

## Thicker than Blood

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## Thicker than Blood

by [DavidFalkayn](#)

### Summary

Tali has to deal with a situation with the Migrant Fleet and Tovan is coming along to keep her company.

## Act One

### *Runabout Telara en route to the Migrant Fleet*

"The doctors had to put him in stasis, Big Brother, until we can get a skilled enough telepath to do what amounts to psychic surgery on him." Tovan quietly listened as his Little Sister poured out her problems to him. "To make it even worse, Morinth escaped and Samara left to go after her."

"How are you holding up, Little Sister?" Tovan asked with a worried look on his face as he gazed into the image of V'lana on the monitor.

"Better than I was." V'lana replied with a sigh. "I had dinner tonight with Satra and Samantha and they dragged me down to the holodeck where we met up with Cilla and Liara and we kind of had a girls night out in an Earth discothèque from the 1970s—at least that's what Samantha says it is—it's her program. She said that she got the idea from a classic Earth movie. I think it was Saturday Night Fever or something like that. Anyway..." The subcommander managed a slight grin, "It had the desired effect in that it took my mind off of things for a while."

"Good." Tovan inclined his head slightly, "He will get better, Little Sister. He's a strong man."

"I know." V'lana responded, her grin now brighter, "I told him he better or else."

Laughing, the handsome centurion asked, changing the subject, "I take it you're through with Omega?"

"For now, yes. We're en route to the Alpha Draconis system to do some scanning there. Hopefully we'll find our wormhole or gateway. So far, everything's been a bust."

"Sooner or later we'll find something." Tovan confidently replied, "It's only a matter of time."

"I know." The subcommander acknowledged, "Hopefully sooner rather than later. So, Little Brother..." V'lana inquired, changing the focus of the discussion to her executive officer and his travel companion, "How are you and Tali and when do you anticipate meeting with the Migrant Fleet?"

"We're both doing well, and Tali says we should be at the rendezvous point in no less than twenty-four hours."

"Good. Once you've finished your business there, plan on meeting us at Illium. V'lana out."

"Understood, Little Sister." Tovan answered back, "Tovan out."

"How is she? Truly?" Tali asked her Romulan companion after the communication had ended.

Tovan replied with a reassuring smile. "My Little Sister is strong. She stared down a Tal'Shiar *D'Deridex* in our old *T'liss* once. That Ardat-Yakshi doesn't know it yet, but her days are marked."

"Kaidan is a strong man as well." Tali observed. "Plus, Dr. Chakwas is there to look after both of them. I remember Ashley once describing her as a 'Momma Bear'. She will take on both our universes to protect those she cares about."

"I remember when V'lana escaped from Hakeev and the torture he put her through." Tovan recalled, "I was so worried...but...she recovered. So will Staff Commander Alenko." Changing the subject the centurion inquired, "What can I expect from your people? Will they be immediately hostile or..."

"They will be watchful." Tali cautioned, "The Cerberus attack on one of our scout ships, the *Idenna*, has made the Admiralty and Fleet wary of outsiders—especially outsiders who are unknown. Expect a cool reception."

"Understandable." Tovan inclined his head, "My people would react similarly were the situation reversed."

"Thank you." Tali replied, her sigh vocalized through her suit's speaker.

"How will they conduct the trial?"

"The Admiralty Board will sit as judges." Tali explained. "As my father is an admiral on the board, he'll have to recuse himself."

"I can understand why. The same rule regarding conflict of interest holds true in a Republic or Federation court-martial."

Shaking her head, the young quarian moaned, "I can't even imagine what he's thinking right now."

"I'd think he'd support his daughter." Tovan replied encouragingly.

"You don't know my father." Tali responded her tone a mixture of bitterness, fear, and hope all intermingled. "He has never been what humans would describe as being very close to me. And he is very serious about the safety of the Fleet."

"Anything else?"

"Yes." Tali nodded her head, "What you would call the burden of proof lies with the defendant."

"In other words..." Tovan concluded, "Guilty until proven innocent."

“Correct.” Tali acknowledged. “There is no presumption of innocence. As a rule on the rare occasion treason charges have been levied, the amount of evidence is substantial enough where the trial itself is merely a formality. A guilty verdict is usually a foregone conclusion.”

“Are we looking at a possible death sentence or lengthy term of incarceration?” Tovan inquired. “I know that the Citadel Council and Earth Systems Alliance in this universe still use capital punishment as well as lifetime imprisonment.” His look now one of deep worry and concern, he asked, “Are you in danger of either of those outcomes occurring?”

“No.” Tali shook her head. “We don’t have the spare resources for long-term incarceration. Instead, for relatively minor offenses, the usual punishment is monitored work details. And we don’t have enough people to afford executions. Those accused of what other races would consider capital crimes are exiled from the Fleet. Someone exiled could still have children and those children would be welcomed back into the Fleet.”

“So...no attainment—the parent’s guilt being passed on to the descendants?”

Tali again shook her head, “No. The children are not punished because of their parents’ guilt. Should I be found guilty, I would be exiled. Banished from the Migrant Fleet and not permitted to return. My name would also be stricken from the ship’s records. If the admirals deem it a tragic mistake in judgment instead of a malicious act of deliberate treason, the convicted person might be permitted a small ship and supplies. Otherwise they are deposited on the nearest habitable world and left to fend for themselves.”

“You stated that treason charges were rare.” Tovan recalled, “When was the last time someone faced them?”

“Yes, treason charges are seldom prosecuted.” Tali affirmed, “The act must affect the entire flotilla, not just one ship. If it’s just one ship, the captain would handle it with the most likely result being the guilty party transferred to another ship.”

“In other words, that person becomes someone else’s headache.” The centurion commented wryly.

“Precisely.” Tali responded with a momentary chuckle that quickly vanished as she recollected the last treason trial. “Anora’Vanya vas Selani was the last person to be charged. She was an engineer who handed Fleet defense schematics to the batarians. She meant well. The batarians were contracted to upgrade our systems. But, instead, they passed the defense schematics to a pirate gang.”

“That’s not treason—well...the Tal’Shiar and Sela’s Empire might consider it treason.” Tovan declared in outrage. “She did not deliberately set out to betray her people. Bad judgment...yes. Naivete...most likely. But treason...” the Romulan officer shook his head, “No. So...why was she charged? And was she convicted?”

Tali shook her head. “She wasn’t convicted because she made a suicide run on the pirate gang and killed them before they could attack the Fleet. Because of that, she was granted a posthumous pardon. I hope it doesn’t come to that to prove my innocence.” She finished with a melancholic groan.

“I’d suggest we get some sleep.” Tovan advised, “I have a feeling tomorrow is going to be a long day.”

Nodding her head in agreement, the young quarian replied, “You’re right about it being a long day, but I don’t think I’m going to get much sleep.”

## Act 2

### Chapter Summary

Tali faces her accusers with Tovan at her side

#### *Arrival at the Fleet*

“We’re near enough to the rendezvous point where it is probably advisable to decloak.” Tovan declared, “I don’t want them to conclude we are hostile. I will however...” he cautioned, “keep the shields up. Just in case.”

“I understand.” Tali acknowledged, slightly lowering her head as she requested, “Could you open a comm line please?”

“Of course. The line is open.”

Taking a deep breath, Tali spoke, “This is Tali’Zorah vas Neema nar Rayya. Requesting permission to dock with the *Rayya*.”

A voice quickly responded, “Your ship does not register on any of our system’s records and cannot be identified as belonging to any of the known races. Under whose authority does this vessel fly under?”

Inclining her head to Tovan, the quarian wordlessly indicated for her partner to speak.

“This is Centurion Tovan Kev, Executive Officer of the Romulan Republic Warbird *Gallena* and we are flying her runabout, the *Telara*. We are non-hostile.”

“You have a form of shielding raised.” The Fleet controller declared skeptically. “Your posture does not appear to be non-hostile.”

“Merely a preventative measure in the event there should be an...accident.” Tovan diplomatically responded, “I am sure a quarian vessel would do the same.”

After a momentary pause, the controller again spoke in a grudging tone, “Understood, *Telara*. Tali’Zorah...verify that you are who you say you are.”

Taking a deep breath, Tali recited the code phrase that indicated that it was indeed her and that she was not acting under duress. “After time adrift among open stars, along tides of light and shoals of dust, I will return to where I began.”

After another momentary pause, the controller returned, this time with a slightly less hostile tone to his voice, “Permission granted. Welcome home Tali’Zorah.”

Answering in acknowledgement, Tali requested, “We’d like a security and quarantine team to meet us. Our ship is not clean.”

“Understood.” The controller responded, “Approach exterior docking cradle 17.”

Noticing the docking tube being extended, Tovan inquired, “Is that the location he mentioned?”

“Yes.” Talia replied, nodding her head, advising, “You will need to change into an environmental suit. Otherwise, you will not be permitted on board. Also we will undergo decontamination in the docking tube.”

“That’s reasonable.” Tovan responded as he walked to the back of the runabout where the environmental suits were stored. “I shall however, lock the command codes and will seal the runabout once we disembark. Not that I don’t trust your people...”

Chuckling, Tali answered back picking up a plasma assault carbine and clamping it to her suit. “Don’t worry. No offense taken. And...” she reluctantly admitted, “You’re right to be careful. The admirals would give their right arm for a chance to tear the *Telara* apart.”

Cleared from decon, the couple exited the docking tube where they came upon an antechamber guarded by a squad of quarian marines—all lounging about at ease. However, upon seeing Tali and her Romulan companion both emerging from the tube, they quickly assumed an alert posture and saluted as another quarian entered the chamber.

“Officer?” Tovan surmised, Tali nodding in agreement, quickly identifying him.

“The captain of the ship. Kar’Danna.”

“Tali...” The quarian captain called out as he greeted the young quarian. His attention now focused on the strange alien traveling with her, he introduced himself in a polite, yet guarded manner, “You must be Tali’s friend...”

“Centurion Tovan Kev.” The Romulan replied as he took a respectful posture and gave the quarian captain the hand to heart salute. “Navy of the Romulan Republic and Executive Officer of the *RRW Gallena*.”

“Centurion.” Kar’Danna responded, returning the Romulan officer’s salute with one of his own. “I wish we could have met under more pleasant circumstances.”

"I am honored, Captain Kar'Danna." Tovan politely answered back, "I too am sorry that we had to meet under these conditions. We came as soon as we could."

"It's good that you came when you did." The captain declared, further elaborating, "There are people already pressing to try her in absentia."

Her voice tone, even through the vocalizer, expressing surprise and shock, Tali exclaimed, "What? Why do they want to do this? They never move this quickly."

Kar'Danna explained, "You're being charged with bringing active geth to the Fleet as part of a secret project."

"That's crazy!" Tali all but shouted, "I've never brought active geth aboard. I only sent parts and pieces—all inert."

"That was your mission on Haestrom." Tovan surmised, his quarian companion nodding her head in confirmation.

"Yes. My father was working on a project and needed the materials." The young quarian replied, her voice now etched with worry, "If I sent something that was damaged, but not permanently deactivated..." No she shook her head in disbelief, "No. Impossible. I checked and double-checked. I was very careful."

"Technically, Tali'Zorah..." Captain Kar'Danna declared, "I'm under orders to place you under arrest pending the hearing. So...you are confined to this ship until the trial is over."

"Thank you, Captain." Tali gratefully acknowledged.

"When is the hearing?" Tovan inquired.

"Preparations got underway as soon as you arrived." The quarian captain responded, "The hearing is being held in the garden plaza. Good luck, Tali. Admiral Raan is up ahead. She wants to speak to you before the proceedings begin."

Walking down the corridor, Tali and Tovan overheard a few conversations in which the young quarian figured prominently. "It seems that opinion is divided regarding you." Tovan noted with concern at the final piece of information that the pair had gleaned. "Will you receive a fair hearing?"

"I don't know." Tali replied, her tone reflecting worry. "Not even my own captain will stand for me. This is not good."

"I will stand with you." Tovan declared without a moment of hesitation, "If you wish it?"

Her heart warming at the Romulan's words, Tali responded tenderly, "Thank you," before pointing to two quarians talking to each other. "The one on the left is Auntie...errrr...Admiral...Raan."

"Are the two of you related?" Tovan inquired as the pair walked towards the admiral.

"Not by blood." Tali replied, "But she was very close to my mother. She synchronized suits with my mother so that she could be in the same clean room with her when she gave birth to me. She was also the one who placed me in my bubble after I was born." The tone coming through her vocalizer now one of tender longing, the young quarian recalled, "She was sick for a week after that."

As they neared, the quarian speaking to the admiral left, leaving Raan alone to talk to Tali and her companion. "Tali'Zorah vas Gallena. I am glad you came. They were growing more and more impatient."

Embracing her old-time family friend, Tali exclaimed, "Auntie Raan! Turning to her Romulan friend, she made formal introductions, "Centurion Tovan Kev vas Gallena, this is Admiral Shala'Raan vas Tonbay. I spoke of her earlier."

Giving the quarian admiral a Romulan salute, Tovan declared diplomatically, "Admiral Raan. My commanding officer, Subcommander V'iana Avesti, offers her greetings in the name of the Romulan Republic and United Federation of Planets."

"Welcome to the Migrant Fleet." The admiral also diplomatically responded, "We welcome the friendship of your two governments. I sincerely regret that we had to meet under these circumstances."

"vas Gallena?" Tali muttered softly to herself as she picked up on how she was greeted by her Auntie, before speaking aloud, her voice one of both hurt and confusion. "Auntie Raan? You just called me vas Gallena."

"I'm sorry, Tali." The admiral responded, her regret coming clearly through her vocalizer, "The Admiralty Board moved to have you tried under that name, given your departure from the *Neema*."

"Is there a problem?" Tovan inquired, "Is being associated with a non-quarian ship an issue?"

"They've stripped me of my ship name." Tali mournfully explained, "That means they've already determined my guilt. The trial is merely a formality. For all intents and purposes I've been exiled."

"All is not lost, Tali. There is still hope." Admiral Raan declared encouragingly. "You have friends who still know you as Tali'Zorah vas Neema even though we cannot legally call you that."

Clearing his throat, Tovan inquired, "Admiral Raan? Will you be sitting on the tribunal or will you have to recuse yourself due to your ties with Tali?"

"I'm afraid I have to recuse myself from participating in deliberations." The admiral ruefully answered, "But I will be presiding over the trial and I assure you both that Tali will receive a fair hearing."

"I imagine Father had to do the same." Tali mused, "Speaking of which...where is he? I'd have thought that he would have been here with you."

"I am surprised as well." Tovan interjected, coming to the defense of his companion, "She is, after all, his daughter."

Hedging her answer, Shala evasively answered the question. "You'll see inside, Tali."

"Then we should get started." Tovan declared, "Does Tali have an advocate who will represent her? Or must she face the charges alone?"

"Under normal circumstances..." Admiral Raan explained, "Tali would be represented by her ship's captain. But as the captain of the *Gallena* cannot be present for the proceedings, but has sent you, her executive officer, as her representative, then, under quarian law, as Tali is now part of your crew, the role of her counsel falls to you—should you wish to accept it."

"There is no question about my answer." Tovan at once declared, his determined expression visible through the visor of his environmental suit. "I would be honored to represent Tali." Addressing his companion, the centurion asked, "That is...if you wish it, Tali?"

"Thank you, Tovan." The young quarian replied, the warmth in her voice clearly resonating through her suit's vocalizer. "I would not want anyone else at my side."

"How are the proceedings carried out?" Tovan inquired, "Are there any rules or formalities I need to be aware of?"

"Our rules are simple." Admiral Raan explained, "There are no political loopholes or legal tricks to worry about. Present the truth as best you can."

Muttering sotto-voce to his companion, Tovan concluded, "As we talked about...presumption of guilt. The burden of proof is on us. It will be a hard fight and I am no lawyer."

Looking up to her friend, Tali whispered back, "Whatever happens...happens. I know you will do the best you can."

"Come." The admiral commanded, "We must go. I promised I would not delay you any further."

"They are anxious to exile me." Tali whispered to her advocate. "I wonder why?"

Agreeing with his friend, Tovan responded in an equally soft voice, "This is the sort of maneuvering I would have expected in the old Star Empire or Sela's courts. Almost Romulan in subtlety."

"It's a good thing then that I have a Romulan by my side." Tali murmured back.

### ***The Hearing Chamber***

As Tali and Tovan entered the chamber, other quarians filed in behind them, taking seats on the benches. Three quarians stood on a dais as Admiral Raan took her place on a platform higher and in the middle of the other quarians.

"The tribunal?" Tovan asked, inclining his head to the three other quarians.

"Yes." Tali affirmed as Shala'Raan opened the Conclave with a short benediction. Following the opening ceremony, the admiral read out the charges to the defendant. "The accused, Tali'Zorah vas Gallena has come with the *Gallena's* First Officer standing for her captain as counsel. The charge is treason."

One of the admirals on the tribunal immediately raised his hand in objection, "An alien from an unknown race has no business at a hearing involving such sensitive military matters."

"That's Admiral Koris." Tali whispered to her advocate.

Admiral Raan quickly reprimanded the objecting admiral. "Then you should not have declared Tali a member of the crew of the *Gallena*, Admiral Koris. By right as the *Gallena's* captain or the captain's representative may stand by her as advocate. As the *Gallena's* captain has delegated her authority to her first officer, Centurion Kev has the right to serve as advocate for the accused."

"Objection withdrawn."

"Tovan Kev vas Gallena. Your crewmember Tali'Zorah stands accused of treason. Will you speak for her?"

"It is my honor to do so." Tovan responded as Tali took his hand and squeezed it.

"Tali is charged with bringing active geth to the Migrant Fleet. How do you respond to that accusation?"

"How could Tali have brought geth to the Fleet while serving on the *Gallena*?" Tovan demanded.

The quarian on the left spoke in answer to the Romulan's question. "Tali is not accused of bringing back entire units. Rather, the accusation is that she brought back parts that could spontaneously reactivate."

"Admiral Xen." Tali whispered, identifying the quarian on the dais. "And the other is Admiral Gerrel."

Tali forcefully answered the charge levied against her. "I would never send active geth to the Fleet. I made sure that any parts I sent back were disabled and harmless."

Admiral Koris then demanded, "Explain how the geth captured the lab ship where your father was working!"

Her voice tinged with worry, Tali questioned, "What do you mean? What happened?"

Admiral Gerrel answered the distraught young quarian's question, "As far as we know, the geth killed everyone on the *Alarei*—including your father."

"I was told that, like Romulans, quarians value family." Tovan declared, "For what reason do you explain bringing this out now. Why did you not inform Tali of this earlier?"

"Please accept our apologies." Admiral Raan replied, "Tali should have been informed."

"She's lying." Tovan whispered to the quarian standing next to him. "Her stance and tone of voice give her away. She's subtle...almost anyone but a Romulan who has seen this before would have missed it."

Looking up at her friend, Tali asked in a soft whisper, "Are you sure, Tovan." Accepting the Romulan's subtle incline of his head as confirmation, the young quarian again spoke, this time in a louder voice so that everyone could hear. "We have to retake the *Alarei*, Tovan. It is the only way to prove my innocence."

Admiral Koris admonished, "The safest course of action would be to destroy the ship. But...if you seek honorable death instead of exile..."

"I'm looking for my father, you bosh'tet!" Tali responded angrily.

"Are you sure you wish to do this, Tali?" Admiral Raan questioned, "It will be an extremely dangerous undertaking. The odds are that you will not survive."

Accepting Tali's slight nod of her head as acceptance of the challenge, Tovan answered for his charge, "We will retake the ship and find the evidence we need to clear Tali of these charges and prove her loyalty."

"We do not accuse Tali of aiding the geth or of disloyalty." Admiral Koris declared, "She stands accused of negligence. Her carelessness has endangered the Fleet."

"Very well." Admiral Raan announced, "Tali. You will attempt to retake the *Alarei* and are given leave to depart the *Rayya*. A shuttle will be waiting at the secondary docking hangar." After a momentary pause, the admiral concluded with a blessing, "Be safe, Tali. We will resume the hearing upon your return or determination that you have been killed in action."

As they exited the hearing chamber and entered a large open plaza, Tali took both of Tovan's hands in hers. "Thank you for helping me retake the *Alarei*."

"The admirals seem sure that your father is dead." Tovan commented, "But I've got a feeling you have other ideas on the matter..."

"I don't know." Tali admitted as the pair walked together hand in hand, drawing askance and disapproving looks from some of the other quarians. "He might have had an escape plan for himself and those of the crew that survived the initial attack. He might be in a secret compartment." Shaking her head, she moaned, "I just don't know."

"How are you bearing up?" Tovan inquired, his expression one of worry and concern. "They hit you with a full spread of plasma torpedoes—and that was before dropping that tri-cobalt bomb about your father." Shaking his head, the Romulan centurion remarked with a note of bitterness in his voice, "That was a trick worthy of Sela. They intended to throw you off balance."

"It does seem that way." Tali admitted ruefully, "My guilt is already predetermined unless we find incontrovertible evidence otherwise on that ship."

"Do you want to talk to anyone before we go?" Tovan asked as he gazed about the room.

"No." Tali shook her head, her gaze falling on the admirals, "I see no reason to talk to them. It would be a waste of time and breath. They've already decided my fate. All I want to do now is find out what happened to my father and then get this sham of a hearing over with."

Nodding his head, Tovan replied in a somber tone, "Then let us be off."

# Searching for the Truth

## Chapter Summary

Tali and Tovan board the Alarei in search for the proof to clear her name

### *The Alarei*

"It's a good thing they allowed us our weapons and kits." Tali remarked as they entered the fallen lab ship. "Depressurized." The quarian engineer noted clinically, "Standard geth procedure when encountering organics."

Nodding his head in understanding, Tovan replied, "Makes sense. As synthetics, they would have no need for oxygen and can function well in a weightless environment." Looking down the corridor and noticing quarian bodies on the deck, the Romulan tactical officer further commented, "The earlier attempts."

"Along with the crew." Tali nodded, further commenting, "It's a good thing Kal' Reegar's not here. Otherwise we might have found him among the bodies."

"Were you close to Kal?" Tovan asked, a part of him dreading the young quarian's answer.

"Not really." Tali replied as her heart skipped a beat. "He's a friend, but that's as far as it went." Shaking her head, a brief, ironic laugh escaped her. "It's not as if I haven't had suitors...but..." another chuckle came out of her vocalizer, "none of them appealed to me. Besides..." her voice now taking on a slightly flirtatious tone, "I think he's found someone. He was very quick to volunteer to remain as an embassy guard just after we hired Lia' Vael."

"That is true." Tovan responded with a warm grin.

"So...what about you?" Anyone other than..."

"Charva?" Tovan shook his head, "No." Approaching what appeared to be a door at the end of the docking corridor, the Romulan tactical officer motioned for his companion to halt as he took out his tricorder. "I'm not detecting any life signs, but the tricorder is picking up on activity. Geth?"

Nodding her head in confirmation, Tali replied as she brandished her plasma shotgun, "Most likely."

"Right." Tovan nodded as he took a grenade out of his kit. "EMP." The centurion explained, "It should take some of them out and provide enough of a distraction for us to get to cover. Ready?" At his companion's single nod of her head, Tovan exclaimed as he opened the door and chucked the grenade, "Now!"

Dashing into the room firing their weapons, the pair quickly took out the geth in the chamber only for a second wave of reinforcements to come in. Noticing that their rifles were now having a harder time of piercing the geth shields, Tovan exclaimed, "They're adapting like the Borg!"

"Frequency modulator." Tali responded, tossing one of the devices to her teammate. "If it works on the Borg, it should work on the geth too."

"Good idea." The centurion exclaimed as he affixed the device and activating it, aimed and fired at a cloaked geth hunter, bringing the charging synthetic down with a single shot. "It works."

"For now." Tali answered back as she felled two of the machines with a fully charged blast from her shotgun. "But it won't take them long to adapt."

"Then we'll have to treat them like we do the Borg." Tovan responded as he again tweaked his weapon. "We'll have to continue to alter the frequency modulation."

"Right." The young quarian agreed as the last of the geth went down. Sighing, she remarked, "That should do it for now."

"Agreed." Tovan replied, suggesting, "Let's investigate. See if we can find anything that can either clear your father or point to where he might be."

"Good idea." Making her way to a long desk with several computer consoles, Tali motioned for her companion to join her. "Log entry." She explained. "Let's hear what it has to say."

*"Something's slowing down the systems. We're taking down the firewalls to rebalance the load distribution."*

"That might have given the geth an opening to take over ship's functions." Tali hypothesized. "Once the firewall was down, it would have been a simple matter to hack into environmental and internal defenses."

*"Rael'Zorah ordered us to bypass standard safeties. Following security protocols will take too long."*

"Did your father have a history of acting rashly?" Tovan inquired.



“He did sometimes play fast and loose with procedure.” Tali forced herself to admit. “Before he began his Pilgrimage, he and Han’Gerrel were assigned to a patrol craft when one of our freighters got attacked by batarian pirates. He was ordered to withdraw, but instead attacked.” Sighing, she remembered, “He always laughed about that. He said that he told Admiral Gerrel that they couldn’t charge them for disobeying orders because they were still minors. After they rescued the freighter, the Admiralty didn’t know what to do with them—try them or give them medals.”

“So...what did they do?”

“They gave them medals and sent them off to Pilgrimage early.” Tali laughed. Her humor quickly vanishing, the young quarian remarked somberly, “I have a feeling that this time his luck ran out.” Entering what appeared to be an examination room going by the beds and the medical station located on the wall, Tali pointed to what appeared to be an inactive geth. “It’s a disabled repair drone, plus a reflex algorithm I don’t recognize. I sent it to Father in one of the storage units from Haestrom.”

“What made it worth sending back?” Tovan asked.

“It had to be in working order.” Tali explained. “Something that could be analyzed and integrated into other technology. Anything new was top priority. Father was especially interested in any technology that the geth had developed themselves—like that algorithm. He was looking for signs of modification to get some clues into how they thought.”

“Does it give you any ideas as to what happened here?” Tovan inquired.

“No.” Tali replied in a forlorn voice, shaking her head. “I don’t know, Tovan. I checked everything. Did I make a mistake and let something get by me that I shouldn’t have? No.” She emphatically shook her head, “I was careful. Very careful. I passed up some terrific finds because I was afraid that they would be prone to reactivation or self-repair like that Colossus on Haestrom.” Her voice edged with fear, Tali moaned, “I don’t know which is worse—that I got sloppy and let something slip or that Father actually did this.”

“Another computer console.” Tovan pointed to a laptop unit resting on a storage crate. “We might want to check it out—see if it can shed some more light.”

“Good idea.” Tali concurred as she played the log entry.

Coming to life, the screen showed two quarians—a male and a female—the female researcher exclaiming, “*Who’s running this system diagnostic? I didn’t authorize...oh, Keelah! How many geth are networked?*”

The male responded, “*All of them. Rael’Zorah...*”

“*Shut it down!*” The female researcher shouted in a panic-stricken voice, “*Shut everything down! They’re in the system!*”

“Father...” Tali moaned despondently, “Did you do this Father? Were you so much in a hurry that you cut corners. I think...” The young quarian sobbed as he fell into her Romulan companion’s embrace, “I think...that he was responsible.”

“What do you want to do?” Tovan solicitously inquired.

“I need to make sure.” Tali replied, her vocalizer expressing her determination. “I have to find out the truth and I need to know whether my father is alive or dead.”

“Very well.” The Romulan centurion nodded, “Let us continue.”

As the pair entered a lab area, Tali, spotting geth hunters, called out as she fired her plasma shotgun, “Incoming!”

“On it!” Tovan replied, activating his rifle’s targeting system and firing, the split beam plasma rifle taking out three geth.

“I’m setting up a shield barrier.” Tali shouted. As a bubble appeared around the pair, she shouted, “Cover me! I’m going to set up a plasma turret near that console.”

“Careful!” Tovan replied as he laid down suppressive fire, “They’re beginning to adapt.”

“So am I!” Tali exclaimed as she set up the turret, “I’ve made some modifications for the turret.”

“I can see that.” Tovan grinned as Tali’s plasma turret took out a geth rocket trooper. Then, as the last of the geth were disposed of, the handsome Romulan pointed to the turret and queried, “That was good work and fast thinking. What did you do?”

“I figured that since we could modulate the frequencies of our weapons that I should also be able to modulate the frequency of the turret.” Tali explained, “So...I adjusted the fabrication settings and...thank Keelah...it worked.”

Searching the laboratory, Tali spotted an active computer console. “Tovan?” She motioned for her friend to join her, “Another log entry.”

“Maybe it can shed more light on what happened.” The centurion declared.

“Part of me doesn’t want to find out.” Tali moaned as she hit the play button, “But another part of me says that I won’t be able to live with myself if I don’t.”

“*We locked down navigation. Weapons are offline. Our mistake won’t endanger the Fleet. They’re burning through the door! I don’t have much time. I’m sorry...so...so...sorry. Jona, if you get this, be strong for Daddy. Mommy loves you very much.*” The screen then went blank.

After another firefight in which Tali’s modified plasma turret played a major part, distracting a pair of geth hunters long enough for her

Romulan companion to vaporize them, the pair came upon yet another computer console.

"I think this console might have something." Tali declared, "Even though most of the data is corrupted, there are a few bits left." Activating her omnitool, the quarian engineer managed to download the fragmented information. "They were performing experiments on geth systems in an effort to find new ways to combat geth resistance to reprogramming."

"Do you think it proper to test weapons on the geth?" Tovan inquired in a grave voice.

"I know both the Republic and Federation have laws regarding the rights of sapient artificial life." Tali sighed, "They weren't testing weapons on prisoners if that's what you're thinking. I only sent Father parts. Even if he had assembled them, they wouldn't be sapient."

"After what we've been through..." Tovan countered, "Can you really be sure of that?"

Lowering her head, Tali moaned dejectedly, "No. I can't. Not after seeing the logs and fighting through these geth." Shaking her head, she forced herself to face up to the truth, "The geth had to come from somewhere...and there was only one logical way for that to happen. It doesn't say so specifically, but it's looking more and more likely that Father activated them knowing that they would be sapient and didn't tell me or anyone else. If that's what he did...then he did something very horrible."

"I'm sorry, Tali." Tovan said as he placed his hand on the young quarian's shoulder. "What do you want to do now?"

"I need to find my father." Tali declared, her voice now filled with steely determination. "I need to know why he did what he did. I need to know why he lied to me and knowingly put the Fleet in danger."

"Is any of the data here useful?" Tovan asked as he inclined his head at the monitor.

"I don't think so." Tali responded, "It's mostly concerning the results of different hacking techniques. I don't understand all...or even most...of it." Her sobs coming clearly through her vocalizer, the young quarian cried, "Why did you do this Father? You promised you'd build me a house on the homeworld. How was doing this going to bring us home?"

"Maybe it's time for your people to find a new world, Tali." Tovan solemnly declared.

"That's easy for you to say!" Tali bit back, "Your people found a safe harbor. It's not so easy for mine. There are few enough worlds that can sustain dextro-based life. Added to that, our weakened immune systems. Even if we do find a new planet, it would take several generations before we would be able to live without our suits."

"You have a home with us." Tovan replied consolingly, "Nothing will ever change that. Don't throw everything away on a fruitless war that you don't need to fight."

"Tovan..." The young quarian sighed dejectedly, "I can't even kiss someone without risking illness. Every time you touch a flower with your bare hands...feel the touch of another person...smell the fragrance of a fine perfume without air filters...eat solid food instead of nutri-paste through a tube...you're doing something I can never do." Taking a deep breath, she gestured to the exit, "Let's go. At least we can retake this Keelah-damned ship."

Making a solemn vow to himself, Tovan nodded his head, "I thought I saw another console in the adjoining lab. Perhaps we should check it out?"

The pair listened intently as the log entry played out: "*First entry: Our hacking attempts failed. The geth have an adaptive consciousness. Hack one process, and the others auto-correct. Still, we're making progress. Rael'Zorah is positive that we will have a viable system in less than a year. This weapon will put us back on the homeworld and it's all because of Rael'Zorah.*"

"It wouldn't have worked, Father." Tali murmured, "The geth adapt too quickly." Turning to her companion, she pointed, "The bridge is up ahead. It's probably going to be heavily defended."

"Then we had best prepare ourselves." Tovan replied as the duo checked their weapons and kits. "I'm ready when you are."

"Come on...let's get this over with."

Her panting audible through her vocalizer after the hard fight on the *Alarei's* bridge had finally ended, Tali, in between breaths, exclaimed in astonishment, "A geth Prime! A Keelah-damned geth Prime! How did that get on this ship? I sent nothing that could even be remotely similar to that. Did..." Her pants now replaced by sobs, she wailed, "Did you do this, Father? Did you permit someone to bring in a geth Prime?"

"Maybe the geth themselves put it together." Tovan ventured in an effort to console his companion, "We know that they are adaptable and...as you said...their consciousness grows when they are in large groups. Large groups would need a controller—right? The geth could have built that Prime to serve as a controller."

"Maybe." Tali said in between sniffles, "But this should never have happened in the first place. Looking about, she asked the empty space as she and Tovan inspected the chamber, "Where are you father?"

Spying the figure lying on the ground before his friend did, Tovan placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Tali? Over there."

Shaking her head as she at once recognized her father's unique suit pattern, the young quarian sobbed as she rushed to the body lying on the deck, kneeling down beside it. "Father? No." She shook her head in disbelief, "No. No. No. You always had a plan. Masked life signals...or a medical stasis program...something...You're not...you can't be...You can't be dead! You wouldn't just die like this! You wouldn't leave me to clean up your mess!"

Seeing his companion in distress, Tovan helped her to her feet and embraced her, not saying a word, he let her cry in his arms.

"I'm sorry." Tali sobbed as she remained in her Romulan friend's embrace.

"You've got nothing to be sorry about." Tovan whispered back as he continued to hold her.

Reluctantly breaking free from their hug and forcing herself to look down on her father's body, Tali declared, "He would have known I'd come. Maybe he left a message." Activating her father's omnitool, her and her companion heard Rael' Zorah's last message to his daughter.

*"Tali, if you are listening to this, then I am dead. The geth have gone active and I don't have much time. Make sure that Han and Daro'Xen see the data. They must..."*

"I'm sorry, Tali." Tovan consoled, "I know that this is not what you wanted..."

"I don't know what's worse." Tali said as she lowered her head, "Thinking that he never really cared, or thinking that he did and that this was the only way he could show it to me."

"You cared, Tali." Her Romulan companion said as he again embraced her. "That's what's important."

Taking a deep breath, Tali pointed to the geth hub that the pair had recently demolished. "Taking out the hub deactivated any geth we might have missed." Looking more closely, she noted, "Some of the recordings are still intact. Maybe they can tell us how this happened. What Father did. Why he did it."

"Are you sure you want to hear this, Tali?" Tovan asked, his face etched with concern and worry for the young quarian.

"No." Tali shook her head, "But I have to. This is horrible, Tovan. Even though I know he did this, part of me doesn't want to admit it. Part of me wants to destroy the recording. Is that so wrong?"

"Not at all." The Romulan soldier shook his head. "Whatever you decide to do...you have my support."

"Thank you." Tali responded as she activated the console and played the logs.

Rael's voice, seemingly speaking from the grave instead of the image on the screen, came from the speakers. *"Do we have enough parts to bring more online?"*

The scientist appearing on the screen alongside her father answered his question. *"Yes. The new shipment from your daughter will allow us to add two more geth to the network."*

Another quarian spoke. *"We're nearing a breakthrough on systemic viral attacks. We should inform the Admiralty Board—just to be safe."*

"No." Rael responded, *"We're too close. I promised to build my daughter a house on the home world. I'm not going to sit and wait while the politicians argue."*

*"It would make things easier if Tali could send back more working material."*

"No." Rael forcefully declared, *"I don't want Tali exposed to any political blowback. Tali is to be left out of this. Assemble new geth with what we have and bypass security protocols if necessary."*

"I never wanted this, Tovan." Tali sobbed, shaking her head dejectedly, "I never asked for this." Turning away, the young quarian declared, "All of this is his fault. I hoped...prayed...that we would find out different. But..." Taking a deep breath and exhaling, she moaned, "When this comes up in the trial..." Coming to a decision, Tali pleaded, "Tovan...we can't let the Admiralty Board know about this. It will destroy my father's reputation."

"Are you sure, Tali?" Tovan replied with a grave look on his face, "If we destroy the evidence, there will be nothing to prove your innocence. Are you ready to go into exile?"

"I don't want to live knowing that I can never see the Fleet again." Tali confessed, her sobs carrying through the vocalizer. "But I can't go back into that hearing chamber and tell everyone that my father was the worst war criminal in quarian history. To have his name stricken from the manifest of every ship in the Fleet that he served on. I just can't do it. Parents would hold him up as a monster in stories they tell their children. He will never be forgiven. Please...don't ask me to do this. For all the neglect...the mistakes he made...with Mother...with me... he also did a lot of good. I don't want that to be erased along with his name. Please..." She begged, "Let me destroy the evidence."

"Very well, Tali." Tovan replied with a single nod of his head. "Destroy it. We will tell the court that your father and crew fought valiantly to resist an unexpected geth infiltration..."

"Due to my carelessness in shipping geth parts that could still be activated." Tali sorrowfully concluded, bowing her head. "Thank you, Tovan." Taking a deep breath and exhaling, the young quarian pointed to the exit. "Let's go and get this over with."

# A New Family

## Chapter Summary

The trial verdict marks the end of Tali' Zorah nar' Reyya and the birth of Tali' Zorah vas Mol'Rihan.

### *The Hearing Chamber*

The duo entered the hearing just as the tribunal was about to pass judgement, declaring Tali killed in honorable action against the death. "We're sorry we're late." The young quarian uttered defiantly.

"Did you find evidence to clear your father, Tali?" Admiral Raan inquired with what seemed to be a tone of hope coming through her vocalizer.

Nodding her head at Tovan, Tali indicated that she wanted him to speak for her.

"We could find no evidence." The centurion lied. "From what we were able to see and put together, Rael'Zorah and the crew of the *Alarei* all died fighting off a geth infiltration due to..."

"My carelessness." Tali interrupted. "I thought I was careful. That I was only shipping parts that could not be repaired or reactivated. But...I was wrong. It appears that at least one and probably more parts were shipped because of my negligence. I am to blame and I will accept whatever punishment the tribunal deems appropriate."

Admiral Raan then spoke in a somber voice, "If there is no further testimony, I ask the judges to render their verdicts now." After a brief pause while the judges on the tribunal entered their decisions on their omnitools, the admiral, reading the unanimous decision, declared, "Tali'Zorah vas Gallena...you have been found guilty of treason against the quarian people and sentenced to exile and your name shall be stricken from both the *Rayya's* and *Neema's* manifests. Tovan Kev vas Gallena...the Fleet appreciates how you have represented your client with passion and honor."

"I thank you." Tovan declared and then raised his voice so loudly that it carried throughout the chamber. "However, Tali's name is not vas Gallena. Her name is Tali'Zorah vas Mol'Rihan. Of New Romulus. Even though she is not Romulan by blood, she is Romulan by heart and spirit and I will proudly sponsor her for admission into my clan once we return to New Romulus."

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Tali whispered.

"Yes." Tovan replied with a warm smile, "If you want it."

"I do." Tali answered back, "Thank you." Raising her voice, the young quarian declared to the Admirals and spectators. "I accept the judgment rendered. From now on, my name shall be Tali'Zorah vas Mol'Rihan. I...Am...Romulan."

Admiral Raan, nodding her head in acceptance, delivered the sentence, "Tali'Zorah vas Mol'Rihan. You have six hours to leave. Would you like to request any personal possessions from the Fleet?"

"No." Tali shook her head, "There is nothing for me here anymore. All that I need...friends..."she glanced shyly up at Tovan, "...loved ones...I have on the *Gallena*."

The admiral then ended the proceedings, "This hearing is now concluded. Go in peace, Tali'Zorah vas Mol'Rihan. Keelah se'lai."

The hearing concluded, Tali took her Romulan companion by his hand, "I'm ready to go now, Tovan."

"Are you sure?" The handsome Romulan replied, "Is there anyone you wish to say goodbye to?"

Glancing back at her Auntie Raan and the other admirals for a moment, the young quarian shook her head, "No. There's nothing and no one here. Come on, Tovan. I want to go home."

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