupant. 'My Daughter?' He blinked. 'Are you sure?' She nodded.

'I've got a couple more tests to run, but all DNA genetic markers point to you and a Trill woman producing a child, around fifteen years ago.' Ke'reth paced the room.

'This is going to sound kind of crazy Doctor. But I've never lain with a Trill Woman.' Karen inadvertently glanced back at the bed. 'She's still unconscious?' Ke'reth asked. The Doctor nodded. 'Those Force-pikes that your Security personnel wield, pack a nasty punch. It put her lower brain into neural shock.' Ke'reth looked down and stroked the young woman's ridges.

'Will She?' He asked, his voice only a little above a whisper. Karen broke protocol and placed her hand upon the Ambassador's shoulder. 'She should make a full recovery, but she'll be unconscious for about two hours while her neural pathways are repaired.' Ke'reth sat down hard on a seat beside the bed and cupped his hands over his brow. Karen sat beside him. 'Her name, at least I believe it's her name is Tula.' Ke'reth looked up, and in that light Karen saw the slight difference in dilation between Ke'reth's eye and his optical implant. 'I found this under her armour.' She handed Ke'reth a small amulet. 'It's a Jinaq Amulet.' He said, holding the copper and Latinum woven bracelet. 'It's given to a girl, when she comes of age, and the name reads TUL 'A' It means Great Hope.' An odd look crossed the Klingons features 'HOPE!' He said standing up. 'Hope!' Karen looked shocked, at Ke'reth's reaction. 'What's wrong?' Ke'reth rubbed his beard. 'Hope, is Kane's Child.' 'That would explain the similarity in the genetic markers, but what is she doing here, and why did she try and kill you.' Ke'reth looked up. 'Those Doctor are two very good questions, and questions that I intend to find answers to.' She nodded. 'Ill be back in two hours then Doctor.' And with that Ke'reth kissed his fingertips and touched them to Hope's brow. 'The thing is Doctor, Kane killed Hope as a Child.' She looked puzzled as Ke'reth spoke. 'Then She had an older sister, or this child is a clone.' Ke'reth turned to face the door. The Doctor called him back. 'Ambassador, that might explain the inconsistencies, that I found in her Genetic makeup, come from her being from, this so called Mirror Universe.'

Commander Woods had taken over the investigation from Security. A bleep sounded as he entered the room, b'Sel looked up, as he wandered towards her desk within the Klingon Embassy. 'Good evening Commander.' She said as checked at the red illumination of her digital chronometer. It read 23:16 Station time. Almost an hour had passed since what had appeared to be an attempted assassination. He put the P.A.D.D on her desk. 'I need to speak with the Ambassador; Admiral Jat wants to know what happened. I think she wants to read my report over tomorrows breakfast. b'Sel stood up; it had been a stressful night. And one, which she'd, been looking forward to enjoying. 'He's in the Sickbay.' She said as Ke'reth breezed in.

'No! I'm not, Chief. How can help you Commander?' Steven picked up his P.A.D.D, and followed Ke'reth over to a large curved leather seat, near a low table set within an alcove within the corner of the Embassy. 'I'd like to think; that I'd be as calm as you appear. If I'd just been shot at.' Ke'reth smiled a polite, but somehow humourless Diplomat's smile. 'Come on Commander, I know you've seen battle; your Starfleet record list several Decorations for such. You were even twice mentioned in Dispatches during the Dominion war.' Steven Shrugged.

'Back then it was war, what happened to you was personal.' Ke'reth poured himself a drink of iced water and sat back in his chair. 'I'm not sure why Tula wanted to kill me either.' The Commander entered the name on his P.A.D.D. 'Tula?' Steven asked, repeating the unfamiliar name. Ke'reth glanced up, as the Commander continued. 'Ambassador, do you know this woman?' He inquired.

'Kind of.' Ke'reth replied. 'She's the Daughter of my Mirror Universe Counterpart.' Steven turned off the log recorder within his P.A.D.D. 'Well, Its

really hit the fan for you, hasn't it?' Ke'reth nodded. 'I know that I once upset the Intendant.' Ke'reth said with a roguish smile. 'But I didn't think that she'd send an assassin to take care of me.' Steven gestured to the jug of iced water, and the small glass that sat on the table between them; Ke'reth nodded his consent, as the Commander poured himself a drink. 'How is she?' He asked, lowering his tone.

'She'll live.' Ke'reth replied. 'She was temporarily paralysed by a force-pike.' Steven shook his head slowly. 'One of those damn things makes one of your Klingon painstiks look like a child's toy.' Ke'reth nodded his agreement. As they spoke, the Communicator chime on b'Sel's desk rang.

--- PART Three ---

She tapped the switch. 'Klingon Embassy.' b'Sel answered, as Dr. Michael's face appeared on the viewer. 'Please inform the Ambassador, that our would-be assassin has just come round. Ke'reth stood up as he made his way to the Embassies private Turbolift. Commander Woods slipped in beside him as the doors closed. A few moments later they entered the Sickbay. The young woman attempted to sit up, but was held in place by an invisible restraint field. She started yell obscenities at Ke'reth. He continued to approach her. 'You can knock that off for a start!' Ke'reth snapped back at her in Klingon. 'Or what? You'll kill me like you killed my Mother and my little Sister.' She retorted. Ke'reth felt his anger build up within in him. His knuckles formed unbidden into a fist. Steven considered moving in to protect her, but commonsense warned him of the folly of standing up to an angered Klingon, especially one with what he'd read of Ke'reth's lethal reputation. Then Ke'reth's manner softened. 'I never even met your Mother!' She looked shocked. 'I certainly never killed her, and I draw the line at harming a child.' She seemed to be suppressing her tears. 'The Intendant told me that She'd tried to stop you. When you attacked my Mother.' She cried. 'Mother called us great and little hope, giving me a Klingon name.' Ke'reth sighed, as he stepped back.

'I think you have your facts a little screwy; Kane killed your Mother and your Sister. And I wouldn't believe the Intendant if she told me space was big.' Ke'reth allowed the young woman to sit up, by turning down the power on the restraint field. She seemed confused. Ke'reth took her hand and held it. 'Please listen to me the Intendant lied to you. Your Father is Kane!' She looked horrified, as he continued. 'And Kane is what Your Father became, after the Intendant's tender loving care. She had Ke'reth, your Father, who from what I'm told was a good and Honourable man kill your Mother.' The tears had started to flow, as Dr. Michaels passed her a handkerchief. 'He turned against her rule, and openly resisted her. There was a mission, and he was injured, and it was, as he lay unconscious on the operating table. That she decided, that she'd have her revenge, she stripped him of his Honour, his hair his ridges, of anything that made him Klingon, She the placed an implant within his brain. Turning a good man into little more than a puppet.' Something in his words touched her, somehow she knew, that he spoke the truth. 'You've had a stressful day! You should get some sleep, we'll continue this little chat in the morning.' She nodded. 'I have a friend, that I'd like you to have a chat

with. She'll help you start to come to terms with what's happened.' he looked back as he turned to leave. 'maj ram. (Good-night, in Klingon.)'

The next morning Anarita Jat replicated herself some toast, and opening a cupboard in her quarters she took down a jar of Klingon coffee and a smaller pot of sweet Ajelberry jam. Commander Woods had left his report for her to read, He'd spoken to several witnesses after the event in the bar the previous night. His report was comprehensive and ran into several pages. She almost spilt her coffee as she read that it had been Kane's daughter that had tried to assassinate Ke'reth, believing him to be the Father that had killed her Mother and Sister abandoning her, to her fate on the Hellish Ram-Qul Station.

A little after 11:00 Am, station time, Ke'reth wandered into the Sickbay, he had a soft dull red leather tunic and a pair of grey trousers tucked under his arm. He placed them on the end of the bed, as Tula ate a small breakfast. She smiled up at him. 'I never knew my Father. Then I find out that he's a monster. I try to kill you, and you turn around and help me, why?' Ke'reth smiled.

'I suppose I should thank you for missing my head, though my Khem'letch will never sound quite as sweet again.' She shrugged an apology. Ke'reth smiled, after breakfast, you can take a shower, I'm sure the Doc here will replicate some underclothes, for you. I'll be back in two hours, to collect you for your first appointment.'

Commander Woods walked briskly across the Stations Shuttle hangerbay, he'd already figured out that if she was alone, she either came to the Station by shuttle, or she had booked passage on one of number of Commercial Passenger Liners that regularly came to the Station, and he'd already ruled that out by checking the passenger lists for the last week or so with Station Security. A few minutes later a Bolian Ensign handed him the Security-log for three days ago, one of the entries had been highlighted. We have her vessel listed as being in Bay Delta-Zero-Six.' The Bolian woman said, reading from her P.A.D.D. A few minutes passed as they walked across the cavernous shuttlebay. 'This is it Sir.' She said as they arrived at a battered Ranger Class long-range shuttle. Commander Woods tapped the side of the dull grey-blue hull of a shuttle that had clearly seen better days. Pulling his Tricorder from the pouch on his belt. He scanned the shuttle and found just what he'd expected. This shuttle had a Mirror Universe energy signature.

Ke'reth sat in the Stations main Starlight lounge. His fingers stroked a fine cloth over the Barrel of his Custom made Remekra Industries Disruptor. The light seemed to dance as it reflected of the polished raised Lantium inlay of his pistol. His eyes flicked upwards as he downed the last of His Romulan ale. The Chronometer above the bar told him that a couple of hours had almost passed. Standing up he slipped the gun back into his holster. He made it back to the Sickbay with a little over two minutes to spare. Tula stood there waiting in the Civilian tunic style armour that Ke'reth had provided for her. After thanking the Doctor, they left for a private Counselling room around the corner from the Medical Centre. 'Tula this is Ezri, Ezri, Tula.' Ke'reth made the introductions.

A couple of weeks passed, as Tula took more than a dozen counselling sessions with Dax. She'd even decided to change her name to help her bury her past. She asked Ke'reth if he would call her K'tuluH. He smiled as he took a Makura Wolf's-head pin from his sleeve, and pinned it to her tunic. She almost managed to repress the tears. Ke'reth hugged her. 'vav? (Father.) She asked.' Ke'reth shrugged.

'I guess so, at least in this Universe.' He replied. 'As long as you need me.' She returned his hug. 'I don't want to cause you embarrassment Father.' She said stepping back. 'Dax say's I still have some problems to address.'

'The scars the Universe cannot see?' Ke'reth asked. She nodded sadly.

'Dax has asked me to return to Deep Space Nine, with her and Julian.' Ke'reth sighed. 'If that's what you want, I hear that there are many young Klingons on that Station; you should be able to make friends of your own age.' She nodded, as Dax and Bashir wandered around the corner deep in animated conversation. 'Are you ready?' Bashir asked. She nodded as they approached the airlock and the waiting Runabout USS. Mississippi. She was about to enter the airlock leading to the Runabout, when b'Sel came around the corner carrying a shoulder bag. 'Wait up, I have something for K'tuluH.' K'tuluH turned to face the Klingon woman. 'It's just a change of clothes, A History Compu-disk of the Makura Clan, so you feel part of something, and the details of your new bank account.'

'Bank account?' She asked. b'Sel smiled, I managed to get a very good price on your on your Shuttle, You told Ke'reth that you had no need for it, and a young woman will need some currency to live on.' K'tuluH smiled.

'Who brought my shuttle?' She asked.

'A Ferengi merchant.' You got this much from a Ferengi?' K'tuluH gasped, as she read numbers from her P.A.D.D, b'Sel smiled. A grin came to Ke'reth's lips. 'It should almost be made a rule of Acquisition, Don't trade with b'Sel unless you wish to end up out of pocket, she drives a hard bargain.' K'tuluH nodded as Ke'reth spoke. 'She's a Makura, and so are you! We're a tough breed.' K'tuluH nodded, as she Hugged b'Sel then Ke'reth for a second time before leaving the Station, for the Runabout.

Anarita Jat sat in her office, as the Runabout left the Station; she turned her chair to face the window. She raised her Raktajino mug to the departing ship. 'Qapla' (Success) K'tuluH, look after yourself.