



A Layperry's Heart (For A Chance At Us #2)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: It turns out every sci-fi romance novel was wrong about the whole 'alien moving next door' thing.

Aldo didn't know what to expect when he realized an alien had moved next door, but Gendry wasn't it. The towering purple alien is awkward, kind, and unimaginably hot. Aldo had given up on dating, but that was when his dating pool only consisted of other humans.

With a promise to keep an eye on Christian, Gendry visits Earth. He wants to learn more about humans but in the process, gives his heart to one in particular. His visit is only a year long, but that's more than enough time to fall in love with Aldo.

Will Aldo come back to Gendry's home planet, or is their love destined to be cut short?

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Gendry

I sit down with a deep sigh, sinking into my seat as I stare out the window. I watch as the only place I've known as my home grows smaller and smaller.

“You sure about this? You really don't need to come along.”

I look over at Christian, a human who came to Deltourah three years ago during the very first Human Layperry Exchange program. He's always been closed off and prickly but right now, I can only describe him as worried. He's best friends with Miles, another human who came during the HLE. At the end of three years, they were allowed to either stay, or go back to Earth. Miles decided to stay. Not that I thought for a second that Miles would be traveling back, not with his new baby and his mate, Timalah.

“I am sure,” I tell him with a nod. “Not only did I promise Miles that I would keep an eye on you, but I also wish to experience Earth.”

“It's nothing special.”

“That cannot be true,” I say right away, my brows wrinkling. “Otherwise, why would you want to go back?”

Christian looks away, staring out the window of our ship. He crosses his arms over his chest. “There's nothing on your planet for me.”

I stare out the window as well. I want to push the issue, but I keep my thoughts to

myself. He's leaving behind his best friend. He's also leaving behind our leader, Ghenie. As much as Christian and Ghenie seem to butt heads, they also have undeniable chemistry. I might not be the most experienced in relationships and feelings, especially where humans are concerned, but I do know there's something going on between them. That something seemed like foreplay to me, someone looking in from the outside.

"I think you'll be coming back with me when this year is over," I tell Christian. "As much as you think you don't belong, you did. People will miss you and I have a feeling, you'll realize you miss them too."

"Wanna bet?"

I tilt my head to the side. "What does that mean?"

"We'll make a wager. If I end up going back to your planet, I'll give you something. And if I end up staying on Earth, you'll give me something."

I think about it for a moment before nodding my head. "Okay. What sort of thing will you give me?"

"Whatever you want. Normally, on Earth, we would bet something like money."

I hum. "I do not want money."

"If I win this bet," Christian says, finally turning and looking up at me. "I'd like for you to give Miles the biggest, longest hug. Like really stay hugging him until he's uncomfortable."

"Why would you wish for me to do that?"

“Because he would secretly love it. And it would be a hug from me but through you. I’m not into that mushy stuff so it’ll be special.”

“Okay,” I say slowly. “Deal. If you win, I will hug Miles for you. If I win, I would like for you to give Ghenie a kiss. Right on the mouth.”

“What?” Christian’s body goes tense, his eyes narrowing at me. “Why would I do that? Why do you want me to kiss him? What the hell, Gendry!”

“Right on the mouth,” I say again, feeling proud of myself for coming up with such a good reward. “Do we have a deal?”

Christian stares up at me for a long time before he finally sighs. “What the hell,” he murmurs to himself. “It’s not like you’re gonna win anyway, so why the hell not.” Christian holds out his hand for me to shake. I grasp his hand and he pumps our hands up and down a few times. “You have yourself a deal.”

We both sit back in our seats, watching as the stars fly past us, white blurs across the window. Nerves nip at my stomach but at the same time, I’m also filled with excitement. What is Earth like? How will the humans react to my presence? Will I be able to make new friends while I’m here?

Everything is going to be so different and new. Miles gave me some insight on what to expect, but I have a feeling there was no way for me to properly prepare for what I’m going to experience. I have my implant behind my ear to help me communicate and understand what the humans are saying and I’ve taken as many lessons as Miles was willing to give me. I know the basics. Thankfully, I was able to bring one communication device with me so if I have need, I can let a human borrow it to make communication easier. Hopefully that will be enough.

“You nervous?”

I shrug. “A bit, but more than anything, I am excited. I’m sure I will learn a lot during this year.”

“Maybe you’ll find a nice human to settle down with,” Christian says with the tiniest bit of a smirk. “Who knows, maybe you’ll be the one ready to stay on Earth when this year is over.”

I can’t imagine something like that happening but then again, I didn’t imagine myself coming to Earth at all. I was more than content to stay on Deltourah . I was raised a warrior and that life is the only life I’ve ever known.

Now, I’m stepping into the unknown instead of preparing for my duty of protection. It’s scary and new and exciting all at once. It feels like stretching a sore muscle, uncomfortable but knowing in the end, it’s for the best.

“If everyone is like you, I know I’ll be embraced with open arms.”

Christian snorts before turning away from me and leaning his head against the back of the chair in order to sleep. I keep staring out the window, wanting to catch the first glimpse of my temporary new home. Maybe Christian is right and I’ll meet a nice human while I’m here. Or maybe I’ll be stuck with a neighbor who’s grumpier than Christian. Either way, I find myself excited at the prospect.

No matter what happens, this will have been a worthwhile experience.

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Aldo

“Okay, bestie, let’s talk about what happened here.”

Brenda sticks out her bottom lip at me. “It’s not a huge deal.”

I hum, holding up the right side of her hair. “I would say it’s a bit of a big deal. Don’t get me wrong, this is your hair and you’re free to do with it as you wish. I’m just curious what the goal was.”

“I was attempting to give myself a mullet,” she finally confesses with a groan. “I saw a tutorial online and figured it couldn’t be that hard, right? But then I quickly realized it was actually that hard.”

I can’t stop myself from smiling. I love my clients to death, but sometimes they take on more than they can chew when it comes to their hair. Thankfully, Papi Aldo is here to fix them up.

“Are we still feeling good about the mullet idea? Or have you decided on something else you’d rather try instead?”

Brenda bites her bottom lip for a moment, looking at herself in the mirror. Finally, she nods her head. “Yeah. I think I wanna stick to the mullet. How much would you hate me if I went home and box dyed my hair after this?”

I look at her reflection in the mirror, making my right eye twitch. “Oh, that wouldn’t be a big deal at all ,” I say, making sure to play up the dramatics before finally giving

up and chuckling. “You know I don’t give a fuck about that. Go crazy! But remember, if you want that stripped, depending on the color, it’s going to be hard as fuck. Box red and box black are hell to get out.”

Brenda hums as I pick up my tools and get to work on her hair. “That’s good to know. I was thinking black, but I don’t want it to be a pain in the ass to maintain.”

“We can always shave your head when you’re tired of it,” I say with a giggle, watching as her eyes widen in horror.

“How dare you! You know I don’t have the head shape for that, Aldo!”

We share a laugh as I go back to cutting her hair. “What do you think about shaving the sides? Or do you wanna keep some length?”

“I think we should shave it. I wanna look as gay as possible.”

“You got it!”

“Speaking of being gay,” she says, wiggling her brows at me. “How’s your love life going?”

I groan as I take out my shears, giving her hair some texture where it needs it. “Listen, usually when a client comes, we talk about them , not the other way around.”

“But you already know all my bullshit. I wanna hear about yours!”

“Fine,” I say with an over dramatic sigh. “I recently went on a date with a man I met on a dating app. Let’s just say, by the time it was over, I removed all of the dating apps off of my phone and not because I thought he was the one.”

“Jesus,” Brenda says with a wince. “It was really that bad?”

“Imagine the worst and then double it,” I say with a pout. I pick up my razor and quickly get to work shaving the sides of Brenda’s head, being extra careful around her ears.

“Okay, I need to know everything.”

“He seemed so sweet and charming while we were texting. I suggested we get dinner. I told him I’d be wearing a blue button up and he said he’d be wearing a black sweater.”

“Right,” Brenda says slowly. “Everything sounds fine so far.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I thought! The pictures he posted online were super cute. He was handsome and had a fabulous smile. You know how weak I am for a nice smile. I got us a table and waited. And waited. And waited. Just when I was ready to leave, he showed up.”

I put the razor back down on my counter and run my fingers through Brenda’s hair, shaking it out so I can see the shape of it.

“What happened? Did he catfish you?”

“Not exactly,” I say with a wince. “It was him. Only the pictures were from about thirty years ago.”

“You’re kidding!”

“Nope. This man was in his sixties. I can handle a sexy silver fox but that was not him. He also wore a black sweater that was covered in cat hair. He smelled so bad.

He was missing his two front teeth.” I shake my head, putting my hands on my hips. “All of that I can kinda look past, but oh my god, the way he spoke to me? He talked down to me in a very childish way. He insisted he order my food, but then also demanded I cut up his steak for him, and then said he’d love for me to call him daddy. Like, I’m sorry what ? On a first date? Sir, absolutely not.”

“Oh my god!”

“At the end of dinner, he asked for us to split the bill which, okay fine, one second you wanna be daddy and the next you’re making me pay for my own food. Cool. But then he had the audacity to get upset when I said I would be heading home alone . He really thought he could treat me like that and I would fuck him? These asshole entitled men, I swear to god, Brenda.”

I stop what I’m doing and turn back towards the mirror. I’m so pissed off just thinking about it. I’m done with trying to find love! If love wants a place in my life, it’s going to have to come get me itself because I’m no longer looking!

Sure, having a little physical fun from time to time is something I’ve enjoyed in the past but lately, I can’t stand the men attached to the fun thing I’m playing with. I just can’t seem to find the right man for me. I’m exhausted. Is it really so much to ask for a kind, handsome man who wants to be my partner?

Now it’s too late. I’m fucking done. I’m on a dating vacation or sabbatical or something and I don’t know if I’ll ever give it another try. Bad date after bad date has me completely burned out. I’m so tired of getting my hopes up only to be spectacularly let down once again.

Brenda is staring at me with wide eyes. She finally blinks and nods her head slowly.

“Yeah, alright. You win. That’s fucking atrocious. Can I interest you in a lavender

wedding instead?”

That snaps all these emotions inside of me. What’s the use of being so high strung about men when I’ve got so much life to live? Fuck ‘em. Fuck ‘em all! I’m out here living my best life, enjoying being single, and living every day to the fullest.

I can’t help but laugh. “Brenda, I adore the hell out of you, but even you couldn’t talk me into that unless there was some sort of crisis going on.”

Brenda giggles. “If it had to be someone, I would want it to be you,” she says, putting her hands on her chest dramatically.

I quickly finish up Brenda’s haircut. She looks fabulous with a modern mullet and I’m glad I could be the one to give it to her. She pays me before she’s on her way.

Brenda was my last client of the night so I throw on my radio and get to work cleaning my station. After sweeping and mopping the floors, scrubbing out the shampoo bowl, making sure everything is turned off, and wiping down my station and chair, I grab my bag and head out the door. I triple check that I’ve locked the door before getting into my car and making my way to my apartment.

Living in a giant apartment building has its pros and cons. On the one hand, I never have to deal with things like lawn care or maintenance. If something breaks all I have to do is go online, submit a ticket, and within a week the cute maintenance man shows up to fix it. Plus, I never feel truly alone. I can hear people coming and going, I can hear people talking outside, I can hear the cars outside my window. On the other hand, I never truly feel alone which makes jerking off pretty fucking awkward.

Thank god I’ve never had a truly noisy neighbor. For a few months there was a couple who lived down the hallway from me who fought almost every night but they were far enough away that I only heard them if I was standing in my kitchen right

next to my fridge. Sure, it was fun to listen to the first few times but after that, it was such a drag.

The two apartments next to mine have gotten new tenants recently but I haven't been able to meet them yet. I'm always so curious when new people move in. Maybe this weekend I'll bake some brownies and knock on their doors to welcome them to the building.

It's not because I'm nosy! No, I'm just trying to be a good neighbor!

If I was really nosy, I would have asked around to the neighbors I already know. None of them have had anything interesting to say lately so it must be just run-of-the-mill average Joe types.

I make my way up the stairs, juggling my keys as I go. At the top of the landing, I turn to the right to face my door, freezing when I hear someone getting ready to leave their apartment in the apartment to my left. That's one of the new people.

Thinking quick, I drop my keys on the floor and kneel down. I want to get a look and introduce myself but I don't want them to think I've been sitting out here waiting for them like some sort of weirdo.

Doing my best to seem cool, calm, and collected, I take my time 'finding' my keys from the floor. The door to the left of mine swings open and nothing could have prepared me for what I'm seeing.

My eyes stare at a pair of purple shins. I look up. Then up. Then up some more. I'm craning my neck all the way back in order to properly gaze upon the face of my new neighbor. He's fucking huge, and purple, and has a fucking tail .

Oh my god. Somehow, without realizing it, a fucking alien has moved in beside me!

Of course I know aliens are real and I even knew there were some coming to live on Earth, at least for a little while. It's been plastered all over the news for the last few years. I would have to be completely off the grid to not know that at this point. But I didn't realize one would be here , in my building, living beside me.

And I certainly wasn't prepared for him to be so hot .

I quickly pick up my keys and stand up. I still have to crane my neck to look up at him. He's gotta be at least two feet taller than me and Jesus Christ, even that is insanely hot. I need to get a grip before I sexually harass my new neighbor.

“Hi,” I say with a wide grin, lifting my hand in a little wave.

The purple, handsome alien grins back, flashing me the sight of his fanged teeth. Oh, I am such a sucker for a nice smile and this guy has the prettiest smile. His fangs are somehow sexy and adorable at the same time. He lifts his hand, mirroring my gesture.

“What's up, buttercup?”

I sputter at the words, unable to keep myself from chuckling. His voice is deep and gravelly, making heat run down my spine.

“Buttercup? I'm not sure we're at the pet names stage of our relationship quite yet, big guy,” I say, popping my hip out and leaning against the wall. I give him a grin.

His eyes widen. He says something in a language I don't understand and I tilt my head to the side. “You don't know much English, do you?”

He shakes his head. He points at something behind his ear and I see some sort of implant. I'm piecing things together, slowly but surely.

“That thing lets you understand what I’m saying?” He nods his head. “But you don’t know enough English to speak back?” He nods again. “Who taught you ‘what’s up, buttercup’?”

He fondly rolls his eyes before walking across the hall and knocking on the door there. We wait a moment before a man opens the door. He looks from the alien, then to me, then back at the alien.

“Yeah? Can I help you?”

The alien says something in his language, points at me, then points at the man in the door with a frown.

“Oh,” the guy says with a grin. Then he looks at me. “Sorry about that. I told Gendry that was how humans greet each other because I thought it was funny.”

Gendry. His name is Gendry. It somehow suits him. I like it.

Looking back at the human, I shrug. “It was kind of adorable. Such a big guy saying something so endearing when first meeting me.”

I watch Gendry’s cheeks turn bright purple and I am fascinated. Would that blush run lower? Could I get his chest to turn that same color? Is he even interested in human men?

Okay, I might be getting ahead of myself here. Time to pull it back down before I do something to make this big, beautiful alien uncomfortable.

Gendry says something before tapping the human and gesturing towards me. The human sighs.

“He says sorry if he’s made you uncomfortable. He’s your new neighbor and he’s delighted to meet you.”

I can’t help but smile, a warmth filling my chest. “The pleasure is all mine,” I say with a wink. So much for pulling myself back. “I’m Aldo.”

“Christian,” the human says, gesturing towards himself and then he points at the alien. “And this is Gendry.”

“I didn’t realize we had new neighbors move in, but I’m so glad I ran into you. Welcome to the building,” I say before chuckling, doing my best to be nonchalant and like I wasn’t just hanging outside my apartment waiting to meet them. “Well, maybe I should say welcome to Earth.”

Gendry smiles at me, showing off the adorable little fangs again. He tucks his long purple hair behind his ear and I have the desire to play with it. I can’t truly be blamed since I am a hairdresser. He would look so cute with shaved sides and a braided top. Or an adorable man bun. Maybe we can work up to me doing his hair.

Gendry looks at Christian then at me. Then he blurts out, “I have to poop,” before running into Christian’s apartment.

Christian looks at me. He blinks a few times before he starts laughing his ass off. I can’t help but laugh as well at how ridiculous all of this is. Not only do I live beside an adorable, giant alien, but he also knows enough English to declare needing to poop.

“Sorry about that,” Christian says, wiping at his eyes. “I told him that meant ‘I need to use the bathroom’. I didn’t think he’d say that in front of cute guys he’s nervous around.”

“You think maybe he thinks I’m cute?” I pretend to tuck some hair behind my ear. “That’s very interesting information, Christian. Thank you.”

Christian bites his bottom lip. “Not a lot of people would call me nice ,” he starts to say, rolling his eyes. “But out of the little bit of kindness I have left in my heart, I think it would probably be nice for me to tell you that Gendry isn’t here to stay. After a year, he’s heading back to his planet.”

“Ah,” I say softly. “An exchange program of sorts.”

“Yeah. Exactly. So if I were you, I wouldn’t get too attached.”

“I would love to attach at the hip, if you know what I mean.”

Christian wrinkles his nose. “I did not need to know that. Eww. Whatever. Have your fun but remember this isn’t like a long term thing. Or do whatever you want, I don’t actually care.” Then he turns around and goes inside his apartment.

As I walk into my own place, I can’t help but ponder what Christian has told me. Sure, Gendry is hot and adorable, but does that mean I actually wanna try starting something up with him. On the other hand, being able to fuck an alien is a once in a lifetime opportunity, even if he’s only here for a year.

I might have sworn off men, but I’m not so sure I was thinking about aliens when I made that decision with myself.

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Gendry

I flop down onto Christian's couch, letting my feet dangle off the arm because it's a bit too small for me. I cover my face with my hands and groan.

"He must think I am an idiot," I say into my hands, feeling my face heat.

"Why does it matter? He's just some guy!"

I peek through my hands. "I know that you are not incapable of sight," I say, narrowing my eyes at Christian. "He is beautiful ."

Aldo is the first human I've met that has stirred emotions like this. He's much shorter than me, even more so than average humans. His skin is a beautiful tan color, his eyes a deep shade of brown. His hair is platinum white, a stark contrast to the rest of him. His voice sounded like honey dripping down the side of a hive.

The way he smiled up at me left me breathless. Could this be how Timalah felt when he first saw Miles? Could this be how it feels to meet your matron ? Your one true partner?

"He didn't seem like anything special to me," Christian says with a shrug, wandering to his kitchen and pulling out two bottles from the fridge. He comes back and hands one to me. "Though, I did kinda like his hair."

I might not be the smartest person alive but I'm smart enough to know it would do me no good to mention that Aldo's hair is the same platinum shade as Ghenie's. I still

don't have a true grasp on what happened between them. Me and all other Layperry share a telepathic bond, but even so, because Ghenie is our leader, he's able to keep certain things to himself. Whatever is going on between him and Christian are one of those things he's chosen to keep private.

"There is something about him that draws me near, though I cannot name it. I wish to get to know him."

"I'm not gonna stop ya," Christian says, tipping his bottle back and sipping at his beer. The food and drink here are so different from that on my planet. Everything is bottled and packaged and bought rather than harvested. I miss finding my own meat. I miss going out to my garden and harvesting my own dinner.

Everything here is gray and concrete. I miss walking barefoot through the grass. I miss hunting. I miss taking care of people as a warrior should.

Even so, I'm not sorry I decided to come here. Already, this has been a wonderful learning experience. I have met so many people, experienced human culture, and been able to see Christian learn to relax again. We may never be best friends, but I am glad to be here with him.

"I have gotten myself a job," I tell Christian, holding up my beer to get his attention.

"Oh yeah? How'd you manage that?"

"I went for a walk and found people on the side of a road, wearing bright orange clothes. They were picking up trash. I gave the one in charge my ear piece and talked to him about what he's doing and how I wanted to help clean up the garbage as well. He told me to come back tomorrow and I would have a spot to help!" I grin over at Christian. "Is that not exciting?"

Christian raises his brow at me. “Buddy. I don’t know how to tell you this, but that is not a job. That is volunteer work.”

“What does that mean?”

“They’re not going to give you any money. You’re going to pick up garbage for free.”

I think about that for a moment before eventually nodding. “That is fine. I’ll still go. I want to help clean up the garbage even if they don’t give me anything in return.”

Christian sighs. “Fine. I’ll come with you tomorrow. I don’t have anything better to do.”

As far as I know, Christian does have a real job that gives him money. He’s back to driving the health emergency truck. I can’t remember the name of it, but he seems to enjoy what he does. Though, I can tell he misses sharing his emergency health truck with Miles.

I still believe that at the end of all this, Christian will come back with me. He misses Miles too much to stay away. And I can’t help but think, despite his prickly demeanor, he wants to get closure with Ghenie. They should kiss, I think that would help smooth everything over, one way or another.

“If that is not a job, then I’ll have to find something else. If only you needed a warrior or a hunter, or something I was naturally good at.”

“I’m sure you’ll find something. If you want help, I can look online at job postings and translate them for you.”

“That would be very kind of you, Christian. Thank you.”

Christian looks away. "It's whatever."

"It is not whatever. It is truly appreciated."

"You're such a sap."

"I don't know what that means but I will take it as a compliment."

Christian chuckles, sitting back in his chair. "Have you thought about anything else you'd like to add to your list?"

Christian thought it would be a fun idea to make a list of all the things I'd like to experience while here on Earth. I have quite a few things on the list already, but as I learn more, more gets put onto the list. I'm sure we won't be able to get through them all but it sure is fun to add to it.

"Today I saw a game on the TV I would like to experience."

"What game?"

"I have forgotten the name," I say slowly, trying desperately to find the right word. "They had a ball that they kicked. There was a lot of running around. It was fascinating."

Christian sets his empty bottle on the table. "Soccer?"

"No, I don't think that's right. I think they called it football?"

"Yeah, that's soccer. Some places call it football and some places call it soccer."

I tilt my head to the side. "It makes far more sense to call it football as people are

kicking the ball with their foot.”

“You’re not wrong,” he says back with a shrug. “We can put that on your list. I’ll look online for a league or something you can try out.”

“Thank you, Christian.”

“Eh, don’t mention it.”

After we’re finished with our beers, I go back to my own apartment. I take a shower which involves me making myself as small as possible so I can get the water over my head. Then I put on a pair of sleeping pants and get myself tucked into my bed.

As I close my eyes, I swear I hear something coming from the wall beside me. Against my better judgement, I roll over in bed and press my ear to the wall, listening.

“Oh fuck!” I hear, followed quickly by a whimper.

I quickly pull my ear away, not wanting to intrude. My cock twitches with interest and I realize with a start, this is the wall I share with Aldo! Those are his noises coming from the wall! Is he pleasuring himself? Is he thinking of me while he’s doing it?

By the Ancestors! I don’t think my cock has ever filled with blood so quickly before.

As much as I want to reach into my sleep pants and stroke myself, that wouldn’t be right. I can’t use his noises to get myself off, not without his permission. Instead, I roll until my back is facing the wall. I close my eyes and do my best to fall asleep, ignoring the way my cock is hard and my heart is racing.

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Aldo

The alarm for the oven beeps and I quickly run over in order to take the brownies out of the oven. They turned out perfect if I say so myself. They're still a little gooey in the middle while the sides have the perfect crunch. One side has walnuts and the other has chocolate chips, that way Gendry has a variety of brownies to pick from.

I have no idea if aliens even like brownies but I sure hope so. This is my way into his good graces. My mama taught me that men can always be won over with food and I'm hoping the same can be said for tall, purple, sexy aliens. It would be incredibly awkward if I found out he's allergic to chocolate or aliens can't have fudge or something like that.

I let them cool before cutting them and arranging them on a plate. The plate is one I painted myself, covered in red mushrooms and a little fairy house in the middle. It'll be a good way to keep the conversation going if it stalls at any point. Plus, I can leave it at his house and have a reason to see him again in the future.

The only issue I see happening is the whole language difference. I could try some charades. I'm not so sure my phone can translate alien dialect yet and I don't necessarily want to rely on our other neighbor to translate for us. Especially not with what I'm hoping will eventually happen.

I can just picture his annoyed look as I ask him to translate 'would you like to come back to my place so I can ride you like a cowboy?'

I am a very stubborn man and when I put my mind to something, I make it happen.

One way or another, I will figure out how to talk to Mr. Tall, Purple, and Sexy.

Quickly checking my reflection one last time, I head outside my apartment to the door beside my own. I give it a knock and wait. A moment passes. And then another. Finally, Gendry opens the door.

His eyes widen as he looks down at me. His eyes land on my hair, staying there for a long time. I wish I could read him, but I don't know him well enough to piece together the emotions playing across his face.

"Hi," I say, lifting up my free hand and waving at him.

"Hi," he says back, smiling at me. He holds up a finger before turning around and darting back inside his house. I'm assuming the gesture was meant to mean wait a moment, so that's exactly what I do.

It only takes a few minutes before Gendry is back, looking awkward and shy, which is really at war with his stature. He's large and in charge, yet so timid and shy. I'm surprised by how into it I am.

Gendry hands me a little device. I turn it over in my hand before realization dawns on me. I carefully put it into my right ear. Gendry reaches over, pressing something and his large finger crushes against the outside of my ear. A shiver runs down my spine at the simple touch.

"There," he says, "can you understand me now?"

I blink a few times, trying to understand what's happening. The ear with the device somehow understands what he's saying but the ear that's open still hears his low, guttural language. It leaves my head spinning.

My free hand goes to my ear, covering it as tightly as I can. “Try again?”

“Can you understand me?”

My face lights up with delight and my insides spark with warmth. “Oh my god! I can understand you!”

Gendry smiles so wide that his little fangs show. They are just as adorable as the first time I saw them. I can’t stop looking at his face, taking him in, checking out every detail.

“The device,” Gendry explains. “I brought it from my home planet.”

“That’s fascinating. I didn’t realize you had such technology!”

“We have much, but we choose to live simple lives as much as possible.”

“I would love to hear about it,” I tell him. I hold up the brownies. “Can I come inside? You can tell me stories of your home planet and in exchange, you can have some of my homemade brownies.”

“Brownies?”

I point at my plate. “They’re a chocolate dessert. Some of them have nuts and some of them have more chocolate. Would you like to try them?”

Gendry looks at the plate before nodding. “I would like to try them. Thank you, Aldo.” He opens the door and I follow him inside. His apartment is scarce, but that’s not entirely surprising. I’m sure he wasn’t allowed to bring all his belongings when he came to Earth.

“You need some more color, Gendry,” I comment, looking around. “Some paintings or something.”

“I was told I was not allowed to add color,” he says, his brows wrinkled. We walk over to his breakfast island in his kitchen. He pulls out two little plates, setting one in front of me and one across from me.

“You’re not allowed to paint the walls, but you’re allowed to have decorations.”

Gendry shakes his head. “I do not want to get too many things. I’m leaving soon and can only take the bags I brought.”

“How soon is soon?”

“About a year. It already feels like it will be too soon. There are so many things I still wish to do.”

I carefully place two brownies on his plate, one with nuts and one with chocolate chips. He smiles at me before taking a bite. I watch as his face morphs into surprise and then delight before he’s eating the entire thing in three bites. I really shouldn’t find that so adorable.

“Oh,” he breathes out, looking back at me. “That was wonderful! You made these?”

“Yeah. It’s my mother’s recipe!”

“She is a genius. These are delicious.”

“Thank you.” Gendry eats the other one just as quickly, eyeing the plate. I roll my eyes and place two more in front of him. “What other things are you hoping to experience while you’re here?”

I have to keep remembering to cover up my other ear while Gendry is talking but otherwise, I can understand him perfectly. His voice is incredibly soothing, the kind I wouldn't mind falling asleep to. Or hearing huskily in my ear while we're fuc--

“Christian calls it a bucket list? Things I wish to do before I leave. So far I have too many things and I just keep adding more.”

“Like what? Give me an example.”

“Like soccer! Have you ever played before? I found a match on the TV and it looks amazing. I want to try it.”

“I've played soccer before,” I tell him with a grin. “I play all the time with my cousins! We try to get together weekly to play. My family is from Mexico and there we call it football.”

“That's what I told Christian! It makes more sense because you're kicking it with your feet.”

My grin stretches so wide my face hurts. It's been so long since I've felt like this, so connected to someone so quickly. Talking with Gendry is easy. He's so laid back and excited about life in a way a lot of people take for granted.

“My cousins and I take our games pretty seriously,” I tell him with a smile. “Sometimes we bring new people to join but they can only come a second time if we all voted to keep them around. I've had past boyfriends kicked out before because of how they acted on the field.”

“Will you teach me?”

“It would be my honor to teach you,” I say. “What else is on your list?”

“I wish to pet a cat. I hear they’re the perfect pet and I haven’t met one yet.”

“There’s a shelter not far from here. We can go volunteer sometime.”

“Together?”

For some reason, my heart skips a beat at the question. Am I really volunteering myself to help Gendry with his Earth bucket list? I’ve sworn off dating, but that was before I knew an alien had moved in next door. It would be fun to mess around with Gendry and find out if all his appendages are size appropriate to the rest of him, but I’m also terrified of growing attached only to have him fly back to his home planet, leaving me heartbroken and alone all over again.

“Yeah,” I say, ignoring all the what ifs and worries. “We can do it together.”

“I would like that. I would like that a lot, Aldo. You are very kind.”

“Oh umm, it’s no big deal. Just being a friendly neighbor,” I say, ignoring the way my cheeks heat at the soft words. Is this an alien thing, to be so forward with one's feelings? Doesn’t he know, here on Earth, we hide shit like that from each other?

“These brownies, they are just a welcome gift?”

“Yeah, something like that. I just wanted to say hello and give you a treat.”

“A human welcome custom,” Gendry says, nodding his head. “Thank you for including me in this gesture. I will remember it for the future.”

Oh great, now I’m accidentally teaching him fake customs. Not that this is fake, because it really is a thing for some neighbors to give each other baked goods when they move in, but also, depending on the area, it’s not the norm. It’s fine. Christian is

his friend and will make sure to explain it better for him. Hopefully.

“Your friend, from across the hall.”

“Christian?”

“Yes. How do you know him?”

“He came to Deltourah during the HLE. He was there for three years before deciding to come back to Earth. When he declared he would come here, I offered to come as well. Instead of staying for three years, I signed up to stay for only one.”

“Interesting,” I say, reaching out and taking a brownie for myself. “Did he not like being there? No offence of course. I’m sure your planet is lovely.”

Gendry tilts his head to the side, thinking. “I cannot say for certain, but I have a guess.”

“Is this some sort of tea? I love tea.”

“Tea? This is not a drink.”

“No, sorry. Umm, there’s a phrase here that means like sharing gossip. You’re spilling the tea.”

“Oh, I see. Yes, I have some tea to spill,” he says slowly, testing out the phrase.

I feel my heart swell within my chest. Just that one sentence has my belly erupting with butterflies. I really shouldn’t find that so adorable but add in the fact that Gendry is built like a brick house yet speaks with such softness, I am a goner.

“Let’s hear it.”

“I think that Christian fell for my Toralleh . Our leader. The two of them always had an antagonizing relationship, but beneath that I believe there were feelings. Something happened that put an even bigger wedge between them and that is when Christian decided to come back here.”

“Oh,” I breathe out, crossing my arm across my middle and leaning back in my seat. “They’re quite literally star-crossed lovers. But this can’t be how their story ends, right? Surely Christian will go back for your Toralleh ,” I ask, testing out the word.

“I think he will,” Gendry says, full of confidence. “Christian will follow his heart.”

“Following your heart sounds like such a fairytale trope.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s like in movies or story books. When everything is said and done, the main characters learn to follow their heart and somehow, that’s always the perfect choice for the situation. I’m not sure real life is quite that straightforward but it’s a lovely notion.”

“I think I understand,” Gendry says slowly. “You are, what is the word, a cynic?”

My mouth drops open in a gasp. “Gendry!” He smirks at me and oh boy, there goes those flutters again. “How dare you! I will have you know that I am the furthest thing to a cynic! I am capable of whimsy and wonder! I just choose not to at the moment.”

“And why not?”

“If you must know,” I say, letting my voice trail off.

“Yes, Aldo, spill the tea.”

I can't help but giggle. I'm creating a monster and I love it. “I've given up following my heart for a little while. I've been burned too many times by men.” Gendry's eyes widen and I can't help myself. Before going on, I add, “ human men. I've had the most rotten luck and I'm ready to give up on human men all together.”

Gendry looks down at the plate in front of him, the tiniest smile playing at his lips. Very softly he says, “that is good to know. About the human men, that is.”

“Yes, well. Don't let it go to your head. Just because I'm open to an alien suitor doesn't mean you'll win me over so easily.”

“That sounds like a challenge.”

I give Gendry a wink. “Maybe it is.”

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Gendry

“Why are we out here?” Christian asks with a whine. He picks up another piece of trash, placing it into the giant garbage bag he’s holding.

“We are volunteering. We are helping the environment. Should you not be happy we are cleaning the Earth you so desperately wish to stay at?”

Christian narrows his eyes in my direction but doesn’t argue further. His movements are more exaggerated and irritated as he picks up a can from the ground and shoves it into his garbage bag.

“Aldo visited me yesterday.”

That catches Christian’s attention. His movements slow down. I pick up another piece of trash as he processes this information.

“Okay,” he says slowly. “Did he want something?”

“He welcomed me to the area with a sweet treat.”

“Is that what the kids are calling it these days?”

I tilt my head to the side. “What do you mean? There were no kids involved.”

“I.. no... Gendry,” Christian says, using his free hand to rub at the back of his neck.

“That’s just a phrase people use when they jokingly mean you’re referring to sex.”

“Oh,” I say, standing up straight and dropping my garbage bag. I feel my cheeks flush with embarrassment. “No. That’s not what we did. There was no sexual relations or anything close. We simply talked and ate brownies.”

“I believe you,” he says right away. “I was just making a joke, it’s okay.”

I pick my bag back up, going back to cleaning up trash. I have no idea why some humans think it’s okay to leave garbage out like this. If this happened on my planet, Ghenie would pass out harsh punishments. We’ve always believed it is our duty to take care of the planet that houses us, why do some humans find that so difficult?

Instead of dwelling on the frustration that comes with thinking about certain humans, I move my thoughts to a different human, one who’s thoroughly caught my attention. I turn towards Christian.

“I have a question.”

Christian perks up. “Yeah?”

“What does it mean when a human changes their hair color?”

I continue picking up garbage, ignoring the way his eyes are on me. When I finally look over, Christian has a small smile on his face. He nods his head.

“That’s a really good sign.”

“Really? But what does it mean? Is it some sort of camouflage technique or something to scare away predators?”

“No, no. It’s more like a mood indicator. Some of us have the ability to project our emotions with our hair.”

I narrow my eyes. That doesn't sound like something humans can do, but who am I to argue with a native? "So what does bright pink mean?"

"Oh, Gendry, really? It was bright pink?" I nod my head and Christian's face lights up. "That's amazing. It means he has romantic feelings for you!"

My heart picks up speed and my skin tingles with delight. Aldo has feelings for me? He's so beautiful and kind, while I am so large and alien. How could he possibly have romantic feelings for me?

"That can't be. I'm an alien."

"Some people look past the skin, even if it's purple, into the man inside, Gendry. I think you should ask him to go on a date with you."

"A date?" I think about the movie I watched last night. It was a romantic comedy, or at least, that's what the TV had called it. It was about two women who fall in love during a medical tragedy. I was expecting it to end in disaster but somehow, they both pulled through and were able to be together in the end. I can admit, I shed more than one tear at the end because it was so beautiful. During the movie, one of the women took the other on a date to see a movie and then walked through a park together. At the end of the date, they shared a soft kiss.

My stomach swoops as I think about possibly doing the same with Aldo. Would he allow me to take him on a date? Would he allow me to duck down and press my lips against his own at the end of it?

I want to find out. I want whatever he's willing to let me have, even if it will only last this year.

"You know what a date is, right? I guess you're used to doing weird athletics to prove

you can mate someone,” Christian says, his brows wrinkling. “That mating ritual is so fucking stupid. What if someone is born with only one leg? Are they just supposed to be alone forever? You shouldn’t have to put on a fucking show just to be with the person you love.”

Ghenie is my Toralleh but even I can see that our ways are outdated. There’s limitations to how we prove ourselves to our mates, I agree with Christian. I also know that it is not my place to question Ghenie’s leadership. Timalah has brought these things up to Ghenie in the past and the two of them have talked about it at great lengths.

It wouldn’t surprise me if things are already different by the time I get back to my home planet. Ghenie is our leader. It is his mission to speak with our Ancestors, to allow them to help him lead our people. They will help guide him into this next stage. They will help him develop a new and better way to bring our matches together, I have no doubt.

“In a movie I watched, two people went to a theater together and then went for a walk. I could do something like that with Aldo.”

Christian snaps out of his terrible mood when thinking about our mating rituals, focusing on explaining different date ideas to me instead.

“As long as you’re spending time together, getting to know each other better, and having a nice time, that’s all that matters. Pretty much anything can become a date as long as your intention is to be with each other.”

I nod along as he explains. “That makes sense. So having brownies and talking could be a date?”

“Yes. But usually, it’s only a date when you’re both on the same page about it being a

date.”

“A conscious decision by both parties involved,” I murmur. I reach down and pick up some more trash as we talk. “I am unsure what Aldo would enjoy as a date, but I could simply ask him next time I see him. He promised to play soccer with me.”

“That’s a good sign, that he’s promising to spend time with you in the future.”

Christian’s words fill me with warmth. There’s a chance this is going to work out. There’s a chance I might have a shot at wooing Aldo. My heart flutters pleasantly every time I think about him. It’s maddening and exhilarating all at once.

As we finish up and start to head to our apartment, I nudge Christian with my elbow. “Aldo mentioned he’s given up on wonder and whimsy because he has been burned too many times by human men in the past. Do you think I’ll be the same?”

Christian stops and looks up at me. He places a hand on my shoulder. “I think you’re a good man, Gendry. You would never do something to hurt someone on purpose. My only caution is remembering you’re not staying here forever. As long as you’re both okay with that, I vote that you go for it.”

“You’ve given me much to think about. Thank you, Christian.”

“Don’t mention it,” he says, starting to walk again. “Ever.”

I can’t stop myself from chuckling as I follow behind Christian. My eyes dart around the streeting, taking in all the signs and shops as we walk. Everything is so flashy and bright, so much more obscene than I’m used to. On my home planet, we do our best to live a simple life but here, it’s so different. I’m enjoying everything Earth has to offer, but I can admit I miss being home.

One shop has a glowing pair of scissors. It makes me pause, thinking about Aldo. To my surprise, when I look through the window, I find him standing inside!

“Christian! Aldo is inside!”

Christian slows down, following my gaze. “I think he works here.”

“I must go in and say hello.”

“You could ask him for a haircut while you’re at it. You have money on you, right?”

“Of course! I will pay him for his services. Would you like to come with me?”

“And listen to you awkwardly flirt? Absolutely not. I’ll talk to you later.”

Before I can argue, Christian turns and leaves. I think about chasing him down for only a moment before I think better of it. Christian has shown much of himself to me today through our conversation. It’s best to leave things as they are before I push too much. He’s not a very forthcoming man, but when he shows slivers of himself, it paints a wonderful picture of a truly caring man. One just has to find it beneath miles of cynicism and grunts.

I step inside the shop, looking around in wonder. Everything is so bright. There’s three stations with chairs, giant mirrors, and counters. There are weird looking contraptions towards the back that look like a giant ball goes over someone’s head. Terrifying. There’s also a seat that tips back into a sink which looks mildly interesting.

The walls are a lovely blue color with splashes and dots of a variety of colors. I instantly feel a smile stretch across my lips. This place makes me feel happy, I can’t describe why, but it does.

The smells however, I could really do without. There's some sort of chemicals in the air that leave my head feeling light and my nose wrinkling.

Aldo looks over at me, a flash of surprise going across his features before he's smiling.

"Hi, Gendry! I wasn't expecting you!"

"Hello," I say in English, hoping my pronunciation is okay. By the look on his face, I'm guessing I nailed it.

The woman in Aldo's chair turns around. I feel her eyes slide up and down my body. When Aldo does it, I'm filled with warmth, but as she does it, I find that I don't enjoy it.

"I didn't realize I liked 'em big and purple," she says to Aldo with a giggle.

"Hush," he says, laying a piece of foil over her face and turning the chair around so she can't keep staring at me. "One second. I'll be right back," he says to her before walking over to me.

"What's brought you here, Gendry?"

I reach into my pocket and pull out my translator, handing it over to Aldo. He takes it and places it into his ear, looking up at me with soft eyes.

"I saw you through the window while I was walking home."

"Oh. Did you need something?"

I shake my head. "I just wanted to see you. Christian said I should ask you for a

haircut.”

“I can do that, but you’ll have to wait. I’m finishing up someone right now.”

“I can wait,” I say right away.

Aldo gives me a soft smile. He gestures towards a plush couch. “There’s coffee if you’d like a cup while you wait. I won’t be too long, I promise.”

I sit down and watch him walk back over to his station. As he goes, my eyes dart down to his ass. His jeans are light gray and hug him just right. When I realize I’m staring, I look back up, only to find him watching me in the reflection of the giant mirror.

My cheeks heat at being caught but the smirk he throws my way lightens the embarrassment. I think he might like that I was taking him in. I like what I see, and I’m not ashamed of that.

I look over at the little coffee machine they have here. As much as a cup of warm coffee sounds good, I have no idea how to work this contraption and it’s probably best I just sit and wait. I flip through a magazine. I can’t read the words but there are some pictures I can look at.

I have no idea how long I wait but eventually, the woman in Aldo’s seat stands up. They walk over to the counter to the side of the shop. They continue to chat as she pays before finally leaving with a lingering glance in my direction.

“Okay, Gendry,” Aldo says, walking back to his station. “Let me clean this up and then I’m all yours.”

Warmth floods through me without my permission. His words strike a chord within

me, tingling sensations rushing through my extremities towards the center of my chest where my heart lies. I barely know Aldo but already I want him to be mine.

Aldo's hair is still that lovely shade of pink. Christian's words play over and over in head. This shade means he likes me. But then again, it was pink while he worked on the last person's hair. Does that mean he likes her as well?

By the Ancestors, these humans are complicated.

"There we go! Hop into my chair, handsome." Warmth floods me once more. I don't understand how this human can sway my insides so thoroughly. What is it about him that has me feeling this way? Why has no one stirred me quite like Aldo?

I get into the chair and he chuckles, hitting a button and making the chair slowly get lower and lower. Once he has me at the perfect height, the chair stops.

"There we go. Now I can actually work on your head. I'm gonna put my hands in your hair now, is that okay?"

"Of course. It would be difficult for you to work on my hair without touching it."

"True," he says with a warm laugh. The sound rings through the room and tugs at my insides. Everything he does makes me feel something. "I didn't want to surprise you, that's all."

Aldo touches my hair and a shiver runs down my spine. Maybe I didn't think this through properly. Sure, I wanted to spend more time with Aldo but now that his hands are actually touching me, I'm not sure I will be able to keep myself from not growing wet and aroused. I don't want to make him uncomfortable but his touch feels so good.

“What are you thinking? Please tell me you’re not planning something super short. Your hair is so beautiful and long.”

“My usual style would be shaved around my ears and the back but keeping the rest long. I like being able to braid it back and away from my face.”

“That sounds perfect,” Aldo says, smiling at me in the reflection of the mirror. “Would you like me to shampoo you?”

I tilt my head to the side. “What?”

Aldo chuckles and nods towards the back of the room where the sink sits. “I can wash your hair as part of your haircut. It feels really nice.”

“Oh,” I breathe out. “Okay. I would like the full human experience, please.”

Aldo gives me a wink. “You got it. Follow me.”

I carefully move over to the sink. I feel like I have too much leg and I have to curl my tail around my thigh to keep it out of the way but with a bit of squirming and adjusting, I get myself into the chair and tilted back so that Aldo can wash my hair.

“What should I do about your antennae?”

“Try not to touch them, please. They can be rather sensitive and I have special oils I use to keep them clean.”

“Got it. They might get a little wet, will that be okay or would you rather I put a cloth over them?”

“If they get a little wet, that is fine. Thank you for asking, Aldo.” I look up at him,

seeing his face upside down from this angle. Somehow, even at this silly angle, his beauty is apparent. I'm not sure any angle could make him any less beautiful. It's a good thing he cannot connect telepathically with me or else he'd be able to know exactly what the cause of my blush is.

"No problem. I wanna make sure you're well taken care of," he says with a grin before turning on the water. He splashes just a tiny bit against my hair. "How's the temperature? Too hot? Too cold?"

I smile. "It's just right."

"Just like you," he says before getting my hair wet. I stare up at him as he works, his eyes glancing down at me a few times before he's giggling. He taps my forehead gently. "Gendry, close your eyes. Humans don't stare while they're getting their hair washed usually."

"My apologies," I quickly say, slamming my eyelids shut.

"It's okay. It's nice to know you think I'm pretty enough to stare, but this is supposed to feel nice and relaxing. Just enjoy the feeling, okay?"

I do as I'm asked, keeping my eyes closed as Aldo gets my hair wet. I hear a squelch before his fingers are dancing over my scalp, lathering the soap into my hair. Oh, that feels nice. Really nice.

Without my permission, a rumble overtakes my chest, something between a content growl and purr.

"Someone is enjoying this, hmm? That's adorable, I had no idea you could purr like that."

In all honesty, neither did I. I don't think I've ever purred before, but it's not completely unheard of, especially when someone is around their matron . Aldo sounds pleased by the purring so I don't try to calm myself.

"Feels nice," I murmur as Aldo washes my hair. He massages my scalp, runs his fingers over my ears, and is careful not to get my antennae wet. I melt against the seat, completely relaxed. I've never had someone wash my hair like this before. I normally shear my own hair back home.

Far too soon, Aldo turns off the water. "Are you still awake, Gendry?" Aldo asks with a chuckle. "It's time to sit up and move over to my chair."

I sit up with a bit of difficulty, allowing Aldo to wrap my hair in a towel to keep from dripping all over as we move back to his chair. Once I sit down, Aldo gets to work drying my hair with the towel before wrapping a plastic sheet around my shoulders.

Aldo runs his fingers through my hair. I watch him in the reflection of the mirror, my insides warm, my body relaxed. So far, this has been the most wonderful experience and I'm so happy to be experiencing it with Aldo. Somehow, I feel closer to him just by allowing him to cut my hair.

"Let's get the dead ends cut and then we can shave the sides," Aldo says, picking up a comb and a pair of scissors. "God, your hair is so fucking pretty. So many people would kill for this color."

"Your hair is pretty as well. The pink really suits you," I say, ignoring the way my cheeks heat up. I clear my throat. "Though, I think any color would be pretty on you."

"Oh, you are such a charmer, Gendry."

"Charmer? What does that mean? Is it something good?"

Aldo starts cutting my hair, humming as he thinks. “It means that you say charming things that flatter me.”

“I am only speaking the truth.”

Aldo has a small smile across his lips as he snips the ends of my hair. “You’re not like anyone I’ve ever met before.”

“Is that a good thing?”

“It’s a great thing,” he says, looking at me in the mirror and giving me a wink.

“May I ask you a question?”

Aldo nods. “You can ask me anything.”

“Can you change your hair color at will? Or is it only when you’re feeling certain emotions?”

Aldo’s hands still and he glances up at me in confusion. “What do you mean?”

“Christian explained that human hair color is based on what the human is feeling. He said that pink meant you felt warmly towards me.”

“Oh my god,” Aldo murmurs, shaking his head. He covers his face with his hand for a moment before giggles are bursting forth, almost like it’s against his permission.

“Oh my god, he’s such an ass.”

“Why do I have a feeling he was fooling me?”

“Because he absolutely was! I dye my hair using chemicals, Gendry.”

“Oh,” I say slowly, understanding washes over me. With that understanding comes embarrassment. “Oh no. I’m sorry.”

Aldo’s giggling fades. “Why are you sorry? It’s not your fault your friend bullies you.”

“I could have made you uncomfortable by implying you feel warmly towards me.”

“I’m not uncomfortable,” Aldo says, going back to trimming my hair. “And you haven’t implied anything that isn’t true. I’ve only known you a short time, but I really enjoy the little time we’ve spent together. I’d love to continue getting to know you, Gendry.”

“Are you certain?”

“I don’t do things I don’t want to do. I have no issue telling people no. When I say I want to spend time with you, it’s the truth.”

I hum happily. Aldo’s voice washes over me. I think I could listen to him speak all day and never grow bored. His words sit against my chest, filling me with emotion. He wants to spend time with me as much as I want to spend time with him. Could he be feeling the same type of sensations inside his chest that I’m feeling? Could he crave learning about me the same way I want to learn about him?

“Now I’m gonna buzz the sides. It can be a little loud around your ears, okay?”

Aldo shaves the sides of my head, careful around my ears. He also does the back, making sure it’s all even. Once he’s done, he brushes the stray hairs away from my head and the back of my neck.

“What do you think?”

Aldo gives me a handheld mirror, spinning the chair around so I can see the back of my head. Everything looks exactly as I wanted. He's done a wonderful job and made sure I felt heard and taken care of the entire time. I can see why he's successful in this profession.

"It's wonderful. You've done a perfect job, Aldo. Would you mind braiding it back for me?"

"It would be my pleasure," Aldo says with a grin. He tries to lower the chair but it's as low as it will go. With a groan, he walks away and comes back with a stepping stool, setting it behind the chair and standing up on it. "You're so fucking tall!"

"And you're so short."

"You're lucky I find men taller than me extremely sexy," Aldo says, running his fingers through the top of my hair and pulling it back.

"Very lucky indeed," I say, my face bright with a blush. I've never felt this way before, never flirted or shown interest in another person. There was no one back home who inspired me in such a way.

"Now is probably a wonderful time for me to ask if you have a lovely lady or handsome gentleman waiting back home for you," Aldo says as he starts to braid my hair back. He's doing a single braid down the middle, careful not to touch the antennae on my forehead.

"My species doesn't have gender the way your planet does. We all possess the same parts and almost all of us consider ourselves men." I think for a moment, remembering a medical program I watched last week. It's amazing the types of things I have learned from the television. "I think the closest way to describe us that you would understand would be intersex?" Then I remember Aldo's original question.

“But no, I do not have anyone on a romantic level waiting for me back home.”

Aldo looks at me in the reflection of the mirror. “That’s really interesting, Gendry. Thank you for sharing that with me,” he says, nodding his head before looking back at his hands. “And that’s really good to know. About the romantic partner. I’m glad.”

“As am I. Can we spend more time together? Sometime soon?”

Aldo finishes the braid, tying it at the end. He places the end of my braid over my shoulder. “Absolutely. Do you have plans this weekend?”

“I am free.”

“Great. I’ll meet you outside your apartment in the morning. Let’s plan for 9. Wear something comfortable.”

I smile so wide that my cheeks ache. “I look forward to it.”

Standing up, I follow Aldo to the counter so that I can pay for my haircut. This entire experience feels like a dream and my head feels like I am floating.

“I’ll see you on Saturday,” Aldo says, reaching across the counter and squeezing my wrist. “It’s a date.”

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Aldo

I tie my laces before standing up and swinging my bag over my shoulder. After triple checking that I have my keys and phone, I head outside. I make a startled noise as I realize Gendry is already outside my door, waiting for me.

“Good morning,” I say once I’ve gotten my racing heart under control. “Fancy meeting you here.”

Gendry tilts his head to the side in a way that makes my stomach swoop with fondness. He always does that when I say something confusing or a phrase he doesn’t quite understand. He hands me the translating device and I stick it into my ear so I can understand him.

“Good morning. Was this not the correct place to meet you? Should I have waited for you to knock on my door? Have I messed up a human ritual again?”

“Absolutely not. You’re perfect,” I tell him seriously, reaching out and squeezing his upper arm. Dios mío, those arms are ridiculously muscled in a way that makes my cock twitch with interest. I need to keep myself under control because these shorts will do nothing to hide an erection.

Gendry stares down at me, his eyes achingly soft. “You charmer,” he says, making me chuckle.

“Look at you! Learning all the lingo.”

“I have a great teacher.”

“Come on,” I say, placing my hand in the crook of Gendry’s arm. We walk down the hallway. “We’ve got some place to be and I don’t want to be late. If we’re late, I will get teased mercilessly.”

“I do not wish to see someone tease you.”

“It’s okay, Gendry. It’s just some of my cousins and their friends.”

“You have family here?”

I nod my head as we make our way outside. The air is crisp and the wind has a chill to it. The sun is out and by noon, it’ll be ridiculously hot but for now, it’s the perfect weather for being active.

“My mother and her sisters immigrated here at the same time. They started on a visa but then they worked really hard to get their green card. My cousins and I were all born here. We were all raised to know English and Spanish which I’ve always been incredibly proud of, being able to stay true to my heritage while also being able to understand everyone here.”

“That is incredible,” Gendry says, awe tinting his voice. “Learning multiple languages is a feat worthy of praise.”

I duck my head, smiling. “Thank you.” I bite my bottom lip for a moment. “Sometimes I still feel like an outsider. When I was younger I would speak Spanish at school with my cousins and people thought it was weird. Sometimes people make me feel like an outsider, but I like it here. It’s my home.”

“I’m sorry people have made you feel like that.”

“Thankfully, this city is a melting pot of people. Diversity makes a city better and I’m proud to be a part of it. It’s probably why you fit in with us so well,” I add with a grin, hitting my hip against Gendry’s leg. He stumbles before correcting himself, turning towards me with a frown.

“Are you alright?”

I chuckle. “I’m good. I just wanted to shove you a little bit. It was an affectionate gesture.”

Gendry is wearing a pair of shorts that cut off above his knees, his shirt is sleeveless. His tail swings behind him and he’s careful not to let it hit anyone as we walk down the street. This is the first time I’ve noticed that Gendry doesn’t really have hair anywhere on his body but for his head. His legs and arms have none. Interesting.

There’s so much dark purple skin on display and it’s taking all of my effort not to stare at him. He’s so hot and I know what I’ll be thinking about tonight when I’m home alone with my hand wrapped around myself.

“This way,” I tell him, grabbing his hand and pulling him over towards the park near our apartment building. “I hope you’re feeling limber and loose, Gendry, because we’re about to play some soccer.”

Gendry’s face lights up with the brightest smile I’ve ever seen. His eyes shine with excitement and I can’t stop looking at his adorable little fangs.

“Really?”

He sounds like a kid who’s been told he’s allowed to stay up late. It’s adorable. “Yes, really.”

Gendry hip checks me but because of his size and the fact that I wasn't ready for it, he plows me over. I sprawl into the grass, letting out a gasp of surprise.

“Oh gods! I'm so sorry, Aldo! I was trying to do the affectionate gesture back at you.”

I sit up, giving him a thumbs up. “All good! I'm okay!”

“Maybe I should go back home.”

I jump to my feet and grab Gendry by the front of his shirt before he can run away. “Absolutely not. We're here and we're going to play some football. Don't you dare go.”

Gendry blinks down at me. “You're quite scary when you are dominant like this.”

“Thank you,” I say because I'm not really sure how I'm supposed to respond to a comment like that. “Hopefully not scary enough to scare you away.”

Gendry looks down at himself before looking back at me. “I am not afraid,” he says slowly. It takes me far too long to realize what he's implying and when I finally get it, my body warms all over.

Oh.

Oh .

He enjoyed that I was dominant despite our size difference. Okay, that's good to know and something I'll keep in mind as we continue to spend time together. I have no idea where this relationship is going, or if it's a relationship at all, but the more I get to know Gendry the more I want to see this through to the very end.

“Come on,” I say, grabbing his wrist. “My cousins are over here and if we keep them waiting, they’ll start cat-calling.”

“What does a cat have to do with playing football?”

“I mean, they’ll start teasing us and making kissing noises.”

Gendry startles. “Kissing noises? After I hit you to the ground? Do you often bring giant aliens who push you down to meet your cousins?”

I squeeze his wrist, smiling up at him. “Nope. You’re the first. I hope you feel special.”

“I do,” he says seriously. “You make me feel very special.”

I open my mouth to respond but before I can, Carlos is jumping into the conversation.

“Aldo!” Carlos calls out, making us both look up. “You’re the last one to arrive. Not that any of us are surprised.”

There are chuckles all around. I shake my head, letting out a snort as I walk over to the group waiting for us. Carlos, Benny, Miguel, Hector, Sal, and Marcus are all here. They’ve brought a few friends along with Benny and Hector’s partners. Perfect numbers for a six on six match.

“Thanks for waiting for us,” I say, clasping Carlos on the shoulder and giving it a squeeze.

“Of course. We couldn’t start without you.”

“And why is that?”

“We were curious about who your mysterious extra player was,” Sal says with a grin, his eyes darting between Gendry and I. “The wait was worth it.”

I rub the back of my neck before pulling my bag off my shoulder. I turn towards Gendry, waving a hand in front of him. “Everyone, this is Gendry. He’s my neighbor and I promised I would take him to a proper football match,” I explain. “Please go easy on him. He’s never played before.”

“Nice to meet you,” Carlos says with a wave. “I’m Carlos.” Then he points everyone out including Page and Michelle, Benny and Hector’s partners.

As the introductions are happening, I walk over to the picnic table near the field. “Hey, Carmen,” I say in greeting to my niece. “It’s been a while since I’ve seen you at one of these things.”

Carmen lets out a little sigh. My niece is 14 years old and knee deep in all the worst parts of being a teenager. Carmen is Benny’s daughter. He had her when he was just 18. I feel way too young to have a teenage niece but here we are.

“My boyfriend broke up with me and Papi didn’t want me at home alone wallowing in self pity.”

“Your Papi is very wise.” Then I wince. “Well, he is now. Don’t ask me about when he was your age.”

Carmen giggles. “I’ll keep score.” Then she looks over at Gendry, her cheeks pinkening. “Is that your boyfriend? He’s so big , Aldo!”

“Dios mío, Carmen! Don’t talk like that!” I walk away, leaving my niece a mess of giggles as I go. I’m happy that frown has faded and I’ve given her a moment of joy even if it means it’s at my own expense.

I run onto the field, joining the guys already out here warming up. I kick the ball a few times, do a few stretches, and then run over to Gendry, pulling him onto the field.

“Enough chatting,” I tell him with a laugh. “I brought you here to play. Come on.”

“They can’t understand me,” he says softly. “I don’t know what I’m doing.”

I frown, completely forgetting that Gendry doesn’t speak English. I make a mental note to stick around so I can help translate for my cousins.

“Don’t let the ball touch your hands. Don’t use your body against other people too much, especially because you’re so much bigger than most of us,” I explain with a grin.

“Speak for yourself,” Hector calls out, slapping his belly.

“I said most of us!”

“We can’t all be as tiny as you, pequeño!” Sal says, stealing the ball from me and kicking it over to Michelle. She grins in my direction, probably overjoyed to no longer be the newest addition to our group.

“There’s a lot of talking going on when we were here to play some football!”

“Skins and shirts?” Benny asks, running down the field and holding up his hand for Michelle to pass. She does and he takes it, turning, and dribbling it back towards us.

“We usually split couples up but today, I think we’ll allow Aldo and Gendry on the same team?” There’s a cheer of agreement from my cousins. The teams end up with myself, Gendry, Carlos, Hector, Benny, and Sal on a team. The rest are on the other team.

We quickly strip out of our shirts, tossing them onto the table by Carmen. She picks mine up and sniffs it, making a disgusted face that makes Gendry chuckle.

I can't stop staring at Gendry now that his shirt is off. His stomach is toned and hard, his pecs have the most adorable purple nipples on them. I can't stop thinking about running my hands all over his purple skin or feeling those muscles lifting me up as he fu--

“We start with the ball,” I say to Gendry, doing my best to cut my thirsty thoughts off before I embarrass myself. “We have a rule where whoever is the newest to the game starts with the ball. And that would be you today.”

“Okay,” he says slowly. “What do I do with it?”

I set it on the ground and pat him on the shoulder which is now naked. His skin is hot against my palm and it makes my mouth run dry. “Now? Now we play some football.”

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:48 am

Gendry

A hearty laugh leaves me without my permission, my chest feeling warm and bright. I run down the field, parallel to Sal, my teammate. He's excellent at this game. They're all excellent at this game.

Sal passes me the ball and I just barely keep myself from tripping over it. It connects with the toe of my shoe, sailing down the field. I frown with frustration for a moment before Benny is chasing after it, intercepting it, and turning back towards the goal.

Benny does a move where he flips the ball over his back, perfectly passing it to Aldo who was down by the goal, waiting. Aldo takes the shot and the ball sails past Page into the goal.

"Let's fucking go," Aldo cries out, turning towards Benny and grabbing him in a headlock. He pulls Benny down so he can mess up his hair.

In response, Benny grabs Aldo around the waist, lifting him up in the air to celebrate his goal. Running over to them, I wrap my arms around them both, lifting them both up in the air. They make a noise of surprise before they're slapping my shoulders in celebration.

"Jesus, your boyfriend is strong! Why is he lifting us like this?"

I look at Aldo, startling at how close our faces are. I carefully set them both down.

"I was joining in on your celebration rituals," I say with a frown. "Have I done it

wrong?”

Aldo shakes his head, still breathless with laughter. “You were perfect.” Then he turns towards Benny. “He was copying your celebration.”

“Oh,” Benny says then nods. “That makes sense. Next time warn me before you’re lifting me like I weigh nothing, big guy,” Benny says to me, slapping my shoulder.

We return the ball to the center of the field in order to continue playing. My chest is bright with joy as I run down the field, trying to steal the ball from Michelle. She cackles as she darts past me, my giant figure making me less agile than her.

I’ll have to bring a ball back with me to my planet and introduce my warrior brothers to this game. We have enough fields to make it work and it would be a wonderful bonding exercise for us all to play together.

I get the ball and head down the field but someone is in my way. Aldo is beside me and I gently pass it to him, using the side of my foot the way he showed me. He smiles so wide, breathtaking in his beauty. Instead of running down the field, he passes it right back to me.

Giddiness warms my stomach. I pass it back and after that, he passes it back. We’re both giggling as we pass it back and forth in quick succession, keeping it away from the other team. Finally, I pass it to him one last time right in front of the goal.

Aldo shoots and he scores.

Wanting to continue with the human ritual of celebration, I grab him around the waist. Then I freeze, remembering Benny’s warning.

“May I lift you?”

Aldo grins from ear to ear. “Hell yeah!”

I lift him up, surprised by how light he is. His skin is hot and sweaty against my palms. I lift him over my head, spinning him until we’re all giggling with excitement. Then I set him on my right shoulder, allowing him to sit there and look down at everyone present.

“Holy shit! Is this what it’s like to be tall? You all look like ants down there!”

“That’s how we feel when we have to look down at you, Aldo!”

I pull Aldo off my shoulder and set him on the ground. My brain feels light, overwhelmed by how it felt to have Aldo’s body against mine like that with only a pair of shorts separating us. I shake my head, trying to expel the thoughts, not wanting to have an erection while running down the field.

Aldo gives me a look, like maybe he knows exactly what I’m thinking. My purple cheeks darken and I take off running down the field, chasing after the ball before I say something I shouldn’t, like asking him to come back to my apartment with me and shower with me so we can get dirty all over again a different way.

I’ve never had urges quite like this before. Aldo makes me feel things I’ve never felt before. I want to explore these feelings with him, but would he actually want that?

We play for about two hours and by the time we’re done, the sun is peaking in the sky, making all of us pink and sweaty. Even my purple skin has a red tint to it that it didn’t have when I woke up this morning.

Hector and Sal both slap my back. “You did great out there!”

“Yeah,” Benny says with a grin. “Especially for your first time playing.”

Carlos nods his head. “Aldo can bring you anytime. Open invitation to keep playing with us.”

My chest feels near bursting with happiness at the invitation. Eventually, Aldo and I pack up our things, get our shirts back on, and head back towards our apartment building. Aldo digs through his bag and hands me an orange.

“These always hit different after playing. Somehow they taste even more delicious than usual. Trust me,” he says, taking out his own and starting to peel it. We’re careful to hold on to the peels, placing them in a little baggie that Aldo has.

I take my first bite and immediately have to agree with Aldo. The juices are refreshing after so much running, the sweetness making my mouth water. It’s the perfect snack for our travel back home.

“We have a fruit that is very similar on my home planet,” I tell Aldo, popping another slice into my mouth. “Though it’s green in color and more sour.”

“That’s so interesting.” Aldo takes a bite before looking up with a tentative smile. “I’d love to try it someday.”

He says it so easily. I stop in my tracks, my body locking up. Aldo makes a surprised noise and stops with me.

“Truly?”

Aldo looks down at the orange in his hands and I so desperately wish I could dart into his mind and hear what thoughts are moving around inside his head. But I don’t. Aldo deserves privacy from me. I’ve not been welcomed inside his head.

Finally, he looks up. “Truly,” he says, just barely loud enough for me to hear. “I

really enjoy your company, Gendry. I shouldn't be talking about feelings yet, it's way too soon. But I would be lying if I said I didn't have feelings for you already. I don't know where this is going, especially with your departure just around the corner, but I don't care."

My heart is pounding inside my chest, making it hard to breathe. Aldo has said everything I've been feeling since I've met him.

"You are the most beautiful man I have ever laid eyes on and I can't stop thinking about you. You make me feel things I have never felt before."

Aldo smiles, his cheeks brightening. "I'm glad we're on the same page," he finally says, starting to walk once more. I quickly follow his lead, not wanting to be left behind.

I have no idea what this means, only that we both have feelings for each other. Back home, I would talk to Ghenie about this, even ask him to arrange my matron ritual so that I could properly win Aldo's hand in front of my people and the ancestors. I would dive into the maze below our town square and find Aldo waiting for me at the end of it.

I would show myself worthy of his affections.

But we're on Earth and he is human. I have to win his affections in other ways.

Quickly finishing my orange, I reach out and take his free hand in my own. He startles for a moment before he squeezes my hand, carefully lacing our fingers together. My stomach feels like I might throw up and my head feels light enough to lift me right off the ground.

"Thank you," I tell him. "Today was everything I hoped soccer would be and it was

made even better by you sharing it with me. I enjoyed getting to know your family.”

“I’m glad they behaved themselves,” Aldo says, shaking his head. “It’s a high compliment that they invited you to come back. I once invited a boyfriend who was banned from ever stepping foot on a field with my cousins in the future. I broke up with him afterwards because he reacted like an entitled brat.”

I hum as I listen. “He sounds like, umm what’s the word? Right. He sounds like a douche nugget.”

Aldo sputters, almost spitting out the last slice of his orange. “Oh my god! Who taught you that?”

“Christian. Did I say it wrong?”

“Absolutely not. You’re perfect,” he says quickly. Does he have any idea what that phrase does to me? Does he know how I would fall to my knees and worship him just to hear him breathe that once more? Does he have any idea the power he holds over me?

“Thank you, Aldo.”

We walk in silence for a bit before Aldo nudges me with his hip. “What else is on your Earth experience list?”

“I’d like to eat a macaron.”

“Okay. I know a place where we can get some. What else?”

There goes my heart again, racing with affection because Aldo is showing me kindness. He’s going above and beyond for me. He makes me feel special in so many

ways just by being himself.

“I have recently added a few things,” I say slowly, ignoring the flutter in my chest. “Things meant for a special person only.”

Aldo looks up at me. He narrows his eyes for a moment before grinning. “Things like what, Gendry? I think maybe I’d like to hear this new list.”

I bite my bottom lip. “I’d like to experience a few earthly pleasures.”

“Oh,” Aldo says slowly. “Oh, Gendry. I would love to help you with this list. If you’d let me.”

“I would let you,” I say straight away. We walk into our apartment building and head down the hall towards our doors. Disappointment sits like cement in the pit of my stomach, sad that our time together is already coming to a close. “I would very much like that special person to be you.”

We get to our doors and pause. Aldo takes out his keys, fidgeting with them between his fingers. He looks up at me. “I had a wonderful time together, Gendry.”

“As did I. Thank you again for everything.” I turn towards my door but Aldo reaches out and snags my wrist.

“Wait,” he breathes out, looking up at me. His eyes dart between my own. “It’s customary for you to kiss your date if the date has gone exceptionally well.”

I open my mouth to respond but can’t find the words to say. Excitement and trepidation equally sit in my stomach.

“Today went really well, wouldn’t you say?”

“Yes.”

“Then I think you should kiss me, Gendry.”

I move without thinking, cupping Aldo’s face between my giant palms. He sucks in a shaky breath and closes his eyes. I move down until our lips are merely breaths apart.

“It would be my greatest honor to kiss you. Thank you,” I whisper before closing my eyes and touching my lips to his.

Kissing Aldo in my dreams was lovely. Kissing Aldo in real life is indescribable.

Aldo’s hands come up to my chest, resting over my racing heart. He tilts his head slightly, getting a better angle. When his lips move, mine dance to follow his lead.

My head is in the clouds like never before. I’ve kissed people back home, but none of them made me feel like this. None of them made me crave more . I want everything Aldo is willing to give me. I want all of him if he’ll let me.

When Aldo’s lips open, I dart my tongue out, meeting his halfway. The taste of him against my tongue is transcendent. One taste and already I’m addicted. I will never get enough of him, even if I had a hundred thousand years to explore and learn his body, his taste, his sounds.

My body heats all over and my cock fills with blood, want surges through me. Nothing in this world could make me stop kissing Aldo.

Except for our neighbor stepping outside and clearing his throat.

Aldo jumps back in surprise and I make a wounded noise at the back of my throat. Looking down, I see the front of his shorts tented just as much as mine are. I turn and

look at Christian, glaring in his direction.

“Hey, don’t growl at me,” he says, holding up his hands in surrender. “If you wanna make out, it’s usually customary to do that inside your apartment, not out in the hall.”

I turn towards Aldo, grabbing his wrist and pulling him towards my door.

“Hey, wait,” he says, pulling away. I make another wounded noise that he chuckles at, tapping the center of my chest. “It’s okay. I think we could both use a cold shower after that. There’s no rush, okay? We’ll get to all of that and more in due time.”

“But,” I say, sticking out my bottom lip. “I want you, Aldo.”

He smiles up at me. “I want you too. But we have time. Let’s not rush it. It’ll make it so much better if we take our time.”

“You guys are still talking about boning in a public space,” Christian helpfully says, leaning against the wall and watching us. I growl at him, showing him my fangs. He just laughs at me.

“Okay,” I say slowly. “I will go take a cold shower, as you’ve said. Thank you for today.”

Aldo gets up on his tip toes and pulls me down so he can give my cheek one last kiss before he’s ducking into his own apartment.

“So,” Christian says slowly. “Do I need to talk to you about the birds and the bees?”

“I don’t know what birds and bees have to do with sex, but I’m well aware of the mechanics, thank you very much.”

“Just making sure,” Christian says, slapping my shoulder. “I’m going to pick up some takeout. Need anything?”

I sigh, shaking my head. “Just a cold shower,” I say before walking into my apartment and closing the door, ignoring Christian’s chuckles as he walks down the hall. We’ll see who’s giggling when we’re back on Deltourah and he’s kissing Ghenie.

Despite the abrupt ending to our kiss, Aldo is right. We shouldn’t rush into anything. We can take our time and really enjoy this time we have together before we need to make big decisions.

With that in mind, I head to the bathroom for a cold shower.

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:48 am

Aldo

The last few weeks have passed in a blur. Gendry and I have been spending time together, he's joined me for more football sessions with my cousins, and there have been many stolen kisses between the two of us. Yet, every time things start to get heated, I pull back. I always stop everything before it can go any further.

Why?

Why am I holding myself back? Is it because he's an alien and I'm still not entirely sure what to expect once our clothes come off? Maybe. Is it because this is the first time I've felt things so strongly for someone and I'm terrified that throwing sex into the mix will ruin everything? Certainly. Could it be that I'm starting to regret jumping into this knowing it has an expiration date? That's not helping.

Fuck, I'm so screwed. No matter how I slice this, someone is going to have their heart broken. Either I stay here and lose Gendry when he goes back to his home planet. Or I leave with him and break my family's heart for leaving them behind. Is there some sort of clause that allows me to bring my entire family with me if I left with Gendry? Would they even want to explore space with me?

I am a mess. A complete and utter mess. The closer I get to Gendry, the more I can see a real future with him. Despite that, I find myself pulling back more and more, wanting to protect my heart from the inevitable. One way or another, this is going to end with me hurting.

There's a knock on the door. I let out a long sigh, rubbing tiredly at my face. All of

this is leaving me feeling so exhausted and spread thin.

I look through the peephole in my door and my stomach flutters, my heart doing a funny little flip. I felt so upset a moment ago but just seeing Gendry's face has my spirits rising. Maybe that's the part of all of this I should focus on; the way he makes me feel.

Opening the door, I look up at Gendry with a small smile. "Hi."

Gendry's eyes sweep over me and I swear I can feel his eyes on me. My insides warm in the most pleasant way. When he's standing here, looking at me like this, it feels silly to hold myself back. All of the reasons and worries that were bouncing around inside my head all fade away, leaving affection that's grown so quickly since meeting Gendry.

As much as I don't want to get hurt, I'm tired of trying to keep him at arm's length. That's doing nothing but making both of us miserable.

"Hello, Aldo," he says, handing over the little translating device. I place it into my ear. "Can I please come in so we can talk?"

"Absolutely." I pull the door open wider, letting Gendry into my apartment. He slides off his shoes and walks into the living room area. He looks like he's about to sit down but instead, he stays standing, walking around my coffee table, wringing his hands.

My heart drops as I watch him. Something is wrong. It's obvious Gendry is worried about something. Fuck. Have I self sabotaged so hard that he's here to let me down gently? Is he leaving Earth earlier than expected?

I walk over to him, placing a hand on his wrist. Gendry freezes but meets my eyes. "What's going on?"

“I’m sorry,” he blurts out, his face scrunching up when he says it.

“You’re sorry?” He nods his head. “For what?”

“I’ve done something wrong,” he says softly. “Obviously I’ve made you uncomfortable with my affections. I’ve done something to upset you or I’ve crossed some human boundary I didn’t know about. Whatever it is, please tell me and I’ll fix it. Or I’ll take a step back like you seem to want and we can go back to just being friends.” He rubs at his face. “I’m sorry, Aldo.”

I squeeze his wrist. “Gendry,” I say slowly, needing him to understand. “You did nothing wrong. I promise.”

“Then why have you been pulling away?”

I let out a sigh. Now it’s my turn to apologize. “I’ve been an ass,” I tell him. “I got freaked out by my feelings and thinking about the future so I started to pull into myself instead of talking to you about it. I just keep thinking that at the end of all this, someone is going to get hurt.”

Gendry moves his hands, placing them on my shoulders. He looks down at me, his big gray eyes soft yet concerned.

“You are holding yourself back to protect your heart?”

I bite my bottom lip and nod my head.

“I promise to do everything in my power to protect your heart, Aldo.” Gendry takes a steadying breath but it comes out shaky. “Even if that means keeping my distance.”

My heart shatters at the thought. That’s not what I want. That’s the furthest thing

from what I really want. Despite the way I've done my best to pull away, it seems my heart has found its home already and I refuse to deny myself this. Gendry and I fit together in a way that doesn't even make sense to my head but somehow makes my heart sing.

I place my hands on top of his before slowly moving them up his arms. Gendry visibly shivers, his skin breaking out in goose pimples as I touch him. He sucks in a sharp breath as my fingers dance over his throat and stop at his cheeks, holding his face between my palms.

“Don't go,” I whisper, cursing the way my voice shakes. “Gendry, please don't keep your distance. I want to be with you for as long as I can. I don't know what we'll do when it's time for you to go back home.” I shake my head. “My heart is telling me that you're it for me and I know it's really soon to be saying that, but it's the truth.”

Gendry's eyes are wide with wonder as I speak, the sides of his lips curling up slightly with a smile. “Hearing these words have made me happier than I thought possible,” he says before reaching down and grabbing the back of my thighs, lifting me up into his arms.

A surprised noise leaves my lips and I quickly wrap my legs around his middle, holding on as he spins me. I can't help but chuckle as he holds me. My cock is very interested in the fact that Gendry can manhandle me with such ease.

“I promise to care for your heart. I do not hold my feelings back. In all my years alive, I have never once felt feelings like this stir within me. You are different and special and everything I didn't know to hope for in a matron .”

“What's a matron ?”

Gendry buries his face against my throat and I can't tell if it's an alien thing where

he's trying to sniff me or if he's embarrassed by the question. He runs his nose over my skin and my cock fills with blood at the sensation. Fuck, I hope he doesn't mind my dick poking him in the stomach like this.

"Where I am from, we have a trial to show we are worthy to take on a partner. We perform for everyone to see and in our Ancestor's honor. A matron is our life mate."

My fingers tighten against Gendry's shoulders. "Life mate?"

"Yes. I'm sorry if that is too much to say."

"No, no. It's okay." I grab him by the hair, pulling him away from my throat so that I can properly see his face. "It's okay, Gendry. I might not understand everything that means, but that doesn't matter. I understand what our hearts want and I'm tired of denying them."

"What are you saying, Aldo?"

I lean down and kiss Gendry's lips. He makes a noise that radiates from his chest before he's kissing me back. His enthusiasm takes my breath away and my heart practically pounds a tattoo against the inside of my ribs. Gendry's hands tighten against my ass, pleasure soaring through me. I'm not sure I've ever felt more horny in my entire life, need courses through me like a raging fire and I know my own hand won't be enough to calm this heat. The only thing that'll sate me is finally giving myself over to Gendry.

"I'm saying," I breathe against Gendry's lips, panting from the intense kiss. "I'm saying that you should take me to my bedroom."

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Gendry

“I’m saying that you should take me to my bedroom.”

My mind whites out. I stand there, completely frozen, trying to understand the words that Aldo has just murmured against my lips which are still tingling from our kiss. I am on cloud nine and I can barely believe that Aldo is in my arms, telling me that his heart longs for me the same way mine longs for him.

“What?”

Aldo grins. “I said, take me to my bedroom, big guy. I need you and I need you now .”

I blink. Then blink again. Finally, my brain seems to catch up to what Aldo is saying and suddenly, I’m moving. I take off in the direction that I think his bedroom is. Aldo starts chuckling, holding on to my shoulder tight as I walk.

My body is warm all over and I crave to feel Aldo’s body against my own with no barriers between us. I want him in the most intimate way two people can be together. I want to feel him inside of me.

“I’m glad we’re on the same page,” Aldo says with a grin. “Right through that door.”

I turn my back to the door, using my shoulder to push it open. Turning, I find his room exactly how I would imagine it. It’s messy and colorful and so very Aldo . I can’t help but smile as I move deeper into the room, gently placing Aldo onto his bed.

The room is filled with his scent and I breathe it in, my cock throbbing where it's trapped within my trousers. Mixed within that smell is Aldo's lust. It's the sweetest most addicting scent I've ever experienced.

My stomach is flipping wildly inside of me as I reach for Aldo's shirt, slowly pulling it over his head. So much tan skin is on display and this is only the beginning. Already I feel overwhelmed with how turned on I am, but more than that, with how much affection I'm feeling. I care for Aldo in a way I've never experienced before. I want him to be my partner, I want him to be my matron . I want to feel that connection between us, I want a bond to flow between us.

Aldo shimmies out of his jeans, leaving himself in just his boxers which are dark red with little rainbows on them. They look so good against his dark skin. My mouth waters with the desire to get my mouth on him, to taste him, to mark his skin and make him mine.

“Are you going to keep staring or are you planning on getting naked with me?”

I grin. “I am simply blown away by your beauty. It feels unreal that I am allowed to touch you, Aldo. I cannot wait to do everything in my power to make you feel good.”

Aldo bites his plump bottom lip, turning it a pretty red color. “Hurry up or I'll make myself feel good without you.”

I playfully growl as I get to work, pulling my clothes away. When I'm naked, I look back to Aldo, finding him completely naked as well. I suck in a sharp breath, my eyes scanning over his body, taking all of him in.

He is the single most beautiful creature I have ever laid eyes on.

“Aldo,” I breathe out, overwhelmed once again. “Aldo, you are beautiful. You are

everything . My delgando .” The feeling of awe one gets from seeing the sunrise. That’s what Aldo makes me feel just by being himself.

“Come here, Gendry,” he says softly, lifting a hand for me. His eyes greedily take me in, darkening at what he sees. I take his hand and follow him down, lying myself against him as much as our size difference will allow.

His skin is scorching hot against my own, my entire body shivering with delight at finally getting to feel him this way. His cock is hard against my stomach, my own resting against his thigh. We carefully grind against each other as our mouths touch, pleasure pooling in the pit of my stomach.

This is everything I dreamed it would be while also being so much more.

“God, Gendry. You feel so good. I’ve wanted you from the moment I laid eyes on you.”

“Truly?”

“God, yes. I wanted to see if your cock matched the rest of you. I stroked myself while thinking about riding you until you saw stars. I’ve come with your name on my lips so many times in the last few weeks.”

My chest rumbles with a pleased growl. I run my teeth over Aldo’s jaw until my mouth finds his ear. “I know,” I whisper, grinding my cock against him. “I’ve heard you pleasure yourself through the wall.”

“You can hear me through the wall?”

“Yes,” I tell him, pulling back so I can look into his eyes. “It’s the hottest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“Fuck, Gendry.”

“That is the plan, I believe,” I say with a little grin on my face. “To fuck. Will you, Aldo? Will you fuck me?”

Aldo makes a strangled noise at the back of his throat. “You want me to fuck you?”

“More than anything. Please?”

“Fuck yeah,” he says right away, tugging me down so he can kiss my lips. Our hips keep up a steady pace, rubbing against each other. My ass clenches around nothing and a whine escapes me. I feel so empty, so needy. My hole is soaking wet, ready to take all of Aldo.

Aldo puts a hand on my chest, pushing me away. I flip over onto my back as Aldo crawls out of bed in order to stand at the end of it instead. He grabs my legs and tugs until my ass is right at the edge of the bed, almost hanging over.

“Does this feel okay? I’m so much shorter than you and the bed is the perfect height for this position.”

“Yes,” I hiss out, wrapping my tail around his back and tugging him close. “Now get in me, Aldo. I have pictured this moment for weeks and I do not wish to wait a moment longer.”

Aldo smiles down at me. “Reach over into my bedside drawer and grab the lube for me?”

I shake my head. “That’s unnecessary. I’m ready for you already.”

Aldo’s hands run over my thighs. A shiver runs through me at the soft, intimate

touch. When his thumbs open my cheeks, I whimper, overwhelmed with my need. One of his thumbs presses against my hole and pleasure surges through me. I'm wet, so, so fucking wet. It drips from my hole down onto the sheets beneath me.

“Oh,” Aldo breathes out, his voice taking on an edge of wonder. “Okay. Yeah, I'm realizing more and more how fucking awesome it is that my boyfriend is an alien.”

I open my mouth to ask him to elaborate but the words are stolen from my lungs as his cock touches my hole. He pushes forward, breaching me with ease because of my slick. As he slowly pumps into me, my body stretches, accommodating him perfectly.

My brain is white with pleasure, my body delightfully overwhelmed with how good it feels to have Aldo inside of me. My tail flicks across his skin and I have to focus on keeping it still so I don't smack him.

Once Aldo is all the way inside of me, his movements still. He runs his hands over my toned stomach and up to my nipples. He runs his thumbs over them until they're hard nubs. I can't do anything but lie there and take the pleasure that Aldo is giving me.

“Aldo,” I breathe out, doing my best to keep my composure and ask the question burning a fire inside my chest.

“Yes?”

“You called me your boyfriend.” More of a statement than a question but it is hard to focus when Aldo's hips are rotating in a little circle, his cock grinding my insides just right to have my toes curling behind Aldo's back.

“Shit,” he hisses out, his eyes widening. “Is that okay? I'm sorry, I should have asked you before assuming.”

“It is fine. What does it mean?”

“It’s umm, like partners. We go on dates, spend time together, touch each other, fuck. You’ll be mine and I’ll be yours.”

“Yes,” I say quickly. “Yes, I want that. You’re my boyfriend.”

Aldo grins down at me and he’s so beautiful like this it steals my breath once again. I dig my heel into his ass, forcing him to move without using any more words.

“Okay, okay. Bossy bottom,” he murmurs before pulling his hips back, just as slowly. Once just the head of his cock is still inside of me, he shoves back in, finally giving me the speed I crave.

“More,” I tell him. “More, Aldo. Fuck me. Come on.”

Aldo begins to fuck me in earnest and everything feels right within the world. I’ve never allowed another person to touch me in this way. No one back on Deltourah made me feel the way that Aldo makes me feel. Maybe no one was worthy back then or maybe I was just waiting for Aldo. Maybe our Ancestors knew I would find the man destined to be my matron out in the galaxy instead of back home.

I’m glad I waited for Aldo. This all feels so much more special, knowing he is my first and hopefully, he will also be my only and last.

“Aldo,” I gasp out as he adjusts his hips slightly, his cock nailing the sweet spot inside of me on every thrust. “Oh, Aldo! Yes! That feels so good!”

“God, Gendry. Your ass feels so good around me. I’ve never felt anything like this. So good. You’re gonna make me come.”

That heat inside of me somehow triples, burning inside of me so hot I'm not sure anything will ever put it out. My ass clenches around Aldo's cock and my own dick aches with the thought of having Aldo's seed inside of me. I need that more than I've ever needed anything ever.

"Please," I say breathlessly, my head soaring into the clouds as I'm lost in my lust. "Please, Aldo. Come inside of me. Mark me. Make me yours. Please !"

Aldo's hands tighten around my hips so hard I'm sure there will be little purple bruises left behind. He fucks me even harder, the sound of his hips slapping into me loud in the otherwise quiet apartment. He feels so fucking good.

I wrap a hand around my cock, stroking myself quickly, matching Aldo's rhythm. My tail snakes down between Aldo's legs, caressing his balls from between his legs. He makes a startled noise before moaning in pleasure. Then I reach beneath his balls, massaging that spot underneath that feels so good on myself.

Before I have time to worry that maybe his anatomy is too different from my own, he moans, long and loud. His cheeks are bright red and his chest has a blush to match. He's beautiful in his pleasure.

"I'm gonna come," he warns me. My hand speeds up and my body locks up with pleasure. A moment later, I can feel his cock twitch and throb inside my tight, wet hole. His seed is scorching hot when it splashes against my insides, marking me as his.

It's all too much. My hand squeezes my dick even harder as I stroke myself. Aldo pinches my nipples and I'm gone, flying off into the deep end of pleasure. Lightning races down my spine and my ass gets impossibly tighter around Aldo's dick, milking every last drop of his cum from him. I cry out as cum flies from the tip of my dick, covering my belly with white.

I feel sated.

Back on Deltourah , after a workout with my fellow warriors, I always felt sore in a way that made me feel satisfied with the work we had done. This feels similar but for my body and my soul. I feel seen and heard and tasted and experienced. I feel like a bond has formed between Aldo and I. It might not be a matron bond, but it's very close, like the first step.

Aldo is mine, even if we don't have a bond yet. I am his, in the human sense.

I do my best not to wince when Aldo pulls his cock from my ass. Every part of me is sensitive, pleasure still tingling over my skin. He leaves me for a moment before returning with a warm, wet cloth. He's careful as he cleans the cum from my stomach and the slick from my ass.

I shimmy up the bed, resting my head against the pillows. Aldo tucks himself against my chest, wrapping his arm around my middle.

“Will you stay tonight?”

Aldo's voice is achingly soft and filled with the same longing I find myself feeling at the center of my chest. I lean down and kiss the top of his head, his hair soft against my lips.

I want to tell him that I will stay forever if only he asks. My feelings for him have a word, one I'm not sure we're ready for quite yet but a word I know is real without a doubt. I love him. I love Aldo.

I run my fingers down his spine, carefully wrapping my tail around his upper thigh. “Yes,” I whisper back. “I'll stay the night.”

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Aldo

I check my hair in the mirror again, making sure it looks okay. I've dyed it a pretty purple color, only realizing it matches Gendry's skin when it was all done and dried. I'm not sure if I did it by accident or if my subconscious wanted us to match but either way, I think it looks really nice on me.

"You look perfect," Gendry says beside me, resting a hand on my thigh. He gives me a gentle squeeze and a soft smile that shows off the little fangs I love so much. Not to mention how much I enjoy the feel of them against my skin. I have a bite mark over the place that Gendry is currently squeezing and yep, I really need to stop thinking about that before I pop a boner in the car outside my mother's house.

I need to get my shit together. Taking in a deep breath, I calm my racing heart. We're just having lunch with my mother, what's the worst that could happen?

"I can tell that you are worried. Are you sure you want me here? I do not wish to add to your worry."

Gendry's soft words break me out of my anxiety spiral. Everything is going to be okay. My two favorite people are about to meet.

"I'm okay," I tell him, bringing his hand to my mouth and kissing his knuckles. It's been about two months since we sat down and had our talk about how we were feeling about each other. The night ended with the most amazing round of sex and since then, we've been nearly inseparable. Sure, I still need to go to work and Gendry does things with Christian. He's also started working at the bookshop with my

cousin, Carlos. We're not attached at the hip, but every night we end up in bed together. It doesn't even always lead to sex, some nights we just fall asleep whispering and holding each other.

I've never been so happy in a relationship before. All the men I've dated before ended up not working out for one reason or another. Maybe all that time, they never worked out because they weren't Gendry . Maybe I was waiting for the alien next door.

Jesus, that sounds like the title of a terrible porn parody.

"I want you to meet my mama. She's going to love you once she sees past," I pause, waving a hand at Gendry's face, "all of this."

"All of this?"

"Yeah," I say gently. "The fact that you're purple and an alien and have a pair of antennae on your head. It might take her a second but she'll love you once she gets to know you."

"I hope so," Gendry says. "I want her approval for our relationship. Family is important. I need her to know that my feelings for you are true. I need her to know I would do everything in my power to keep you from hurting."

My heart gives a twinge within my chest, affection practically bursting through my seams. It's getting harder and harder not to throw myself into Gendry's arms and tell him that I've fallen completely and utterly in love with him. I've only known him a few months but I already know everything I need to know about him. I love him.

"Let's go," I say, unlocking the car and stepping outside. I swallow around the nervous lump in my throat and head to the front door of Mama's home. It's small and

just on the outskirts of town. The perfect little setup for a house of one.

I knock on the door and only a moment passes before my mother is opening the door, greeting me with a wide smile. She immediately pulls me into a hug. We're about the same size so when she pulls back to greet Gendry, she has to look up at him, the same way I normally do.

"Oh," she says, turning back towards me. "Who is this, Aldo?"

"Mama," I say slowly, holding on to her shoulders and giving them a squeeze. "This is my boyfriend. His name is Gendry."

"I see," is all she says before turning around and walking into the house. "Come in! Lunch is ready to be served. I hope you brought your appetite because I made a lot."

I let out the breath I was holding. Turning towards Gendry, I grab his wrist and walk inside, closing the door behind us.

"This is going really well," I tell him under my breath.

"Is it? I cannot tell."

"Oh yeah. She invited us both in. If she was upset she would have taken off her shoe, thrown it at my head, and then told us to leave so she could have some time to cool down. This is going super well."

Gendry gives me a look that makes me chuckle. "I'm kidding. She wouldn't do that. But trust me, I can tell she's going to make a genuine effort to get to know you."

"As you say."

We walk into the kitchen where Mama is taking a tray of enchiladas out of the oven where she was keeping them warm. Half of them are covered in her homemade red sauce and the other half are covered in her green sauce. My mouth immediately begins to water with anticipation. It's been too long since I've had Mama's cooking and I tell myself I'll be better about coming here to visit; especially if I only have so much time to do that before...

"Sit down, sit down," Mama says, pulling me from my thoughts. Gendry and I sit beside each other at the little round table. Mama carefully sets the tray down before pulling out three plates for us. Then she sets down forks for everyone.

Enchiladas with a side of beans and rice. She even has a container of sour cream for me, knowing I love adding that to my beans and rice. My heart aches as I think about leaving her behind. I might have gained a partner but I'm worried about losing my family.

I haven't even made a definitive decision yet and already I'm mourning things. I need to get a grip. Maybe I'll sit down and talk to Mama about it, see what she thinks before I decide anything.

"What are you waiting for, mijo? Dig in," Mama says, passing me the spatula so I can serve myself.

"Sorry, Mama. My head is in the clouds," I say with a chuckle.

Her eyes dart between myself and Gendry. "I see that."

I place two enchiladas onto Gendry's plate, one with red sauce and one with green. Then I grab myself two as well. I take the translator from my ear and hand it to Mama.

“Put this in your ear. It’ll make it so you and Gendry can speak and get to know each other.”

Mama looks skeptical but she takes the translator from me and places it into her ear. As she serves herself, she looks to Gendry expectantly. He takes a giant mouthful of enchilada and grins. It makes him look like a chipmunk with a cheekful of nuts and it further proves how far gone I am about him because I find the gesture ridiculously adorable.

Gendry quickly swallows. He speaks to Mama, his words deep and guttural. It’s been a long time since I’ve been unable to understand him. His words flow over me and despite the fact that I don’t know for certain what he’s saying, I can tell he’s happy based on the tones of his voice. I’m embarrassed to admit that it’s also making me kinda horny to hear him speak his native tongue like this.

Mama’s eyes widen as the translation device does its job, allowing her to understand him. She turns towards me.

“Do you also have one?”

I shake my head. “Just the one. I have no idea what he’s saying right now. Hopefully only good things.”

Now there’s a twinkle in her eyes and I’m not sure I like where this is going.

“Tell me,” she starts, getting a little smile on her lips. “What are your intentions with my boy?”

“Mama!” I say, letting out an embarrassed groan. “Don’t ask him that! He’s very honest and he’ll actually tell you anything you ask him.”

“Well, I’d like to know. Is he here to stay? Is he stowing you away in the trunk of his spaceship and taking you away from me? These are things mothers should know, mijo!”

Gendry begins to speak and his eyebrows tell me he’s actually explaining everything to her in a very serious matter. Gendry knows when to be silly but when it comes to matters of the heart, he’s always very straightforward and serious. It’s one of the many things I adore about him. I just wish he wasn’t spilling his heart out to my mother on the first meeting.

Although, based on the look on her face, maybe Gendry always wearing his heart on his sleeve isn’t such a bad thing after all.

“Thank you for your honesty,” Mama says with a nod. She takes a bite of her food, chewing slowly. I dig into my own food as well, wanting to keep busy so my heart doesn’t explode from panic.

“Has he told you all our secrets?” Gendry snorts, shaking his head. “Okay, that’s good at least.”

“He said he cares about you a great deal but despite all the affection he has for you, he would never ask you to leave me behind to fend for myself. He says family is very important.”

“Oh,” is all I can manage to say. “That’s umm, that’s good.”

“Anything you’d like to add?”

I turn towards my mother. Clearing my throat I say, “I care about him a great deal as well, Mama. This is like nothing I’ve felt before.”

My mother reaches over to me, taking my hand in her own. “Long ago I’ve accepted that the future I saw for you was not the same future you would achieve. I wanted you to marry a beautiful woman but then you came out to me as gay. I wanted you to be a lawyer but then you told me, quite fiercely, that your passion was hair. I wanted you to marry a rich man,” she says, her eyes darting over to Gendry. “But now you’ve brought home an alien.” Mama finally gives me a grin. “What am I going to do with you, mijo?”

“Keep doing what you’ve always done.”

“Love you until you eventually ship me to a nursing home,” she says, nodding her head. Gendry asks something and Mama giggles. “A nursing home is a place where nurses are available around the clock to take care of people who have a hard time taking care of themselves.”

Gendry asks something else, his head tipping in that way I find incredibly adorable. Mama shakes her head.

“I would never ask Aldo to take care of me like that. That’s such a burden and he has his own life to worry about without me getting in the way.”

“Mama, you’re not a burden. Not ever.”

“Hush, Aldo, your giant boyfriend is trying to speak.”

I sputter. “Mama! He is not a giant!”

Mama cocks her brow at me. “Compared to you and I? Gendry is a giant, anyone can see that.” Then she tilts her head, looking between us. “It does make me question the logistics of--”

“Mama! Absolutely not! Don’t ask him or you might actually hear the answer of how.”

“Okay, okay,” she says, raising her hands and giggling to herself. “An old woman can’t have any fun anymore.” She turns towards Gendry, gesturing for him to speak. He says something that makes her chuckle. I look between them, shaking my head. Maybe introducing the two of them wasn’t such a good idea after all.

Lunch goes on without any hitches or concerns. Gendry and Mama get to know each other, the two of them grinning and chuckling while I’m left to hear a one sided conversation. I can’t wait until I can get a permanent implant like Gendry.

Well, you know, if I actually go to his home planet with him.

Who the fuck am I trying to kid? Of course I’m going with him. Seeing him interact with my mother has only made my feelings for him stronger!

Gendry stands up. I look up at him in question but it’s my mom who tells me he’s going to use the bathroom. Before he goes, he leans down and kisses the top of my head.

“That matching hair was a nice touch,” Mama says with a grin. My cheeks flame but all I do is roll my eyes at her.

“It wasn’t planned.”

“If you say so.” She reaches over and takes my hand again. “While he’s gone, I want to say something, just for you to hear.”

“Okay,” I say slowly, looking into my mother’s eyes. She’s the person I trust most in the world. My father died when I was really young so it’s my mother who’s done

everything for me. It's been the two of us against the world for as long as I remember. It hurt me so much to leave and get an apartment of my own but Mama wanted me to have independence. To go out and live my life.

I don't want to leave her here.

"I love you, Aldo. I love you more than I have words to say. You are my son and nothing will ever change that."

My heart clenches where it sits within my chest. "I love you too."

"I know that," she says with a soft smile. "I have seen you with other men. None of them were good enough for my boy. None of them looked at you like Gendry looks at you."

"How does he look at me?"

"Like you're the reason the sun rises every morning. He loves you, mijo. I'll admit, the fact that he's purple really threw me off, but I can see you make each other happy."

I swallow around the lump in my throat. "Mama?"

"I want you to go with him, when the time comes. You should experience everything life has to offer you. What's that saying your cousin is always spewing? Right, umm, live life balls to the wall."

"Oh my god," I blurt out, a surprise laugh bursting out of me and stopping the tears threatening to fall. "Mama!"

"Don't hold yourself back, Aldo."

“How can you know all this from just one meeting? Huh?”

“I have intuition like no one else. I can just tell. Trust me.”

I squeeze Mama’s hands. “Mama? Would you consider coming with us? I’m sure we could have a nice home there, something with a suite connected to us so you don’t have to be far. Please?”

“I’ll think about it. I might be getting too old for space travel.”

Gendry says something as he walks into the room from the bathroom. He raises his brow at me, making sure I’m okay. I nod my head and turn towards Mama.

“He says I’m not too old for anything. He really is a keeper, Aldo, he knows when to flatter his elders.”

Gendry chuckles and I can’t help but mirror the noise. The two of us stay for coffee and dessert with my mother before finally piling back into the car and heading back home. There’s so many things swirling around inside my head but the biggest thing is a brand new certainty I didn’t have before I came here.

I should have known talking to my mother would help, it always does. When the time comes, I’m going to go with Gendry back to Deltourah . I’m going to live with him there. I’m going to be his matron and everything that comes with it because I can’t go back to life before Gendry was here.

He’s it for me and instead of feeling scared of that realization, I feel liberated.

“Everything okay, delgando?”

I have no idea what that word means but it makes my chest flutter with butterflies.

“Everything is perfect.”

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Gendry

“Christian?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you have any of those round green things? The ones that burst when you sink your teeth into them? They’re sweet and juicy? I forgot the name but I would like some sooner rather than later if you have them.”

Christian opens the fridge and pulls out a bag, handing it over to me. “They’re called grapes.”

“Grapes! Yes! Thank you so much.” I pop one into my mouth and immediately moan in pleasure. Oh by the ancestors! Nothing has ever tasted as good as these grapes. They’re pleasing me the same way scratching an itchy spot would feel.

“What’s gotten into you lately?”

“What do you mean?” I ask, tilting my head to the side. “Am I acting strangely?”

“Kinda? It’s hard to put my finger on it,” he says, narrowing his eyes at me. “You’re having strong cravings, you’ve been kind of touchy feely lately, and I caught you crying during a movie the other night.”

“It was an emotional moment! The two characters finally found each other in the crowd, Christian! It was beautiful!”

“Mhmm. Right. That makes total sense.”

There’s a sensation at the back of my brain, telling me that Christian is right. But what could it be that’s different? Things with Aldo are going good. Better than good, things with him are perfect.

Yet there’s something different.

I look down at myself, trying to take stock of my body. My tail flicks behind me in irritation, slapping a paper plate off the counter and onto the floor.

“Sorry,” I mumble, bending down and picking it up. That’s when I notice something. My stomach. My stomach has a soft swell to it that wasn’t there before. I’ve apparently gained weight while I was here.

I place a hand on my stomach. Christian makes a strangled noise, his eyes widening.

“What? What is it?”

“Oh my god. No fucking way,” he says, pinching the bridge of his nose. “I did not think I needed to give you the safe sex talk, Gendry!”

“The sex I am having is very safe! No one is getting hurt! There is always plenty of lubricant and consent!”

Christian makes a growling noise in my direction. “Not that! I mean, have you been bottoming without Aldo wrapping it up?” I tilt my head to the side. Before I can ask what that means, Christian continues. “Have you guys been using condoms? The little plastic thing you put on your dick so that your cum doesn’t go inside someone? You know, the love juice that makes a fucking baby?”

That makes a baby .

Oh.

That would explain the cravings, the heightened emotions, and the weight gain. That would explain everything.

Oh my gods. By the Ancestors! I'm pregnant with Aldo's baby!

"How can this be?"

Christian groans as he covers his face with his hands, rubbing at his eyes. He looks up at me. "Okay, so when two people really love each other..."

"No, not that. I know the mechanics. I just didn't think. I am just surprised. I should have known better, knowing that Miles and Timalah conceived but I wasn't thinking."

I knew we were capable of breeding with other species but the thought never even crossed my mind with Aldo. As far as I know, this baby will either be human, Layperry, or a hybrid.

I lean against Christian's counter, slowly eating his grapes as I try to process what I've just learned. Placing a hand on my stomach, I do my best to connect with the life inside of me. There's a small blip of something, small and gentle. They don't reach back so they're either human or a hybrid incapable of telepathic bonds. Just feeling them like this sparks something inside my heart.

The feeling of love and adoration washes over me. This little life inside of me is still so new but already, I love them, whoever they might be. They're a part of me and a part of Aldo. They're the product of our love for each other.

“Are you umm, are you okay? Are you happy? Do you like, need anything?”

“Christian,” I say slowly, looking up at him. “I am happy . I did not think this possible but now that it is happening, I could not contain my joy even if I wanted to.”

“Okay. Cool. That’s good.”

I step away from his counter and pull him into a tight hug. He makes a surprised noise before patting my back.

“There, there,” he says, making me smile at how awkward he is around affection. I pull away, holding him at arm’s length.

“Thank you for being here for me. Thank you for being my friend.”

“Umm, yeah, whatever. It’s no problem.”

“It’s a big deal to me. Miles is very lucky to call you his best friend, Christian.”

His face takes on something wounded. “I miss him,” he says, just barely loud enough for me to hear.

“I know you do. Which is why you should come back with me.”

“I didn’t belong there. I’m alone here. Gendry, what am I supposed to do?”

“You come back with me and make yourself belong. I heard a saying when I met Aldo’s mother. Live life balls to the wall. Stop holding yourself back from feeling, Christian, and yes, I’m talking about Ghenie.”

“Fuck you,” he says right away but there’s water in his eyes and a smile on his face.

“Fuck you for being so insightful. Fuck you for making me think I could actually have a place. Just, fuck you, man.”

“That’s Aldo’s job but I appreciate the gesture.”

Christian shoves me away and chuckles to himself. “You should umm, probably go talk to him about this new revelation huh?”

“Oh gods, yes!” I look down at the grapes in my hands and he snorts.

“Take them.”

“Thank you! Wish me luck!”

“Good luck, but I don’t think you’ll need it.”

I rush from Christian’s home over to Aldo’s knocking on the door and waiting. I bounce from foot to foot, anticipation making me giddy all over. I feel like my heart is soaring through the clouds. I don’t think I’ve ever felt joy like this before and I cannot wait to share this joy with Aldo.

Aldo opens the door, a wide grin across his lips when he sees that it’s me.

“Aldo! I have to talk to you about something. It’s important.”

Aldo holds out his hand and I realize he’s waiting for the translator. Shit. It’s in my apartment. I barely give Aldo time to grab his keys before I’m tugging him outside and towards my apartment door.

Once inside, I quickly find the translator and hand it over. Then I pull both of us over to the couch in order to sit down.

“Sorry,” I say, rubbing my fingers over Aldo’s hand which is in my lap, my other hand still clutching my bag of grapes. “I just really needed to speak with you.”

“That’s okay. Is everything alright? Whatever is going on seems really sudden and has you on edge.”

“I’m not on edge. I am excited !”

Aldo’s shoulders relax and he breathes out in a way that makes me realize he was nervous. I guess I could have gone about this in a less stressful way but now that I know what’s going on, I can’t contain it. I need Aldo to know.

“Well then, don’t leave me in suspense. What’s going on, Gendry?”

“I have some news that I need to tell you. Don’t worry, it’s good news. The best news. I hope you’ll agree.”

Aldo pulls my hand towards his face, kissing my knuckles. “I’m listening.”

There’s no better way to break news than to be swift and to the point. No holding back. No mincing words. “Aldo. I am pregnant.”

I watch Aldo’s face, my stomach clenching as his entire body seems to lock up with shock. This whole time, all I’ve been feeling is joy but now I’m realizing that maybe this joy isn’t shared. We never talked about this. By the Ancestors, we haven’t even fully talked about whether Aldo would like to join me on my journey back to Deltourah.

Have I completely blundered this moment?

Aldo stares at our hands for a long time, processing the news. Finally, he blows out a

long breath through his nose, his brown eyes darting up to meet mine.

“This isn’t something I even thought was possible,” he says, his voice achingly soft.

“I think I’m in shock.”

“Oh, Aldo. I am sorry to have sprung this on you this way. I was so excited that I didn’t think about how this must be for a human. I have always known I was capable of carrying my young, every Layperry is.”

“Right,” he says, nodding his head. “You sort of told me that when you talked about being intersex. I just didn’t realize. I just didn’t think. Shit, okay. Yup. This is totally happening. For sure, for sure,” Aldo begins to mumble, his free hand coming up to rub at his eyes.

“This is a lot,” I whisper. “Maybe this is too much?”

Aldo shakes his head. “It’s not. I’m just trying to wrap my head around this. I never thought about having children, especially because two cis gay men can’t have biological children together. I just assumed I would always be the kickass gay uncle to all my nieces and nephews.” He squeezes my hand.

“Are you okay?”

“I think so. At the very least, I will be okay. I guess this is how my mom always feels when I throw her plans for my life out the window and do my own thing,” he says with an amused snort.

I wrap my other arm around his shoulders, tugging him towards me. He wraps his arm around my middle, putting his head against my chest. He listens to my heartbeat and I wonder if he knows that it beats for him, for our baby.

Tentatively, Aldo's hand moves lower, resting against my stomach.

"I can feel them," I say softly. "Already I can feel their life force, feel some of their newfound emotions and I love them so much, Aldo."

"I can't believe we're having a baby together. Will they be purple?" Aldo's voice is barely above a whisper but I can hear the way his emotions have changed. He's no longer surprised, instead he sounds like he's in wonder at the idea of starting a family with me. It's enough to bring tears to my eyes that I quickly do my best to blink away.

"I don't know," I say with a wet chuckle. "I can't seem to get them to reach back to me telepathically so I have a feeling they're not fully Layperry. Maybe human or a hybrid. Hybrids can come in colors, the same way Layperry's do. If they're human, I have a feeling they'll be this beautiful shade of brown that you are."

"I'll have to learn more about the Layperry," Aldo says, his hand rubbing little circles against my stomach. "I want to know everything so I can be a good dad to them. You'll teach me, right?"

"Yes," I say right away, emotions welling up inside of me. "I'll teach you everything you need to know." A single tear slides down my cheek, landing on Aldo's head.

Aldo pulls away in order to look at me. He makes a soothing noise and cups my cheeks in his palms. "Hey, you're okay. What are these tears for?"

"I'm just so happy," I tell him. "I am happy that I met you, Aldo. I'm happy that we are together. I am overwhelmed by how happy I am for our baby."

"Oh, Gendry," Aldo breathes out, pulling me close so he can kiss the tears from my cheeks. Then he kisses my lips achingly gently. "Gendry, I'm happy too. I still need a

little time to take this news in, but I promise you, I am very happy. I'm not going anywhere."

"Truly?"

Aldo smiles. "Yes, truly. Gendry, I love you."

My mind goes blank as the words refuse to register. It's like Aldo is speaking a completely new language, one my translator chip can't seem to figure out. I stare at him for a long time before it finally hits me square in the chest.

Oh.

Aldo loves me. He loves me!

"You love me?"

"Yes," he says simply, his thumbs carefully wiping my face. "I love you."

"You are making me cry," I say but we're both smiling. "I love you too, Aldo. I love you so much and I cannot imagine my life without you in it. I will do everything I can to keep your heart from hurting. I promise to love you until I'm called to the stars with my Ancestors."

"That's a big promise, big guy," he says with a warm chuckle. "I promise to take care of you and our baby to the best of my ability."

Aldo shifts from the couch onto my lap. My hands go to his hips, holding on tight as he kisses me, cementing our confessions with a kiss. I'm swept away in the feeling of Aldo kissing me, his hands on my body, his soft whispered words.

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:48 am

Aldo

I turn my phone flashlight on so I can see Gendry. The two of us are huddled under a blanket which stretches from the couch over to a pair of kitchen chairs I pulled into the living room. We're reclined on a bunch of pillows and covered by soft blankets.

"What do you think?"

"It is a bit cramped."

I shake my head laughing. "It's a tried and true human experience! Although, I suppose you're right. Most blanket forts are for children and you're really big."

Gendry pretends to gasp in shock. "Are you calling me fat? Aldo, how dare you! I am pregnant, not fat!"

I can't stop laughing. "Oh my god, stop. That's not what I meant and you know it." Gendry finally cracks a smile, giggling along with me. "Here's another silly tradition," I say, handing Gendry a pillow. "Pillow fight."

"What is a pillow fight?" Gendry asks just before a pillow collides with his face. He makes a shocked noise before picking up his pillow and slapping me with it.

Our blanket fort quickly explodes with chaos. Gendry wraps it around his shoulders like a cape as he chases me around the living room, doing his best to deliver blow after blow. We're both giggling until we're breathless. We stand off against each other on opposite sides of the room and my eyes can't seem to help themselves,

looking Gendry up and down.

Jesus, he looks good. He's wearing a shirt that's just a little bit too tight, showing off his swollen belly and toned shoulders. He's in nothing but a pair of boxers below the waist, giving me a wonderful view of his thighs. His stomach makes me feel fondness and affection, and the rest of him makes me feel lust. Gendry is so fucking hot and I feel so lucky that he's mine.

I'm so distracted thinking with my dick that Gendry gets the jump on me. He quite literally leaps over my coffee table and hits me with his pillow. Then he shoves me onto the couch and sits on me, pinning me down.

I don't really mind this at all. My cock seems to be on the same page, quickly filling with blood.

Gendry says something, smirking down at me and I realize with a start that I can't understand him. I reach up to my ear and feel nothing. Shit. Shit, shit, shit. Where's my translator device?

I look around frantically, but can't seem to find it. I shove Gendry off me and he says something else I don't understand, panic welling up inside of me. What's going to happen if I can't find it? What if I can't understand him?

Oh god.

"Fuck. Gendry, I can't find my translator. I don't know what you're saying. Oh my god, we have to find it."

Gendry gets off of me so I can look through the blankets. When I find it, my heart somehow manages to sink even further. It must have fallen out of my ear while we were wrestling and one of us stepped on it.

It's broken.

I hold it in my palm, my eyes watering. Oh god. I'm not going to be able to understand my boyfriend now. We're not going to be able to talk. This is a disaster. I feel like I can't breathe and I'm having a hard time seeing through the watering of my eyes.

Fuck.

"Fuck," I say out loud, holding it out for Gendry to see. He cups my hands, closing them around the device. "Fuck, Gendry. What are we gonna do?"

Gendry pulls me through my apartment. He makes sure the door is unlocked before heading into the hall and knocking on Christian's door. I follow behind, unable to do anything. I'm in shock and despair threatens to completely choke me.

Gendry knocks on the door again and Christian opens up, his eyes wide as he looks between us.

"Shit, what's wrong?" Gendry says something, pointing at me. Christian nods his head. "Fuck, man. That really sucks." Gendry speaks again. "Oh, okay. Yeah, I can do that."

"What's going on?"

Christian turns towards me. "So, Gendry can still understand everything you're saying. He wants me to explain that he's capable of telepathic communication, but he didn't want to dive into your head until he had your full consent." Christian rolls his eyes. "Weird you guys haven't talked about this before now. Miles and Timalah had this shit down pat as soon as they got together. They were always having secret conversations inside their heads."

I tug on Gendry's hand. "Yes. Do it. Please, I can't stand the idea of not being able to speak with you."

Everything will be okay, I hear inside my head. Gendry's voice is soft, soothing, and everything I needed to calm myself down.

I let out a long breath, the tightness in my chest slowly relaxing until I feel like I can pull in a full breath again. Looking at Christian, I give him a nod. "Thank you for translating."

"Don't mention it," he says before closing his door on us.

Gendry puts his big hand on my lower back, guiding me back to my apartment. I can still communicate this way. We can still talk. Everything is okay, Aldo.

"Why can I understand you inside my head?"

Somehow, communicating straight into your brain translates it automatically. It works with anyone I speak this way with.

"You speak like this with other people? I thought this was like a special bond."

It's very special. You are special to me. Someday, we will form our matron bond and you will be able to speak with me in my head, the same way I am doing to you. I share a bond with my fellow Layperry people. We can all sense and speak with each other in this way.

I pull Gendry into my bedroom before pushing him down onto the bed. I follow him, laying myself across his chest.

"What does a matron bond include? Do I have to do anything special?"

Once you feel I've won your heart and shown myself worthy, it is very simple. Gendry takes my hand, running his thumb over my knuckles as he explains it. I would probe your mind, pushing a bond into place. You would simply need to allow me in, allow our bond to form. Once you feel it, you would have to push back into my mind as well, linking our bond between us.

I swallow around the lump in my throat. That sounds good. Honestly, that sounds better than good, it sounds fucking perfect. I want to bond with him in that special way. I want him inside my head and I want to be inside his.

Leaning up on my elbow, I run my hand over Gendry's chest. I skim my fingers over the skin of his throat before cupping his face. Then I kiss him. I kiss him and force all of my feelings into the kiss, silently telling him exactly what he means to me, exactly what he does to me. I do my best to bring all of these things to the front of my mind, wanting him to feel them.

Gendry sucks in a sharp breath, his hands going to my hips, pulling me until I'm straddling him. He's already hard and I can't stop myself from grinding against him, moaning at the feeling of his huge cock through our clothes.

"Gendry," I gasp out, my hips having a mind of their own, moving against his cock over and over until I'm panting and needy. "Gendry, please. I need you. I need all of you, everything you're willing to give me."

Everything , I hear inside my head. You can have everything .

I kiss him one more time before I start pulling off my clothes. Gendry follows my lead, doing the same. Every inch of toned, purple skin revealed leaves me aching even more. I want him. Scratch that, I fucking need him. I want to feel him stretching me wide, fucking me deep, and marking me in every way that matters.

Once we're both naked, I start to crawl back into place in Gendry's lap but he surprises me. Gendry's big hands grab my hips and swing me around so my ass is over his face and I'm facing his feet.

"Oh fuck!"

Gendry pulls my cheeks apart and a moment later, his face is against my ass. His tongue is so hot and wet as it lavishes my hole, swirling around the puckered skin until I'm relaxing against the sensation. Then he points his tongue, wiggling it inside and oh my god, that feels so fucking good. His alien tongue is able to reach places otherwise impossible.

"Fuck, Gendry. Fuck. That feels so good," I mumble, tilting my head back and moaning. "Fuck, I could come just on your tongue."

Don't. I want to come inside your ass.

"Fuck. Okay, yeah. I want that too. Get me nice and ready."

As Gendry tongue fucks my ass, I have to do something to distract myself so I don't go off like a rocket. I open my eyes and look down at Gendry's cock. It's so interesting how he's different from me. His cock is long and proportional to the rest of his body, much bigger than me. There's little bumps on the underside. I can't wait to feel them inside me, rubbing against all the best places inside my ass. Beneath his dick, there's no balls and past that is his wet hole.

I wrap my hand around his cock, stroking him slowly. I love feeling the weight of him. I love noticing how big he looks compared to my smaller hands.

I gasp out as Gendry pushes a finger into my ass. Pleasure races through me as that one finger pushes as deep as it can go before slowly sliding back out. Jesus, I really

need to focus to keep myself from coming. It would be so easy to rub my dick against his chin and cover his chest in my cum.

But that's not the plan. No. I want to come with him inside of me. I want to come with our bond being formed.

"That feels so good," I pant out. "So good, Gendry."

Leaning forward, I bring the tip of Gendry's cock into my mouth. With our size difference, I can't get more than the tip between my lips, especially with his swollen stomach, but that's enough. I swirl my tongue around the tip, tasting his precum and moaning at the flavor. He tastes so sweet and delicious.

Gendry pushes another finger into my hole. And then another. I do my best to focus on sucking the tip of his cock, wanting him to feel as good as he's making me feel. Eventually, Gendry decides I'm ready, or he's as pent up and in need of release as I am. Either way, I'm happy to turn around and get myself into his lap.

Gendry's tail, covered in his slick, slides into my ass, making sure I'm lubed up. The fact that he's using the slick his body makes turns me on more than I care to admit.

Reaching behind myself, I point Gendry's cock up. Then I adjust my hips just right before sliding down. It takes a moment for my body to accommodate his girth but with one push, I get the head of his cock to breach my hole.

"Fuck," I breathe out when he finally gets inside me. "Fuck, Gendry." He's hot and hard and fills me up. The stretch is almost too much but I can take it. I want him, all of him, inside me.

It feels like he's splitting me in two but I love every second of it. My body stretches to fit him and the burn only adds to my pleasure. I'm sweating and panting and

overwhelmed but I don't care because past all that, all I feel is how good this is.

Aldo, Gendry's voice speaks into my mind, sounding breathless and overwhelmed. You feel so good. You feel like you were made just for me. I cannot get enough of you.

I continue to press my hips back, taking more and more of Gendry inside of me until finally his entire cock fits inside my ass. I don't think I've ever bottomed for someone so big before. I can feel him all the way up in my stomach. My cock is throbbing, my entire body aching for release.

"Dios mío, Gendry. Fuck!" I lift my hips up and then look down into Gendry's eyes. "Fuck up into me. Take your pleasure and come inside me. Form our bond. I want it, Gendry. I want it all. Give it to me."

Like a flip has been switched, Gendry holds on to my hips and starts fucking up into me. His thrusts are hard, slapping against me as he chases his pleasure. My eyes roll back and pleasure washes over me. The moment his tail snakes between our bodies and wraps around my dick, it's all over.

Crying out, I come across Gendry's stomach. The force of it knocks the air from my lungs and my brain goes completely white with pleasure. I'm lost, completely and utterly, the only thing keeping me from drowning is Gendry.

I feel a presence at the back of my mind, tentative but persistent. I know without a doubt that it's Gendry. I let him in fully, allow him to penetrate my mind the same way he's penetrating my body. I don't just let him in but I chase the bond back to him until I'm inside his mind the same way he's in mine.

"Gendry," I cry out, experiencing his emotions and his sensations. As his cock begins to throb inside of me, his hot cum warming my insides, I come again. Our orgasms

mingle, dancing together, somehow heightening them back and forth until it's a feedback loop I don't think we'll ever escape. If this is the way I go out, it's not a bad way to go.

Eventually, we both come down from our highs. My entire body is sated and sore. I melt against Gendry's front, little shivers of aftershock running through me.

Gendry carefully pulls the blanket around us, holding me tight. I can feel him still inside my head. I can feel that he's here, that he's content. I can feel his love .

"Oh," I breathe out feeling equal parts of wonder and disbelief. It really shouldn't surprise me but somehow it does. Testing out our bond, I project the words I want him to hear into his head. Gendry. I love you too.

Gendry's chest starts to rumble with a content purr. I love you so much, Aldo. I love you and our baby and our future together. I do not wish to ever leave your side. I will be your mate, content to make sure you are loved and cared for until the end of my life.

The declaration washes over me. It wiggles its way into every corner of my heart until there isn't a part of me that isn't filled with Gendry's love and devotion. Before I met him, I was ready to give up on love and now, in his arms, I'm so thankful that I gave him a shot. Gendry is everything I didn't know I needed in my life and I love him more than words can say.

So I don't use words. As best as I can, I project all of my thoughts and feelings for Gendry to feel for himself. His arms tighten around me further. He nuzzles my head, his purr growing even louder.

We stay like that for the rest of the night, testing our bond and sharing soft words in each other's heads. We plan our future on Gendry's home planet. We think about

names for our baby. We exist in each other's arms, ready to take on whatever the future has in store for each other, knowing we'll face it all together as a team.

No more holding back. Together, we're following our hearts.

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Source Creation Date: July 26, 2025, 5:48 am

Gendry

Are you sure about this? This is the last time I can ask before we leave .

Aldo looks up at me with a grin. Inside my head, I hear his voice. I'm sure, Gendry . It's still a marvel that I get to hear him inside my head. Our bond has formed beautifully. I'm not sure there's any distance we could go where we wouldn't be able to reach each other.

I feel closer to Aldo than I thought was possible. He is my delgando, my reason for rising in the morning, the sunshine that leaves me recharged and refreshed. He is my matron , my mate, my partner. I love him.

Taking his hand in my own, I turn towards Maria. Aldo explained that the translator was broken and how I needed to reach into her mind to speak with her. Are you sure you want to come along?

Maria slaps my chest playfully. "Of course I'm sure! Like I'd let you take my grandbaby to another planet where I can't visit." She makes a fart noise. "As if."

My chest feels near bursting with joy. I have my matron . I have my mother-in-law. I have my family. We're going to be going back home where my Layperry brothers will be waiting for me. I cannot wait to see Timalah once more. I can't wait to hug Ghenie, my Toralleh .

When the ship arrives, my stomach erupts with excited butterflies. Aldo stares at it in awe, his Mama mirroring the look as they watch it land and then open.

Three Layperry step out and I don't hold myself back. I turn to them, pulling them into my arms. They're dressed in their usual leather pants and harnesses and I can admit I miss wearing my usual clothes. Jeans are rough on my tail!

"Darthleem! Shuntar! Plan! I'm so happy to see you!" Having them this close reignites my connection with them. I suddenly feel less alone, like a new limb has formed after being missing for too long. It's warm and comforting. I didn't realize how much I needed this until I had it again.

"Gendry," Darthleem says, looking down at my stomach in shock. "Are you well?"

"Very," I tell them right away. I turn towards Aldo, gesturing for him to come close. Maria comes along as well. "This is my matron, Aldo. This is his mother, Maria."

"Matron?" I nod my head. I can feel them inside my head, feeling for my emotions. They're good brothers, wanting to make sure I'm truly happy and well. "Gendry, I'm so happy for you. You've left your home but found something greater than gold."

"I have," I tell him, resting my hand on his shoulder. My tail reaches out, wrapping around Aldo's waist, keeping him close.

Darthleem, Plan, and Shuntar help us carry our bags onto the ship. They've brought extra translator devices and I make sure both Aldo and Maria have one so they can understand all of the Layperry here on the ship and those they will meet when we arrive on my planet. Then I stand at the opening of the ship, waiting.

There are other people who come onto the ship, ready to embark on their own exchange program. Plan and Shuntar plan on staying here for the next year. But they're not who I'm waiting for.

Before leaving today, I stopped by Christian's apartment. He hugged me and wished

me the best before closing the door in my face. He's always been a man of few words, but I know he's been thinking long and hard the last few months.

"Gendry," Darthleem says softly, resting a hand on my shoulder. "We must leave."

"Just one more minute. Just a little longer. Please."

Darthleem sighs. "I can give you five, but that's it. We have to leave if we're to stay on schedule."

I nod my head. "I understand."

Standing in the opening of the ship, my hands resting on my round stomach, I wait. Just as the five minutes come to a close and the doors begin to move, I see him.

"Wait! Wait, there's one more!"

The doors halt as Christian leaps onto the ship, out of breath, face red from running. There's a bag slung over his shoulders and nothing else. He looks up at me with his eyes narrowed.

"Don't. Say. A. Word." Christian says between pants, doing his best to catch his breath.

I slap him on the back, humming happily to myself. I knew he'd come, I just knew it. He might be stubborn and grumpy, but he knows his place is with us, with the family that's adopted him into their hearts. His place is with his best friend, Miles, being the honorary uncle to Miles' and Timalah's children.

Plus, it's about time Christian actually sat down and talked with Ghenie about their feelings for each other. This is a good thing.

“I’m glad you are here,” I say as the ship doors close behind Christian.

“Whatever,” he says before pushing deeper into the ship, finding his seat and strapping in. He crosses his arms over his chest and stares out the window as we set off.

I rub at my stomach, wondering if the pressure difference of moving through space is making me cramp up or if maybe I ate something weird for breakfast that’s causing indigestion.

Everything okay? You look like you’re in pain, Gendry.

I turn towards my mate, coming to sit beside him. The Earth outside grows smaller and smaller until we can no longer see it.

I think I’m okay. My stomach is hurting a bit. I must have eaten something strange .

Aldo shakes his head. You didn’t eat anything strange that I can remember.

My brows wrinkle and I’m about to suggest maybe it’s something else when my bottom half grows wet all at once. I look down at myself, my eyes wide.

“What the fuck?” Christian blurts out, staring over at me. “No fucking way. Did your water just break?”

Just as he says it, my middle ripples with a tight cramp, pain exploding through me. Oh. Oh, by the Ancestors! This baby couldn’t decide to come just a little bit later?

“I think Christian is right,” I say, holding my stomach. “I think our baby is coming. Now.”

“Now? On the ship? In space?”

Maria jumps in, reaching across Aldo and taking my hand. “Everything will be okay.” Then she turns towards Aldo. “Stop panicking! You’re not helping your partner. You need to stay calm and in control, mijo.”

Aldo nods his head. He takes a few deep breaths before turning back towards me. “Everything is going to be fine,” he says slowly, like he’s trying to convince himself. He’s adorable. “What do you need?”

I look down at myself. “New pants and some towels to clean up this mess.”

“I’ll take care of that. You just umm, breathe? Or something? Fuck, I feel so unprepared for this.”

Maria stands up and calls over one of my Layperry brothers. “I need some bottled water, some towels, some new pants for my son-in-law, and maybe a bucket, just in case Aldo throws up.”

Aldo’s face goes white. “Throw up? Why would I throw up? Is something wrong with me?”

Maria shakes her head. “Deep breath, mijo. You’re fine, but I know you get squeamish sometimes. It’s just to be safe.”

“Right. That makes sense. Fuck,” Aldo turns back towards me, holding my hands. “I’m so focused on myself. I’m being a terrible partner. Are you still okay? How’s the pain? Should I rub your back?”

I can’t help but chuckle, watching my mate flounder like this. He’s usually so in control, able to face situations head-on without faltering. Seeing him this way is

amusing and helps distract me from the pains cramping my middle.

“I’m okay.” I lean forward in my seat. “You may rub my back.” I look over at Maria and she gives me a wink, knowing I’m doing this to keep Aldo busy and his mind off his anxiety.

Darthleem comes with blankets, towels, and water. Maria gently cleans me up and helps me out of my pants. I would be embarrassed if she wasn’t so lovely and kept reminding me that I’m her son now, just the same as Aldo. Christian squeezes my shoulder, silently letting me know he’s here for me as well. Darthleem keeps coming and going, making sure I have everything I might need.

I’m surrounded by people who love and care for me. What better place to bring a child into the world? They’re going to know love from the moment they join us.

I’m not sure how long it takes, but eventually the contractions running through my body intensify, coming quicker and quicker until they’re too hard to ignore. I position myself on my knees in front of Aldo’s chair, tucking my face against his stomach. Aldo runs his hands up and down my back as best as he can, massaging my shoulders.

Thankfully, by this point he’s calmed down. “You’re doing so well. You’re almost done. Our baby is almost here,” he murmurs, his voice soothing me to my core.

Darthleem and Maria are behind me, ready to catch our baby. I squeeze Aldo so tight I worry for his health as I bear down, letting my body follow the lead of my contractions.

“I see them,” Maria says from behind me. “Almost there, Gendry.”

Aldo wipes the sweat from my brow. “You’re almost done, love. Keep going. You

can do this.”

My tail flicks out as pain lances through me, connecting with someone. Maria makes a startled noise and I look back over my shoulder, finding her holding her cheek. We all freeze and a moment later, the four of us burst out laughing.

“I am so sorry!”

“It’s okay, it’s fine! Just focus on getting this baby out,” Maria says with a grin.

The laughing forces my muscles to contract in a new way and a moment later, I feel our baby slide free from my body. Relief like I’ve never felt before washes over me and I fall forward into Aldo again. I’m careful to keep my tail to myself.

“Oh, boys,” Maria says, her voice soft and filled with awe. “She’s beautiful.”

I quickly lift my head and turn so I can see our baby. Maria is correct. Our baby is beautiful. She looks completely human but for the two little antennae sprouting from her head. She’s a hybrid, a perfect mix of myself and my matron .

Aldo holds out his arms, taking our baby from his mother. He cradles her in his hands, staring down at her. Maria helps clean me up quickly before helping me to sit beside Aldo. There are tears in his eyes as he looks at her.

“I love her so much,” Aldo says, his voice shaky. “She’s the most perfect little person I’ve ever seen.”

“Just like her human father.”

Aldo hands her to me and I bring her to my chest, allowing her to feed for the first time. He places his hand over mine where it lays against our baby’s back. Then he

leans up and kisses my lips, conveying all his emotions in that simple kiss. I feel cared for. I feel loved. I feel cherished.

She looks so much like you. I feel so happy, delgando.

I'm happy too. I love you so much, Gendry.

“What’s my granddaughter’s name? Have you decided?” Maria asks, handing me a bottle of water.

I look to Aldo and he nods. “We’re going to call her MJ. Maria Jooth. Maria after you, and Jooth because it’s a Layperry name. She has both of our heritages, she deserves a name that reflects that.”

“Oh,” Maria breathes out, holding a hand over her open mouth. “You two,” she says, tears welling up in her eyes. I reach over and take her hand, giving it a squeeze.

“Thank you for your help. Thank you for raising Aldo. Thank you for seeing me as your own son.”

“That’s because you are,” she says, standing up so she can kiss my head, careful not to touch my antennae. Then she walks over to Darthleem, helping him get everything cleaned up.

A surprise birth on the ship wasn’t what I had planned for this trip home but neither was finding love while on Earth. Apparently, the Ancestors enjoy keeping me on my toes. I went to Earth to experience everything I could and in the process, I found Aldo.

I send up a silent prayer to my Ancestors, thanking them for guiding my path. This might not have been a traditional matrous trial , but I know they had a hand in

guiding the two of us together. I thank them for everything they've brought me and ask them to help guide Ghenie into our future. Our trials and traditions did what they needed to do in the past, but now, it feels like times are changing. It's time for the Layperry people to allow their hearts to lead them.

Mine has led me to Aldo. If mine can do that, I can only imagine where everyone else's will lead them.

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Aldo

I step off the ship, thankful to have my feet on solid ground once more. I carry all our bags while Gendry carries the precious cargo that is our daughter, MJ.

It's still hard to wrap my mind around the fact that I'm a father. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine my life going down this path. I'm on an alien planet for god's sake! No one could have prepared me for this! Even so, I know this is the path I was destined for. Everything here feels so good, so right.

I look around, gazing at all the faces staring back at me. Beautiful rainbow men as far as the eye can see. They all look so happy to see us, leaving me feeling welcome. Beyond them, is the city and beyond the city is green like I've never seen before. It's bright and lush and alive. The air here smells so crisp and fresh.

My head is spinning. It's still so hard to believe that we've made it to a completely different planet. I can't seem to wrap my head around it yet, like I'm going to fall asleep tonight and wake up back in my little apartment on Earth.

Mama takes my hand, looking around in awe. "I think I'm going to like it here," she whispers to me. I can't help but grin.

"Me too, Mama. Me too."

A Layperry man walks up to us. He's beautiful in a way that's hard to describe. Like an elf or a fairy. His skin is pale white and he has long platinum white hair that runs down his back. He holds himself in a way that demands respect and I find myself

straightening unconsciously. Despite the aura of authority he exudes, he's gentle and soft.

"Hello," he says with a kind smile. "Welcome to Deltourah . This is our capital city, Shentellah . I am very pleased to meet you. I am Ghenie."

"It's really nice to meet you. Gendry has talked about you a lot."

Gendry steps off the ship, his voice booming as he calls out, "Ghenie!"

Ghenie's face breaks out into a wide grin, his eyes shining with joy. Gendry steps over to him, pulling him into a tight hug, careful not to squish MJ. "And who is this?" Ghenie asks, placing his hands on Gendry's shoulder and looking down at our daughter.

"This is MJ, my daughter. You've met Aldo, my partner. Beside him is my mother-in-law, Maria."

"I never expected this when you left," Ghenie says softly. His eyes dart between Gendry's. "Are you happy?"

"More than I can say with words," he says, putting his hand on Ghenie's shoulder, matching his posture. The two of them get very close, their forehead almost touching. My guess is that they're communicating their emotions through the bond that they share. A tiny part of me is jealous that someone besides me is inside Gendry's head but that's something I need to get used to now that we're here. This is his family, his brothers. The bond they share doesn't affect the bond that we have between the two of us. Gendry deserves both in his life.

"Oh," Ghenie says softly. "That's lovely. I am so very happy for you, Gendry."

"Thank you, Toralleh ."

“I say this as your friend, not your Toralleh . You deserve this.”

From this angle, I can see the baby that’s strapped to Ghenie’s back. As far as I can tell, she’s human with bright eyes and messy brown hair on top of her head. I don’t have a lot of experience with children but if I had to guess, I’d say she was a few months older than MJ.

Gendry is about to say something else but someone gently pushes him to the side. Christian steps out of the ship. He looks around until his eyes land on Ghenie. I suck in a sharp breath as Christian grabs him by the front of his shirt, tugs him down into a kiss right on the mouth, before shoving him away and heading deeper into the crowd.

Christian walks over to a human man, pulling him into a hug, pretending like he didn’t just kiss the leader of this planet square on the mouth. What the fuck was that?

Ghenie touches his lips before turning his face away, trying to compose himself. Then he turns towards the crowd, holding up his hands. Just like that, he’s back to being everyone’s leader, completely put together and in control.

“We welcome everyone here whether they’re returning or only just starting their stay here! Tonight, we celebrate!”

Then Ghenie carefully swings the harness on his back around so he can take the baby out and hold her against his chest. He walks away into the crowd, disappearing before I can see where he actually goes.

I raise my brow at Gendry. “What was that about?”

“An overdue kiss between people holding themselves back.”

“They got history?”

“Like you wouldn’t believe.”

“What an interesting introduction to this new planet,” Mama murmurs, looking around. “Is everyday like that? I’ll need to get my implant as soon as possible so I don’t miss any of the drama!”

“Mama!”

“What? I’m just saying!”

The three of us chuckle as we head deeper into the city. That night, we get ourselves comfortable in our new house. MJ sleeps in her bassinet beside our bed and Mama has her own suite connected to our home. I was worried she wouldn’t be able to sleep with how excited by everything she was.

I lean against Gendry’s side, looking down at MJ as she sleeps. She looks so much like me when I was a baby. My heart feels so content and full and warm. Gendry’s tail wraps around my middle, holding on tight.

I’m happy .

Gendry hums and my chest somehow manages to warm even further.

As am I. I am so thankful that I’ve met you. I’m so thankful that you agreed to come home with me.

I’m happy to see other people with hair like yours. I hope I can talk some people into letting me be their hairstylist.

Gendry runs his fingers down my spine. I’ll talk them into it if I need to .

If someone told me last year that my heart would lead me across the universe I would

have laughed. As I stand beside my mate, staring down at my daughter, I'm overwhelmed by how glad I am to be here. I have everything I might need, everything I didn't know I wanted.

I miss my extended family, the ache in my chest is bright and burning because everything is so new but Gendry promised we can go back to Earth to visit. He explained there will be more exchanges and during one of them, we can go back or if they'd like, they could come here. We might be a galaxy away but we have ways of seeing each other again. This wasn't a goodbye, it was a see you later.

"Come," Gendry whispers into my hair. "Let's get some sleep. Tomorrow we can start looking at buildings for your new business endeavor."

"Thank you," I say softly, letting Gendry lead me into our bed. Gendry wraps himself around my back, holding me.

"For what?"

"For loving me. For taking a chance on me. For following your heart even when I was ready to back off. I love you, Gendry."

Gendry nuzzles the back of my head. "I love you. Thank you for doing the same for me. You are mine and I am yours until the Ancestors call us to their side."

That sounds like a perfect plan to me.

The End