

The Chapters of D'nai T'keyah

Chapter One - The First Night

Michelle was confused, when she woke, as she why she had woken. The room was still dark, the curtains drawn over her large windows blocking out what little light came thrown by the moon outside. At her side, curled beneath the duvet was small bundle of wiry brown fur. A bundle by the name of Shadow.

She shoved the small terrier off the bed with a grunt. "You know you're not supposed to lie in the bed!"

The dog barely woke, curling up again on the designated cushion lying at the foot of the bed. The creature immediately began to snore, tail and ears twitching as with some exciting chase dream.

Slowly, Michelle stood looking about the room, trying to gauge what had propelled her so forcefully from sleep.

It wasn't a dream; though those few dreams she had were all strange and wonderful... and unusual. Most concerned a man named Nathaniel and another named Luke. Who these people were, however, she had little or no idea. She had never met anyone of either of those names; not at work or out and about. Even from university - despite her memories of those years being dim - she could recall no men by those names.

With a grunt of her own, Michelle slipped back into bed, sinking into the warmth of the duvet and it was with these motions that she suddenly realised what had woken her.

She sighed heavily, watching her breath cloud in the air before face. She sighed again, expelling steam into the frigid cold air like a steam train. The odd thought amused her. But it was not enough to distract her. The room was cold; painfully so and goosebumps rose rapidly along the length of her bare arms.

"What the hell?"

Touching a hand against the radiator beside the bed did little to help. It was warm, boiling hot in fact and she drew her burnt fingers away to jab them into her mouth. So... if the heaters were so warm why was the room so painfully cold?

Michelle stood, wrapping the thick duvet under arms and swinging the end over her arm like a toga. That done she padded across the bedroom to feel the other radiators. These

were just as warm as the first, and a rapid inspection of the rest of her flat yielded similar results. But the rooms were freezing!

Her gaze flickered towards the window. She flicked aside the curtain with a careless toss of her fingers glancing outwards and down. From the thirteenth floor of her apartment, the view of the rest of the city was nothing short of stunning.

There were lights on everywhere, tiny orange spots glowing like fireflies in the marshes. The city of London certainly never slept. Cars rushed up and down the crowded streets, pedestrians bravely navigating their way between them. Even a helicopter traversed slowly over the low-rise buildings, blue lights whirling silently. To the left of the flats, the Thames ran by, a brightly illuminated strip of sparkling blue-black ebony, reflecting the few stars strong enough to permeate the permanent smoggy cloud of pollution hanging over the area. The moon too, was reduced to a smoky grey disk, partially hidden by a wisp of pale cloud.

It was a beautiful view, enough to distract from the biting cold for a few minutes. When Michelle came to herself, however, it was with a jolt as her gaze ran down and over the four long icicles hanging from her window sill. The *inside* of her window sill, above her third radiator.

For long moments she stared, trying to convince herself that the long hangings of ice were nothing more than the lingering residues of her dreams. She pinched herself and then reached out, meaning to prove to herself that the icicles were simply an illusion.

Her fingers closed about the frosty stakes, solid and whole. The ice immediately fused to her skin and the whole icicle broke away as she drew her hand back with a startled yelp.

Behind, lying on his cushion with his paws in the air, Shadow gave a soft rumbling growl. He slowly opened one eye, peering out with his left ear slightly cocked. When certain that his mistress was safe he closed the eye, relaxed the ear, and resumed his sleep.

Michelle shook her hand, hopping about the room in a bizarre fit of mingled fear and confusion. Savagely she waggled the limb, fighting desperately to be free of the clinging ice. It was a strange fear, but one well founded, she thought, as she had the most terrifying, but powerful conviction that the icicle was gradually freezing her whole body.

Steam continued to cloud in the air about her as she raggedly gasped for breath. Any onlooker might have believed her to have run a mile, but it was simple fear that fuelled the race of her heart and the taxing labour of her lungs.

Just when it seemed that no amount of shaking, wagging, grunting or even cursing would remove the ice she felt the freezing stake give a little beneath her palm. Heartened by the progress, albeit small, she closed the other hand about the pointed end and pulled with all her might.

“Get away!” She bellowed.

The ice abruptly melted. Her hands flew apart as though drawn on wires and the sudden give to all her pulling landed her in an untidy heap on the ground next to an icy damp patch on the carpet. The duvet fell from beneath her arms and tangled in her feet, making her attempts to rise clumsy and for the most part unsuccessful. After brutally kicking away the thick, clinging covers, Michelle crawled over to the radiator. There remained three more icicles and the stub of the first, all of them gleaming wetly in the reflected lights of the city outside.

As if the strange events of the night weren't enough Michelle was then subject to an experience she had never encountered before. Of course she'd heard about it on TV, read about it in books. She had laughed at it with her friends and ridiculed it openly. Never in all her darkest nightmares did she ever imagine that she could also experience a vision. A foreign, detached and unrelated vision that rocked her on her knees and threw her back down against the carpet. She lay there helpless against the sights and smells her mind put before her; waving her hands against things that couldn't possibly be there and yet were all the same.

She saw a man; the same man from her dream, the one named Nathaniel. He was holding a sword, or what appeared to be a sword, except there was no hilt. The weapon began at the bend of his elbow slanting forward in the place of his forearm and hand. His other arm formed a similar weapon, this with a double edged blade with a cruelly serrated tip. Blood stained both.

He was fighting, hacking slashing, mercilessly mowing down a group of people dressed in once beautiful garments. Now their clothes were grey, ragged and travel worn, splattered with generous lashings of deep red blood.

Michelle gagged, or at least that was her intention. At the sight of the blood, she felt her stomach turn an angry flip flop. But it was not a turn of disgust; quite the opposite, in fact, her stomach gurgled an applicative rumble of appreciation at the sight. Anticipation almost.

The man turned then. It seemed he heard the thunderous drumming of her stomach. He seemed amused at any rate. Pausing briefly in the motions of the fight, he swept a wisp of

lustrous black hair from his eyes and grinned. His large dark eyes flashed dangerously as for those few seconds his attention was wholly on her. For those few, small yet wonderful moments Michelle knew that she was the total focus of Nathaniel's attention. It was almost enough to make her forget there was a fight at hand. Almost.

He shouted then, projecting his voice above the sounds of battle. His ordinarily smooth and suave tones vanished beneath the child like glee at the thrill of the battle. "Are you going to leave them all for me T'keyah? That's not like you! Come on; there's plenty for us *both* to enjoy."

Quite inexplicably, his words brought a chuckle to her lips, one that she gave full voice too. Then she raised her own weapon.

The very motion of raising her hand was enough to drag Michelle from the vision. She came back to herself painfully, not as she had with her dream but painfully, as though forced. It felt almost that a part of her had been ripped away to remain within the vision.

She lay there panting on the floor, regaining her breath once more while wondering what the hell was happening.

Shadow seemed less impressed. Obviously irritated at once more being woken from his chase dreams, and with no good reason, he stood up. After shaking his tail and throwing a reproachful bark over his furry shoulder he trotted off into the living room.

"Who the hell is T'keyah?" The name, though awkward on unpractised lips, was oddly familiar. Irritatingly so, though, again, there was no memory to link it to.

It was a long time before Michelle moved again. Indeed she had no idea how long she'd been lying on the floor. All she did know was that by the time she started moving again, the lights of the city were dimming beneath the natural glow of the sun's first light. Pale golden fingers of dawn stretched out over the city, chasing away to darkness of the Thames to replace the river with a ribbon of silver that gleamed as though with fresh polish.

Michelle got up quietly, picked up her duvet and crawled beneath the covers. She slept.

Three hours later, when the grating buzz of the alarm clock drew a weary Michelle from more troubled dreams, she was hard pressed to remember the first. She even forgot the vision. For the present anyway.