



Orin (The Protectorate Warriors Alien Fated Mates #2)

Author: *Rayne Reilly*

Category: Fantasy

Description: The Krilex and Unknown alien forces continue to threaten and unravel the delicate, peaceful balance in Alaran space. And tensions among Alara's citizens grow daily. Orin, a fierce Protectorate Warrior, is tasked with the critical mission of protecting the king and queen and rooting out shapeshifting enemies bent on destruction.

Beneath his warrior's exterior, he harbors a secret that weakens him more than any foe: his intense feelings for Olivia, a human woman who makes him feel more than he ever thought possible. But Orin finds it challenging to open up to her.

Can he protect her from danger while finally telling her she is his K'sha, his soulmate?

Or will his fear of rejection force them apart?

Olivia, a pregnant former school teacher from Earth, now lives on planet Alara. The home of the Empire and the head of the Protectorate Alliance.

With her future uncertain, she can't shake the magnetic pull toward the handsome stoic warrior. Since the moment they met, her heart has belonged to Orin.

But with each passing day, his cold distance makes her question if she'll ever find the happiness she longs for.

This story is a slow burn, low-angst romance with some steamy bits, and a sweet hero. Adult content. Also, with plenty of intrigue, excitement and hunky aliens.

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Orin

THE DOOR TO KING TREX'S private office slid open, and I stepped inside. Positioned on one wall was a sizable viewscreen, while Trex was seated at the table across from it.

I saluted him, placing my right fist across my chest to my left shoulder. In return, he mirrored my actions and signaled for me to sit across from him.

Following the demise of his father, King Trex took the throne, and I had accepted a job at the palace. He had been my Captain on the Chetok, and I held him in high esteem. Trex was an honorable leader and warrior.

My position at the palace granted me the chance to make up for failing to protect Queen Grace from a shapeshifter.

Although I was incapacitated, I still felt shame for not stopping her abduction.

Afterward, they both reassured me it was not my fault.

This only increased my admiration and respect for them.

Thankfully, the Queen was unharmed. Yet, it did not ease my guilt.

My desire to remain on Alara went beyond my loyalty to the new King. One of the most extraordinary females I had ever laid eyes on resided within the walls of the palace.

The feelings I experienced for her while serving as her protector on the ship were unfamiliar and unexpected. My mind was consumed with longing as I imagined the enticing feel of her curves, picturing the gentle caress of her soft skin against my fingertips.

Before meeting her, all my focus had been on being a warrior. I knew nothing else.

But from the moment I met Olivia, I felt a deep connection to her that confused me. At first, I didn't know if my suspicions were accurate or if they were due to my loneliness influencing my emotions. Despite exchanging glances and brief greetings, I found myself unable to speak to her.

I knew very little about humans, especially females. My lack of experience with relationships stopped me from pursuing her.

From the moment we arrived on Alara, I'd been observing Olivia's expanding belly. I knew she was expecting a youngling. This only made her more stunning in my eyes. But I was inexperienced in the matters of being a mate, let alone taking on the role of a father to a youngling.

Seated upright with my hands on my thighs I bowed my head once before speaking. "You wanted to see me, majesty?"

"Alaran groups calling themselves purists are targeting individuals who are not pure-blooded Alarans. There have been a series of physical assaults on hybrid Alarans."

Tensions in the city had escalated following the coronation and the unearthing of shapeshifters on Alara.

One had killed Trex's father, the former King. While another attempted to kill Trex.

I'd heard about the problems within the city, from my fellow palace guards.

Vendors at the marketplace, who were attempting to sell their products, had been suffering from blatant abuse by groups of Alaran males.

We'd never had this problem in the past, and it was very troubling.

Trex continued. "I have reason to believe the purist group is receiving their instructions from within the city guard itself." King Trex ruled the Alaran Empire, which included the Protectorate Alliance and many planets within Alaran space.

The King had a Council to assist him in running the Alliance, but all final decisions or rulings were up to him.

Until recently, no one had challenged the Monarchy.

But with the discovery of an Unknown race of aliens, things had become unpredictable. His concern about the situation on Alara was understandable. "What would you like me to do?"

"I've arranged for you to work with the guard.

They think I have dismissed you. They won't suspect anything. While you are there, I want you to monitor Commander Tinuk. Get what information you can about the purist group. Report only to me and only at my private quarters. I do not know who can be trusted."

I stated firmly, "I won't let you down, sir."

Trex smiled. "I know you won't. I'm asking you to do this for that reason." He sat back and sighed, his posture relaxing just a little.

Then he sat forward with his arms on the desk. “You're a good and loyal warrior, Orin. I have no doubt you have Alara's best interests at heart.” He sighed. “Sometimes I wish I was back on the Chetok. Things seemed more straightforward there. We knew who the enemy was and I could trust my crew.

Since I've been here, it's been nothing but one problem after another. I'm worried things will only get worse.”

We teetered on the brink of war with an Unknown alien species, who were partnered with the Krilex. The reptilian aliens were slavers and pirates, which made their alliance with the Unknown all the more concerning.

I nodded my head in agreement. “Have you heard from Captain Krin?”

I too missed the crew on the Chetok where I'd served for several tenri. But the thought of leaving Alara now filled me with sadness. It would mean leaving Olivia...the one female I yearned to claim as my mate.

“We are trying to find out where the Unknown aliens are hiding their ships. Commander Krin received news that one of the moons of Jaxia might house a base for them. They are headed there now. If Krin can locate their base, we have a chance to stop them before they do any more damage within our system.”

I frowned. “I've heard the Protectorate Forces are having a hard time keeping up with the attacks on some of the smaller planets?” In fact, it was common knowledge among my fellow guards, but I hadn't heard it from Trex himself yet.

“The Unknown are no doubt behind the attacks on vulnerable planets. Even with extra ships, it is difficult to keep up with the onslaught of problems. The Krilex appears to be backing off...I guess that is something.” Trex's mouth twisted.

“Have there been any new discoveries of shapeshifters?” I asked.

“Not that I know of. Council member Vimur and advisor Xilta are doing their best to keep me informed. Ixul leaders have become more accommodating as they realize the severity of the threat.”

A shudder ran through me. We were aware of the two shapeshifters found on Alara. Their confessions proved they were not only after mining resources on the planet, but wanted females to use as incubators for their offspring. Gods only knew what they had planned for Alara and the Protectorate.

Their threats about removing the Monarchy and taking down the Protectorate Alliance were being taken seriously. The warriors and leaders on Alliance worlds were more diligent than ever in trying to stop the encroaching enemies.

LEAVING THE PALACE for the city guard even for a short while, made me apprehensive. After meeting with King Trex, I found myself tempted to take a detour past Olivia's suite. It had become something I did more than I cared to admit to myself.

As usual, I found myself lingering outside her door, hoping to catch a whiff of her one-of-a-kind, soft, powdery fragrance. It was as essential to me as the very air I needed to survive.

The incredible human had captivated me. There were instances where I almost found the confidence to approach her, allured by her glances and sweet smiles. But I hesitated because I lacked confidence.

Instead, I did my duty as a warrior, hoping I could move past my feelings for her. However, they had only become even stronger. The desire to hold Olivia consumed me. I wished I could convey all the love and admiration I had for her while getting

lost in her sparkling brown eyes.

Despite lacking personal experience with female intimacy, I had a thorough grasp of the essential aspects of mating. I knew that beneath her clothing lay a coveted prize, beckoning me to claim it.

My thoughts and dreams were haunted by Olivia. Each time I contemplated going to her, I stopped myself, fearing I would only end up losing her. What if I was unable to keep her safe? The thought of losing Olivia was too much.

Being rejected by her would be even more painful.

I found myself making excuses instead of summoning the courage to talk to her. The turmoil I'd been feeling gnawed at me, leaving me restless and uncertain. Deep down, I suspected she was my K'sha. But I felt powerless to act on it.

Each time I contemplated approaching her, my fears constructed an unbreakable wall that appeared impossible to overcome. With every passing cycle and the growth of the youngling inside Olivia, my concerns about being a worthy mate for her grew.

I had no memory of my own parents. What knowledge did I have about fatherhood?

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Olivia

FOUR MONTHS HAD GONE by in a flash since I first found myself on an alien slave planet. It was insane. I never expected to hear myself utter those words. 'I was abducted by aliens.'

Shaking my head, I reminded myself that my life began to fall apart two months before that. When I told my boyfriend, Roger, I was pregnant, and he ended our relationship.

Then, while driving home from work, my car broke down on a side road, leaving me stranded. As if things couldn't get any worse, I was taken away by aliens while sitting in my car crying over the state of my life.

In a world where humans inhabited colonies and space stations throughout the Milky Way and beyond, encounters with aliens were no longer a rare occurrence.

Despite my knowledge of alien existence, I had never come face to face with one.

It was a shocking experience to wake up and realize that I was stranded on an alien planet. Several more women had been abducted, which was the only saving grace. Having them around prevented me from getting too overwhelmed and losing my mind.

The Krilex, an alien race, had plans to enslave us after purchasing us from our abductors, the Zinids. We were fortunate that the Protectorate warriors saved us in time to stop the reptilian aliens from taking us.

On the Protectorate spaceship, we were guarded by a gorgeous warrior protector named Orin. My heart fluttered every time I thought about him even though he didn't acknowledge me now that we were on the planet Alara. Well, he did sometimes smile and say hello. But that was the extent of it.

My smile faded as I looked at my reflection staring back at me.

Running my hands over my light-brown curls, I took a moment to appreciate how the pale blue dress with navy accents hugged my growing belly and swollen bosom.

My pregnancy bump had become increasingly noticeable each week, and at about eight months pregnant, it was impossible to hide.

Not that I wanted to hide it. I was excited to meet my baby despite everything.

"Olivia, it is time to meet Queen Grace for lunch." The male AI voice made me jump.

You would think I'd be used to it by now. "Thanks," I said aloud.

The AI system provided a small reprieve from the loneliness and isolation in my spacious apartment.

Technically, where I lived was one of the palace's guest suites. At first, it felt strange living in a palace. Not that it looked like one. It resembled a fancy hotel, similar to ones on Earth. Only far more hi-tech.

My accommodations were larger than my old apartment back home, with multiple bedrooms, a huge balcony, three bathrooms, and a massive living room with two long sofas.

In the kitchen, there was a sink and a food prep area equipped with a complicated

food replicator.

Thankfully, there was a dining hall which I sometimes attended for my meals when I wanted some company.

Sometimes I ate with Grace and Trex in their private apartment, but I liked to give them their privacy.

There were days I still couldn't believe how vastly different my life had become.

It was odd to think that soon I'd be a single mother raising a human child on a strange new world.

I hadn't made many new friends since I rarely left the palace. Aside from Clor, one of the kitchen staff, my friends included only Grace and Trex. Rekna, whom I met on the Protectorate ship, was someone I also considered a friend, but we didn't hang out or anything.

He now served as the palace medic and was very protective of my baby and would give me grief if my body showed even the slightest hint of poor nutrition or dehydration.

Luckily, my checkups showed the pregnancy was going well for both me and the baby. Rekna seemed thrilled about my baby's upcoming birth and was always reminding me that Alara needed more younglings. He was the only one I trusted to help deliver my baby when the time came.

Orin was the one person I desired beyond friendship, but that was a pipe dream. Since I was already pregnant when I was abducted, I was under no illusion that he would want to be with me. But I couldn't deny he was all I had thought about since I first saw him.

Because he was our chief guard on the Chetok, I got used to seeing him every day. Though he didn't smile often and rarely spoke, I'd looked forward to seeing him and the pleasant tingles I felt every time I caught him looking at me.

His handsome blue-green face, pointed ears, shoulder-length brown hair, and dark-blue eyes drew me in every time. I couldn't help but be attracted to him.

Once or twice the usually somber warrior smiled at me, which filled me with hope he might feel something for me too. I was left disappointed, though.

Glancing at the time, I sighed and rushed out of my apartment to avoid wallowing any further.

As I waddled out of my suite, I glimpsed Clor heading in my direction. "Hello," he grinned, stopping in front of me and holding up a plate of Alaran baked goodies that made my stomach growl. "I brought something for you."

I glanced at the plate, then back at him, and my lips curved downward. "Actually, I am heading to the garden to have lunch with Queen Grace, but thanks for thinking of me."

My frown turned into a grin when I saw the smile didn't leave his face. I sensed he may have wanted to hang out for a while, so I added, "If you want to come by later this afternoon, we can visit and share these goodies?"

He nodded and pulled the plate back. "Then I will bring these with me when I visit you later. I don't want to make you late for lunch with the Queen." He sidestepped, and we walked down the hallway together.

The journey from palace to garden resembled an art gallery, showcasing intricate tapestries and paintings depicting past rulers. The fancy rugs in certain halls made me

feel like I was committing a crime by stepping on them.

“I’ve missed seeing you since you stopped helping us in the kitchen. The market visits are less interesting now too,” said Clor.

Then when I didn't respond he asked, “How do you feel today?”

“The baby has been kicking up a storm, but otherwise nothing exciting to report.” I grinned. He didn’t need to know about the various side effects of my pregnancy, such as swollen ankles and a persistent feeling of bloating. Not to mention the frequent trips to the toilet.

We didn’t have that kind of relationship.

Grace and Rekna were the only ones I complained to, and even then, I felt self-conscious if I divulged too much.

“Your Terran language has such descriptive vocabulary.” Clor shook his head, looking amused.

“I suppose we do.” I laughed. Alaran’s weren’t much for colloquialisms or sayings. Clor frequently chuckled at my remarks, but he never made me feel stupid for the things I said. Which I appreciated.

Not long after I offered to work in the kitchen, I became friends with Clor, a kind, and mixed race Alaran. Making a new friend was great, but since Alara’s inhabitants were mostly male, I had to accept that any new friends would probably be male too.

It was a bit of a change since there was a fine line to walk regarding the males, and I still wasn’t clear on all Alaran customs yet. I kept things light in all my chats with guys at the palace so as not to give any of the males the wrong impression.

It was important that I treaded carefully where they were concerned. I didn't want a romantic partner at the moment. Unless Orin had a sudden willingness to be with me, of course. Which didn't look like a possibility.

Sighing, I smoothed some hair off my face and redirected my attention to Clor.

The friendly male, standing at almost seven feet tall, towered over me and was at least half-a-foot taller than Orin or other pure Alarans. Adorning his head were two gold-colored horns, with one extending from each temple that curled around his pointed ears.

All pure Alarans possessed blue-green skin, but Clor's teal skin also had a shimmery silver hue to it. His hair was white as snow and cut short. Although he seemed close in age to me, I wasn't sure how old he was.

The two large bumps on his back were almost hidden by his typical attire of pale trousers and a billowy beige top. The bumps confused me. Once I got to know him, I asked about them and he confessed that his mother was Ixul from the planet Graacux.

He was born with wings like his mother and confided in me he had never shown them to anyone in public. He kept them hidden. Even from me. Clor did not possess the same level of telepathy as pure-blooded Alarans, but he appeared to have strong empathic abilities.

Despite their differences, I stopped perceiving the people around me as aliens.

Rather than fighting against my new circumstances, I realized it was easier to accept my new life and try to adapt best I could. That included accepting that the people on Alara looked different from me, and I was one of only two humans on the planet.

I got the impression that Clor wasn't comfortable with long silences. Because when

we hung out, he talked. A lot. Today was no different, and Clor didn't stop talking while he filled me in on the latest juicy palace gossip.

"...and someone witnessed them exiting the closet," he finished, then widened his eyes, giving a scandalous glance.

I couldn't help but chuckle at the way Clor told stories with all the drama in his voice. It was delightful that this seven-foot tall being that appeared intimidating was lighthearted and funny.

He sighed, and I noticed a wistful look on his face, but it vanished when he caught me staring. We were both lonely, but avoided discussing it with one another. I didn't want to hurt Clor or lead him on. My heart belonged to someone who would never want me. But it didn't stop my longing for Orin.

We neared the doors to the gardens, and Clor turned his head to gaze at me. "Have you considered where you'll live after the baby is born? Are you still thinking of leaving Alara?"

My eyes met his. "I haven't decided yet." I responded with a casual shrug.

The reality was that I couldn't decide whether to stay on Alara.

Should I choose to stay, Grace would be the only female friend I had, and I'd still feel lonely. Especially since I couldn't see myself settling down with anyone but Orin.

Being surrounded by thousands of other humans in a human colony would help me feel less isolated. There, I wouldn't bump into Orin and be reminded that he had no desire to be with me.

"I understand." Clor nodded, looking disappointed. "I'll make my way back to the

kitchen.” He smiled. “I promise to bring extra yudatillo cakes when I visit later.”

We said goodbye, and he headed toward the kitchen.

When I turned, I saw Orin walking in the opposite direction. It had been weeks since I last saw him and I couldn’t resist calling out just to get a glimpse of his face.

My mouth fell open when he stopped and gazed back in my direction. He squinted at Clor’s back, then grumbled something about the city guard, but I couldn’t make out what he was saying.

Without a second look, he walked away. If I didn’t know any better, I would think he was jealous. I laughed at my thoughts. Yeah, right. Good one, Liv.

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Olivia

STEPPING INTO THE PALACE garden, I was met with unique floral scents that never failed to lift my spirits. There was a mix of sweet yet peppery fragrances. They weren't familiar to me, so I couldn't compare them to anything on Earth.

The colors on this planet were truly exceptional. The sky also had a soft pink hue that I found fascinating. There were tiny shrubs with cute yellow-gold flowers that stuck straight up, and the garden beds had tons of plants, shrubs, and flowers of all shapes and sizes.

I didn't stop to admire them because I knew Grace was waiting for me at one of the tables in the tent.

The same tent where King Trex was crowned and their mate bonding ceremony took place.

Trex's transition from warrior to King left him unsettled when we first arrived on his home planet, after his father's death.

But together, he and Grace were making the best of ruling the planet and overseeing the Protectorate Alliance Forces.

I heard my name being called by Grace, and I turned to see her waving at me. She was my sole human companion on Alara since Riley left months ago with Krin.

"You look pretty today," she said, getting up to hug me.

Standing nearby were staff waiting to bring us our food. My butt barely hit the chair when one of the male staff members brought over a tray of cups, a pot of Tulian tea, and some Alaran foods that I already knew would be delicious.

The baby kicked, and I rubbed my belly, eyeing the delicious-looking lunch. The tray also had some yummy yudatillo cake, my favorite sweet treat.

I was tempted to start with that, but stopped myself.

“Is he kicking?” Grace asked with a huge grin.

“Yes. He’s getting more active. Since I stopped helping out in the kitchen, I spend a lot of time reading Alaran children's books to him. He seems to like it.”

Both Grace and I had received translator upgrades, that taught our brain how to read and write the Alaran language.

“It’s tough to keep myself occupied sometimes.

That’s why I like when we can have lunch together.

” Grace didn’t need to know I was having trouble coping at times.

Especially seeing how happy Grace was with Trex.

I wished things were going better for me here.

“It's great to see you finally settling in.” She said, giving her teacup handle a gentle stroke.

“I don't really have a choice.” My tone was resentful, and her expression made me

feel guilty.” I added, “don’t get me wrong, I’m glad you and Trex allow me to stay here at the palace... I am going crazy thinking about life after the baby's arrival.”

She reached out and squeezed my hand. “Please don’t be concerned. I’m here for you, and you can stay as long as you want. I would miss you if you left. It sounds selfish, but it’s true,” she said, chuckling. “Have you considered your plans for after the baby arrives?”

“It would be nice to teach again someday.” I shrugged and my mouth twisted in one corner. I missed seeing my students and having a job to go to.

A staff member poured tea for each of us, and Grace thanked him and took a sip before picking up a sandwich. “I am sure you will get to teach again. When you’re ready.” She took a bite of her sandwich while I watched.

The sleeveless dress she was wearing highlighted her curvy figure, and my eyes widened when I noticed the beautifully detailed, colorful patterns on her wrists.

“Grace! Are those what I think?”

She placed the rest of her sandwich on the plate and extended her arms to show me the colorful marks in red, blue, and gold.

“They are the same mating marks as Trex has on his chest...I expected them when we first bonded. Rekna believes that their sudden appearance is due to me carrying a half-Alaran child,” she said, beaming.

Delighted, I let out a high-pitched squeal. “Oh, Grace that’s fantastic! You both must be so happy. Wow...how far along are you?”

The sheer delight I felt for her had me squirming with excitement in my seat.

“We are. We both can't wait to be parents. It seems I am about three months pregnant...I didn't want to say until I knew for sure.” Her skin was glowing, and I shook my head surprised that I hadn't clued in sooner.

I pointed to her wrists. “When did they appear?” I hadn't seen them, or maybe I just never noticed? Then I recalled how she had been wearing long-sleeved, summery dresses a lot. It was clear she'd kept them concealed until now.

“When we bonded, I had hoped they would appear, but Trex said not to get my hopes up because I am human and they might not. Then, about a month after I conceived, they began to show.”

“Wow. That's amazing. Our children will be close in age. If I am still living here after he or she is born maybe they can play together and will one day become friends?”

It was painful knowing I would never have an Alaran/human child. I wasn't good at romantic relationships and I'd only ever had one boyfriend. When Roger broke up with me, I wasn't surprised, but I was hurt. He had never been attentive, and never made me feel like I mattered to him.

When I saw the way Trex was with Grace, I knew I deserved better. Part of me worried that I'd never find someone who would love me. However, I had come to terms with being alone, particularly with the added responsibility of a child.

I released a long breath, wishing I could quit fantasizing about having an adoring alien mate like Grace.

It hurt to know that the only person I would consider a relationship with, didn't want me.

Joining a human colony seemed like the only way forward for me.

Grace gaped at me. “Are you really thinking of leaving, then? Once you’ve given birth, I mean.

... I didn't think you were serious about it.” Her mouth sunk into a sad smile.

Nodding, I chewed my bottom lip, holding back tears to avoid spoiling our lunch.

My hormones were making me way too emotional these days.

When I could speak without crying, I said.

“In all honesty, a human colony would be a more logical choice. Plus, I can’t expect to stay here for free forever.

” My gaze fixed on my teacup as I continued. “It’s not just about me now.”

I glanced at Grace. “Baby deserves the best shot at a good life.”

I wasn’t being completely honest with myself or Grace, but things weren’t looking up for me here. I craved a life beyond what I had and I craved a mate of my own. It was painful to see Orin, wanting him and knowing there was no chance to be with him.

I didn't think he knew I was pregnant on the ship, but now that I was showing, he would know. Being pregnant ensured he would not want to be with me.

My friend went silent, and took a sip of her tea. Then she reached over and squeezed my hand, as she was so fond of doing when she wanted to comfort me. Grace was like an older sister to me and we'd become fast friends.

“Take your time. Don't rush into this important decision.”

Nodding in agreement, I glanced down at the food in front of me. I picked up one of my sandwiches, studying its contents.

“A relationship with Orin might make me stay. But he always runs in the other direction whenever we see one another. It's clear he doesn't want to be with me.” My lips curved into a frown. “I suppose it makes sense. What guy wants to help raise another man's child?”

Grace tilted her head, giving me a sympathetic look. “Orin will come around. Give it time.”

With my hormones running wild, my voice rose when I snapped in frustration. “Time! He's had months already! We met four months ago on that ship, Grace.” I scoffed, feeling my anger rise, making my chest tight.

A lump lodged in my throat and I forced it down. My next statement was fueled by hurt. “I'm tired of sitting around, waiting for something to happen with him. Maybe it's time to set my sights on other males? There are plenty of them available.”

She closed her lips and gave me a skeptical look. “You know you don't mean that. Besides, Orin could be your fated mate.”

A rueful snort escaped me. When an Alaran male met his K'sha, or fated mate, he knew it. Trex proved that when he met Grace. There was no way I could be Orin's fated mate. He'd know if I was. He would've said something.

“When did you last lay eyes on him?” Grace asked.

My shoulders tightened. “While coming here, he turned and walked away. He's

barely said a word to me in months.” My lips drooped. “Even on the ship when we spoke before, it was only to relay instructions to me. We’ve discussed nothing personal.”

I stroked the side of my teacup. “Today was the first time I’ve spotted him at the palace in weeks.”

In the halls, he couldn't seem to get away from me fast enough. I had no idea why he disliked me so much. I'd done nothing to make him feel that way. At least I didn't think I did.

My thoughts made tears well up.

Grace gave me a thin smile, as if she understood my situation.

She didn't. Trex made it clear right away that she was his fated mate, and he did everything he could to win her love. For them, it was love at first sight.

But I understood she was trying to be supportive, so I said nothing.

“He’s rarely been here. Trex has him assigned to the city guard.” She said, as if that altered anything. My heart sank at her words. It just proved he didn't want to be around me. I frowned, but Grace continued to elaborate.

“Trex says things are still tense in the city. There are problems cropping up with some of the citizens and the guards. Trouble is brewing due to rumors of more shapeshifters on the planet.”

An icy chill ran through me. “Have they discovered more shapeshifters?”

Upon our arrival on Alara, Grace had a firsthand encounter with one. Playing the role

of a royal medic, he went to the extent of killing Trex's father, then abducting her.

Luckily, she didn't get injured, but it frightened me enough to avoid leaving the palace alone.

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Grace tilted her head and gave me a tight smile. “No. There have been no reports of them. The city guard knows what to look for and Orin's new posting there will help weed out anyone with bad intentions.”

“Hopefully, Orin will be happier working for the city guard.” I didn’t mean it. In truth, I’d miss seeing him around.

Taking a sip of my hot tea, I enjoyed its sweetness, closing my eyes for a moment. When I opened them, Grace glanced around as if making sure we were alone.

She leaned forward and spoke in a hushed tone. “Orin’s posting is only temporary. It’s top secret.... he is trying to find out if anyone on the guard is involved in a series of attacks on non-Alarans.” She relayed, as if knowing my thoughts.

Thank god he’ll be coming back.... hang on . “What?” I gasped.

She raised her hand. “Males are the ones being hassled. Fortunately, no one has suffered severe injuries. Fear can lead to foolish behavior. That’s all this is.” She sat back in her seat, brushing some of her long red hair off her face.

That didn't sound reassuring at all. How could she be so nonchalant? As a nurse, her perspective on things like this differed from mine.

We both continued to eat in silence for several minutes. My mind wandered to how I ended up in another part of the galaxy where there always seemed to be one crisis after another.

I thought about my students back on Earth who were ages seven and eight. A perfect age where wonder and mystery abounded in their imaginations. Biting the inside of my cheek, I wondered what people thought happened to me when I failed to show up for work?

Not that it mattered. There was nobody who cared about me. No one who loved me.

“Liv?”

Grace’s voice jolted me back to reality. Shaking my head, I glanced at her. “Huh?”

Her lips were curled into a grin. “Any plans for the rest of the day?”

Grace wasn’t just the new Queen of Alara. She had been a nurse on Earth and spent some of her day with Rekna in the palace infirmary. He’d been training her since we were on the Chetok, Trex’s former starship.

She worked, a lot. Which was one of the reasons we didn’t go outside together. Plus, as a Queen, she couldn’t leave without a guard.

“Oh...I don’t know...Clor might drop by for a visit. I was thinking of asking him to go with me to the market just to get some fresh air. We’ll take a viko though. Walking far is too hard for me right now.” It beats sitting in my apartment feeling bored.

Grace reached over and patted my baby bump. “Just don’t overdo it, Liv. Rest as much as you can. Baby will be here soon.”

Ever the nurse and big sister, I chuckled at her advice. “Don’t worry, I won’t do anything demanding.” I grinned when baby kicked my hand in response as well.

INSTEAD OF WAITING for Clor to come visit me at my apartment, I decided to

head to the kitchen to ask him about going outside for a walk.

The only sounds I heard as I walked through the halls were the occasional nearby footfalls of leather boots on the floor. Alarans communicated telepathically, leaving few voices to be heard.

I entered the sprawling palace kitchen and greeted everyone with a “Good afternoon.”

The aroma of herbs, yeasty breads, and savory soup filled my nose. Even though I just ate, my stomach still growled.

With its sleek metal counter tops, the kitchen had designated spaces for both cooking and food preparation. The cooked meals always provided a sense of familiarity and comfort, making the alien world feel less foreign.

The two cooks, always too busy to chat, stood with their backs to me and didn’t look at me. Whenever I arrived to assist, they were always at the stove, communicating telepathically.

“Olivia!” Clor’s face lit up with a smile as he looked up from chopping vegetables. “I wasn’t expecting you to visit.”

I grinned at him. “I wondered if you wanted to head to the marketplace with me this afternoon?”

At times, the palace felt like the only place. Like I was living in a safe bubble. Aside from the fresh air, I enjoyed spending time outdoors somewhere other than the palace halls or gardens.

Clor went back to chopping up vegetables. “Of course. I am almost finished here and we can head out.” He looked over at me. “Perhaps it’s best to arrange transportation,

don't you think?"

I chuckled. "Yes, for sure."

When we first became acquainted, Clor and I began regularly escaping the confines of the palace to visit the market together.

Until a couple of weeks ago, we would wander to the vibrant marketplace on foot.

There, he would buy foods requested by the cooks, and we would walk around seeing what the various vendors were selling.

A credit system was used on Alara, and Trex made sure I was given a weekly number of credits for anything I might want to buy. I chose kitchen work to earn them. Being in the kitchen gave me a sense of contribution.

I lent a hand whenever I could until my lack of stamina got the better of me and it was too much at this late stage in my pregnancy.

Not that I was very fit before I got pregnant, mind you. I'd always had a curvaceous body, with some extra weight on my hips and thighs. But at this point in my pregnancy, I was always tired and sometimes needed an afternoon nap.

I watched as Clor removed his apron and motioned for me to lead the way out of the kitchen toward the staff entrance.

When it came to weather, Struna boasted a year-round warm and inviting climate.

It fascinated me it only appeared to rain at night, waiting until the cover of darkness to water the plants and fill the water reservoirs.

Once we were dropped at the marketplace, I pushed myself to keep pace while Clor adjusted his speed and stride to ensure I could keep up.

As usual, Clor talked non stop, and I nodded along, responding with a half-hearted, “Hmm” to show I was paying attention.

I grinned to myself as I listened. It was easier to stay quiet and listen sometimes.

I enjoyed having someone to go walking with, so I wasn’t going to complain.

In the past month or two, I’d only ventured outside the palace when in the company of others.

I’d spent a lot of time avoiding anxious males when I first ventured outside the palace gates alone. I figured, since I was assured Alaran males did not believe in harming women, it would be okay. The problem was that unmated males would approach me under the assumption I was looking for a mate.

They would offer to protect me and be my mate. Even when they realized I wasn’t their K’sha, mind you.

It was obvious they sought companionship and weren’t picky about who they wanted. It surprised me how direct they were about their desire for me. They didn’t seem to care about my very obvious pregnancy.

We approached the food stands, and I noticed a small group of Alaran males jeering and picking on one of the mixed-Alaran vendors. When we got closer, I heard what they were saying.

“You don’t belong here freak.”

“Leave Alara if you value your well-being.”

Their words filled me with shock and disbelief. Even though Grace mentioned some people might not like non-Alarans, I never thought I’d witness this kind of behavior right in front of me.

This was the first instance of bullying at the marketplace that I’d witnessed in all my visits.

Due to the infertility of Alaran females and their dwindling numbers, some males sought mates from other planets and brought them back to Alara. They’d been doing so since the viral outbreak thirty tenri ago.

As a result of these mixed couplings, there were some younger citizens who weren’t full-blooded Alaran. Just like Clor.

My stomach flipped, and I cringed.

Clor’s lips were spread into a grim line as he watched the crowd.

I raised my voice to be heard over the rude males. “Let’s come back another time.”

He glanced at me with anger evident in his gunmetal gray eyes. “No. We came to shop, so that’s what we’ll do.” He gestured with his head, pointing to the right. “The city guard is approaching. They will stop this from escalating.”

I cast a brief glance to my right and froze. Orin was staring back at me and our eyes locked.

The vendor started yelling when the males grabbed fruit from his stand and started throwing them at him. Several other Alaran males pushed past me, and I stumbled

while being shoved aside. Clor grasped my arm and yanked me away from the group.

Orin's eyes moved from me to Clor and back to me again. Then he scowled before racing forward and snatching the guy who had made me stumble. An angry roar erupted from his chest, contorting his lips.

The impact of his fist connecting with the guy's cheek sent a resounding sound echoing through the air.

I let out a shocked squeak and covered my mouth.

Orin glanced at another guard who was standing nearby, and pushed the troublemaker over to him then stepped away.

With a confident stride, he pushed back his shoulders and walked toward me, only to be interrupted by another guard calling his name. His eyes darted from the chaos to me, revealing his inner turmoil.

I saw his super-heated gaze and my heart quickened with each new emotion that flickered across his face. I could see the fire in his eyes, igniting a profound desire within me, as if an invisible string was pulling me toward him.

As my body heated up, the world around me seemed to fade away leaving only Orin and me. I'd never seen that determined look in his eyes before...it wasn't just intense... it was akin to a deep desire or insatiable hunger.

My lips parted as I sucked in a quick breath

Clor bent down and asked if I was alright, and just like that, the magic between Orin and me disappeared. I caressed my growing belly. It felt like I was drowning in heart-wrenching sadness that I couldn't contain.

“I think I’d like to go home. I’m not feeling well,” I choked out.

Clor opened his mouth, his eyes showing how worried he was. “Of course.... did they hurt you?”

I shook my head, trying to clear the confusing thoughts swirling in my mind. “Can we please just go?” I snapped.

My friend guided me to the outskirts of the bustling marketplace, where he hailed a viko to take us back to the palace.

While we walked away, I was startled by a deep growl that vibrated in the air behind me.

I glanced over my shoulder to see Orin's fierce gaze fixed upon Clor.

There was no doubt in my mind if his gaze had the power, Clor would have been reduced to dust. Orin’s clenched fists and twisted mouth revealed a level of anger I had also never witnessed in him before.

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Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Orin

THE MEMORY OF OLIVIA with another male made me clench my jaw in irritation.

I'd not laid eyes on her in many rotations while I'd been away serving the city guard on behalf of the King. Earlier in the day I'd reported to King Trex. Afterward, I ventured down the hall past her suite.

The sight of her speaking to a male sparked an intense anger, akin to a blazing fire. But the thing that still distressed me most was what I'd overheard.

She'd told the male she planned to leave Alara once the youngling was born.

I felt my heart being pulled and twisted in anguish. The mere notion of her absence from Alara felt like an unbearable weight on my heart.

Being a warrior held great significance to me. It was the only thing I was familiar with. However, I had no desire to be on a ship that would take me away from my planet for long periods of time.

I stayed here for good because of Olivia.

AFTER LEAVING THE PALACE I went back to my position at the marketplace later in the day.

I tried to push my emotions aside and focus on my job when the sound of shouting echoed through the air. Scanning the crowd, I hoped to spot the troublemakers I'd

been sent to investigate.

My eyes fell upon something unexpected and my breath caught. Olivia stood in the busy marketplace. Her presence caused me to stop in my tracks.

My heart pounded like a Tulian war drum, overwhelming my senses as it filled my ears, while my fingers grew taut by my sides.

Our eyes met, and I couldn't break the connection. The rhythmic pulse of my mating marks resonated within me as my emotions swirled in chaos. Gods, I wanted her. The intensity of wanting to go to her and hold her in my arms engulfed me, causing unbearable longing.

Nevertheless, I couldn't help but show my displeasure when I witnessed her with the male companion I had seen her with earlier. The sight triggered a reaction in my body. My throat felt dry and my muscles tightened.

It appeared she'd chosen another male as her mate.

The weight of regret settled on my shoulders as I cursed myself for my own carelessness. The responsibility for losing her fell on me.

A moment later, I saw the group of menacing males pushed past, causing Olivia to lose her footing, and she stumbled.

Her mate pulled her away from the flutzing grik's in time to stop her from falling, but it didn't stop my instincts from kicking in.

The roar that erupted from within me was uncontrollable. The primal urge to defend my mate took hold, leading me to lunge at the male who dared to harm her.

His jaw felt the impact of my fist, causing his head to jerk backwards.

When I stepped away and met her gaze again, I found it hard to breathe. The knowledge that Olivia had moved on shattered my heart into a million fragments. I felt a deep, agonizing pain in my chest. I wished I had let her know how I felt earlier.

Before I could reach her to make sure she was alright, my focus was broken by the sound of someone calling my name. My head spun to see a fellow guardsman giving me a scolding look.

“Some help here?” He tilted his head at an angry male who was struggling with his wrist cuffs.

My mind and heart were in a tumultuous storm of conflicting thoughts and emotions. I desperately wanted to go to her, but I was bound by my commitment to the King and this mission with the city guard.

Before I averted my gaze, a powerful growl emerged from the depths of my being as I observed her and the male departing. The reminder she had chosen another male tore at my heart.

The presence of Olivia near the altercation today was worrisome, when considering that her chosen companion might face discrimination from the purist group due to their mixed parentage.

I held on to hope that she would be happy and her mate would welcome and treat the human youngling well.

Regardless, I knew a piece of my soul would always remain connected to her.

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Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Olivia

MY EMOTIONS WERE ALL over the place, like a freaking rollercoaster since I left the marketplace. I kept switching between crying and snapping at people. Granted, I was crying a lot more than usual over the past few weeks.

Grace and Rekna attributed it to pregnancy, but I disagreed it was the sole reason.

Whenever I saw Orin, I kept hoping he would finally show some interest in me, but he never did. I wasn't sure why I continued to set myself up for disappointment.

The incident at the marketplace replayed in my mind as I made my way home.

It was obvious Orin didn't like Clor, but I had no idea why, since I knew they didn't know one another. I hadn't bothered to tell Clor about Orin, but maybe I should have.

Orin punching the guy who shoved me was a surprise. I couldn't believe how he reacted. On the ship, I saw Orin get irritated, especially with Avery.

While he didn't smile often and seemed grumpy most of the time, he had never lost his temper in front of me. His behavior now was different from when we were on the ship. I wasn't sure if it was my fault or if there were other causes.

After some Krilex aliens took us from the Chetok, I woke up on the ship to find him standing by my bed in the medical bay.

It had been so awkward when he tripped over his words and apologized for not

protecting me. I didn't even think it was his fault we got taken.

How could it be? How in the world could he be expected to protect us from a weapon that knocked everyone, including himself, out?

Orin hadn't given me a chance to speak my mind, though. He left without a word from me.

That day kept replaying in my mind for months. It made me wonder if he did feel something for me at one point, but changed his mind.

I'd hoped once everything settled down that he would come to me...and ask me how I was doing here on this new planet...anything that might make me feel he cared about me.

But he didn't.

I let out an enormous sigh and shook my head in frustration. "It's time for me to accept that he isn't interested in me." Recognizing that all the emotions I believed I sensed from him on the ship were products of my imagination, I chastised myself.

Looking down at my stomach I spoke aloud to my unborn baby. "He's a warrior, whose first instinct is to protect females from harm. Whatever he did was never about me."

A loving partner would be a wonderful addition to my life. But I refuse to settle for anything less than what I deserve.

The baby shifted, and I felt a little fist pressing against my side. I smiled, but my heart felt the weight of my responsibility toward this fragile being. I wanted to make sure he had an enjoyable life with lots of love that I didn't receive growing up,

because my parents were abusive jerks.

When I left for college, I never looked back. Choosing my own path was the best decision ever. When I stopped talking to my parents, they never tried to connect with me again.

My child will grow up in a nurturing environment. And I will give him the best life possible. I got comfy with some cushions behind my back, and tried to stay awake as exhaustion washed over me. A nap might be just what I need to feel better.

Orin was the star of a steamy fantasy when I drifted off to sleep. It was a lot like most of the dreams I had been having for months involving him.

In this state I was no longer expecting a baby. Our naked bodies were pressed together as we engaged in a heated make-out session, his grip on me firm and possessive.

His enormous member pressed against me, heightening my arousal to new levels. My subconscious filled in all the gaps of what he might look like under his uniform.

I ran my hands along his hard chest inhaling his spicy scent into my nostrils.

Orin's kisses started out soft and became more intense as his hands caressed every inch of my body. He caressed my breasts, exerting a slight pressure as he played with my nipples.

Moaning, I ached for more of his touch. My desperation grew as I pleaded for him to make love to me.

His seductive grin sent shivers down my spine as his eyes glimmered with warmth. Then he parted my thighs and knelt down between them. His face reflected utter

devotion as he leaned in and swiped his tongue along my crease.

In an instant, I was wide awake and let out a disappointed groan in response.

Overwhelmed by a tingling sensation, I had to pause and catch my breath, feeling as if a thousand tiny electric shocks surged through my body. I exhaled with a mix of frustration and discomfort as I became aware of the wetness between my thighs.

As I fidgeted in my seat, I found myself unable to stop replaying the intimate encounter in my mind. I was left with a heightened sense of arousal and a flushed feeling. Deciding to treat myself to a quick shower and some much-needed self-care, I got up and began to strip off my clothes.

THE FANTASY-FILLED shower did little to quell my craving, leaving me wanting more. My sexy warrior continued to dominate my thoughts.

Grunting, I reminded myself he wasn't my sexy warrior at all. Despite grabbing a snack that failed to provide the dopamine boost I wanted, I found solace in sipping Tulian tea, its warm and comforting aroma filling the air.

Before long, sharp cramps began to gnaw at my belly. The longer the pains persisted, the more my discomfort intensified, making me increasingly uneasy.

To be on the safe side, I chose to have Rekna come to my suite rather than walking hunched over in pain to the infirmary. When he arrived, he was holding a scanner and had a furrowed brow. "Where does it hurt?"

"My lower abdomen. It's sharp. Could they be contractions? The baby was kicking a lot over the last few days, but this isn't the same thing."

Rekna helped me to the sofa and had me lie on my back. "For how long have you

been experiencing discomfort?” He leaned over me with his scanner in hand.

“About an hour, on and off.”

The idea that the excitement of my shower might be related to my cramps made me cringe, but I didn’t mention it to Rekna.

The kind medic gave me a quick once-over and scanned my belly. When he stood with pursed lips, I knew he was about to speak. “You are not in the process of giving birth. The discomfort is caused by the mild contracting of your uterus.”

Discomfort? I’d say it was a little more than that. “Are you sure?”

“Quite sure. Queen Grace mentioned this sometimes happens with human females this late in their pregnancy. I will give you something to help with the pain...don’t worry it is safe for the youngling.”

I bobbed my head. “So... false labor?” Though Grace had told me it could happen, I hadn’t expected it.

“Yes.” His lips curved into a smile. “Scans show a lively youngling, but not yet ready to emerge.”

I felt a mix of disappointment and relief because I wasn’t prepared to meet him yet.

“Okay, good.” I gave him a sheepish grin. “I’m sorry for bothering you.”

He nodded while wearing a smile. “You did not cause me any inconvenience. I am here to serve as your medic. When you have a health concern of any kind, contact me. Day or night.”

A happy chuckle escaped from me at the sincerity in his words. “Thank you for being so understanding, Rekna. I’m happy you are my medic. I wouldn’t trust anyone else to take care of me and my baby.”

The cheeks of the older Alaran male darkened a deeper shade of blue-green and he exited my apartment.

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Orin

IT HAD BEEN MANY ROTATIONS since I joined the city guard, and the attacks on hybrid Alarans had only gotten worse. We had arrested and detained at least ten of them, but every time we did, they would be released later the same day.

A senior member of the city guard voiced their disappointment to me about the release of the males.

In order to obtain information, I spoke with other guards who acknowledged that Commander Tinuk was the one who authorized the release of the males.

When the Commander asked me to come to his office, I eagerly went to speak with him to understand why he was letting the offenders go. It made our job much more challenging.

“Take a seat,” he said, sitting down at his desk and leaning forward.

I settled into the chair, keeping my emotions in check. Given that all pure Alarans had telepathic capabilities, it was crucial for me to do my best to conceal my thoughts and emotions around him.

The city guard’s Commander was distrustful of anyone who wasn’t Alaran and he had no difficulty in expressing it. I had a suspicion that he might be aware that I had been asking questions, so I made sure to be prepared in case he confronted me.

He placed his hands together on his desk and sat upright. “We’ve arrested the vendor

from yesterday's altercation." There was a hint of contempt on his face as he observed me, no doubt hoping to elicit a reaction from me as he spoke

I sat up, clutching the chair's arms and attempting to hide my intense distaste for the male individual. "Vendor, sir? He was the victim in the attack. We arrested the perpetrators."

My superior laughed and narrowed his eyes. "Come on. He's a hybrid.... we both know they don't belong here. I released the males you brought in."

I tightened my jaw. "They?" Is he serious?

"Non-Alarans should not be permitted on Alara. After the incident with the shapeshifter, any one of them could be one." There was something in his voice that hinted he didn't believe what he was saying.

I shook my head in disagreement. There was only one known shapeshifter on Alara, and he was in a jail cell. "Sir, the shapeshifters have only disguised themselves as pure-blooded Alarans."

His sneer intensified as he nodded. "I am sure the King told you that...The truth is, we are clueless about the identity of those flutzing griks . That's why they are called the Unknown for flutz sake. Who knows how they will appear to us. Anyone could be a shapeshifter."

"Exactly. Anyone." I said through clenched teeth. Even you.

Not long after I arrived at my temporary position at the city guard, I probed Tinuk's mind and confirmed that he was not a shapeshifter. But his irritating attitude infuriated me. His lack of honor was evident, and he brought shame to the entire Alaran community.

It was clear he suspected I was a spy for the King.

He spoke again. "I'm pulling the guards from the marketplace. We have better places that need to be patrolled within the city."

I fought the urge to say something not so polite, but I had a mission to complete.

Tinuk sat back, looking smug.

I cleared my throat. "Why are you choosing to leave the market unprotected?"

He pressed his lips into a line. "Things will take care of themselves there. Don't you worry about it.

I'm looking after it. I have another assignment for you.

"He paused. "There have been reports of Krilex ships seen landing near Fruner mine. I am sending you to investigate. Report back if you see any ships, but don't engage them without notifying me first."

"Understood, sir." I didn't understand. Tinuk's role as Commander of the city guards was just that. He had no jurisdiction over such things as ships landing outside the city limits. His request made no sense.

If Krilex ships were seen landing, the King would have been notified. I wanted to discover the truth here. But first I would report to King Trex.

EVERY TIME I ENTERED the palace my mind was dominated by thoughts of the enchanting goddess with brown hair, who possessed a piece of my heart and soul.

Acknowledging that I mishandled my opportunity to be with her was disheartening.

The fear of disappointing Olivia or the fear of her rejecting me.

It was all the same. And it was too late.

She had chosen someone else who would never be her destined fated mate.

The deep ache of loss filled my entire being.

I'd lost my K'sha, and with it, any chance of happiness.

On my way to update King Trex. I inhaled the sprawling building's unique aroma. The scent was always fresh, with a hint of flowers and polish.

The royal suite was on the opposite side of the palace from the guest suites, where Olivia was living. Although I knew she had moved on, I yearned for another glimpse of her.

Instead, I forced myself to head toward the King's suite. Queen Grace's smile greeted me when the door opened. "Orin. Hi. Come on in." She waved her hand to usher me inside.

Bowing my head, I greeted her and stepped inside.

"I'll fetch Trex for you," she said before rushing off.

Multiple interconnected rooms formed the expansive royal suite on this wing of the palace. A burst of vibrant colors filled the space. The ambiance was a one-of-a-kind and cozy fusion of technology and cherished UI family heirlooms, complemented by contemporary furnishings.

No staff were present, making it the perfect time for private meetings with the King.

Trex entered the spacious main room, and I stood tall, pulling my shoulders back and lifting my chin. When he approached, I saluted him and he replicated the movement.

He smiled and gestured to the amber chair across from the matching sofa. I bowed my head and sat down.

Trex had fostered a laid-back environment as Captain on the Chetok, but I always respected him as my superior. Even in his position as King, he displayed a much greater level of kindness than I had anticipated.

Carrying a tray of drinks, Queen Grace glided into the room. The scent in the air gave away that the drinks were made from fruits, which made my mouth water.

She offered one to each of us, then joined the King on the sofa and he clasped her hand in his. When they were together, he prohibited any form of telepathic communication. He had stated he wanted nothing hidden from his Queen.

In the beginning, this troubled me. I felt unsure she could accept some of the things we were forced to do as warriors.

However, I witnessed Grace's remarkable strength and courage firsthand.

I had faith in her ability to handle whatever challenges came her way. It was a logical decision for him to want her to be involved in every issue concerning the planet they governed together.

“Tell me.” Trex requested. His expression was somber. “What have you to report?”

Before explaining, I asked. “Have the Krilex attempted to land on the planet?”

The corners of his lips turned down. “No reports have been made so far.” He eyed me

and lifted his chin. “What have you heard?”

I shared both the conversation with Commander Tinuk and the previous day’s incident with the troublemakers. “Leaving the marketplace unprotected doesn’t seem safe to me. I fear for the safety of the vendors and anyone who is not full-blooded Alaran,” I said.

For a brief moment, King Trex narrowed his eyes.

“Agreed. Tinuk doesn’t have the authority to send you or anyone else beyond the city limits.

If the Krilex ships that were spotted above the planet had touched down, I would have received an update.

Go to your assigned position at the market.

And I will dispatch patrols to look into the rumors surrounding the Krilex. ”

“Yes, sir.” I acknowledged.

“In tomorrow’s public speech I will address things for those being targeted.

First thing in the morning, I will talk to Commander Tinuk.

I will replace him with someone who will prioritize protecting Alaran citizens.

All citizens . The threat posed by the shapeshifters is minimal.

I will put an end to his part in the purist movement.

Thank you for bringing this to my attention. ”

“With the recent increase of ships in the Alliance Forces, is it possible to request a couple more ships to monitor our atmosphere?” asked Queen Grace.

Trex’s lip curled and his chest puffed with pride for his brave mate. “I’ve already ordered extra patrols to monitor our immediate airspace. They are on the way.”

I sipped my drink and reflected on Alara’s vulnerability to incursions in contrast to the planet Graacux. Our neighbor. The Ixul had armed the space around Graacux to deter invaders or anyone who tried to get close to their planet.

I forced myself to redirect my focus back to King Trex and the purpose of my visit.

King Trex scratched his chin as he said, “It is the ships of the Unknown that are an issue. The Ixul leaders and I have been discussing trading technology, which will grant us the ability to detect cloaked ships with ease. Our warriors stationed on the surface are prepared and ready to fight if it comes to that. I’m confident we can keep Alara’s people safe if the enemy lands on our soil. ”

Happy with the news that Alara would have a fighting chance against the Unknown thanks to Ixul technology, I smiled then finished my drink.

As our discussion concluded, Trex smiled thinly at me.

“Thank you again for your report. Once I sort out the situation with Tinuk, I will have you return to the palace. For now, I don’t want to take any chances with anyone being hurt.

Once we halt this group of purists, things will settle. ”

I smiled in relief as I left the King's suite. Thankfully, I wouldn't have to be away from the palace for much longer.

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Orin

BEFORE LEAVING THE palace, I couldn't resist being drawn toward the guest suites, as if an invisible force compelled me.

Ensuring Olivia's safety was a top priority for me.

Any excuse to be in her proximity. The moment I shifted my gaze in that direction, I saw Kagin, my ex-Captain from the palace guard.

With a friendly grin on his face, he approached me. "Are you here because you plan to rejoin us at the palace?"

I pursed my lips. "Not yet." My eyes flicked past him toward the guest suites.

Kagin noticed where I was looking and his eyebrow raised in recognition. He had a knowing smirk on his face as he crossed his arms. "Don't tell me you've worked up the nerve to speak to that luscious human female you have your eye on?"

His disrespectful words about Olivia made me bristle, and I had to bite my tongue to prevent myself from retaliating. When I worked as a guard after Trex became King, Kagin and I had a decent relationship.

It took me some time to adapt to his joking style, and he soon realized how committed I was to being a warrior.

My entire world revolved around the Empire, and I strived to meet my obligations to

it. Prior to his disappearance, my father had been a warrior for the Protectorate.

While I was growing up, I deeply missed his guidance and wished he'd been part of my life. To honor him, I made an effort to walk the path he chose.

I believed that becoming a warrior would help me deal with his absence and his failure to come back. It did not help. Despite having one living family member, I still felt alone.

Kagin's penetrating gaze indicated he was aware Olivia was my K'sha.

That would have been the only reason he never approached her.

It was an unspoken rule, but Alaran males knew they shouldn't chase after other males' mates.

Especially not someone's K'sha. The chances of finding one's fated mate were scarce and treated as something sacred.

The jealousy that was already within me was sparked by my thoughts. I gritted my teeth as I spoke. "She's chosen to be with someone else." The mere thought of another man touching Olivia made me furious.

With a burst of laughter, the flutzing grik's head jerked backward.

The sound echoed loudly, bouncing off the walls of the hallway.

My eyes narrowed and hands balled into fists.

What is amusing about me losing her? She is my K'sha.

My fated mate. My teeth felt like they were about to shatter due to the extreme tightness of my clenched jaw.

I was not the one she chose to spend time with.

Kagin's expression transformed, reflecting his regret. With a wave of his hand, he adopted a more solemn tone. "If you're referring to Clor, he is her friend. They work together in the kitchen. I do not believe they are a mated couple."

His statement caught me off guard.

Not a mated couple? But I had witnessed them together multiple times. I had observed them sharing a laugh. An unexpected growl rose from my chest. I didn't consider that my feelings were noticeable on my face.

Captain Kagin raised his shoulders, letting his hands fall to his sides. "There is no need to get worked up. I speak the truth...plus, I heard it from one of the other guards that she is not mated."

I took a step back. "Why are other males speaking to my...my K'sha?" This was the first time I admitted it aloud.

He raised his hands with his palms facing out. "Take it easy.... it's hard not to notice her when she walks about the palace daily. She chats with some of us. I know everyone is wondering why you have not yet claimed her."

It was not the place of other males to meddle in mine or Olivia's concerns. Did all the males on Alara desire my attractive human mate?

I straightened my posture while clearing my throat. Then let out another involuntary growl. "This male you mentioned... Clor. Is he in the kitchen now?"

Captain Kagin shrugged again. “How would I know? You can check if you like. I haven’t seen him today. He comes and goes through the staff entrance. Why do you ask?”

“I need to tell him to keep Olivia away from the marketplace. It's unsafe.”

Kagin gave me a wary look. “No fighting inside the palace.”

“Very well,” I mumbled and turned to storm off toward the kitchen.

The kitchen was empty, with only a couple of staff members still present. The lingering smells of fresh-baked breads and spicy meats made my stomach growl.

Two staff members were cleaning, their backs turned away from me. They took a break, and I spotted the male I had been searching for. He redirected his attention to me.

“Can I help you?” He asked, then glanced at my uniform. “The city guard doesn’t usually visit the palace...Is there an issue?”

A bitter laugh escaped me. That’s one way to put it . “I have come to discuss Olivia.”

His posture became defensive and his brows rose. “What about her?”

The male had a slight height advantage, but was not a trained warrior. I narrowed my eyes and stood taller. “What was the reason for bringing her along to the marketplace?”

He grunted his annoyance. “It’s not your place to know, but Olivia and I are friends and she asked me to accompany her.” He glared at me, as if challenging me.

I despised hearing her name on his lips.

I'd noticed the way he gazed at her when they were together. His claim of being just her friend was false. He wanted her as his mate.

My irritation was simmering just below the surface, ready to erupt like a boiling pot. I made an audible noise to clear my throat.

"You two are not mates?" I stated rather than asked.

The grik's mouth curled into a smug smile. He took pleasure in aggravating me.

"No." He said, before declaring, "we are not mates." He scrutinized me from head to toe. "Who are you to her, anyway? How is this your concern?"

I took a deep breath and displayed an aura of confidence. Embracing the truth, I held my chin high and proclaimed with absolute conviction. "She is my K'sha."

He glanced at my biceps, where my mating marks revealed small but visible signs of activation. I hadn't made physical contact with Olivia yet. To fully activate the marks, she needed to be claimed by me, but anyone familiar with the mating marks could see that I'd met my fated mate.

A sigh of resignation escaped his lips, his face momentarily filled with a wistful expression.

In a swift motion, Clor's hands flew up, palms outstretched, his expression shifted to one of shock.

"I did not know she was mated," he admitted, the realization hitting him like a lightning bolt.

“I realized some time ago that she was not my K’sha, and I made peace with being in a platonic relationship with her.

She did not mention that she had a mate, or that she was your K’sha. ”

Of course not. Why would she? She doesn't know. Clearing my throat, I ran my fingers through my hair. In addition to my lack of mating experience, I also didn't know how to fulfill Olivia's relationship needs. In her eyes, I would only be seen as an inadequate mate. How could I tell her?

With a tilt of his head, Clor fixed me with a skeptical gaze. “Is she aware of the special bond you two share? Does she know she is your K’sha?”

I expressed my disdain by giving him a disapproving look and pursing my lips.

His arms crossed. “I don't mean to intrude, but it's clear to me she is lonely. The imminent arrival of her youngling has left her unsure about what to do next. Maybe you should let her know the significance she holds in your life before it becomes too late.”

It may already be too late. The rumbling in my chest grew louder, causing him to back away. He was intruding, and I didn't like it one bit. “This is not something that involves you...I am here to warn you to keep her away from the marketplace. It is not safe.”

“Not safe?” A puzzled look took over his face, and his brow wrinkled. “Oh, do you mean the bullies that have been showing up there?”

“Bullies?” I repeated. I was not familiar with that word.

“Olivia uses the Terran term to describe individuals who prey on the weak.” A

cautious smile appeared on his lips.

My heart twisted.

This male knew more about Olivia than I did. How could I have let this happen? I had suppressed my emotions so much that my entire body ached.

“A group referring to themselves as purists have been targeting those who are not full Alaran,” I stated. This was pure agony. I should be the one protecting Olivia . Not asking him to do it.

He nodded thoughtfully. “Well, I guess that includes me, too. But I won’t let them stop me from doing my job. The cooks send me at least every few rotations for supplies.”

I scowled while pointing at him. “Under no circumstances should Olivia be brought to the market with you,” I ground out. “Understand?”

Honestly, I’d rather he avoided spending any time with my mate. But now that he knew she was my K’sha, maybe he’d back off without me having to tell him as much. Without waiting for a response, I turned on my heels and left the kitchen.

Latza and Vrek were expecting me for the day’s last meal and I was already late.

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Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Olivia

MY FEET WERE SWOLLEN and my back ached, so I finally surrendered and sank into the comfort of the sofa, closing my eyes to shut out the world.

This far into my pregnancy I found myself low on energy and in desperate need of a full-body massage. But I had to settle for hot baths instead.

As per usual, the thought of taking a hot bath conjured images of sharing a large Alaran tub with the one and only warrior I desired in every way. Despite feeling uncomfortable, I couldn't stop myself from daydreaming about sharing more than a bathtub with Orin.

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't let go of the desire for something that would never come true. The attraction I had toward Orin was so strong, it felt magnetic.

It would have been nice if he would at least acknowledge my presence and have a conversation with me.

The baby kicked, and I felt a sharp jab against my spine. I cried out and sat up, reaching back to massage my aching lower back. "Hey. Relax in there. Mommy is exhausted."

I heard a chirping sound, signaling that someone was at my door. Letting out a groan, I forced myself up from the sofa and wandered over to swipe my hand across the panel. My friend stood in the hallway with a pained expression on his face.

Something felt off. “Clor? Come in.” I stepped back to usher him inside.

He shook his head and remained in the hallway. “I’m here to tell you I won’t be able to bring you to the marketplace anymore.” Clor’s voice sounded sad. He shifted from one foot to the other. “We should no longer spend time together.” His eyes dropped to the floor.

My head jerked back in shock; mouth wide open in disbelief. “Why? What happened? Have I upset you or done something? What changed in the last few hours?” I choked up as a lump formed in my throat.

He put his hands out to his sides. “It’s not due to anything you did,” he clarified.

“Where is this coming from?” Confusion filled my voice. Clor and I had a friendship. He was one of my only Alaran friends besides Trex.

He frowned, still unable to make eye contact.

“Clor? What’s going on?” I squinted at him.

He fidgeted and his eyes darted around before settling on mine with a look that squeezed my heart. “The bullies yesterday are part of a group called purists. They are after people like me.”

While stepping forward, my hand stayed in its usual place on my baby bump. “Then you shouldn’t go alone. All the more reason I should go with you.”

He let out a soft chuckle. “No. That can’t happen. You must stay at the palace where it’s safe.”

What he was saying didn’t sound like the complete truth.

I moved my hands to my wide hips. “Then why can’t I visit you in the kitchen?

There are no bullies there. This makes no logical sense.

.. who told you to tell me this?” I was certain this didn’t come from my friend.

There was no reason for Clor to push me away like this.

He coughed to clear his throat. “A visitor advised me not to put you in danger. You should know I never intended to put you in harm’s way. I’m sorry.”

My hands fell to my sides as my eyes widened. Danger? “What? Who? Who was this visitor?” I found myself growing anxious and angry that someone would do this.

His fingers clenched the sides of his tunic as he directed his mournful gaze toward me. “It was...your K’sha...”

“What? Do you mean Orin?” I interrupted, and the sound of my own high-pitched voice startled me before I even realized I was speaking. Who else would call themselves my fated mate? I scoffed. If it were true, why didn’t he admit it to me instead of threatening Clor?

“He did not tell me his name, but I have seen him before, here at the palace. He is a strikingly handsome male, with chiseled features, and brown hair to here?” He indicated with his hand Orin’s hair length.

I would’ve laughed at Clor’s vivid description if things weren’t so serious.

My hands fisted, and I let out a groan. “Yeah. That’s him.

” I closed my eyes and sighed in frustration.

“How dare he go to you like this. He had no business...” The words died on my tongue and I swallowed as my throat dried.

I couldn't decide which was worse. The fact that I now knew I was his mate?

Or the fact he was struggling to acknowledge the connection, and didn't want me.

Clor continued to speak, while I stewed. “He asked me not to take you to the marketplace.” His gray eyes filled with hurt. “You did not tell me you have a mate.”

My stomach burned at the sudden realization, which he confirmed. I should have told him about Orin. Not that I knew Orin was my mate, but that I liked him.

Clor's voice held a lot of emotion as he spoke. “What I feel for you is more than friendship, Olivia. I always knew you were not my K'sha. Though I'd hoped you might allow me to be your mate once the youngling was born.”

My eyes filled with tears at his confession. How could I have been so stupid?

“I'm so sorry for all that's happened. Please know, I never meant to hurt you.” Unsure if any words could improve the situation, I reached out and touched his arm. It was heartbreaking to know I had lost a dear friend.

Clor's eyes closed, and he compressed his lips.

I gulped, knowing I had royally messed things up. “You have been a great friend to me, Clor. I don't know how I would have coped without you.”

Clor looked at me and frowned. “Your mate has genuine concern for you. His presence at the palace implies that he cares more than you may realize. I suggest you speak with him. It's not appropriate for me to be spending time with someone else's

K'sha."

My eyes shut, and I swallowed down the impulse to break down. The baby's small kick seemed to mirror my distress.

"I didn't intend to upset you. But felt you should know right away," said Clor.

"I'll be fine. It's the fact I've hurt you. It's this situation... I didn't know I was his K'sha, Clor." I insisted.

He gave me a tentative smile. "I know."

"Where did he go? Is he still here at the palace?" I glanced behind him as if Orin might be hiding there.

"He left." Clor's eyes brimmed with understanding and empathy.

If Orin left the palace, it suggested he placed little importance on our connection.

Clor seemed like he was getting ready to walk away.

My stomach soured. "Please forgive me for not mentioning him to you. It's a lot to ask, but I hope we can still be friends?"

His head bobbed. "All is forgiven. I understand... I hope you will be happy." He turned to leave, and I watched him walk away. The door slid closed, and I shook my head while tears streamed down my face.

I couldn't help the flood of emotions inside as I paced around my living room. "If he cares so much, why does he keep ignoring me?" I grumbled, wiping at my cheeks.

Part of me wished I was attracted to Clor in the same way I was Orin. It would make things so much easier. Walking back and forth I grew more upset. “Why doesn’t he want me?” I spouted as a thought formed in my mind.

It’s clear he doesn’t want to be with me. He can’t control who I spend my time with.

FISTS CLENCHED BY MY sides I marched toward the door intending to seek help from palace security. Enough was enough. I was going to make Orin talk to me.

When the security office door opened, I was greeted by Kagin, the Captain of the palace guard. “Miss Olivia. What can I do for you?” His mouth curled into its usual cheeky grin.

Right now, I wasn’t in the mood to deal with his sense of humor.

I put my hands on my hips and thrust my chin forward before he could make a joke. “Do you have Orin’s home address?”

His head snapped back and his eyebrows shot up to his hairline. “Orin doesn’t work here. He’s with the city-”

With a grunt of annoyance and an eye roll, I interjected. “I’m aware he’s not at the palace. Just tell me how to get to his house. I need to speak to him.”

Kagin chuckled, then chewed the inside of his cheek. When he didn’t answer right away, I thought he wasn’t going to help me.

He studied me, then responded. “He is supposed to be staying at the city barracks, but I think we have a home address on file. The barracks are closed to females and will be locked for the night now, anyway.”

“What about the home address?” I wondered why he would stay at the barracks at all if he had a home to go to?

“It’s further away. I’ll get the address, but you’ll need to take transportation to get there. It’s not safe to wander outside the palace without an escort.”

I suppressed the urge to roll my eyes again. Right now, all I cared about was confronting Orin and straightening things out once and for all. I needed to know where I stood.

Kagin scratched his head, and it seemed like he was sensing my emotions, but I wasn’t sure. “I’ll order a viko for you, but I won’t be able to come along since I’m on duty. If you like, I can have another guard-”

“I’m okay going by myself,” I said, cutting him off.

His silent look of surprise made me realize the rudeness in my words given how he’d offered to help me. With an embarrassed smile, I uttered the words, “thank you.”

Address in hand, he accompanied me to the palace gates, staying by my side until my ride came. When it did, he told the onboard AI to wait for me at my destination, and return me to the palace when I was finished.

Kagin stepped back and waved me off while the AI responded.

Thanking him again, I got in and chose one of the many empty seats as the door slid shut. The onboard AI advised me to stay seated, then hovered and glided through the air.

The only sound it made was a faint hum as we made our way through the city streets.

Struna was a gigantic city and a lively trade hub. During the day, the white stone buildings with reflective glass were attractive, but at night they had an almost eerie presence as they loomed over the streets. The cleanliness of the city was pristine.

The streets were empty. Most of the citizens were probably at home unwinding. If that was the kind of thing an Alaran did. Honestly, I had no clue how they spent their free time. After today I knew there was a lot I still didn't understand about the Alaran people.

I had gone sightseeing with Grace and Trex twice. I'd learned there were museum-like buildings that primarily focussed on the Monarchy, its past rulers and details about a war that ended around a century ago.

While it provided valuable insight into Alaran history, I wished I could see more of the city as well as the countryside.

According to Clor, there were forested parks on the outskirts, although I had not had the chance to see them myself.

We had only walked to the market, always taking the same route.

The city center was encircled first by businesses then further out by residential streets. The homes were quite distinct from the outside and nothing like homes on Earth. I was sure they would have AI just like every other place I'd seen. But I'd never stepped inside an Alaran home.

"You have reached your destination," the AI voice announced at the end of the journey. The transportation vehicle parked in front of a small house that was situated among a series of identical homes.

All the houses were painted white. The windows were encased in colorful frames

ranging from dark-brown to pale yellow.

I stepped out of the viko and made my way toward the house number Kagin provided.

Each house had beautifully maintained gardens in front. The paths were beautifully decorated with shrubs and flowers, leading to doorways that were clearly built for beings of much greater height.

A small laugh escaped me as I struggled to imagine Orin, or any warrior, being responsible for maintaining such a lovely garden. The house didn't match the image I had of where he lived.

With my newfound calm, I wondered what I should say to him? My mind was blank, and I had no idea what words would come out of my mouth when I faced him.

I glanced over my shoulder to see the vehicle hovering in silence above the street and debated getting back into it to go home.

"I can do this," I muttered as the front door of the house opened and I jumped back.

My stomach flipped when I saw a beautiful Alaran woman emerge. I could see her pointy ears peeking out from under her one long braid of brown hair.

Panic struck, and I dove back into the viko before she could notice me. My body trembled at the discovery. "Take me to the palace." I said aloud to the automated vehicle. Tears streaked my cheeks as I began to sob.

So much for me being his fated mate. It was clear why he didn't want to acknowledge me or speak to me. It seemed he already had someone.

I felt extremely embarrassed and foolish.

Orin already had a mate!

It made sense now why he'd ignored me since we arrived on Alara. Full of shame and heartbreak, I cried all the way back to the palace.

When the viko stopped outside the gate, I hurried out and rushed to my apartment, keeping my head down, hoping nobody would see me.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Olivia

DESPITE CRYING MOST of the night and feeling tired, I also had puffy eyes. But I couldn't miss my weekly medical appointment. It would only worry Rekna.

Forcing myself to have something to eat, the food sat heavy in my stomach. After a speedy shower I headed to the infirmary. When I entered, Rekna and Grace were in the middle of a conversation, so I waited.

There were two large hospitals within the city, but I wanted to have the baby here in the palace, and I was glad Rekna agreed.

They stopped talking and glanced over at me. The medic took one look at me, his mouth poised to speak, but instead, he closed it and glanced at Grace.

She rushed to my side, pulled up a chair, and gestured for me to sit.

Leaving my friend next to me, Rekna disappeared, saying, "I'll be right back."

"Are you okay? What's happened?" Grace asked with a worried tone. Crouching down she took one of my hands and rubbed it between hers.

I hated my face showed everything I was feeling. A sigh escaped me as I pressed my lips before giving my reply. I caught Rekna out of the corner of my eye, pretending to be busy picking up, examining, and putting down instruments on one of the tables.

"Last night, Orin showed up and told Clor to stay away from me and stop bringing

me to town.”

“He did what?” Grace blurted, looking shocked.

Tears brimmed my eyes and I couldn’t stop them. “Clor dropped by my apartment and told me. He said he can’t be my friend anymore. I went to Orin’s house to give him a piece of my mind.” I fought the lump in my throat that choked my ability to speak.

Grace tucked my hair behind my ear and pulled up a chair to sit opposite me. “Start at the beginning, sweetie.”

I wrung my hands in my lap and my voice broke. “He’s already got a mate, a partner, or whatever you want to call it.” Tears fell from my eyes despite feeling like I had none left to cry.

Grace’s face pinched. “Are you sure?”

After wiping my face, I rested my hands on my lap. “Of course I’m sure. She came out of his house for heaven's sake. I saw her!”

Grace shook her head, not impressed by the news. “I had no idea. I’m sorry, Liv.”

“I don’t know why it bothers me so much. We weren’t ever an item or anything.” I sniffed.

Her voice was soft. “It’s only natural for you to be hurt since you have feelings for him.”

I wish I didn’t.

Rekna cleared his throat, causing both Grace and I to shift our attention to him. I stood and my friend joined me.

“Let’s check out how the baby is doing,” Grace said sweetly. “We’ll grab a bite to eat after and we can chat.”

ONCE I LEFT THE INFIRMARY , I was reluctant to go back to my lonely apartment now that I had no one to hang out with aside from Grace. My mind wandered as I walked aimlessly through the palace halls, uninterested in the repetitive paintings and art I’d seen a million times already.

I was so distracted that I ran into a solid wall of muscle when I turned the corner. It startled me, causing me to make a high-pitched noise. My heart sped up when I saw Orin staring down at me with a pinched brow.

“Are you okay?” he asked before his eyes fell first to my full breasts, then my stomach, before returning to my eyes.

My traitorous body warmed as if he’d touched me. “Fine,” I snapped, filled with irritation. How dare he ask me how I am.

He had a shocked look and crossed his arms. “Are you sure? You seem upset.” His voice carried a hint of the same annoyed gruffness he had on the ship.

I snorted and shook my head in silence. Of course I’m upset. You have a mate and don’t want me.

There was a long, awkward pause.

“Has Clor spoken to you?” he asked.

“What if he has?” I snarled. Who does he think he is? I found myself glaring at him and feeling defensive, but unable to think straight or form complete sentences.

Orin’s lips were pursed. “I asked him not to take you to the market because it isn’t safe.”

I placed my hands on my hips and saw a brief twitch at the corners of his mouth. Is he amused right now? His response only provoked me further.

Before I knew it, I was jabbing my index finger into his chest. Casting a quick glance at it, he then turned his attention to me, his eyebrow quirked in curiosity.

“Look, you had no right to scare him away from me. He was one of my only friends here...It’s not up to you who I decide to spend time with.” My speaking halted as my words got stuck. I wished he would admit he felt something for me.

Clearing his throat, Orin couldn’t hide the hurt that flickered across his face. “I am concerned about your safety, as well as that of your youngling. The marketplace is currently unsafe.”

Is this the moment he admits our connection? I held my breath as I waited.

When he added nothing, I released the breath and scowled at him. My idiotic hormones insisted on picking a fight with the big bad warrior.

“Why do you care what happens to me?” You don’t want me.

I didn’t mention the mysterious woman I saw at his home. The thought of him acknowledging her as his mate terrified me. Guessing she was his mate was one thing. To find out she was indeed his mate would crush me.

In a rare gesture, Orin extended his hand and grazed my arm with his palm, leaving a tingling sensation behind. His mating marks on his biceps raised and began to have a bit of color.

Our skin sizzled where his hand touched me, leaving me in no doubt.

We were indeed fated mates. I'd learned a little about what the Alarans called their K'sha and I knew the bond was one of the strongest there was.

If he knew of our connection, why would he not make an effort to be with me? I thought that was how this worked?

The little voice in my head revealed the painful truth. He was already claimed by someone else.

"Olivia, I..." Dropping his hand, he glanced downward. His expression filled with regret.

My heart sank. I had to escape before my tears started. It was evident he didn't want to acknowledge the connection between us. I put my hands in my hair shoving it off my face. Maybe he didn't find me attractive? Stop it. Stop torturing yourself. He has someone else .

I was about to turn and run away, but he spoke again.

"Are you going to stay on Alara after you give birth?" Orin asked, meeting my eyes with his.

I was numb . Huh?" I...I don't know. I want to teach and the only way I can see that happening is if I go to a human colony," I stammered, not sure where the words came from.

The guy hardly ever smiled or talked, and I had no clue what was going on in his head or why he would ask about my plans.

Orin eyed me before declaring, “I need to leave.” He left, taking what remained of my heart.

I needed to get it through my skull. Orin would never be mine.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Olivia

WITHOUT TAKING THE time to think about it, I found myself standing outside the palace having made my way through the staff entrance. My thoughts were a muddled mess of hurt and anger towards Orin for rejecting me.

And towards myself for having allowed myself to have hope.

“It’s my business what I do with my life.” I muttered. “There’s no reason I can’t go for a walk outside. I have the freedom to make my own choices. Orin isn’t in charge.”

Women weren’t in danger here. What was the worst that could happen? No one was going to bother a pregnant woman.

“Alaran males would never do that,” I said, glancing around to make sure I was alone. I huffed as I began walking. Maybe I should confront Orin and say what I really think?

Our earlier encounter had left me confused, and I wanted to know if we really were mates.

And if it were true, why was he choosing to pretend we weren’t?

Surely his current mate would understand it if he met his fated mate?

My face burned at the thought. Liv! Don’t be that woman.

My inner voice admonished. I was no home wrecker.

After taking a few deep breaths, I made a solemn commitment to myself to take one last look at his handsome face before moving on. Permanently. I would leave Alara as soon as the baby came and we would start a new life somewhere else.

I felt safe taking the main street to the downtown marketplace since it was the route Clor and I always took.

But I thought better of it when my ankles began to ache.

Two Alaran males approached, and I went to great lengths to avoid making eye contact. When they got closer, I saw them holding hands and felt stupid for thinking they'd bother me.

It was too late to call a viko , so I took my time heading toward the market, stopping often to rest my feet. Soon I reached the corner nearest the stalls and was greeted by boisterous laughter and lively voices coming from the vendors at the market stalls.

Despite feeling tired, a smile spread across my face as the alluring aromas of flowers, food, and cooked meat reached my nose.

I hadn't eaten since before my appointment with Rekna in the early morning.

My stomach growled, and I looked down, rubbing circles over my baby bump.

“Would you like to have some delicious ciglemia bread?” I asked, and the baby's reply was a forceful kick.

I laughed and continued toward one of the stalls that sold cooked food.

While scanning the crowd, I told myself I wasn't searching for Orin. Then my eyes locked onto him and my stomach fluttered with excitement. He hadn't seen me and I was frozen on the spot unable to look away.

My goodness, he's handsome . My knees weakened at the sight of him.

His shoulder-length hair spilled over one cheek and I yearned to run my fingers through it. And even though I'd rarely witnessed it, I was aware that beneath his broody exterior he possessed a stunning smile.

My spirits instantly plummeted when I saw Orin and the same Alaran woman from before, locked in an intense conversation. The sight of her standing in front of him left me with a sinking feeling, as if a stone had been dropped into my stomach.

A warm smile spread across her face as she looked at him. Then, she handed him a small, metal container that he accepted.

First, anxiety coursed through me, tightening my chest, then jealousy overwhelmed me, coloring my vision with a red haze.

An argument broke out a few feet in front of me and I tried to ignore it to take in the woman...alien...whatever. I watched as she leaned in and planted a quick kiss on Orin's cheek before disappearing into the busy crowd. I swallowed to clear a knot of emotion, and my eyes filled with tears.

Bolting from the food stall, I glanced down at the pavement as I hurried away. Chaos erupted among the crowd and the sound of fists striking skin registered in my ears.

A sudden, sharp jab in my back sent me soaring through the air from the force of it. With a thud, I landed face down on the ground with my hands out to help break the fall. I screamed, reaching out for anything to cling to, desperate to flee the crowd.

Pushing myself up, I could feel the rough ground scratching against my palms, urging me to crawl away to safety.

Before I could make any progress, a powerful kick landed squarely on my side, jolting me with pain. The impact was so powerful that it took my breath away. As I gasped for air, my breathing became choppy and irregular. My body was flooded with waves of pain, making me flinch with each pulse.

My panic intensified as I realized that the surrounding people were oblivious to me lying on the ground at their feet. Dozens of angry males surrounded me, unaware that they had knocked me down and were now stepping on me.

With one hand clutching my stomach, I struggled to pull myself in the opposite direction. My body shook, and I felt like I was going to vomit. There was no one coming to help me. No one knew I was here. All I could do was try to get out of the way.

Amid the commotion, with people jostling and swearing at one another I felt invisible. Pushing against the sturdy legs of a nearby table, I cried out for help. I rolled underneath while crouching, hoping it would provide protection.

Holding onto my belly, tears marked my cheeks. "It's going to be okay." I whispered to my baby, not convinced that was true.

The baby's stillness filled me with fear. Please God, let my baby be okay. My stomach was hit by an intense pain, causing me to curl into a ball with my arms wrapped around myself.

Orin

MY ENCOUNTER WITH OLIVIA at the palace earlier filled me with regret. I had the perfect opportunity to tell her everything when I bumped into her. Instead, all I managed to do was irritate her. Further proof that I didn't have the skills needed, to be with her.

There was no question in my mind that she was my K'sha once I felt the touch of her skin. The searing energy that arced between us, combined with the flare of my mating marks showed me it was true. Feeling her skin against my palm intensified my longing to make her mine.

Unfortunately, knowing she was my K'sha didn't put me any further ahead. I still hadn't told her how I felt. My job as her mate was to protect her from harm and that's what I was attempting to do regardless of how she saw it.

Perhaps she was right and I should not have spoken to Clor. It would have been better if I had warned her myself about the problems in Struna. Regardless, Clor did the right thing in backing off. It wasn't appropriate that another male was sniffing around her.

When I returned to the palace in a couple of days, I would make a point of checking in on my mate to make sure she was okay. Somehow, I would break through my fears and confess my feelings for her. Not taking action was leading to unbearable suffering.

I had never come across a female quite like her.

The intensity of my longing for her caused me physical pain from being apart.

The sight of my gorgeous K'sha never failed to elicit a physical response from me as well as an emotional one.

Even before I realized she could be my fated mate, there was something about Olivia that drew me to her.

There had always been a special connection between us. One that I foolishly ignored.

Standing amidst the crowd, I felt a sudden rumble in my chest and a surge of emotions just thinking about her. I longed to hold her close, feeling the softness of her brown curls as they entwined around my fingers, while I tenderly kissed her rosy lips.

I had not tried to get close to her because I was unsure of whether she would welcome me into her life.

Fearful that my inexperience with females would lead to her disappointment, leaving her unsatisfied.

It was a major factor in my decision to disregard our bond, and I didn't know how to repair it.

I MADE A CONSCIOUS effort to stay focused on my work for the rest of the day.

Once again, the troublesome males appeared in the middle of the day.

Even before I saw the bullies, I'd been filled with a sense of dread that enveloped me. King Trex made the right decision by assigning me to protect the marketplace. I was glad I'd enlisted Drad who was more than willing to help when I told him about

Commander Tinuk.

The males disrupted the pleasant mood of the crowd as they pushed through to harass citizens. It was the very same males that we had arrested days earlier. I noticed vendors and customers giving the males disapproving glances and avoiding any interaction.

For a moment, I was sidetracked by an itch in my biceps, but I made the choice to ignore it and resume my observation of the crowd.

Hearing a voice I recognized, I looked to see Latza approaching with a container in her hand. “Why are you here alone?” I accused with annoyance.

She gave me a mocking glare. “Why am I not allowed to visit my little brother at work?”

The corners of my mouth drooped. “It's not safe here right now without your mate with you. You must leave.”

As if to validate my statement, the conflict I'd been anticipating broke out, and it was turning violent. I turned my head toward the loud voices, startled, and then turned my focus back to my sister.

“You need to leave.”

She let out a sigh as she handed me the lunch box. “Fine. See you tonight.” She leaned towards me, planting a quick kiss on my cheek before rushing away.

I joined the other guards in their effort to halt the fight, redirecting my attention to the crowd.

It was a bit of a process, but we caught the troublemakers and other guards moved them to our facility for holding. The crowd dispersed and vendors started packing up to go home as things quieted down.

With Drad on one side and me on the other, we strolled through the marketplace, observing as it cleared of the crowd. Moving from stall to stall, I felt the intensity of the burning sensation in my mating marks increase.

A mysterious unease settled upon me, leaving me unable to pinpoint its origin.

My attention was caught by whimpering sounds. It was impossible for me to disregard the female who was crying. Her distress made my ears tingle and my stomach churned with bile. I moved towards where the sounds were coming from.

It was then that I spotted her, huddled under a cart. I recognized Olivia by her messy brown curls, and my chest seized up.

Flutz, why is she here?

Olivia's unexpected image, curled up in a ball with tears streaming down her face, evoked my deepest fears. "Olivia?" I reached out my hand, trying to steady my voice. "Are you able to move?"

Nodding, she shifted her position to look up at me. Her eyes brimmed with tears and she grimaced. I took stock of where she might be injured, searching for any traces of blood.

"Which part of your body is in pain or injured?" I asked when she didn't speak. Anguish twisted my heart. I extended my hand once more, urging, "Take it."

She disregarded me and moved onto all fours to escape from under the table by

crawling. Not once did she utter a single word to me.

Once Olivia had emerged from under the table, I made another effort to offer her my hand. This time, she accepted it, and I helped her stand up. Both her dress and arms were coated in dirt. It was evident from the muddy footprints on her dress that someone had stepped on her.

My stomach twisted into knots and I swallowed bile that rose in my throat.

Someone hurt my mate, and I had not been there to protect her.

Without warning, my mate pulled her hand away from mine and bent over in excruciating pain, letting out cries as her body spasmed.

“Drad. Call me a viko. Now!”

His response was prompt and my attention returned to Olivia, who was grasping her abdomen. Wrapped in agony, she seemed oblivious to my presence.

I quickly caught her arms to prevent her from falling.

In a split second, a strong electric shock shot through my hands and up my arms, causing my mating marks to burst into a dazzling display of colors. Swallowing hard, I closed my eyes for a moment. This was not how I wanted to acknowledge our connection.

I saw her body enduring continuous tremors of excruciating pain.

“You’ve been injured.” I stated the obvious and grimaced. My hands trembled with uncertainty about what might happen to her. I could not bear to lose her.

Olivia's eyes snapped to mine, then drifted downward. I wanted her to talk to me. I needed to hear her soft voice.

Beneath the pain, I could sense her anger toward me, even though I couldn't understand why.

Trying to maintain composure, she straightened herself and brushed away the tears from her face, then returned her hands to her stomach.

Her voice croaked as she spoke. "I fell...Then someone kicked me. I don't think they knew I was on the ground...I have cramps...the baby...something feels wrong." She sniffled, and her eyes became glossy once again.

"You need to see a medic." Extending my arm, I promised, "I'll bring you to the closest medical center."

"No. I refuse to see anyone except Rekna," she cried out, shoving me away.

I withdrew my hands and ran them through my hair, sighing.

Another wave of pain washed over her, causing her to release a long moan, and when the pain subsided, she cast a quick glance in my direction.

"I'll accompany you to the palace," I said more firmly this time.

With a hint of frustration, she half-heartedly remarked, "You don't need to do that."

Ignoring her, I scooped her up and settled her onto a seat in the viko , joining her moments later. We went on our way without talking, yet I couldn't help but watch her, wishing I could offer more support.

If only I hadn't spent so much time disregarding my feelings for her. She might not have come alone to the marketplace.

My fists clenched. I had failed to keep her safe.

My eyes were shut as I prayed to Tenage and Veshar, asking for their protection over her and her offspring.

During my younger years, I was taught about Tenage and Veshar. Gods who were said to have created the grand tapestry of the Universe. Doubts lingered regarding the truth behind the story, that said we were born with destined mates.

The virus, which took the lives of many over thirty tenri ago, made many doubt there were any Gods, let alone fated mates. Still, the faint mating marks on all Alaran males hinted at the truth behind the stories.

Latza didn't reveal the truth about our parents being fated mates until I got older. This could have been the reason behind his dire grief and ultimate abandonment of his only children.

But only now could I relate to how he might have felt.

The sheer intensity of encountering my own fated mate was unimaginable. Until Olivia appeared, the dormant markings on my body remained inactive. When we first crossed paths, I had no clue about the immense impact she would have on my life.

As we neared the palace, my gaze fell upon my K'sha, and my mating marks seared my skin like fire. I shifted closer to her. "I am going to carry you inside."

She didn't respond when I picked her up, cradling her.

With her nestled in my arms, our connection became even more undeniable. Olivia was my destiny. She was my K'sha.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Orin

I RUSHED PAST THE STARTLED guards and made my way to the main hall, cradling Olivia protectively against my chest. Mentally, I reached out to Rekna and alerted him we were on our way. He responded, urging me to hurry.

Emotion flooded me as her warm body pressed against mine, her hands gripping her stomach. I experienced the fear and pain she was feeling and wished there was a way to shield her from it.

Carrying her into the palace, I felt no resistance from her, as if she had surrendered to the situation.

Olivia rested against me, her closed eyes doing nothing to hide what she was feeling.

I inhaled a deep breath, noticing the familiar sweet scent of my fated mate, accompanied by traces of distress.

Although she wasn't speaking, I sensed she felt safe in my arms.

The truth struck me with the force of a lightning bolt, piercing my heart. Olivia was a gift from the Gods but I had failed to protect her. I allowed my fears to hold me back from embracing the divine gift that was given to me.

The thought of losing Olivia filled me with anguish. My mind was consumed by worry and guilt. I groaned. I am a flutzing grik. It was my fault she'd been injured.

Had I not advised Clor against taking her to the market, he might have been with her and she would not have been injured.

Bursting into the infirmary, Rekna and Queen Grace hovered near a medical bed, their worry palpable. "Lie her down here." Rekna ordered, and I placed her on the cot.

I detected the faint metallic odor of blood. Olivia's face was pale, and she appeared to be in shock.

My body froze in place. Gods, please help Olivia and the youngling to be well.

Queen Grace was at my side. "What happened?"

Scared for the youngling and my mate, I shared what I knew, which was only that I'd found her on the ground, injured. I had not witnessed the incident myself.

The medic and Grace examined Olivia for injuries. My mate fixed her gaze on the ceiling while silent tears flowed from her eyes and vanished into her curls. The sound of her quiet, agonizing sobs pierced my heart, and I wanted to embrace her and comfort her.

I felt helpless. A low rumbling purr came from my chest as I watched.

"Where are you hurting? Is it just your abdomen?" Grace asked her.

The intensity of Olivia's crying increased, and she had a momentary spasm in her body.

The sight made my heart leap into my throat. "Help her. Give her something for the pain. She's suffering," I roared, unable to contain my emotions.

Rekna's voice, though calm, carried a firmness as he spoke with his back facing me. "Once I am aware of what injuries she has, I'll be able to administer something for pain."

Ignoring me, Grace directed her words to Rekna. "Is she in labor?"

Rekna didn't answer and continued to examine Olivia.

I felt beads of sweat forming on my forehead as I rubbed it in frustration. My breathing quickened, mirroring the rapid rhythm of my pounding heart.

"Why don't you wait outside," Queen Grace suggested, her eyes piercing into mine, her voice carrying a comforting yet unwavering tone.

My jaw set. I would remain by Olivia's side, refusing to be swayed. "I will stay." She was not just my mate; she was my fated mate. Our connection meant more to me than obeying the commands of Alara's Queen.

Rekna showed no interest in me as the large scanner came to a halt and hovered above my mate's cot. He gave a nod and walked towards a nearby table positioned next to one of the cabinets. He pulled open a drawer, retrieved a hypo-syringe, and filled it with a yellow liquid.

Seconds later, he administered a shot to Olivia.

"Although there are internal injuries, they are treatable. Your youngling is in some distress. I am going to give you something to help both of you," he said to Olivia.

"Save my baby, Rekna...Please," she sobbed.

Rekna patted her arm.

“Is that to relieve pain?” I asked while keeping my eyes on him. I felt sweat starting to trickle down my back. My hands trembled.

Frustrated, I sighed and raked my fingers through my hair. The medic didn’t respond. Why does he hide what's happening from me?

The anticipation made my stomach twist as I waited for news on Olivia and her youngling.

In a matter of moments, my K'sha's breathing steadied and a peaceful aura surrounded her. She had a gentle expression as she closed her eyes. A relieved sigh left my lips as I watched.

I stayed immobile, my hands falling lifelessly by my side as I was unable to look away from her. She had a halo of curls around her head, and her lips held a subtle pout.

Despite her condition, she remained beautiful.

Queen Grace and Rekna moved aside from the bed, and I moved closer to Olivia brushing the back of my fingers against her cheek. Her skin felt as soft as the finest Alaran silk, and I could feel the tingles of electric energy skitter across my skin.

I heard Grace and the medic speaking my name. Pushing my shoulders back, I stated, “I will not leave unless she asks me to.”

I glanced to my right to see Rekna’s gaze on me. He had a look of understanding on his face. “You may stay. But do not get in the way.” The medic pursed his lips before adding, “she had initial signs of going into labor, but now everything has quieted down.”

I nodded my head to show that I understood.

“I have administered a painkiller and a relaxation agent to her. Olivia has a few bruised ribs. She has cuts on her knees and hands from falling. However, both she and the youngling are fine....they will be okay.”

He took a quick look at Olivia before putting his hands in his pockets. “I will keep her here for the next rotation so I can monitor her.”

Rekna turned away to continue his work.

Queen Grace walked over to me, her face filled with disappointment. “I need to talk to you in the hall.” She walked out of the infirmary without waiting for my response.

Orin

I HOPED WHATEVER QUEEN Grace had to say would not take long. I disliked leaving Olivia's bedside. My hands fisted at my sides as I waited.

With her hands on her hips, Queen Grace narrowed her eyes at me.

"Your grace? Is something wrong?"

She ejected a tight-lipped huff. "I'm upset with you."

My posture stiffened. "My apologies Queen Grace. I am unsure what I have done to upset you."

She pointed at the infirmary doors. "That should never have happened," she accused.

My eyes jerked to the doors and back to her. I rubbed the back of my neck. "I agree. She should not have gone to the marketplace alone." Grace's gaze pierced through me, making me feel both exposed and vulnerable.

"Didn't you tell Clor to keep away from her?"

My jaw clenched, and my lips formed a straight line.

"Yes, I did have a conversation with him," I answered, crossing my arms in front of me. She also believed I was at fault for Olivia's injuries, which intensified my guilt.

I already knew I had shared some of the blame. But I never expected Olivia to go to the marketplace unescorted.

The Queen readjusted her stance and tapped her foot, eyeing me. “Can I ask you a question?”

I gave a single nod and frowned, curious about where this was headed.

“Do you like Olivia?”

My brows lowered, and I dropped my arms to my sides. What kind of question is that? “Yes. Of course. Why wouldn’t I?”

“Olivia has feelings for you,” she said.

My head jerked back. Oh? Queen Grace had a skill for addressing my fears that made me think she could read my mind, but I knew humans couldn’t do that.

She continued. “Why do you avoid her?”

Her unexpected question startled me, and I blinked in surprise. I thought about our few interactions, but I already knew why I was avoiding Olivia.

At first, I thought it was simply a fear of rejection, but it ran much deeper than that. My biggest challenges were my self-doubt and insecurities about not being good enough or a suitable mate. Grimacing, I stared at the Queen, unable to find the correct words to say.

Grace grumbled under her breath. “Men.” She folded her arms. “Would you like a bit of advice on human women?”

Her decision to discuss such matters with me left me puzzled, so I shrugged.

This conversation seemed highly inappropriate, especially given that she held the title of Alara's Queen. On the other hand, if she could assist me in communicating with Olivia and developing trust, I was open to listening.

Queen Grace dipped her head releasing a sigh, then looked up. Her eyes searched mine, waiting for a response.

"Okay," I croaked, then cleared my throat. "Yes."

"Still the strong, silent type, huh?" She smirked.

I tilted my head, trying to interpret the true meaning behind her comment.

The Queen shook her head, a smile appearing on her face.

"Look, we females are an emotional bunch. But in Liv's case, being pregnant has enhanced her hormones.

She tends to be more tender at times. I'm sure she would like it if you spent time with her.

Your lack of communication is hurting her, to be honest."

My chest seized tight with pain. "That was never my intention." The thought that I could be hurting her hadn't occurred to me. My stomach twisted in knots just thinking about it.

Queen Grace rested her hand on her hip. "I want a straightforward answer."

“Always.” My voice was firm.

“Is there someone else, and that’s why you don’t speak to Olivia?”

I flinched. What is she talking about? Olivia was the only female I wanted. And had ever wanted.

It felt like I was on trial at a Protectorate tribunal, defending myself against accusations I didn’t deserve. I’d always admired Grace, even before she became Queen, but this aspect of her was less pleasant.

My mouth opened, prepared to voice my objection.

She scrutinized me.

“There is no one else,” I said with a hint of indignation.

“Okay, so there has been a misunderstanding...But why don’t you tell Olivia you’d like to spend time with her?” Her tone was gentler this time as she studied my face.

I grunted in response, not wanting to confess my insecurities to the King’s mate.

How could I reveal Olivia occupied every corner of my thoughts? Yet I wasn’t convinced I could fulfill her needs or meet the standards she deserved. I didn’t want to vocalize that. I couldn’t. I didn’t want the Queen thinking any less of me.

With my silence, her face changed to one of compassion. “City guards are allowed to have relationships too,” she grinned.

My mouth refused to form words as I acknowledged her with a bob of my head. To speak of my fears out loud would only remind me I had failed to protect Olivia and

was not a suitable mate.

Queen Grace took a step toward me and placed her fingertips on my forearm. “What is it that is stopping you from talking to her?”

Frustrated, I ran my hand through my hair.

Surprising even myself, I blurted out, “She won’t want to be with me.” The sharpness of my own words caused my jaw to tighten.

Her face softened. “Well, I know she does. Both of you need to communicate with one another. I promise you I know what I’m talking about.” She offered me a comforting smile.

I shrugged, unsure how to make things right or if Olivia truly wanted to be with me.

The prospect brought a subtle boost to my mood.

“Talk to her and you’ll see how amazing she is. You two are totally meant for each other,” said Grace.

My heart raced. I was well aware that Olivia was incredible . She is my perfect mate.

“I do not want to give up.... but I cannot force her to accept me when I am...” I halted, a frown forming on my lips as I abandoned my incomplete thought. It was hard to shake the feeling that I was not deserving of her.

In a soft tone, the Queen continued, “Olivia is lonely, Orin. She’s unsure about what to do after the baby arrives. I’m worried she doesn’t feel welcome here. She’s been mentioning the idea of leaving to join a human colony once the baby arrives.”

My heart pinched. No! She can't leave! The thought of never seeing her again was unbearable. "I am committed to doing whatever it takes," I declared.

Queen Grace's eyes were fixed on me, filled with reflection. "Listen... if you want Olivia to know you're serious about her, you gotta earn her trust. I know Alaran males are loyal mates. Let her see that side of you. She needs to know you won't let her down. She is afraid of being abandoned."

I gulped at the sudden realization. So am I.

Her words echoed in my mind, swirling around my thoughts. As warriors, our loyalty to one another and the King remained steadfast, unyielding even in the face of adversity.

The determined Protectorate warrior refused to surrender. No matter what, I couldn't abandon the idea of being with Olivia. I would dedicate my entire life to my K'sha if she would have me, never wavering in my loyalty.

This was a completely unfamiliar experience for me.

Finding my K'sha was something I never anticipated, let alone imagined. My heart quickened its pace, and a surge of hope filled my entire being. "You mean I should woo her?" I asked, smiling and remembering the occasions when I heard other males use that term.

Using her forefinger, she gestured at me with a big smile. "Yes, that. Show her you're thinking about her."

My hands opened and closed by my sides. "What is the best way to show her... if I cannot find the correct words?" Even I noticed that my voice sounded constricted.

It was obvious from my words that I had little experience with females.

Watching my reaction, Queen Grace placed her hands on her hips and chuckled. “Take it easy, you’re not heading into battle. This isn’t rocket science...Start with bringing her flowers or a thoughtful gift. Human women love that.”

I pressed my bottom lip between my teeth. I had never heard of giving flowers to a mate, but I would do anything to win my K’sha’s trust and love.

“Then tell her how you feel,” she said.

I listened attentively. “Understood.”

“Elaborate on the fact that she is your K’sha.”

My lips parted. Wait. “How do you know?”

She glanced at my bare arms, then back at me, and shrugged. I was filled with more embarrassment.

“I will follow your advice. Thank you, Queen Grace,” I said with a grateful bow of my head. I simply wanted my K’sha to accept and desire me.

Grace grinned while giving my arm a playful slap. She had changed her attitude since we entered the corridor. “Anytime, Orin. Anytime. Good luck.”

I inhaled deeply, exhaled with a sigh, then whispered a prayer to the Gods, determined to win Olivia’s heart and be with her forever.

Back at Olivia’s bedside King Trex reached out to me at the most inconvenient time. I acknowledged him, then shifted my gaze towards the medic and Queen Grace.

“The King has summoned me. How long before Olivia wakes up?” I asked, noting the worry in my voice. It wasn’t as if I could refuse my King, but I hated having to leave Olivia’s side for even a moment.

Rekna gestured with his hand. “For much of the rotation, she should be in a deep sleep,” he assured.

I lowered my head and departed from the infirmary, stealing a last glimpse at my lovely mate sleeping soundly.

UPON MY ARRIVAL, I found King Trex standing staring out the window of his office. He turned and returned my salute when he saw me.

“I wanted to update you on things. Commander Tinuk has been replaced by a senior member of the city guard. He did not go willingly and I suspect there are others like him, but he won’t admit anything. He is being detained until I decide what to do with him.”

I felt honored that Trex valued me enough to keep me up to date. But I hoped to finish our meeting quickly so I could get back with Olivia before she woke up.

“I want to discuss one other thing. Considering things with Tinuk, I have decided I would like you to return to the palace tomorrow... as my personal guard. You will accompany me during the day. Except when I am in my suite of course.” He chuckled.

My chest puffed. Personal guard to the King of Alara and my former ship’s Captain? “It would be an honor, sir.” I saluted him again.

King Trex took my excitement in his stride and folded his arms. “How did it go at the marketplace?”

“We arrested more troublemakers...but Olivia was injured.” The recollection of encountering her huddled under the table, distressed and wincing in anguish, resurfaced.

In an instant I was transported back to that place, overwhelmed by feelings of panic and shame for failing to keep her safe.

The King’s authoritative voice rescued me from sinking into despair. “What happened? Is she okay?” he asked.

My throat felt thick and my face heated. I grimaced. “She was knocked down and kicked...She has sustained multiple injuries, but the medic says she and her youngling will be okay.” I paused, then added, “I’m unsure of her reason for going to the marketplace alone.”

Trex stepped toward me and put a hand on my shoulder. “Where is she now?”

“The infirmary. She and her youngling are being monitored by Rekna for at least one rotation.”

King Trex bobbed his head, frowning. “I’m glad she will be okay, but you should be with her. Our talk could have waited.”

“She is asleep right now. Rekna says she won’t wake for a while. I am headed back to her when we are finished here.”

Trex dropped his hand and gave me a knowing grin. “You are a loyal warrior. But if she is your mate, as I suspect, you will have to learn to balance your duty to me, with your duty to her.”

His statement caused my head to snap back in surprise. I wasn’t sure how to respond.

His smile widened, and he angled his head. “Your mating marks are even more visible than they were on the ship. I’ve known all along there was something between you both.”

I let out a sigh and rubbed my forehead. “That’s just it, sir. There isn’t. I’ve been too afraid to tell her how I feel.”

King Trex’s lips pressed together. “You have always been a warrior first. I was the same until I met Grace. Do not worry about telling her. She will accept you I am certain of it.”

My mind was filled with relentless self-doubt. Trex had experience with females before he encountered Grace. I did not.

I ran my fingers through my hair, clearing my throat.

“You will soon come to terms with what it means to be both warrior and fated mate.” King Trex’s smile radiated an unexpected warmth and empathy that took me by surprise.

Our relationship had always been professional, or as I preferred to think of it, official. Previously, I would have never considered discussing personal matters with him.

“Do not be hard on yourself. Finding our K’sha is not something many of us are prepared for. Our traditions have been abandoned by many who have given up hope on being blessed with their fated mate. I can assure you of one thing...you will not feel settled until you claim her.”

I frowned, nodding my head.

“You two will figure things out” Trex said with a wave of his hand.

I wondered if Queen Grace would tell him of our private conversation. Then decided it didn't matter. I intended to tell Olivia everything when she woke up.

Olivia

REKNA AND GRACE WERE speaking in hushed tones when I woke in the infirmary. The baby kicked, and I sighed with relief, thankful for the Alarans' advanced medicine. My hands still went to my stomach.

“Is my baby okay?” I tried to ask, but it came out as a croaking noise. Closing my eyes, I cringed, recalling the incident at the marketplace. I regretted that I'd gone out alone. If I hadn't been there, the baby wouldn't have been endangered.

From my left, I heard clothes rustling and smelled the faint hint of flowers. The air was also filled with another familiar scent, a blend of cinnamon spice and something deliciously undefinable. I only knew of one person that smelled like that.

My stomach fluttered.

When I glanced to the side, I caught sight of Orin standing beside the bed, shuffling his feet. He gripped a bouquet in one hand that looked like it had been freshly plucked from the palace gardens.

Before he spoke in a low voice, he cleared his throat and moistened his lips. “How do you feel?”

With a hoarse whisper, I managed to utter just one word, “What?” My mouth was as dry as a bone. I wanted to say something else... anything else, but the right words escaped me.

It didn't take long for my mind to turn on me. He's with someone else, it taunted.

My throat tightened as I remembered getting hurt at the marketplace. I attempted to sit up, and Orin rushed to adjust my pillow.

"I'm good," I snapped, shoving his hand away.

He blinked at me with his lips parted.

The memory of him with an Alaran woman at the market resurfaced, feeling like a gut-wrenching punch. My lips pressed into a deep frown and I glanced downward. I had put my child at risk by going out on my own.

If I hadn't run into him at the palace, I likely wouldn't have gone to the market. I closed my eyes and shook my head.

When I opened them and met Orin's gaze, I could see the confusion in his eyes.

"Why are you angry with me?"

I shot him a fierce glare.

When he didn't look away, I snapped. "Is that woman I saw you with the reason you left the palace?"

He gaped at me. "What are you talking about?"

I fought back the wave of emotions, my throat constricting as tears threatened to spill. What was wrong with me? This wasn't like me. I wasn't possessive.

Yet I couldn't seem to keep my mouth shut.

Naturally, I kept going. “You know what I'm talking about. I saw you with her at the marketplace. She kissed you for goodness’ sake.”

His eyebrows raised; a clear sign he remembered the exact moment I was referring to.

With a brief snort, he remarked, “She only kissed my cheek.” Orin took a step closer to the bed, wearing a cheeky grin.

Unbelievable! I fumed. He needed to explain why he was waiting by my bed when he already had a mate.

My jealous reaction was cringeworthy and uncalled for, but I continued. “Do you mind telling me who she is?”

I grimaced when I saw the look on his face, then spoke before he had a chance to say a word. “Never mind. She is a lot prettier than me...And she is Alaran, so I get it.” He couldn’t help who he wanted any more than I could.

Even though it hurt to know he didn’t want me .

Orin purposefully looked me up and down, his gaze sweeping across my entire body. He leaned closer to my face, never breaking eye contact. His warm breath stroked my cheek as he spoke.

“You are the most beautiful female I’ve ever encountered.”

My breath quickened as I blushed at his words.

Although there was no physical contact, my body reacted as if he’d touched me. “There’s no need to lie.” I grumbled, and reached up to scratch my cheek, clearing my throat.

“Who is she?” My insistence was foolish, yet uncontrollable. I knew I was behaving like an idiot but couldn’t stop myself.

A wave of goosebumps washed over my skin when his fingers grazed my arm. Suddenly, I felt a jolt of electricity course through my body. It flowed through my veins, igniting a cascade of tiny sparks that seemed to dance beneath my skin.

A warmth spread through my core making it pulse. I found myself cursing my traitorous body when I momentarily ceased to breathe.

With utmost sincerity, he declared, “She is my sister.”

I froze. His sister?

I couldn't control the twitching of my lower lip as I blinked at him. From my neck to my hairline, my face blazed with embarrassment.

“I... I had no idea you had a sister,” I stammered.

My mind raced over everything that had happened. “I don’t understand. Why do you always run away instead of talking to me?”

He withdrew his hand from my arm and stepped back before scanning the room. His hand went to scratch the back of his neck.

No one was looking at us, but I was pretty sure they knew what was going on.

His jaw flexed, and he cleared his throat. “I would prefer to discuss this in a more private environment.”

I couldn't help but notice a flicker of embarrassment on his face.

To be fair, I didn't like the idea of discussing personal matters in front of the entire infirmary either.

My body felt lighter, and I sighed.

Reasonable me appeared to be back. "Okay." I smiled politely, as if I hadn't just acted like a crazy woman. "If I ask you to come to my apartment later to talk, will you?"

His eyes met mine. They seemed to sparkle with the same hope I was now feeling. "Yes. I will."

Grace approached the opposite side of my bed. "Sorry to interrupt."

With a mischievous grin, her gaze snapped to Orin who shifted his feet but didn't speak. "How are you feeling?" she asked me.

To my surprise, I wasn't in any pain. "Good, now. But, what about the baby?"

She gave my hand a comforting squeeze. "Rekna says the baby is fine."

Thank god. "How long have I been asleep?"

Grace exchanged another glance with Orin, then looked back at me. "Just over an entire day... I mean, rotation. Orin has stayed by your side almost the entire time."

This news made my heart beat faster. Had I misjudged him? Did he really care about me? "Were you really here the whole time?" I tried to control my emotions, but my voice broke.

Grace answered promptly, pre-empting Orin's words. "He was worried about you.

We all were.”

Orin coughed, and both Grace and I glanced at him. “I need to make a last visit to the city guard to report in.” He set the flowers down on the bed next to me, and our eyes locked. “I brought these for you.”

I took the bouquet and inhaled their fragrance. “Thank you.” I grinned.

Although the flowers seemed droopy, the thought behind them was what counted. Best of all, hope had finally found a home within me. “I’ll see you later?”

He nodded but a tiny grin curled his lips. Orin’s cheeks turned a shade darker but his eyes shone with excitement. I guessed he felt awkward because Grace was there, grinning like a fool at the both of us.

Grace’s joy was evident on her face when he left, and she leaned in to wrap her arms around me. “I’m thrilled for the two of you.”

She stood back and bit her lip as her brows drew together. “I have something to confess.”

I watched her and waited to hear what she had to say.

“Earlier, when you were asleep, I talked to Orin alone.” Her mouth curled on one side.

“You did what?” I said it louder than I intended, and Rekna and another medic glanced at us before looking away again. I lowered my voice and kept going. “Did you say anything that made him uncomfortable? The guy seems super shy, Grace.”

She didn’t usually meddle, but she was probably sick of me whining about him.

“He’s a warrior Liv. They aren’t exactly known for being shy.

” She shrugged. “It was clear in our chat that he didn’t know what to say to you.

He seemed to think you didn’t want him. He thinks he’s not good enough for you. ”

What? My mouth dropped open. “How can he think like that? He’s gorgeous and I haven’t been hiding the way I feel. I mean...,” my voice trailed off.

Grace laughed again. “You two always give each other lovesick looks, but you don’t speak a word to one another.”

She wasn’t wrong. “I wanted him to make the first move,” I admitted.

Grace rolled her eyes. “In any case. I told him he should talk to you and that you like him.”

I blushed. “Grace, this isn’t high school for goodness’ sake. I don’t need you to tell a boy I have a crush on him.” Though I felt this was way more than a crush.

She laughed. “My chat appears to have been successful. He stayed and spoke to you. That’s progress.” She let out a sigh. “It was tough seeing the two of you stealing glances but not acting on it. Intervention was needed.”

I couldn’t help but chuckle because, well, she had a point. In the past, whenever I found myself around guys I was interested in, my shyness always took over.

I wasn’t sure what got into me today, but I was glad I spoke up. Orin’s strong, protective warrior image and rare smiles made it hard to imagine him lacking confidence. Hopefully, he would feel more comfortable talking to me now that we broke the ice.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Orin

MY TIME WITH THE CITY guard was over and I would be returning to the palace in a new position. One that I was proud to be doing. Being with my mate under one roof was also something I looked forward to.

With my old city guard uniform in hand, I felt a tinge of sadness as I left the palace, wishing I could have extended my time with Olivia. I'd spent every moment by her side in the infirmary, leaving only to meet with Trex.

The sight of astonishment on her adorable heart-shaped face as she noticed me by her bedside initially brought me hope.

However, her subsequent irritation towards me left me feeling perplexed. I didn't understand why she felt that way until she mentioned seeing me with Latza. Though she was angry, part of me was happy that she appeared to want me.

I was comforted by the fact at least she had seemed happier by the time I left.

Later, when I visited her, I intended to reveal everything. Including the fact that she was my K'sha. It pained me to think about the irreplaceable time I had lost, which I could have spent cherishing her.

Once I was back at the palace full-time, I would go above and beyond to win over my mate. I would show her how much she means to me. If she will have me, I would gladly spend the rest of my days with her, proving she is my heart and soul.

Before returning my uniform to the city guard, I made a detour to Latza's home to share the news about Olivia.

Despite not confiding in my sister often, I felt compelled to share the details of what happened at the market.

It was Latza's keen perception that allowed her to connect the dots and understand how important Olivia was to me.

She knew I would not leave Olivia's bedside until I was certain she was alright.

Upon entering the house, I heard the soft hum of the sewing machine coming from her dedicated sewing room, where she spent most of her time.

I stood in the doorway to greet her and she jumped up from her chair and hurried over.

"You're back!" A wide smile spread across her face. "Is Olivia doing better?"

"Yes. She and her youngling are both doing well." I replied.

With a flick of her hand, she tossed her braid over her shoulder. "You look happy. Does this mean you have spoken to her?"

I pressed my lips together, feigning annoyance at her question. "We spoke."

What I didn't add was that I had not yet mustered the courage to share the truth with my mate.

After pulling me into a big hug, Latza stepped back and took a moment to study my face. "My brother," she said with a smile. "This news fills me with joy. When will

you have your bonding ceremony?”

A burst of laughter escaped from me. “We have only just spoken to one another.” Stepping back, I folded my arms and stood tall. Grinning, I stated, “You will be the first to know when we decide to have one.”

The thought of a bonding ceremony excited me, even though I hadn’t claimed her, kissed her, or told her she was my K’sha.

Once she realized my inexperience with females, would her opinion of me change?

I once kissed a female, and she ended up admitting that she had stronger feelings for my friend. The memory of my failed attempt to attract a mate who wasn’t my K’sha had lingered with a bitter taste.

Until now, that is.

No other female had ever fascinated or aroused me like Olivia did.

Latza clapped her hands together. “I want to meet her. Having a sister and a youngling in the family will be great. It’s been too long since I’ve held one. Do you think she will allow me to care for it sometimes?”

Nodding, I placed my hand on her shoulder. “Olivia is a considerate female. I am sure she will be grateful for your offer.”

My sister grinned from ear to ear.

“I need to collect my belongings and visit the city guard before returning to the palace barracks.”

“We’ll miss having you around,” she said.

“I think your mate might have a different opinion.” I snickered.

Latza gave my arm a sharp slap before exiting the room, only to come back moments later holding a small box. She held out her hand, holding the box in her palm. “Here, give this to your K’sha. It was mother’s.”

I studied her. “Do you not wish to keep it?”

She waved her hand to dismiss the matter. “I have a collection of items that used to belong to our mother. I will never have a youngling of my own to give them to, so please...Give this to Olivia.”

The words of Queen Grace raced through my thoughts. It was expected of me to bring gifts for my K’sha. “Okay, if you are sure.”

Latza snatched it back and smiled. “While you pack your belongings, I will wrap it for you.”

I nodded in response to the overwhelming joy my sister was exuding. However, the feeling I had after taking that first step with Olivia was incomparable. I was determined to show her just how much she meant to me, no matter what it took.

UPON EXITING THE BUILDING after having returned my uniform, my thoughts focused on Olivia and what I would say to her when I saw her again. I was caught off guard when voices nearby were speaking about the King and I stopped to listen.

“The King's message didn't address the problem of off-planet skirmishes,” said one male voice.

A second male spoke. “I don’t understand his reluctance to make a deal with these Unknown aliens. I’ve heard they have technology we could use.”

The first male scoffed. “How can he make a deal? The aliens trade with the Krilex for females. The Protectorate Alliance and the Empire would never permit working with the Unknown.”

His point was valid. Though I was not part of the interrogation of the two shapeshifters at the palace some cycles ago, I understood the King would have offered to help them with locating the minerals and metals they needed.

But the issue regarding the Krilex’s abducting and selling of females to the Unknown aliens meant he was unwilling to help them.

The second male grumbled. “I believe that acquiring their technology through trade would be more advantageous for us. Better than the Krilex having it.”

A growl rumbled through me when I thought about the Unknown shapeshifters. I knew firsthand about their technology and its danger.

The guards didn’t comprehend the threats that the Protectorate were facing in space. I wondered what their reaction would be if the Krilex showed up on Alara?

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Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Olivia

I ATE A VERY QUICK lunch in the infirmary with Grace then hurried back to my apartment. I figured Orin would come see me after he finished work for the day. The thought of seeing him again made me smile from ear to ear.

Despite my best efforts, I couldn't contain my excitement about the prospect of sitting down and talking to him. That was, if he did show up after the way I spoke to him.

Once he'd left my side to go to work, I was riddled with guilt for the way I had treated him when I first woke up.

The rude way I accused him of...what was I accusing him of?

I wasn't sure exactly, since we weren't a couple.

Yet I couldn't help but feel he was mine .

Never in my life had I felt so possessive and jealous.

Sitting down, I covered my face with my hands recalling the Alaran female I'd seen with him was his sister. The longer I considered it, the more unsure I became about whether he would show up.

I was awful to him. Even though he said nice things, he might have just been trying to be polite and get away from me. I sighed. "Quit torturing yourself." I said aloud.

After a quick shower, I found myself engrossed in mundane chores, my hands occupied with the repetitive task of fluffing and re-fluffing the sofa cushions.

To occupy myself, I broke the silence by rehearsing what I would say to Orin when we met again.

Now and then, I'd pause and let my hands rest on my hips while I inspected my work.

Once I had finished fluffing, I sighed and settled onto the cozy sofa, placing a pillow behind my back for support.

I put my hand on my stomach as the baby's foot pushed against my palm, making me feel comforted I wasn't alone.

FINALLY, AFTER A LONG day, as the evening approached, and I stared at my untouched last meal, the sound of a chirp filled the air, signaling a visitor at my door. I pushed myself out of my seat and bounced from foot to foot.

He's here!

My pulse sped up and my stomach lurched with anticipation. Would I say the right things? Would he admit I was his mate?

I nervously ran my hands through my hair before smoothing down my dress, then walked to the door to wave my hand over the panel to open it.

My heart almost burst with joy at seeing Orin grinning back at me.

With hands behind his back, Orin and I took each other in. I couldn't stop the goofy grin that must have shown on my face.

In as calm a voice as I could muster, I spoke. "I'm happy you came."

His rugged turquoise face captivated me, and his delectable full lips made me want to feel them against mine. The way his dark eyes lit up, radiating heat and intensity, as he stared back at me, made my knees go weak.

The mere presence of him caused my body temperature to rise. He smelled incredible with a one-of-a-kind scent of cinnamon and spice that made my mouth water.

I couldn't believe Orin was here, standing across from me.

My breathing stuttered and my mind was consumed by erotic thoughts, pushing aside any trace of sensible thinking.

I continued to stare, my eyes tracing every contour of his fit physique, my pregnancy hormones amplifying the urge to kneel down and worship his muscular form with my mouth.

The strong, handsome warrior in front of me was the one guy I couldn't stop thinking about. My heart told me he was the one I'd been waiting for without even knowing I was searching.

"I'm grateful you asked me here." He surveyed me up and down before meeting my eyes with a soft-as-silk gaze. "Are you feeling better?"

"Yes. Thanks." I gestured for him to come in.

Orin stepped forward, and the door slid shut behind him.

My hand trembled as I brushed the hair off my cheek, a mix of nervousness and excitement filling me as I tried to recall the words I had carefully rehearsed for this

moment.

“Uh, with everything that happened after I woke up, I never got the chance to thank you for helping me...back at the marketplace.... You saved me and my baby. I can never thank you enough.”

His mouth down-turned while his Adam’s apple bobbed.

“I failed to protect you when the Krilex took you away from the Chetok. And I failed to protect you from being hurt at the marketplace.” A pained expression etched across his face.

“Olivia, I promise I will not fail you again. I will ensure the safety of both you and your youngling.”

Orin’s genuine words caused my heart to stutter, captivated by his sincerity. The weight of his words hit me like a thunderbolt, surprising me even more because in my eyes he had never failed to protect me. The things that had happened weren’t his fault.

“You’ve never failed me. You saved both Grace and me multiple times. I trust you to keep me safe, Orin.”

His face lit up. With a proud stance he extended one hand in front of him presenting yet another beautiful bouquet. The unmistakable scent of the freshly picked flowers filled the air, blending enticingly with his own unique scent.

His radiant smile caused an instant beam of joy to light up my own face. I studied him for the first time. Oh, my god . He has dimples. Why didn’t I notice them before?

My heart was racing like crazy, like it wanted to burst out of my chest. “Wha...why

have you brought me another bouquet?" I asked, reaching for them.

Orin's smile vanished, and a look of disappointment clouded his face. "Oh. Is this not a human custom when wooing one's mate?" His brows drew together as he straightened his posture.

Wooing? "Yes. I...um." I sniffed the bouquet, feeling like a heel.

"Am I incorrect? Or is it that you do not like them?" he asked.

I waved my hand. "No... That's not what I meant.

... I like them." I glanced at the flowers.

Why did I constantly say stupid things? Smiling I added, "They are pretty. It's sweet of you.

It's just...No one has ever given me flowers before.

And you've brought me two bouquets within a brief span of time.

" I said, before chewing on my bottom lip.

The handsome warrior's shoulders relaxed, and he grinned again.

"Have a seat." I gestured toward the sofa. "I'm going to put the flowers in water."

Being in the infirmary with him was one thing, but now that we were alone, I felt unsure about what to say. Especially when I felt such a powerful attraction towards the guy. How would I manage to resist the urge to kiss him?

I hoped things were headed in that direction and he wasn't about to tell me he wasn't interested in me.

I headed to the kitchen preparation area to locate a vase for the beautiful flowers.

"Thanks again for the bouquet," I said while rummaging through the cupboards, waiting for my anxiety to subside.

When I glanced over my shoulder at Orin, he was running his hand through his hair. Following his movements I couldn't help but notice he had a death grip on his muscular thighs. Despite being a formidable warrior, he seemed just as anxious as me.

It was a relief to know I wasn't alone.

His head tilted in my direction. "Queen Grace mentioned I should bring you flowers."

Of course she did. I rolled my eyes. She failed to include that part when we were talking.

After arranging the flowers and placing the vase, I returned to the sitting area and sat beside him. Close enough to catch his delicious scent and feel his body's warmth, yet not so close to make either of us uneasy.

My cheeks heated. Then I reminded myself to keep things cheerful.

Giving myself a mental pep-talk I chose to engage in small-talk to break the ice. Piece of cake.

Placing my hands together in my lap, I fixed my eyes on him. "Are there any other family members of yours living here on Alara, apart from your sister?"

Orin stiffened, and I felt a wee sense of panic.

He remained motionless for a millisecond before shaking his head. “Only my sister. She raised me after my mother died and my father left.”

It broke my heart to see his eyes lose some of their sparkle. It was definitely a sore spot for him. Way to go, Liv. I was back to worrying my bottom lip.

It surprised me when he added, “My father is...was...a warrior for the Protectorate. Just like his father before him.” Pride lingered in his voice.

Lost in his thoughts, Orin let out a deep sigh, his gaze passing right through me. “After the death of my mother, my father accepted a mission that would take him to a different planet.”

I didn’t interrupt him. It was clear he needed to talk, but the sadness in his voice left me feeling choked up. My chest constricted as I felt the weight of his pain.

“My sister told me my father’s grief for my mother overwhelmed him. We were constant reminders of my mother and he couldn’t bear it. We haven’t heard from him since he left. I have no idea if he’s alive or deceased.”

A mist formed in my eyes.

“Orin. I’m so sorry.” I managed to resist the temptation to hold his hand. My biggest concern was that he might interpret my intentions as pity, when in truth, I empathized with him.

Beneath Orin’s calm exterior, there was a complexity to him that made me like him even more. I wasn’t sure why he was opening up to me.

Then it dawned on me that he had never said so many words at once in the time I'd known him. Even though he shrugged off my apology, I couldn't ignore the emotional scar that he carried.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Olivia

“WHERE DID YOU GET THE beautiful bouquet, anyway?” I asked, sitting back.

His face turned a lighter shade of teal, and he glanced at the vase before answering.

“Once I had finished unpacking following my meeting with Captain Kagin, it was too late to buy flowers for you from the market.” His lips curved at the corners. “I decided to pick some from the palace gardens. I didn’t want to disappoint you.”

You could never disappoint me. Orin was a treasure, and I almost melted on the spot. He appeared to be as honest as they come. An endearing trait for a guy. And rare.

“You didn’t have to bring me anything.”

He casually shrugged and smirked, letting me know he was going to keep bringing me flowers even if I told him not to.

“Are you glad to be back working here?” I asked him. Grace mentioned he was coming back to work at the palace, which made me happy that he would be living nearby again.

His posture changed, and he sat up tall. “Yes. My first shift starts in the morning. It is an honor to be the King’s new personal guard.”

My head bobbed and my mind raced, wondering what to say to him next.

The effect Orin had on me was indescribable; he had the power to make my heart race and my mind go blank. The pull to him was irresistible, like a strong magnetic force. Whenever he gazed at me with his intense dark eyes, a whirlwind of emotions stirred within me, leaving me breathless.

I smoothed my hair, trying to maintain the same look of calm his face reflected but his eyes betrayed. Then I cleared my throat. “Now that we’re alone, can you tell me why you’ve been avoiding me?” I asked with a slight grimace.

Orin looked me in the eye and I almost averted my gaze, worried about his answer. “Before my talk with Queen Grace, I believed you did not want to be with me.”

Seriously? “That’s why you’ve been avoiding me?”

” I was stunned by his confession even though Grace hinted at it.

“What changed your mind?” My eyes drifted to the mating marks on his biceps, and he noticed.

Orin’s markings had darkened in color and confirmed I was his fated mate, and I couldn’t help but feel overjoyed.

When he looked down at his biceps, and I saw a touch of uncertainty in his expression, I wished I could hear what he was thinking. Alaran’s had telepathic powers, and communicated with one another mind to mind most of the time. They were also empathic by nature.

Blushing, I wondered if Orin had ever read my mind. Clearly not. If he had, he’d know how badly I wanted him. I knew it was possible for him to sense or pick up on my emotions, but figured he hadn’t done that either.

Given that he thought I didn't want to be with him.

Seeing Orin's mating marks were visible made my stomach flutter as I waited for him to say something.

"It is true." He swallowed hard. "You are my K'sha."

His reaction was so adorable that I couldn't help but smile.

"What happens now?" I asked, feeling hopeful.

Orin bowed his head and closed his eyes. "I'm sorry..."

My stomach plummeted to my feet. Is he going to reject me?

"I do not know how to..." His voice trailed off as his throat bobbed.

According to Trex, Alarans had only one fated mate, and they were very rare. No wonder he didn't know what to do next. I wasn't sure either. Amid all the memories since we first met, I had a sudden and scary thought. "Do you not want a mate?" Or do you just not want me?

Orin, the hunky alien warrior, grimaced. "I do. But I want to be a good mate." His head angled and his lips drooped. "One worthy of you."

Excuse me? How could he doubt his worthiness?

"Your mating marks prove we are meant to be together." Why was this so hard for him? I was usually the unsure one in relationships.

I wanted to comfort him, but I wasn't sure how. He seemed to believe what he was

saying, and that made me feel sad.

Even though I wanted more than anything to be with Orin, I knew better than to expect his feelings about finding his fated mate to make everything okay.

It was clear he'd been carrying these thoughts around for a while. If I let myself believe we had a future, I could end up hurt.

But I wanted to take the chance, because I believed he wanted that too.

I wondered if maybe Orin wasn't ready to accept our connection or if he believed I didn't want to be with him? Maybe he was having second thoughts because I was pregnant with someone else's child?

I was consumed by insecurity. Does he think I've slept around? The sudden thought gave me a mini heart attack, so I glanced down, pretending to brush off some imaginary lint from my dress.

"I've only been with one man," I blurted, hoping to set things straight before I met his eyes again.

He grinned as his eyes flicked to my baby bump.

I chuckled.

"Look, I like you, Orin. But I would forgive you if you decided not to take me on just because your mating marks activated."

Perplexed, Orin's eyebrows pinched. "Take you on?"

I rubbed my stomach. "I'm carrying someone else's child. That's a lot, even if I am

your mate. Most men would not even consider it.”

He studied me for a moment. “What about the younglings father?”

I scoffed. “He never wanted a child with me. And he didn’t want me once I got pregnant, so it doesn’t matter. I’m over him. I’m okay raising my child alone.”

The last thing I wanted was for Orin to think I expected him to help me raise another mans child.

Witnessing his posture shift and his chin jut out, I was met with a tender look of empathy that brought me close to tears.

“I am not a human male. I am an Alaran warrior and we do not abandon our K’sha. It would be an honor if you allowed me to be a father to your youngling.” His voice, deep and rich, sent warm tingles through me.

“All my life I assumed I would remain unmated. Our connection surprised me, I’ll admit. But there is no denying the fact you are my K’sha, Olivia. My thoughts of you consumed me long before I was ready to speak to you. Can you forgive me?” His smile was sweet with a hint of sexy.

I wondered if he’d been thinking of me in the same way I was with him. God, I hoped so.

“Of course.... There is nothing to forgive. I should have spoken up sooner, too.” I looked down, feeling ashamed.

“Is it safe to assume you won’t be leaving Alara?” He asked. Hope was evident in his tone.

I fidgeted with my hands in my lap. “Truthfully, I never wanted to leave, but I couldn’t handle seeing you when I thought you didn’t want me, so I knew I should leave.”

Orin reached out and touched my arm, smoothing his fingers down it. “It appears we are both at fault.” He grinned and I could tell he was teasing.

“Will you allow me to learn more about you? About what pleases you, and makes you smile?”

Yes, please.

My eyes fell to his lips and all I could think about was how much I wanted him to kiss me. His palm grazed against my cheek, and I couldn’t help but shudder at the comforting warmth.

Orin gazed at me with hunger in his eyes.

Why is he waiting?

“Well, kiss me already,” I demanded.

He stilled and doubt started to creep in for a moment. “I assume you know what a kiss is, don’t you?” I uttered. Need was rising faster than I was ready for. Every cell in my body cried out for his touch.

A chuckle escaped him, and his eyes shone brightly. “Yes. I do.”

Still, he hesitated to make a move. I decided to take matters into my own hands. “Good. May I kiss you?” My mouth watered and my thighs quivered.

He uttered a husky, yes.

I pulled him closer as I leaned forward, gripping his shoulders to balance myself. My lips closed in on his, sweeping across his mouth. I ran my tongue along his bottom lip feeling the soft plumpness of it.

Placing his palms on either side of my head, Orin's hands slid into my hair. He kissed me back with a tenderness I didn't expect.

My response was to pull him even closer. I tugged at his hair and held him tight before he could get away or change his mind.

He chuckled. His laughter vibrated against my lips, before he deepened the kiss, causing me to melt into him.

Our mouths opened to one another and the kiss evolved into a passionate intertwining of tongues and lips. He tasted like a mix of fresh mint and warm spice, and it sent a thrilling jolt through me.

It seemed I wasn't alone in my thoughts as I heard words in my mind, Gods; you taste even better than I could have imagined.

Excited, I drew back, breathless with my chest heaving. "Did I just hear your thoughts?"

One side of his mouth tilted, revealing a seductive grin. "Yes."

I gasped. This was real. We were fated mates.

The instant attraction I had felt when I first saw him told me a part of me knew all along about our connection, but I had been too afraid to believe it was possible.

I could feel the vibrations as my handsome warrior's chest rumbled. It sent a jolt through my body, like a surge of electricity coursing from my veins to my very core.

In that moment, our breaths became one, as our foreheads met and our chests rose and fell in unison, each gasp filling the space between us.

A wave of joy washed over me, making me feel as if I had been handed the greatest gift imaginable.

With the air of someone who had just recalled something important, Orin settled back and reached into his pocket.

“I have a special gift just for you.”

My breath hitched.

In his hand, he held a small box, his palm cradling it. The package was wrapped nicely with gold fabric and white ribbons. It was stunning.

Curiosity struck me as I wondered whether he had enlisted someone's help to wrap it. I couldn't fathom how his massive hands managed to tie such a dainty bow, like the one delicately wrapped around the box.

“What's this?” My fingers trembled as I reached for the box.

“It belonged to my mother. My sister wrapped it so I could give it to you. She is looking forward to meeting you.”

I jerked my hand back like it was on fire, and had to hold back tears from the sweet gesture. “No way I can accept this... Your sister should have it.”

He ignored my words and pushed the box toward me again, grinning. Then bowed his head, indicating that he wanted me to have it. Excited, I accepted it and took off the colored ribbon. Then removed the gold fabric wrapped around the small box.

When I pulled off the lid, I gasped.

Nestled inside was a dainty silver chain, complete with a sturdy clasp.

Adorning it was a captivating green stone similar to an emerald,.

The stone was carved into the graceful form of a teardrop.

When I held it in my palm, I could feel its substantial weight, which surprised me.

The pendant was about the size of my thumb, but wider.

I couldn't speak due to a lump in my throat. My eyes brimmed with tears as I met his gaze.

“Do you like it?” he asked, smiling.

I nodded and gazed at it in my hand.

“Let me help.” Orin said.

I handed him the necklace and lifted my hair from my neck. His fingers grazed my flesh, sending sweet chills down my spine at the brief contact. I looked down at where it lay against my chest then wiped my eyes and turned to face him.

“Thank you, it’s beautiful.”

He smiled and his gaze shifted towards my cleavage and then to the pendant. “It looks stunning on you.”

Tears filled my eyes as I inhaled his scent and pressed the pendant against my heart.

With a gentle touch, he reached for my cheek and locked eyes with me. “Would you mind if I kissed you again?”

“God, no. I don’t mind. You never have to ask.” My heart was skipping beats.

In one unexpected yet smooth movement, Orin picked me up and shifted me onto his lap as if I weighed nothing. One of his hands went to my hair while the other wrapped around my waist, holding me against him.

The force of his kiss took me by surprise, and I couldn’t help but moan in pleasure as he explored my lips. Arousal pulsed through my body, heightened by the deep rumbling purr emanating from his chest.

As Orin held me close, his hands conveyed both strength and gentleness, while his soft kisses danced along my jawline. Allowing him access, I tilted my head, and he began planting a series of tender kisses along the sensitive spot where my neck and shoulder met.

I kept my eyes shut, fearful that he was a figment of my imagination and not wanting the moment to end.

My fingers threaded into his hair. Being with him was like being under a spell, and I never wanted to break free from his enchantment. I had always imagined Orin kissing me and much more, but the reality was even better.

“Olivia...Gods, you taste delicious.” He husked, running his hands along my shoulder

and down my arm.

My gaze slipped to what I could see of his upper body, and my mouth watered. Orin's enormous erection pressed against my bottom.

My own body responded in less visible ways, unless you counted my hardened nipples that rubbed against the fabric of my dress.

I touched his chest, feeling the taut muscle of his pecs beneath my fingers.

Until now, I had not been able to study him up close.

I noticed that despite his blueish green skin he had freckles on his cheeks that spread across his nose.

It was hardly noticeable, but if you looked closely, you could see them.

His lips curled slightly and his brows expressed more than ever as he gazed back at me. He gave me an enticing grin.

Orin had the sexiest dimples I had ever seen on anyone. When he smiled at me, my entire body tingled from head to toe. Everything about him filled me with need and happiness.

“You are a great kisser.” I said, glancing at his mouth.

“So are you.” With a twinkle in his eyes, he planted a gentle kiss on my nose and then grinned widely, radiating pure happiness.

I'd never witnessed this side of him and I liked it very much.

“You should do that more often,” I said.

“What's that?”

“Smile. It makes you even more handsome.”

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Orin

FINDING MY K'SHA AND being the personal guard to the King filled me with pride. The knowledge that I was trusted by Trex made me feel more confident.

Being back in the palace brought a sense of comfort and familiarity. At long last, my K'sha's heart was mine, and the world would be restored to its rightful order.

A smile involuntarily crept onto my face. My heart swelled with joy at the mere thought of seeing Olivia tonight.

The excitement of my first day as Trex's personal guard dissipated when I laid eyes on his troubled face. He relaxed when our eyes met.

A tight smile formed on his lips. "Our first task today is an interview with Tinuk. He claims he's ready to talk."

I followed Trex out of his office.

When Tinuk was escorted into the interview room, he gave me a hostile look but remained silent.

King Trex questioned, "You stated you were ready to speak to me?"

Tinuk's expression remained neutral, but his voice revealed tension." Just so you know, I was working with other individuals."

Trex leaned in, intrigued by the disgraced Commander's words. "Who are they? Are they part of the purist movement as well?"

The city guard was now overseen by Drad, a long-time guard. He'd detain any remaining purists to prevent further harm.

Trex had also mentioned that Tinuk's information about Krilex shuttles near the mining area was accurate, which made me confident that the King was giving Tinuk's words serious consideration.

The ex-Commander, Tinuk, shook his head in disapproval. "You have no idea what is going on here do you? This isn't just about some group of manipulated Alaran males."

Trex leaned back and folded his arms. "Enlighten me."

Tinuk emitted a grunt. "Instead of going to prison, can I be exiled from Alara?"

King Trex scoffed. "You have violated your pledge to protect Alaran citizens. You are fortunate no one lost their life, or else you would be sentenced to death."

Tinuk frowned. "I instructed the males not to kill the hybrids. I had to do something or they would have killed me... I'm not the one you should be worried about. The Voletti will not give up on their plans until they control Alara."

"Voletti? You mean the Unknown alien shapeshifters?" growled King Trex.

We now had the name of our new enemy.

"Yes. They are an ancient race from another Universe. They ended up here by mistake but they cannot reproduce here...."

“I know this already,” Trex snarled.

Tinuk’s face contorted before letting out a sigh. “Then you know that their ships require flonium as fuel. Alara has the minerals and metals to make it.... The Voletti want control over the mines, so they have an ongoing supply.”

“They will fail, regardless of their plans,” stated Trex with certainty.

A rueful laugh escaped from Tinuk. “Is it not clear to you? They have been biding their time for years, waiting to carry out the next part of their plan... It all began more than thirty tenri ago when they introduced their virus into our people. Their sole aim from the beginning has been to eradicate the Empire and its Protectorate, from Alaran space. Then no one stands in their way to have what they need. Now, they are running out of time and patience.”

The Voletti were responsible for the deaths of my mother and many others? My jaw ticked, and I held back a growl.

The virus had all but wiped out the Alaran people, causing the remaining females to become unable to bear children.

Our race would face extinction, leaving only fragments of our DNA to survive in the offspring of Alaran and non-Alaran unions.

And for what? Access to the products needed to make flonium?

The Voletti were a cruel and selfish race. They needed to be removed from Alaran space. Did Tinuk not care that this was his home, too? He too would have lost family members due to the virus.

The shock of the revelation left King Trex as stunned as I was.

“Why? Why would you do anything they ask? What did they promise you?” Trex accused.

“My life. They promised not to kill me if I cooperated. One of the shapeshifters approached me with an offer. If I helped them, I would be allowed to live and be part of the new government.” He glanced from Trex to me and back to Trex.

“I am telling you the truth....They will attack. It is only a matter of time.”

“When are they planning to attack? What are their plans?”

Tinuk shook his head. “I am requesting assurances I will face banishment rather than being sent to Ronroth prison...or executed.”

Alara didn’t have a prison, at least not on the planet.

The Protectorate Alliance designated a minor planet, previously unoccupied, as a repository for high-risk criminals. Technology was non-existent and escape from the planet was impossible.

Rather than landing, ships teleported prisoners to the surface, leaving them to fend for themselves. The nightmarish reputation of the place reduced crimes in the Empire.

Trex let out a roar as he reached across the table and grabbed Tinuk by his shirt. “You will tell me the truth.”

Tinuk’s face turned sour, but he quickly surrendered.” The Krilex will create a diversion, while the Voletti launches an attack on Struna. Their goal is to eliminate you and the Protectorate.”

Trex shook him. “Why would you turn against your own people?”

Tinuk frowned. “My people? I have no one left. The reason I helped was because they threatened me.

At first, I thought the shapeshifters just wanted to create tension between our own people.

I went along with it, thinking it couldn’t do any harm.

If it kept me safe. Shortly after, a member of the Protectorate Council approached me.

He said we had no option but to obey the Voletti’s demands, as they had the power to annihilate us.

He was adamant.” Tinuk stopped and cleared his throat.

“There was nothing I could do but follow orders. But once I was arrested and began thinking about what was coming...I knew I had to speak up.”

Trex released him and plopped into his seat, running his hands through his hair. His emotions showed plainly on his face. He had been betrayed and was ready to end the person who turned against the Alaran people.

“Who is the Council member that approached you?”

WE WERE DESPERATE FOR every detail we could gather. Within minutes, we were standing outside the cell of the shapeshifter who had attempted to assassinate Trex when we arrived on Alara.

The moment I laid eyes on him, it was evident that the creature in the cell was unlike any Alaran or any other race I’d encountered before. Despite its frail, spindly physique and pale skin, Trex and I were well aware that these creatures should not be

underestimated.

After killing his father, a Voletti shapeshifter abducted the Queen, but she'd been saved by King Trex and Captain Krin. No thanks to me.

I kept my gaze fixed on the creature, trying not to race to Olivia to make sure she was okay. However, I had a duty to the King and Alara that I had to fulfill.

The news that we might be attacked was more than unsettling, but the palace was well protected.

The Voletti shapeshifter did not move toward the cell door when we entered.

“Prince Trex, this is unexpected. What brings you here? Are you ready to execute me?”

Trex's fists were clenched at his sides.

I folded my arms and gave the alien a stern glare.

With venom in his voice, Trex confronted the being whose people posed a severe threat to our planet. “You will not be executed by me . You are far too eager to die. Perhaps your people...the Voletti, may want to kill you themselves for failing your mission.”

The alien's face twitched in shock and I sensed fear drifting off him in waves.

“How...How do you know my identity? Are my people here?”

“I want you to tell me about the Voletti and how to defeat them.” Trex barked.

Trex was very skilled at masking his emotions. My own were barely contained because of my fear for Olivia's safety, and anger toward the Voletti and Krilex.

We needed to know how to stop the Voletti, and this creature could be our only chance.

"You will never leave this cell. You will die here. But not by my hand. Tell me about your leader's intentions." Trex finished.

The alien frowned. "If what you say is true. It means time has run out for all Voletti in this Universe. Our leader, Leox87003, must be desperate if he is here."

"What makes you think he is here?" asked Trex.

"You would not be speaking to me if he were not. It makes sense that he would return to the seat of the Protectorate and the Empire. By destroying you and your people, he will gain access to the minerals needed for our ships' fuel.

"The being sighed and his shoulders slumped.

"If my leader finds I am still alive, he will see I am destroyed and used to create more of our kind. However, as further punishment he will ensure my memories will be gone and I will not exist again."

I watched Trex's puzzled expression. "Explain what you mean?"

"We do not procreate the way most humanoid races do. Our bodies are destroyed and we use the DNA to create more of us, which includes keeping the memories of our previous versions."

King Trex's hands went to his hips. His eyes narrowed at the shapeshifter. "You

mean cloning? The Voletti are clones? If that's true why are you trading technology for females?"

The alien heaved another sigh as his already thin lips pressed together until they couldn't be seen.

"Our scientists have detected mutations from the repeated rebirthing process, cloning, as you call it. Which is causing concern. Using human DNA mixed with ours we can ensure better quality versions of Voletti soldiers. There is the added benefit of being able to use female wombs to grow them."

Judging from his appearance, he had mutations, and I wondered what their race originally looked like.

"How many Voletti are there left in this Universe?" Trex asked.

After a moment of contemplation, the alien responded.

"We entered this Universe with ten ships in the armada. We've lost two vessels as well as two hundred of our people.

There are one hundred Voletti on each ship.

This is all we have left, though I suspect not all of them have the fuel to leave our moon. "

I was reminded of our conversation when Trex mentioned that Captain Krin's ship the Chetok was on its way to one of Jaxia's moons.

Hopefully he had found and destroyed their base. We had not heard from them yet to verify whether they'd been successful.

“You’ve told me in the past, that you are scientists. Yet you referred to the clones as soldiers a moment ago. Which is it?” Trex’s brow raised in annoyance.

“We consider ourselves scientists, however our people had once been referred to as soldiers. The fact is, we’ve been in this Universe for so long we have lost much of our abilities.

I spoke the truth regarding hand-to-hand combat.

Our vessels have weaponry. We have nothing else to protect ourselves. ”

“Tell me how to destroy your ships?” Trex demanded.

The being was silent while he watched Trex. “If you wait long enough, we will no longer be a threat.” Fear was evident on his face, but I wasn’t sure if his fear was of us or his leader.

Trex released a rueful laugh. “We both know I cannot do that. Tell me what you know and what your leader may do now that he’s lost access to flonium and females?”

“I’ve told you all I can. My importance on the ship was very low. I was ordered to infiltrate the monks of Tenage and kill you if I had the chance....There is not much more I can tell you.”

“I’ve asked you this before, and I want the truth this time. Are the Voletti invaders?”

He shook his head. “I’m unsure what our leader has planned for you.”

“That is a lie. I’m going to assume you are invaders.”

The creature didn't respond, but appeared to be contemplating something. Several long minutes passed, and we turned to leave when the being spoke again.

“What if I were to tell you how my people came to be here on Alara without being detected?”

Trex spun on his heels, glaring at the alien. “Tell me everything you know.”

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Orin

THE EVENTFUL FIRST day back at work at the palace and the revelations that were revealed only made me more certain about claiming Olivia and activating our mating bond.

The immediate threat to the Alaran people made me determined to protect her from any potential harm.

My intention during my visit to Olivia's suite one rotation ago was to apologize for avoiding her.

I also had planned to admit my lack of mating experience, hoping she would still choose to be with me. That did not happen, but I had spoken up and confessed another truth. That she deserved a better mate.

Olivia's forgiving and kind nature caught me off guard in the best way possible.

The truth was, I would never have been able to stay away from her once I knew we were fated mates. It would have been impossible, and I wasn't sure I could live without her regardless of how she felt about me.

Opening up to Olivia felt effortless, and as a result, I shared things with her I had never disclosed to anyone else.

I was surprised when I began talking about my parents with her.

Being close to Olivia, I experienced unfamiliar emotions, and I felt things for her I never imagined I could feel for anyone.

My chest ached when I had to leave her side.

What caught me off guard the most was her admission of feelings for me, and then came the kissing. The mix of joy and arousal was new to me.

After our shared kisses, I had not been able to stop thinking about holding and kissing her again. My feelings for her were stronger than ever. We'd only kissed, but my desire for Olivia was burning like a roaring fire.

Now I was about to see her again and I hoped for much more than a kiss, though I knew it might not be appropriate. One thing was certain. I no longer had any fears or reservations about accepting our connection.

UPON THE OPENING OF Olivia's suite door, my mate welcomed me with an unexpected embrace and kiss.

My heart thudded with excitement upon receiving her delightful greeting.

My K'sha was a breathtaking beauty, with her mesmerizing eyes, graceful manner and soothing voice.

I lifted her effortlessly into my arms and I carried her to the sofa while she giggled. Then I sat down with her in my lap like I had done the day before.

"Can I expect the same greeting each time I see you?" I asked, grinning.

She eyed me with her head tilted as if unsure of my meaning. "Don't you approve?" she asked, sounding hesitant.

I smiled, then gave her a quick kiss. “I approve. Very much.” The bulge in my trousers pulsed eagerly, enjoying the feel of her soft buttocks as she settled onto my lap. I’d been here mere seconds, and I was already hard for her.

I had been in the company of many males who freely shared stories about their mating experiences with females from different planets.

The thought of putting my cock into a stranger or taking a mate that I had no bond with held no allure for me.

I’d prayed to Tenage and Veshar to bring me my K’sha. I dared to believe that they might find me worthy enough to create a fated mate just for me.

To my astonishment, it finally happened. The instant I laid eyes on Olivia, I knew she was the one for me. It just took me a while to come to terms with it.

Now she was in my arms and I never wanted to let her go. Sheer bliss engulfed me when Olivia acknowledged our fated connection.

I would smile more often just to keep seeing my K’sha’s adoring gaze forever.

Whatever fears and reservations stopped me from accepting our connection before now, I no longer cared. There was an immediate threat to the Alaran people, and I was not willing to risk losing her to anything or anyone else.

I couldn’t afford to waste any more time. I had to claim her.

She gushed, “I’ve missed you...And I’m so glad to see you.”

A wide grin spread across my face. “Personally, I found it difficult to concentrate.”

Olivia giggled, then pressed her lips against mine and I groaned, kissing her back. My arms tightened around her as her hands went to my head where she stroked me tenderly.

Passion and bliss were intertwined, making my head spin with every lingering kiss we shared. Her soft, pink lips made me feel an intense rush of desire. I longed to delve into every inch of her, determined to uncover the source of her pleasure and satisfy her.

Her passionate responses fueled my eagerness to be consumed by her. To be enveloped in her warmth and feel her essence pulsating against my cock.

I didn't know if she could engage in mating while in her current condition. I wanted to inquire, but I hesitated.

Placing my hand on her abdomen, she responded with a smile. "I have never seen a pregnant female up close before. You are beautiful like this." I said, gazing at her stomach then meeting her eyes.

"Really?" She made a grimace and raised her eyebrows. "I'm glad you think so, because I feel huge." She let out a chuckle.

Grinning, I added without thinking, "I can't wait to fill you with younglings of our own."

Olivia blushed and chuckled again.

The surrounding air was filled with a captivating scent, a blend of her unique, powdery sweetness and a hint of growing arousal.

Thank the gods my statement had not scared her. I berated my lack of self-control,

nonetheless.

It was time to tell her the truth. I reached out and placed my hand on her knee. “Olivia, I have something to tell you.”

“Is everything alright? Don’t tell me you have to leave Alara? I couldn’t bear it.” Panic was evident on her face. I wasn’t great at conversation and this only proved it. It was not my intention to send her into a state of worry.

Her subtle movements made me painfully conscious of her bottom pressing against me, and I had to suppress a groan. “No. It is nothing like that.” I flashed a reassuring smile. “I am uncertain about how you will view me after I share this with you.”

Her brows drew together, and she put her hand to my jaw. “Now I’m curious. It would take a lot to change my opinion of you, Orin.” She ran her hand along my cheek, then smoothed it through my hair.

I shut my eyes and let out a deep, rumbling purr.

Olivia had stopped moving her hand, so I opened my eyes and saw her staring at me, expecting me to provide an explanation.

In a husky voice, I confessed, “Olivia, your touch feels incredible... I crave you.”

Her lips curled into a mischievous grin that made my heart race. “I want you too,” she said, her eyes filled with desire.

In that fleeting moment, our gazes met, and the world blurred into insignificance.

I let out a cough, trying to ease the tension, before stumbling through the words, “I want to be truthful with you, always... I’ve never mated with anyone before.”

Her head snapped back as she observed me. “Mated?” she asked, raising her eyebrows. “You mean sex?”

I shrugged, unsure if we were talking about the same thing. My translator clarified what she meant, and I nodded.

“But you’ve been with other women... You’ve done other things, right?” she asked.

I shook my head, pressing my lips. “Only kissed. And only once.”

“I don’t understand... I never expected you to... not that I mind.” Her eyes held a gentle look. “So, you’re a virgin?”

My lips curved into a grin. “I do not know that word, but based on what my translator is telling me... I guess I am.” Relief flooded me when she didn’t become upset at my revelation. I inhaled the delicious scent of her as she licked her lips.

“Why? I mean, you are gorgeous.... I’m surprised no one has snapped you up already.”

Laughter bubbled up from deep within me. My K’sha had a way with the Terran language that brought a smile to my face.

Her head leaned into my touch as I ran my hand down the side, savoring the feel of her hair against my palm.

My heart thrummed in sync with hers. “I was waiting for my fated mate.” With my arms wrapped around her, I gave her a gentle squeeze.

“I was waiting for you, my heart.”

Beaming at me, she looked up, and I responded with a gentle kiss before studying her. The stars seemed to shimmer in her brown eyes, with flecks of gold catching the light. Her affection for me was evident in the way she looked at me, and I could feel it.

“Are you concerned about my inexperience in relationships?” I asked.

“Absolutely not!”

Pleased by her response, I gazed back at her with a half-smile. My heart felt lighter.

As her fingertips grazed my cheek, a gentle warmth spread through me.

“You’ve been very open with me...I respect that.

You never have to worry about how I feel about you.

I’ve never stopped wanting you.” She chuckled.

“Besides, I’m not experienced in relationships either.

I’ve only been with one guy. And he was a jerk. ”

I tilted my head, captivated by every subtle gesture she made. My hands seemed to have a mind of their own, gliding along her shoulders, arms and hips with a gentle touch.

Her response to my touch was immediate, as she squirmed and traced her hands along my chest. “Exactly what is it you’re worried about?”

“That I will not know how to...” I swallowed, “to bring you pleasure.”

She grasped my face with her tender hands and shook her head, locking her gaze with mine.

“Orin, the slightest brush of your hand electrifies me. When you are near me, all I want is to kiss you. You turn me...” She looked down as her cheeks turned crimson. “Well, let’s just say, I need to change my panties soon...Believe me, you pleasing me will be a breeze.”

Her words took a moment to sink in and I grinned with pride. “Are you sure you don’t mind my lack of... experience?”

She wrapped her arms around my neck. “Not at all. It will be fun, teaching you what I like.... if you want me to, that is.” Her lips quirked.

“Gods yes. I’d like you to show me the areas that give you the most pleasure when touched. I only hope to satisfy your needs and make you happy,” I husked.

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Despite her flushed cheeks, Olivia maintained eye contact. “I will show you, but I want to bring you pleasure, too. You may have to teach me a few things as well.” Her lips curved into a grin.

I licked my lips. “Whatever makes you happy, my mate.”

My K’sha was a divine gift. One I was eternally grateful for.

Leaning in, I captured her lips with mine, pouring the intensity of my emotions into the kiss.

She pulled away from the kiss and struggled to get off my lap.

I wondered if I had already done something incorrectly, but before I could ask, she tugged on my hands, signaling me to stand up with her.

I discreetly made an adjustment to my pants to relieve the discomfort caused by the pressure on my hardened length.

Olivia’s hands slipped beneath my shirt, and her nails traced a tantalizing path across my skin, igniting a pleasurable tingle. I couldn’t help but moan in response.

She leaned back, looking up at me. “It’s taken us ages to admit our attraction to one another.” She pointed at her stomach. “Before the arrival of this little guy, which will be soon... I want to have some time with you.”

As my mate embraced me, her arms encircled my body, her belly jutting out between

us. She spoke with a breathy, needy voice. “I’m excited to teach you right away.” She grinned while her fingertips reached into my waistband and my hips jerked.

I held her hands to halt her movements.

“But...?” I began.

Olivia pressed her finger to my lips, signaling me to be quiet.

In a challenging manner, she squinted at me. “Orin, warrior of the Protectorate Alliance, let me be explicit about this. I want you to make love to me. Now!”

I laughed at her fierceness. “I was going to ask if it’s safe to mate while you are pregnant?”

She chewed her bottom lip, looking sheepish. “Oh...sorry...I thought you were trying to stop me.”

With a closed-lipped grin, I touched her shoulders with my hands. “I was.” I tilted my head and placed a kiss on the top of hers. “You have recently been injured. And you are with child. I do not know if this is safe. Maybe we should wait?”

My body disagreed, but I wanted to do what was right and best for my K’sha.

The corners of her mouth turned downwards. “No. We’ve already waited too long. It’s safe for the baby, don’t worry. And I am not in any pain. Let’s do this.”

“If you are sure. Our first mating with our fated mate is considered the act of claiming. It’s significant and bonds you to me forever. Are you sure this is what you want? Because I can’t breathe when I think of you not being in my life, Olivia. I want you with me forever.”

She responded with a sensual kiss. “I am sure.” Olivia’s eyes shone. “I want you to claim me and make me yours forever.”

My heart skipped a beat. I ran my fingers through her hair as I captured her lips in another claiming kiss.

After we stopped to catch our breath, she started speaking. “Once you claim me, we will be able to hear each other’s thoughts and talk in our minds to one another, right?” Hope was evident in her voice and expression.

Still stroking her hair, I responded with a casual shrug. “This is unfamiliar territory for me. But according to what we were taught growing up, it could happen.”

“I want that.” She declared.

I hugged her to me. “Me too.”

My K’sha released me and stepped back and began undoing the buttons on her dress. “We’re doing this, now.” She breathed.

Taking another step, she let her dress slide down her body and gather on the floor, creating a pool at her feet.

There was a loud, growling noise, and I realized it was coming from me. “ Flutz ...you’re breathtaking.” My hands glided along the delicate flesh of her shoulders. Her irresistible breasts beckoned me, and I couldn’t help but succumb to the desire to caress them.

I’d been unable to stop imagining them each time I saw her. Her body was more beautiful than I imagined.

With a soft moan, Olivia tugged me down towards her, locking her lips with mine and letting her hands slide back to my waistband. I didn't interrupt her this time as she unbuttoned and lowered my pants, relieving my throbbing erection.

She cast a quick glance down at my cock and inhaled a deep breath. It had crossed my mind how my anatomy might differ from that of a human male, and I was hoping for her approval.

Her wide eyes and the way she licked her lips indicated she liked what she saw. I discarded my pants and peeled off my shirt, feeling the freedom of being unclothed.

We both stood exposed, save for the delicate fabric of a single undergarment covering the space between her creamy thighs, which added an alluring hint of secrecy.

Taking her hands in mine, I asked one last time. "Are you sure it's safe to do this?" I glanced at her swollen belly with uncertainty. My hand went to my cock which was already wet at the tip, and I stroked it a couple of times in anticipation.

She nodded. "God, yes. It's fine. We may need to be creative with positions because of my belly. But I am game, if you are."

Before I could utter another word, she seized my hand and directed me away from the main room.

Based on the powerful scent of her that filled the room we entered, I knew it was her bedroom.

My K'sha's face beamed with a smile as we stood next to her bed. She looked down and pressed my hands against her breasts, and I felt the warmth of her skin.

"Lesson one....You can touch me anywhere, but I will show you the bits I want you to

touch that will bring me pleasure.”

My brows shot up and my cock twitched. “Okay.” My throat was parched.

Her perky peaks against my palms ignited a desire to indulge in their softness and I couldn’t help but give them a gentle squeeze.

“I find my breasts have become quite sensitive, especially my nipples.”

I couldn’t have imagined the intoxicating feeling of caressing her silky, supple skin. Cupping her luscious mounds, the swollen bounty filled my large hands, and I began by circling her nipples, with my thumbs while she moaned in delight.

“Can I taste you?” I asked, my mouth watering.

“God, yes,” She breathed.

I lashed at the dusky jewel before taking it into my mouth, sucking it. Each swirl and suckle of my tongue made her vocalizations even louder. Her hands tangled in my hair, pulling it until I felt the tingling of my scalp.

While I continued, taking time to lavish both breasts, her moans grew louder and more desperate.

“God, that’s sooo goood....” she drawled.

The aromatic scent of sweetness coming from her was tantalizing. Pride made me smile to myself. Pleasing my mate was not as hard as I thought it would be.

My own hungry cock was hard to ignore, and I found myself palming it to help ease the pulsating ache.

I hoped I could hold out long enough. I had many ideas for what I wanted to do with her. Her body writhed under my ministrations and I was filled with happiness that I was bringing my mate pleasure.

When her breathing changed and her chest heaved, I looked up to see her nibbling on her bottom lip. Her hooded eyes spoke of the lust she was feeling.

I pulled my lips from her nipple. “Is there a lesson two?” I smirked and ran my hands down her body to her hips.

“Heck, yeah.” With a grin, she took off the garment that was covering her center and then moved to crawl onto the bed.

My eyes were locked on her, filled with wonder, as I tried to decipher her next move. I wanted to continue sucking her nipples and hearing the delightful sounds she made while doing so.

Nevertheless, her reaction was to move onto her hands and knees and thrust her bottom in the air. Despite my disappointment at no longer being able to see her breasts or kiss her, I couldn't help but be awestruck by the delectable sight in front of me.

Panting and trembling with desire, Olivia turned her head to peer over her shoulder.

With every ounce of self-control, I restrained myself, anticipating when I would finally touch her hidden treasure.

“I thought we could try this first.... my stomach is too big for you to be on top the normal way... this is one way to do it. It's called-“ She growled with impatient lust. “Never mind, just touch me for heaven's sake. Before I explode.”

Upon her invitation, I ran my hands over her well-rounded ass, giving it a squeeze. I glanced at the shimmery wetness between her legs, and reached down, stroking her outer folds, and my fingers slipped easily through them.

She moaned, and the sound made me harder.

“Gods, Olivia, you are so wet.” I fell to my knees, captivated, and leaned in for a closer look as I stroked my fingers along her crease.

As I bent down, her unique scent filled my nostrils, and with great care, I separated her folds. My mouth watered at the sight of her drenched pink petals, covered in delicate drops of glistening goodness.

I couldn’t resist the overpowering temptation to taste Olivia. To savor every inch of her.

She let out a long, satisfied moan as I explored her, laving her center. I stopped for a moment to ask. “Is this what you mean for me to do?”

In response, she pushed herself back against me.

I chuckled and dove in with my tongue licking her again and again. The treasure between her legs tasted like the sweetest nectar one could imagine.

It seemed following my instincts was working. I used two fingers to enter her and closed my eyes at how soft her inner walls were. My tongue didn’t stop working and I could barely hold myself together from the pleasure I felt at what I was doing to my mate.

Olivia cried out my name, murmuring for me not to stop. I would not. My chest puffed with pride knowing I was pleasuring my mate.

She cried out when my tongue hit a tiny nub seated at the apex of her center. Her body convulsed in response, and she let out a long, sensuous moan.

“Does that feel good? Do you want me to continue?” I asked as I stroked her with my fingers, feeling confident.

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Olivia squirmed. “Orin...” she cried out, spreading her legs farther apart allowing me more access to her. “Keep touching me in that spot. It will make me come,” she asked.

“What is it called?” I asked using my thumb to circle it before applying some pressure with my tongue.

“Oh....God, that’s good. It’s my clitoris...my clit.”

I pumped my fingers into her core, while I continued to circle her clit with my thumb, alternating with my tongue. I listened to her moans and breathy murmurs to figure out what brought her the most pleasure.

“Don’t stop...right there.” She begged. “You’ll make me climax if you keep doing that.”

I grinned and continued to devour and stroke Olivia in the places she demanded until her body tensed and I could feel her core tighten around my fingers.

My K’sha shattered, screaming my name while clutching the blanket with fisted hands.

My own control was tight because every movement, sigh and sound made me want to spill my seed. I stroked and licked her during and after her orgasm until she pulled away.

“Did I hurt you?” I asked, reaching for her again.

She looked over her shoulder at me. “No. Far from it. My clit is sensitive to direct pressure after making me come the way you did. Give it a moment.”

I peered at her unsure what to do with my seeping cock. Did this mean she wouldn’t want to mate?

It seemed as if she’d read my mind because she spoke again. “You can still enter me. Orin...I want you inside me, please.” She begged.

I swallowed. “My need for you is all-consuming, Olivia. I want to be inside you...to claim you. But I want you to be comfortable.”

She had just told me her body was too sensitive. The last thing I wanted to do was to make our first time a terrible experience.

My mate let out a husky laugh as her breathing tried to even out. “I’ll let you know if I’m not comfortable.”

I stroked my length, trembling with the need to be inside her. “Can you move onto your back so I can see your face?” I wanted to memorize every second of this experience with her. To see her face when she climaxed again. And to kiss her.

Olivia shifted onto her back, nestling herself in the center of the bed. “I’m unsure of how well this will work,” she said, chuckling and reaching for a pillow. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were glazed from her orgasm.

I crawled onto the bed and spread her legs. Putting my hands under her knees, I lifted her hips off the bed and she placed a pillow under her for support. When Olivia was in the perfect position, she pulled me to her with her legs wrapped around me.

My cock pressed against her opening while I held her hip with my other hand.

She grinned. "I won't break, Orin. I want this. Don't make me wait any longer."

She angled her pelvis even more, and I took my cock in hand, putting it against her. Then slid into her in one thrust.

I stopped when she gasped, giving her a moment to adjust to my size. The sensation of her inner walls squeezing me made my mind go blank.

Flutz. .. This feels good. My eyes closed as I enjoyed the sensation of being inside her.

When I met my mate's eyes, she gave me a reassuring smile. "You can move. I'm okay."

I began to stroke into her, savoring every measured thrust. The feeling of her tight heat enveloping me was too much, and I was close to spilling. I slowed my pace, but it was no good and I stopped moving.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I don't think I can hold on. You feel too good." I grunted.

A gentle and understanding smile adorned her face. "When you're ready, we can do it again. Don't worry if you can't hold back now."

I couldn't help frowning. "But I wanted to claim you. If I am not able to hold out long enough for the bond to form, I don't know what will happen."

"You are overthinking this, Orin. Just enjoy yourself. We are finally together. We have the rest of our lives to make love, many, many times." She moved her hips. "Now please move. I need you to move."

I began thrusting again, starting off slowly, but the intensity of my thrusts quickly grew. Alongside it, I felt a tingling sensation in the back of my mind, as if I could perceive Olivia's thoughts.

My cock began to vibrate. A sensation I had never encountered while pleasuring myself but knew would occur during mating.

“Wow,” she exclaimed. “Grace mentioned that you guys vibrated, but I never expected it to be this intense. Oh.. my...god. That’s good.” She keened in a long sensuous groan.

I couldn’t help smiling at her reaction, feeling even more confident to keep going.

Olivia’s back arched and her mouth fell open as a breath escaped. Her body shuddered and convulsed as she was carried away on a wave of pleasure once again. I was powerless to resist joining her.

My pace picked up, and I pounded into her fast and hard. My vision blanked, and I heard myself roar as I exploded my release. I pushed myself deep into Olivia, feeling the intense pressure as her inner walls clenched around me, milking me for every last drop.

Gods, this was nirvana, and I was suspended in a state of pure bliss. Then I heard her voice in my head, bringing me back.

My heart swelled with an indescribable joy as the realization sunk in. Her voice reverberated in my mind, echoing through our connection like an unbreakable bond .

I love you Orin.

To kiss her, I dropped her legs to the bed and leaned over her belly.

“My K’sha, I love you too,” I replied with a beaming smile.

The claiming worked. We were bonded.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Orin

FOR THE FOURTH TIME today, I stood in the meeting room where King Trex consulted with the Protectorate Council and his royal advisors. This time, an emergency communication from one of the Protectorate Captains had everyone on edge.

Appearing on the large viewscreen on one wall was Captain Stusa. His face showed the stress that all warriors working in Alaran space must have been feeling right now.

There was a wave of shock from the males in the room when Captain Stusa gave us the news. “No one was expecting the attack on the human colony, majesty.”

Being the King’s personal guard allowed me access to information that most citizens did not have. Knowing the dangers we were facing didn’t make it any easier now that I had claimed Olivia.

The weight of concern pressed down on me, intensifying with each passing moment as I contemplated the repercussions that a conflict with our enemies would bring.

With increased sightings of Krilex ships over Alara, it was only a matter of time before they tried to land or attack one of the villages or cities.

“Do we know what happened?” asked King Trex.

Stusa wearily scraped his hand down his face, the lines of exhaustion etched on his features, before letting out a heavy sigh.

“From what I've been told, a civilian witnessed one of the guards being killed. Afterwards, they saw the murderer transform into the security guard before escaping. The witness notified another guard who raised the alarm. However, by that time, it was already too late. The assault on the colony was already in progress. The Voletti seem to have discovered a method to infiltrate the Terax 2 colony.”

With a regal bearing, Xilta, the senior advisor to the King, sat tall and exuded an aura of dignity. “Did they find the shapeshifter among the survivors?” he asked.

“Not yet. The guards are looking for shapeshifters now. Everyone they find alive is being tested.”

The King expressed his annoyance with an angry grunt but otherwise remained silent.

I could perceive his anger, even from where I stood. He no doubt wished he could be back on the Chetok, kicking our enemies' asses. He was a warrior, through and through.

Captain Stusa stated, “In addition to the casualties among both civilians and soldiers, there are also hundreds of people unaccounted for. Though a handful of our ships have rescued many survivors, it appears the Voletti have taken some of the females.”

I watched as King Trex brought his fist down hard onto the table where it remained clenched, startling some of the Council members.

His voice boomed as he spoke. “Finding the humans that were taken should be your focus. If the Voletti have them....” He didn't finish his sentence, shaking his head.

Trex and I both knew firsthand what the Krilex were capable of. Not to mention what the Voletti intended for the females they had taken.

These devaras had to be stopped.

Stusa gave a single nod. “They are, majesty. There were four vessels tracking two Voletti ships, but they cloaked. Our ships are searching the area for them. There is one Krilex vessel that is being boarded as we speak. Three more Protectorate vessels have taken refugees aboard, including my ship. We are making arrangements for the humans to be taken to safety.”

Angling his head, Protectorate Council member Brek turned to face the King. “Your majesty. I can have accommodations prepared if you want them brought here?”

Trex nodded in acknowledgement. “Do it.” He turned his gaze back to Stusa on the screen. “Bring them here and instruct the other’s ships that we can receive them as well.”

Captain Stusa disappeared from the screen and the Council began to chat among themselves.

Trex raised his voice. “There is one more thing I want to address.”

The room fell silent as everyone looked in his direction.

Trex spoke with me earlier and we had discussed what would happen next.

I carefully watched the faces of the Council members as King Trex spoke.

“I’ve spoken with Vyramos Nura before our meeting.

The Ixul government has agreed to send two Ixul warships to help protect Alara.

They have the ability to detect cloaked vessels and have superior firepower.

Compared to our patrol ships they can do a lot more damage to anyone trying to land here. ”

“This is great news considering how protective they are about their technology,” said Vimur hastily.

“Despite being self-governed and xenophobic, they support the Empire. The decision ultimately revolved around what would benefit all planets within Alaran space. I have given my assurance that we will not share their technology with the Drakkari,” stated the King.

Everyone who’d been raised on Alara knew the Drakkari used to be enemies of the Ixul due to their invasion on Graacux long ago. The situation escalated into a brutal conflict, causing significant casualties for both sides.

The intervention of King Tvar’Ul, Trex's grandfather, and the Ruler of the Empire at that time, resulted in a negotiated peace treaty that finally ended the long war between them. Since then, there had been no significant conflicts in Alaran space.

Xilta spoke in his usual serious manner. “The Ixul harbor long-lasting grudges. I’m glad to witness their eagerness to assist Alara.”

Trex’s lips curled into a wry smile. “As they say, a new enemy can unite old adversaries.”

I DID AS TREX ASKED and followed Vimur, who disappeared into one of the private rooms to make a communication.

While I was outside the room, I overheard him explaining what Trex had just told the Council. The voice Vimur spoke to was not one I recognized, but based on what he was saying, he was indeed betraying the King, and Alara.

I waited for him to leave the room and blocked his path.

“What’s the meaning of this?” he asked, looking afraid.

I grabbed him by the arm and tugged him with me down the hall where Trex waited. He eyed Council member Vimur, and he was fuming.

“You know flutzing well what’s going on. You are a traitor. And for that you will be sent from Alara to live out what days you have left on Ronroth Prison colony.”

Vimur opened and closed his mouth a couple of times before he broke down. “They made me help them. I had no choice.” He whimpered.

“You could have come to me. I would have ensured your safety. Are there other traitors or shapeshifters on Alara?”

Vimur shook his head. “Tinuk and I were the last. The shapeshifters left when they knew their people were coming to invade.”

Trex pushed Vimur against the wall with his arm to his throat. “You’ve allowed the entire planet to be endangered. Did you know Terax 2 was going to be attacked?”

Vimur put his hands out to the side. “No. I did not. I was as surprised as you...but I do know where they are based. I overheard things.... I can tell you.”

Trex exerted more pressure with his forearm against his throat, causing the Council member to let out a pained grunt. When his face color darkened Trex eased up.

Vimur coughed then spoke. “Those Voletti who are not in charge of Krilex ships in Alaran space are stationed on one of Jaxia’s moons.”

Trex and I shared a brief look.

Vimur continued. “They have breeding facilities there, and possibly female prisoners. But it is heavily protected from what I’ve been told. You’ll never get close to it.”

Trex pursed his lips, and I listened and watched Vimur spill his guts about everything he knew about the Voletti.

We learned the shapeshifter prisoner’s words rang true, leaving no room for doubt about the diminishing number of their kind.

“My Voletti contact informed me that they have destroyed numerous worlds, including their own. The Thralla, another race, were pursuing them when they ended up here. They didn’t expect their technology to bring them to an unknown Universe.

They appear to have been exploring this sector when they stumbled into Alaran space.

They were trying to find a new home and a way to stop from going extinct when they met the Krilex.

They were convinced not to ask for help from anyone else and trusted the Krilex to provide what they needed.” Vimur said.

Trex asked. “Why have they waited until now to attack?”

Vimur’s lips twisted. “They are upset that the Krilex have failed them. The fuel supply for their ships is running out. Furthermore, their efforts to generate new technologies, similar to what they had achieved in their Universe, have been fruitless. Their race is on the verge of extinction, and their small numbers make it impossible for them to confront the entire Protectorate Alliance. Maybe they believe that by

targeting Alara and the Empire, they can seize control?”

I shook my head at the council members explanation. If the Voletti were not dealt with here, they would destroy anyone who stood in their way. They were a danger to our entire galaxy.

The fact that Vimur and Tinuk believed the crap they were told and felt threatened made me feel sick.

I would never consider for one moment betraying Alara, the King or my K'sha.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Olivia

I HAD JUST FINISHED contacting the kitchen to arrange our dinner for the evening, as Orin would be arriving soon. The anticipation I felt every day while waiting for Orin to visit had me trembling with excitement.

The past eight rotations or days, had been the most amazing time of my life.

Each evening, Orin arrived at my apartment with a bouquet or a gift, accompanied by a loving smile on his face.

The gift selection from my handsome warrior was both thoughtful and puzzling. I was surprised to receive fabulous fabrics that could be transformed into stunning dresses.

When I'd mentioned my lack of sewing skills, he informed me that his sister was a seamstress and would like to meet me. That she'd offered to make me whatever clothing I needed. I looked forward to meeting her and her mate Vrek, at some point.

Besides the fabrics, his generous presents included an array of pretty items, such as precious stones and one-of-a-kind handmade pieces of art. I had been moved by the thoughtfulness behind every gift.

Orin was way more affectionate than I expected, and it was refreshing. I could tell he enjoyed being with me as much as I did him. But more than that, he listened and paid attention to what I said, and what I liked. I'd never had someone pay so much attention to me.

My muscles ached from our late-night activities. But it didn't bother me at all. Our nights were about giving each other pleasure. Something Orin excelled at.

When we were together, it was only us and he made me feel like the most beautiful woman in the Universe.

In addition, our talks had been amazing, and we had been sharing stories about our lives. I couldn't help but smile, overwhelmed with delight by his newfound openness. It was clear he was as comfortable with me as I was with him.

Our strong bond made it feel as though we'd known one another for a lifetime already. The experience of getting to know Orin had been nothing short of magical, and my heart overflowed with happiness as I realized that he truly was the perfect person for me.

He made me feel safe and happy when I was with him, and my confidence had never been higher. I'd always seen Orin as the strong silent type, who never smiled. Now he smiled almost constantly when we were together.

ORIN'S ARRIVAL WAS announced by the familiar chirping sound of the door, and I smoothed my hair in anticipation. I pressed my hands to my lower back as it twinged, while I sat down on a cushion I'd placed on the dining room chair.

I wasn't prepared for the challenge of walking to the door. Baby was due any time now, and I was exhausted most days.

"Come in, it's not locked."

The door slid open with a soft hiss, and I tilted my head to greet him with a smile.

Inside the apartment, Orin stood with a small, fragrant bouquet in his hands.

“Why is your door unlocked? It is not safe.” There was a hint of annoyance in his voice, and I noticed he looked more stressed than usual.

I shook my head. “The palace is secure. There are guards everywhere. Plus, I already knew it was you.” Despite his excessive protectiveness, I continued to smile.

He gave me a solemn look. “Alaran males take the safety and protection of their K’sha very serious.”

“So you’ve said...several times.” I couldn’t help smirking.

He stepped closer and laid the bouquet on the table, and I noticed his eyes were filled with genuine concern. “You must promise me you will be more careful, even if you think me unreasonable in my request.”

“I promise I will lock my door.” I pushed myself to stand, and hugged him. His arms wrapped around me and I peered up at him. “And you are never unreasonable. I know you are just trying to keep me safe.”

Orin tilted my face with his hand under my chin and delivered a passionate and exhilarating kiss. My heart raced as we continued to make-out for several minutes until I thought we weren’t going to get to eat our dinner.

Not that I was complaining. I loved when Orin touched me. I loved everything about him.

My life had changed so much that I often found myself stopping to reflect on how lucky I was. It seemed too good to be true. But I had found someone who loved me for me.

Orin’s gaze locked onto me, and a smile spread across his face when he saw the joy

reflected on mine.

He kissed me on the nose before taking a seat at the table. "I would have brought you a gift, but I did not have time to leave the palace. King Trex was in talks all day with leaders from various Alliance planets."

It was nice to see him without a gift box this time. His thoughtful gestures, though unnecessary, melted my heart.

"You don't have to bring gifts and flowers every visit. Seeing you is gift enough." I gave him a spontaneous kiss on the cheek. "You've got me. I'm yours. All I want is your love and affection. Not gifts." I moved to take a seat next to him.

Orin gave me a look that matched my own happiness that we were together. But I also sensed he was worried about something.

"How was your day?" I asked as we both began to put some of the various foods on our plates. It occurred to me that we were much like a happily married couple and I grinned to myself.

"I couldn't wait to see you...like every day." He responded.

His words made me happy because I felt the same way.

Orin placed his hands on either side of his plate and looked at me with his lips thinned into a line.

I put the serving spoon down and tilted my head. "What? What's wrong?"

His eyes shone with uncertainty. "There is something I want to talk about.... it concerns your safety here at the palace."

My body tensed, but I didn't speak. I stared at him, trying to push away the panic that threatened to settle in.

"There are some problems in the outer provinces with Krilex ships being seen. And there is news of more conflicts in our airspace. A human colony was attacked."

His words were making me more nervous by the second. This wasn't what I was expecting him to talk to me about. Finally, things were going well, and I wanted life to be a constant state of bliss.

"What happened at the colony?"

The corners of his lips turned down. "Some human females were taken by the enemy. Many more have been rescued and are being brought to Alara for safety."

I shuddered hearing about the abductions.

Sensing my fear, Orin reached out and took one of my hands, giving it a gentle squeeze. "Perhaps I should not have told you. It is only that I promised I would always be honest with you."

I forced a smile, concealing the turmoil brewing inside me. I was happy he was telling me the truth. I just wished it was not such bad news.

"Are we in danger here? In the city, I mean?"

He gazed at me for a moment before responding. "It's possible...yes." He continued to hold my hands. "And I may be called to fight."

I gasped. "You can't! You're Trex's guard...And he promised Grace he wouldn't have to leave the planet to fight. His place is to remain here, safe, as King."

I'd felt reassured that both Trex and Orin would not have to fight or be in danger regardless of what happened with the enemy aliens. I guess I'd been lying to myself. He was a warrior, and I had to remember that.

The corner of Orin's mouth curved up as if he was expecting my argument.

"We aren't leaving the planet, my love. The fight may come to us.

If I am helping protect Alara and our King, it means you will have to be guarded by someone else.

Here at the palace." His expression hardened.

"I don't like it. I should be the one here protecting you.

..but until the Krilex and the Voletti are dealt with, all Alaran warriors are expected to protect the planet. "

I swallowed unsure I could handle it if anything happened to him. "Do you really think the Krilex will attack?"

He frowned and glanced at his plate while he responded. "Right now, we have to be ready for anything." When he made eye contact again, he smiled. "I will do whatever I must, to ensure you are safe."

I nodded because there wasn't much I could say. His sense of duty was strong, and I had to trust that if he left to fight, he would come home to me in one piece.

His voice was gentle when he spoke again. "We've talked about what will happen when you give birth...you know I want to be there with you?"

Biting my lip, I responded. "I want you with me. It's important to me you be there."

He grinned, and I started to feel better.

"Well, I was also thinking it might be better if I stay here with you....in the suite. I want to be available whenever you need me. Day or night."

"What about your job?" I asked, bubbling with excitement at what he was asking.

He chuckled. "I am still the King's personal guard but my time is flexible. He and I have spoken about my duty to him and my duty to my K'sha."

I raised my brows. "Duty?"

"I am your fated mate. It is my duty to see you are protected, provided for, and cared for. I never want you to be unhappy."

"You want us to live together? Here?" I couldn't help the beaming smile on my face. Because of course I wanted that. The thought of snuggling up with him every night filled me with joy.

He cast a shy glance downward before reestablishing eye contact with me. "Yes. If you are comfortable with it?"

I managed to push myself out of my chair to plant kisses all over his face. "Yes. Please." I whispered every word in between kisses.

He laughed. "I want to keep you safe as well as happy and satisfied, my mate."

My loins began to ache upon hearing his words. "You keep me very satisfied and happy, in every way."

The baby chose that moment to kick, and I dropped my hands to my belly and rubbed slow circles. Orin's attention was drawn to the little foot sticking out from my stomach. My pregnancy had captivated him, and he constantly asked questions about it.

The sight of my child's foot left him speechless, and his mouth dropped in awe. "Is... the youngling... does it hurt?"

I grinned. "Sometimes. He seems to respond to my voice." I glanced at my mate to see a look of astonishment on his face, and it touched my heart.

Orin laid his palm on my belly. His massive hand covered my stomach.

The baby shifted inside me and Orin pushed his chair back, moving to kneel on the floor in front of me. He held my bump with both hands this time, and his face lit up when the baby kicked again.

His gaze changed. I saw and felt his excitement as he stared off into the distance. His eyes took on the faraway look, reminiscent of his telepathic exchanges with other Alarans.

He spoke in a gentle whisper as if he didn't want to frighten my baby. "Are you able to communicate with her telepathically?" He looked up at me with wide, innocent eyes.

My breath caught in my throat. "Her?"

His revelation hit me, leaving me stunned. Although Rekna had offered to reveal the baby's gender, I had wanted to keep it as a delightful surprise. This was the first time Orin felt the baby kick with his own hands.

“She is female is she not?” Orin’s voice carried a no-nonsense, matter-of-fact tone.

“I don’t know. Aside from my new connection with you, I’m not telepathic,” I teased, raising an eyebrow, “but thanks for spoiling the surprise.” I giggled.

Rising to his feet, he wore a sheepish grin.

I stroked his arm, beaming at him. “Are you sure that my baby will be a girl? How can you know? She’s not telepathic either.”

It was funny to think he knew the sex of my baby before I did.

He led me to my chair. When I sat a wide grin formed on his lips. “Yes, I am sure she is female. I can hear her thoughts. She is happy.”

My heart felt hundreds of pounds lighter.

“Really? After everything that’s happened, she is happy?” I sighed as tears rimmed my eyes. It was a miracle she had survived with all we had gone through.

“Thank you.” I choked.

He leaned down and his hand went to my belly. “I am looking forward to being with you for the birth of this youngling.”

My heart felt so full. It felt as if I was in a dream. One I never wanted to wake from.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Orin

TEN ROTATIONS HAD PASSED since we last interrogated the captured Voletti and traitor Vimur. The city of Struna and its citizens were on edge due to the news about the Krilex and Voletti.

I couldn't shake the feeling of impending doom. I knew that time was running out, and we had to be prepared for whatever might come our way.

The Protectorate Council and King Trex had been convening emergency meetings daily. Their faces etched with concern more each day.

I listened as they discussed strategies to fortify the city's defenses and prepare for any potential attack by the Voletti.

Walls were being reinforced, additional guards recruited, and secret passageways reopened.

Today's meeting focused on the palace's defenses and what more could be done. I'd stood through the session with my stomach twisted in knots. I feared for the safety of my K'sha and her unborn child and wished there was more I could do to ensure her safety.

When everyone had left the room, Trex sighed, then turned to me. A beat or two passed before he spoke. "How are things going with Olivia? Are you settled in and enjoying mated life?" There was a small smile at the corners of his lips, but I sensed his question was leading somewhere.

I forced a smile despite the worry I felt. “We are happy, majesty. I am pleased to be with my K’sha.”

Trex cleared his throat and pressed his lips into a hesitant smile. “We are blessed by the Gods with the mates we have.” He rubbed his chin as he spoke. “I’ve been thinking.... It might be best if our mates were sent away somewhere safe?”

My brow pinched. Send them away? “Safe? What is safer than the palace?” I asked.

He frowned. “Outside Struna. To the countryside where things are quieter.”

I was aware that the royal Ul family had homes all over Alara but to send our mates away, without us there to protect them seemed...well, foolish.

“Surely we will accompany them?” I asked.

He pressed his lips into a frown. “No. We will be needed here if there is an attack. The reports of two Voletti ships seen entering our airspace are troubling. Thanks to the Ixul we can detect them even if they are cloaked. But there is no guarantee the Voletti will not attack the palace.”

The idea that the palace could be threatened hadn’t crossed my mind until he mentioned it, and now I couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Trex continued. “It would ensure the safety of our mates if they were elsewhere. I thought that since Grace and Olivia are good friends, we could convince them it is best for them to be somewhere other than the palace.”

I chuckled despite my growing stress.

King Trex’s mate was as stubborn as they came and if he was asking me to speak to

Olivia, that meant he wanted her to convince Grace.

“Olivia is due any day...she will not want to leave the palace without Rekna and access to medical facilities.”

Trex’s mouth twisted as he chewed the inside of his cheek. “That’s exactly what Grace said.”

“I agree they should be somewhere safe, but I don’t know how it will be possible.” Running my hand through my hair, I added. “I will speak with her. Maybe once the youngling arrives, she will be willing to leave Struna until things quiet down?” It wasn’t a great option, but what choice did we have?

The palace would go into lock down if the Voletti attacked. There would be no one allowed in or out. That would have to be enough, for now.

I studied Trex, doing my best to push down the stress I was feeling.

“The fact my father was killed inside the palace, I am more cautious than ever. I must keep Grace safe.” King Trex said in a low voice.

I shared his concern and wished we’d moved the females earlier.

“The Ixul battleships will be here soon, won’t they?” I asked.

He shrugged with pursed lips. “I flutzing hope so.”

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Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Olivia

WAKING SNUGGLED UP against Orin, enjoying the feeling of being wrapped in his muscular arms, was the best feeling in the world.

This morning, like every other morning, Orin's hands caressed my pregnant belly, his touch sending a shiver of delight through me. He kissed the top of my head, before planting soft kisses against my cheek. His arousal was evident as he pressed himself against me.

I smiled to myself and rolled over to look at him. "Hi," I croaked, giving him a quick kiss.

Orin responded by holding my head with one hand and swooping in for a long, tender kiss before pulling back and smiling at me.

Despite frequently waking during the night due to my pregnancy, and needing to use the bathroom, waking up next to him every morning was the highlight of my day.

Orin quickly became familiar with my body and understanding my needs, which was amazing.

He always made me feel beautiful, even when I felt the farthest thing from it.

Exploring each other's preferences in bed had been an incredible journey, and I'd relished every moment of teaching him what I liked and learning about his desires, too.

I took in his delicious spicy scent and his mussed-up hair and couldn't help but grin like a lovesick fool. "How can you always look this handsome?" I teased, stroking his face then dropping my hand to his chest.

His sexy dimples appeared as he grinned back at me. "How do you always look this stunning?" he said, running his hand down my hair.

Just as he leaned in for another kiss, the palace alarm rang out, shattering the tranquility of our morning, replacing it with a sense of unease.

Orin cursed, muttering a sharp, ' Flutz! ' before throwing back the bedding.

My heart was racing with anxiety and I pushed myself to sit up. "What's going on?" I shouted, worried as he leaped from the bed and yanked on his uniform pants.

My hand went to my chest. Despite knowing this might happen, my anxiety had been at a minimum for months, and I didn't plan on welcoming it back now.

Orin observed my panic-stricken face, his voice remaining steady and composed. "Give me a moment. I'll check in."

I waited as he communicated with the palace guard. Then joined him at his side, looking up at him as my hands twisted in front of me.

His face displayed genuine concern, and I could feel his worry.

Memories of my experiences with the Krilex and the Zinids, made me shudder. My mind was racing, and I quickly got dressed while I waited, in an attempt to keep myself calm.

Orin gave me a quick peck on the lips, then ran a hand through his hair while looking

back at me. “The Krilex have attacked a village outside one of the mines. King Trex needs me to accompany him to the site.”

I trailed behind him like a lost puppy while he finished dressing and left the bedroom.

When Orin turned to see me watching him, he frowned at my expression.

Grabbing my face in his hands, he gave me a soft kiss. “I’ll come back as soon as I can manage. Stay here and don’t leave the suite. Keep the door locked.”

I tugged on his arm. “Please be careful?” I pleaded, holding back tears.

Orin’s hands went to my shoulders, and he looked me in the eye. “I always am. Don’t worry.”

Standing watching him go, I hugged myself and tugged at my bottom lip with my teeth.

The concept of normalcy on this planet eluded me.

When Orin moved in with me, I thought our life together would be blissful. I’d been deluding myself. Until now, I felt ignorance was bliss and was so done with succumbing to fear every time something bad happened. I just wanted to live my life with the guy...alien, I loved.

The alarm stopped, and the palace was quiet.

The last thing I needed was to devolve into a terrified mess like I was when I was first abducted. If it weren’t for Grace’s kindness and patience with me, I doubt I would be as okay as I am now. I pinched my eyes closed unable to shake the feeling winding its way through me.

What if the Krilex decided to attack the city? I rubbed my forehead with trembling hands.

I needed to talk to Grace and find out what's going on. I wouldn't go against Orin's advice and leave the apartment, but I couldn't just stand here and wait for news, either.

After much pacing, I gave in and swiped the panel by the door. When it glided open, a palace guard stood smirking at me. I grimaced at the guard, knowing it was likely Orin told him to expect me to try to leave. But I couldn't help myself. I would only worry if I was alone.

"Miss Olivia, it is advisable for you to remain in your suite."

"Why? Are the Krilex in the city? Am I in danger?" I gulped.

"It is only a precaution. We want to make sure you are safe." He gave me a polite nod.

I moved my head back and forth. "Can I please talk to Queen Grace?"

She would know more about what was going on and besides, I didn't want to be alone right now. I'm sure she didn't want to be either.

After nodding in acknowledgement, I waited for him to reach out to someone. When he was finished, he spoke. "Queen Grace is being escorted to you right now. Please step back into your suite. I will let them in when they arrive."

I sighed and wrapped my arms around myself, then stepped back into my apartment without a word. Still shaking, I tried to tune into Orin to sense if he was okay. The only response was more stress.

Frowning, I took a seat, tapping my fingers on the table.

Grace arrived, and I could see lines of worry on her face, which didn't make me feel any better. I hurried to her, and we both walked into the food prep area to make some tea. It was an automatic response for both of us.

“Do you know what's going on?” I asked.

Grace reached into the cupboard, pulling down two cups while I prepared the tea.

This was the only way I could think of to stay calm for the baby's sake. My tummy was in knots, but the tea usually did the trick to help calm it.

Grace's lips down-turned. “Trex heard a call came from the Fruner mining village reporting that the mining supervisors had been taken hostage by the Krilex.”

Hostages? “Wait, all the mines here are controlled by AI, aren't they? The Krilex would have to bypass the advanced technology to gain access to the mine's materials.” This much I knew from reading about the planet when I first arrived.

The corner of Grace's mouth twisted. “Yes, every single one of them is automated. But there are at least a dozen males at each mining sight who oversee the operation of it. This particular mine is for cerium, and lanthanum, which is pretty valuable, apparently.”

A sigh escaped from me. “And our mates have gone to stop the Krilex from stealing these minerals?”

She nodded her head. “Yes. And to free the hostages. I'm unsure of the number, but there are other warriors accompanying them.

“Do you know how many Krilex are at the mine?” I wasn’t sure I wanted to know, but I couldn’t help asking.

“Trex only mentioned that he’s assembling a group of warriors to confront them. I told him as King, he shouldn’t go, but he said that is the reason he should.” She threw her arms in the air, looking just as upset as me.

Trembling, I held my tea cup and prayed for Orin’s safe return.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Orin

WE ARRIVED AT THE FRUNER mining facility with a group of warriors to see four Krilex stationed at the front entrance, armed with blaster pistols. Careful to stay out of view Trex ordered two of the warriors to secure the nearby Krilex shuttle.

“Is there another way inside?” one of the warriors asked.

“No,” stated Trex. “We will take out these devaras first. Any Krilex inside will be easy to subdue. Their blasters will not work inside the facility.”

As the rush of battle filled me with adrenaline, I drew my sword from its sheath. It had been several cycles since I had witnessed any action. And I was prepared to deal with the scum that was causing problems for those residing in Alaran space.

“I will distract the males out front while the rest of you slip inside,” I said, glancing at King Trex.

He shook his head and pursed his lips. “I am going with you,” he said aloud, then added, ‘You are one of my best warriors, but I won’t let you do this alone. We both must return to our mates in one piece.’

I swallowed, allowing his words to sink in, then I bowed my head . ‘Yes, your highness.’

With our plans set, Trex and I advanced on the Krilex, weapons at the ready. The other warriors fanned out to attack the aliens from behind.

Catching them off guard, we disabled two of them while the remaining two fired off a couple of blasts of their pistols.

While the warriors reached the front door and prepared to head inside, I ducked to avoid getting shot. Spinning on my heel, I brought my sword down on one of the last two reptilians and watched him fall to the ground.

King Trex roared as he took down the last Krilex blocking our entry to the mine.

Together, we advanced and the facility doors opened before us. Upon entering, the clamor of multiple voices greeted us from inside.

A male voice asserted his determination to stay put and denied the Krilex any access to the ore and the rest of the mine.

“The AI only reacts to Alaran DNA,” I heard him say.

Moving closer to the voices inside, I spotted a dozen Alaran male hostages and a group of six Krilex encircling them. The males had no weapons and watched the Krilex with narrowed eyes despite the danger to themselves.

Trex and the other warriors were at my side as we headed toward the Krilex. When we got close enough, the aliens turned and held their blasters on us.

I couldn't help the smile on my lips as I watched their futile attempts to shoot at us. In shock, they gazed at their pistols distracted. This gave me the perfect opportunity to bridge the distance.

I attacked one of the confused reptilians, grabbing his blaster and delivering a punch to his abdomen. He was lifted off his feet and thrown, landing with a loud thud on the floor. His firearm clattered to the ground.

Other warriors fought the remaining Krilex, filling the air with grunts and hand-to-hand combat echoes. I readied my sword while the snarling Krilex I had hit struggled to stand up, then charged at me. I struck him down before he landed a blow.

Once we incapacitated the Krilex, one of the warriors who'd been sent to secure the shuttle, communicated from outside . 'I have a dying Krilex out here that wants to speak to someone in charge.'

Trex gave a derisive snort, and I followed him as we stormed outside.

The King towered above the defeated Krilex, who lay covered in blood. He narrowed his eyes, looking down at the alien. "What were you hoping to achieve here today?"

The fallen Krilex was having a hard time focusing his eyes.

"The Voletti...are...angry...our progress is slow...tire of waiting. One last opportunity... to retrieve the minerals." He managed amidst bouts of coughing. "They've destroyed ...our ships... in this sector ...we could not ...deliver what they needed...fast enough."

I sensed fear from the reptilian. Not something I ever expected from a Krilex. They were an arrogant, cruel race who did not show weakness.

"What do you mean one last opportunity?" Trex's voice took on an urgency. "You work with the Voletti. Why would they destroy you?"

The alien's voice weakened further. "We are leaving Alaran...space...Voletti...turned...on us. They cannot... be trusted." His breath became a rattle in his chest, then ceased.

Trex's jaw twitched. He pushed his shoulders back and looked at one of the warriors.

“Where did you find him?”

“He was in the Krilex shuttle and tried to flee.” The warrior responded.

The King and I shared a quick glance without speaking. We both knew there would be a diversion before the main attack.

This was that diversion.

The question was how long before the Voletti showed up?

My thoughts went to Olivia and the danger she was in if the Voletti attacked Struna. There was no question the King was contemplating the same thing about his mate.

More commotion erupted behind us, and both Trex and I turned our heads to look.

I witnessed a Krilex male, wounded and bloodied, pointing his weapon at Trex. Without hesitation, I threw myself in front of my King as the alien fired his weapon.

I was thrown off balance, but remained standing. My shoulder was hit by a sharp, agonizing pain, making me struggle to take a breath. Placing my hands against my chest, I gasped and choked.

Trex’s hands gripped my shoulders, preventing me from collapsing.

He led me away from the scene while he barked out orders to the other warriors.

The pain caused my vision to blur, and I saw stars due to difficulty breathing.

Drifting away, I could hear Trex's voice transforming into an echo in my mind.

WHEN I WOKE, I WAS lying on my back in the palace infirmary and I looked up to see Rekna next to me. As I struggled to sit up, his hand landed on my uninjured shoulder, applying a gentle pressure that forced me back down.

“Stay still. I managed to close the wound, but you must allow yourself time to heal. You were lucky the shot did not damage your heart,” he said.

I groaned at the residual pain in my shoulder. Then caught a whiff of my mate's familiar yet unique, soft scent and turned my head to look at Olivia.

She touched my arm and said, “I’m here.”

My mind cleared, and I was relieved to see her.

“Orin, I was terrified when I heard you’d been shot,” she reproached, her tearful appearance and swollen eyes giving away that she had been crying. I extended my hand, and she took it, then leaned to kiss it.

“King Trex? Is he okay?” I blurted, lifting my head off the bed to look around.

Trex’s voice reassured me, saying, “I’m fine,” as he came closer to my bed. “Thanks to you. You saved my life,” he smiled at me.

His words made me feel proud I hadn’t let him down. Relief flooded me as I’d redeemed myself even if only in my own mind. With Olivia’s glare not escaping my notice, I declared, “I am your personal guard. It’s my honor and duty.”

Next, my attention was drawn to Queen Grace, who greeted me with a warm smile. She opened her mouth to speak when the palace alarm rang out.

Startled by the noise, Olivia’s hand clenched mine.

“What now?” Queen Grace snapped.

Xilta who I also failed to notice sooner, turned and left the infirmary with Trex close behind.

I took a few deep breaths to find I had only a minor amount of pain in my shoulder and little difficulty breathing.

I sat up.

Olivia’s eyes bulged as she gaped at me. “How are you moving right now?”

I swung my legs over the side of the bed and stood, giving my mate a brief kiss. “It is going to take more than getting shot to stop me from doing my duty.

Rekna who was standing at a nearby cabinet shook his head, giving a disapproving cluck. “I suppose it will do no good if I ask you to remain here.”

“It will not,” I announced.

“Stubborn warriors,” he grumbled. “You are not fully healed. Be careful.” His lips pressed into a disappointed frown.

Olivia looked at me with fear radiating off her, and I pulled her into my arms. She clung to me for a moment before letting go to look up at me.

I touched her cheek. “Return to the suite. I will be there soon.”

“That’s what you promised earlier, before you showed up with a blaster wound in your shoulder.” She sniffed.

With a tilt of my head, I offered her a sympathetic gaze. “It is my duty to protect the King.”

Sighing, she pressed her lips into a thin line, then shook her head before gesturing with her hand toward the door. “Go. But don’t get hurt again.”

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Olivia

GRACE FOLLOWED ME WHEN I stepped into the apartment, feeling drained, both mentally and physically. I had cried so much when they brought Orin into the infirmary that my eyes felt gritty and tired.

My lower back was aching, and I felt light-headed.

Maybe it was all the stress, but for what felt like a couple of hours I'd been having worsening cramps. The pains, initially mild, felt like period cramps.

Scraping my hands through my hair, I let out a massive sigh. Would this day ever end?

A whirlwind of emotions and worry clouded my mind. I couldn't bear the thought of losing Orin. Even when Rekna said he would pull through, the wait for him to wake after being shot was agonizing.

When he opened his eyes, I almost sobbed with relief then reminded myself that I had to be strong, for him. Then the second alarm went off in the palace, sending everyone on high alert again.

After he left the infirmary, I began freaking out all over again.

I padded across the room. "I hope it's not some kind of invasion force out there, because I've already had enough worry for today." My attempt at humor only made me shudder with more fear. All I wanted was to be in Orin's arms, where I felt safe

and loved.

“They will be okay,” she said, trying to reassure us both. “I will make us something to eat, and some tea.” Grace headed to the food prep area, and I eased myself onto the sofa.

A sudden, thunderous noise from above jolted us, and Grace and I shared startled looks. “I’m sure we are safe here. Don’t worry.” Although her voice lacked reassurance, I nodded in agreement as a wave of pain rolled through me.

It was getting worse. The contractions were getting too frequent, and I couldn’t deny that I might be in labor.

Well, okay, it was pretty clear I was, in fact, in labor.

Pressing my hands to my belly I moaned as an even more intense wave of pain rolled through me.

“Argh,” I cried out bending forward in agony.

This wasn’t the way it was supposed to happen. The baby couldn’t come yet...I needed Orin to be there when I gave birth to my baby girl.

He said he’d be there.

I moaned as a crippling wave of contractions hit. “Grace!”

She was entering the living area, holding two cups of tea and when she saw me, she put the cups down and rushed over. “Liv? What’s wrong?”

I waited for the pain to ease off. It didn’t right away, and instead escalated to the

point I almost couldn't bear it before it finally eased.

"The baby is coming."

She helped me off the sofa and led me toward the door. "How long have you been having contractions?"

"Don't know...maybe a few hours? They are getting worse and happening more often now," I hissed between gritted teeth.

"How far apart are the contractions? Like every ten minutes? Or more often?" she asked.

I shrugged. "Ten, maybe?"

"I'm calling Rekna. Whatever you do...don't push, just do short pants like we talked about."

"I can walk to the infirmary, Grace," I ground out as I tried to walk and keeled over instead.

She made a clucking sound, releasing me. Then hurried to the door, and I heard her tell a guard to contact the medic.

By the time I reached the door, Rekna and two other medics carrying a stretcher were dashing toward me.

Rekna and Grace helped me onto the stretcher when I felt dampness trickling down my legs.

"Uh oh," I whispered.

Rekna's brows pinched while he stared at me.

My lips down-turned. "I think my waters just broke."

He scanned my belly with a handheld device then shoved it into his coat pocket. "We must hurry. Baby is ready to arrive."

'Orin, I need you,' I cried out in my mind. Tears threatened. "I can't have the baby yet. Orin isn't here."

Grace patted my hand. "I'll try to contact him for you."

The medics hurried me down the hall to the infirmary and lifted me onto a bed while I attempted to pant through the pain of more contractions.

Rekna fussed over me, giving instructions to Grace as the pair readied me to deliver the baby.

Panting in quick breaths I willed my baby girl to hold on a little longer. I tuned the others out as my mind returned to Orin and I pleaded for him to get to me in time to see my baby being born.

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 3:20 pm

Orin

I CAUGHT UP WITH THE King and his advisor asking what had caused another alarm to be sounded.

‘Two Voletti ships have uncloaked over the city,’ Trex communicated as we strode toward the main hall.

Xilta’s voice broke the tension we were all feeling. “I’ve received word the Ixul have arrived, your majesty.”

A loud noise resonated overhead, making the ground shake. I swallowed, knowing the explosion would have worried Olivia. Flutz. I needed to get back to my K’sha to reassure her.

We reached the main hall moments later.

Captain Kagin marched toward us with his chin held high. “The Ixul warships have fired on the enemy vessels. They have been destroyed, your majesty.”

Trex nodded in acknowledgement. “Have there been any more enemy ships detected?”

“No, sir. The Ixul are monitoring the planet for signs of Krilex or other Voletti.”

Xilta stepped forward, peering at the King. “I understand the warning system is fully functional, but we must not take any chances. The palace should remain on lockdown

until we are certain it is safe.”

Trex looked to Captain Kagin. “Tell your men to stay alert outside the palace. Keep me informed.”

Xilta spoke up. “I will see that all protocols are followed, your majesty.”

Trex acknowledged him, looking grateful. “Thank you, Xilta. I’m going to check on my mate. You know where to find me.”

King Trex and I turned to head back to the females when I heard Olivia’s cry of pain in my mind.

‘King Trex, my mate needs me.’

Trex’s eyes flicked to mine. ‘Go to her.’

I felt certain she was about to give birth. Without stopping, I sprinted towards the infirmary. I made a commitment to be by Olivia’s side when she gave birth, and I intended to honor it.

Her cries echoed in my mind, causing me to wince as I neared the infirmary.

Bursting through the doors, I called out, feeling frantic that it took time to reach her. “Where is she?” I looked side to side.

Rekna’s voice responded from behind a screened-off area. His voice was the picture of calm, as usual. “Your K’sha is here. The youngling is almost born.”

When I peered behind the screen, my incredible K’sha turned her head to look at me and smiled, looking exhausted.

Her cheeks were rosy and perspiration caused her hair to stick to her face.

Going to her bedside I took her small hand in mine, leaning down to kiss it.

“I’m here my heart,” I murmured as I smoothed damp hair from her face.

Her body tightened, and she released a sudden cry that made my adrenaline spike and my chest rumble.

“Can’t you give her something to help her with the pain?” I couldn’t bear to hear her suffering.

Rekna’s brow furrowed. “She’s refused any medication.”

“I’m...okay,” she grunted, giving my hand a squeeze.

She didn’t sound okay to me. My own body tensed with worry.

“You are here in time,” Rekna added, standing at the end of the bed where Olivia had her legs spread wide.

Queen Grace had one gloved hand pressed to my mate’s knee and glanced at me. “The baby’s head is showing,” she stated.

Olivia let out a huge grunt and cried out.

“That’s it, Olivia...push...,” Rekna urged as my mate squeezed my hand even tighter.

I continued to wipe sweat from her brow, wishing there was more I could do to take away her pain. Olivia peered up at me with moist eyes, breathing heavily and her cheeks flushed. She gritted her clenched teeth as she was encouraged to push again.

Fascinated by the miracle of birthing, part of me wanted to witness the emergence of her youngling, but I knew she needed me at her side. I trusted Rekna and knew Queen Grace was also a trained medic, so I knew Olivia and the youngling were in expert hands.

My mate's lips, rosy and plump, bore the marks of her pain as she bit down on them. Her voice was hoarse. "I'm glad you made it."

"Me too." I whispered, taking in the sight of my beautiful mate's face. I was filled with a deep and profound love for her and her soon to be born offspring. The way her face glistened with sweat, and her hair clung to her damp skin, matted and unruly, only made her more beautiful in my eyes.

"Push," said Grace without looking up.

Filled with determination, Olivia exerted her last ounce of energy, pushing with all her might, before collapsing back, spent, and with closed eyes.

"She's here, you have a female." Rekna declared. He sounded happier than I had ever heard him.

Growing up without a father had left me feeling lost and unsure of what it meant to be a good father. That's why I became a warrior, forsaking the notion of a mate or offspring. Until I met my K'sha.

Since our joining, Olivia and I spoke at length about our lives and I knew her own parents had not provided a nurturing environment for her. We both wanted to give and receive unconditional love, and we agreed the youngling would not know a life without feeling loved and wanted.

But doubts and fears started to creep into my mind. Sometimes I had failed to protect

my mate, and I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of guilt and inadequacy for not being able to keep her safe.

Those moments of weakness only fueled my self-doubt, making me question if I could be the protector and provider that the youngling would need. Despite Olivia's unwavering faith in me and reassurance, there were times I still struggled to see myself as worthy of such a precious responsibility.

With a gentle motion, I continued to brush away strands of hair from her face, leaning down to place a tender kiss on her forehead, murmuring soothing words.

I spoke into my mate's mind, assuring her she could rely on my strength, and that I would forever be by her side. It was in that very instant that I realized the truth of it all.

There was nothing I wouldn't do to guarantee her happiness and safety. And that of her youngling our youngling.

Her breathing began to steady, and she grinned at me with her eyes still closed.

A big smile spread across my face as I glanced over and saw Grace comforting the newborn, wrapping it in a swaddle.

Olivia's eyes fluttered open, and tears welled up in them, reflecting a profound feeling of relief and joy. I locked my lips with hers, sharing a tender kiss.

Queen Grace approached me with the youngling in her arms, and I glanced down at the newborn. Her beige skin matched Olivia's, and she had a smattering of dark-brown hair. I grinned. "She is perfect. Just like her mother," I said unable to stop staring at the tiny being.

Next to me, Olivia asked, “Do you want to hold her?”

I shifted my gaze first to Olivia then back to the delicate and vulnerable youngling, feeling a lump in my throat. “She’s so small,” I choked out. “What if I end up hurting her?”

Grace extended the child again. “You won’t. Babies are pretty resilient anyway.” She grinned at me.

Carefully, I took the small bundle from Queen Grace and cradled her against me. The baby’s body was slightly larger than my hand.

She smelled like Olivia and a mix of her own unique scent. The sight of the small face gazing back at me filled me with wonder. My heart felt lighter.

The little one emitted a gentle noise that filled me with joy, and I touched her tiny hand with my fingertip. My heart softened further when she clutched it, filling me with love and making me smile.

Olivia chuckled. “You’ve got what it takes to be a brilliant father.” Her voice exuded a sense of pride.

Instantly, any lingering doubts inside me vanished as I sensed the sincerity behind her words.

Grace’s voice interrupted. “What will you call her?” she asked.

Olivia responded. “We are naming her after Orin’s mother. Nala.” Her eyes met mine. We hadn’t spoken about what the youngling would be called. It meant a lot to me she chose my mother’s name. I sent her my emotions and thoughts. ‘ Thank you.’

“You don’t mind, do you?” she asked.

I shook my head and with tenderness, handed the newborn to her mother, giving them both a kiss on the cheek.

“I will always love and protect you both.”

Olivia placed her hand on my cheek, cupping it. “You will always have our love, too. I can’t wait to have more babies with you. We’re bound to make some badass warriors just like their father.” Her eyes sparkled, and I couldn’t help but wish for the same.

Olivia

OLIVIA SIX WEEKS LATER

The apartment was the cleanest it had been since Nala was born. Fresh flowers filled vases, pillows had been fluffed by staff, and delectable foods would soon fill the dining table.

What was supposed to be a simple evening with Trex and Grace turned into something more. She was now calling it a housewarming party, although Orin and I had been living together for a couple of cycles.

“You don’t have to do this.” I insisted. “It’s unnecessary, really.”

Grace waved her hands. “Please allow me to do this. It means a lot to me. You and Orin are happy. Who wouldn’t want to meet Nala? Babies are a big deal here. Even if she is human. Besides, who doesn’t enjoy a housewarming party? It will be fun.”

“The guys don’t even know what a housewarming party is.” When I mentioned it to Orin, he didn’t understand why there would be a party to warm our house. I giggled, recalling the adorable look on my mate’s face when I mentioned it.

He’d become a doting father to Nala and was even more attentive to my needs now than ever.

We had not had intercourse since the baby was born, but that didn’t stop us from pleasuring one another in other ways. Orin had become an expert in knowing his way

around my body. I couldn't wait to resume our sex life in full again. Especially now that I didn't have an enormous belly in the way.

Since Grace's pregnancy began showing, she'd been nesting like crazy and part of that process was helping me with anything she could. It was nice having her help out with Nala, and she enjoyed being an aunt.

"Do you want me to invite your kitchen friend?" Grace asked, tapping something into the electronic tablet she was holding.

My brows pinched. "Clor? I haven't spoken to him in ages. Not since he came by to congratulate me and Orin on the birth of Nala. I don't know if Orin would be happy about him being here, but...."

Grace sighed. "Fine, I'll check with Orin. I am sure it will be okay. You should know Orin's asked me to invite his sister, Latza and her mate."

There was a knot of anxiety at the thought of finally meeting Orin's sister. She'd sent along packages for me and the baby and Orin reassured me she was excited to meet me, but still. She was his only family and her opinion of me mattered to me.

"Okay," I said.

Grace grinned at me. "I've spoken to her. She's quite nice. I can see why you were jealous of her. She is beautiful."

"Thanks for that," I said wryly.

My friend shrugged and a sheepish expression crossed her face, as if the realization of what she had said had just dawned on her. She reached over and squeezed my hand. "So are you, of course."

I shook my head. "I'm not really, but it's fine."

Just then, Orin entered the apartment, accompanied by Trex. Our mates smiled at us as they strolled over to the table.

Orin kissed the top of my head and smoothed my hair.

"Tell Grace we don't need a housewarming party," I said, angling my head to look up at him.

His brows lifted. "Why not? I'm curious about this human custom. And besides, Latza and her mate are coming. She can't wait to meet you." He finished with a smile.

"Traitor," I teased, pouting.

Trex chose that moment to pipe up. "I'm also curious about this house party. It's not a custom here to celebrate moving into new accommodations."

"It looks like I'm outvoted." I eyed Grace. "Don't throw me a baby shower, though. It's too late for that.... I mean it."

Grace laughed.

Our mate's looked at us, stunned.

Trex piped. "What is this baby shower? Is there to be an audience at the offsprings first cleansing? Will our youngling require this?"

It was my turn to laugh as Grace responded. "It's a party to celebrate the birth of a baby. There is no showering involved. I promise." She looked up at her mate with a sly grin.

The intensity of Trex's stare at Grace sent a wave of heat through the air. It was apparent they were engaged in a secret telepathic conversation. To avoid feeling awkward, I shifted my focus elsewhere.

Orin gave me a sympathetic look. "An offspring party is unnecessary."

Grace's hands went up. "Fine. I wasn't going to throw a baby shower for Olivia, anyway. But I might for my own." She patted her small baby bump.

Trex leaned down and kissed Grace on the cheek. "Our younglings will have anything they desire...just like my Queen." She beamed at Trex and they once again got lost in each other's gaze and began to kiss.

Orin and I shared a grin and waited for them to rejoin us.

They stopped kissing and looked at us unabashedly.

Grace picked up her tablet. "We'll see you after the last meal.

" Trex put his arm around her and the pair left the apartment.

Orin held me and we kissed. "Do we have time for a nap while Nala is resting?" he grinned.

I nodded and took his hand to pull him to the bedroom.

THE DOOR CHIMED, AND Orin answered. It was Clor stopping by to deliver a gift. I was glad that Orin didn't make things difficult and instead accepted it with grace. He didn't invite Clor to stay and visit, however.

I waltzed over to the door and slid an arm around Orin's waist.

“Is it true that more humans have arrived?” Clor asked from the doorway.

I cast a quick glance at Orin, then answered, grinning. “Yes. Many will be staying at the palace.”

Clor’s face lit up.

“You may be lucky and find your mate among them,” I said.

“Good. I look forward to serving them.” He waved goodbye moments later, his step a little lighter than before.

“He deserves to be happy. I hope he meets his K’sha among the new humans,” I said as we walked over to sit down.

Orin grunted. “There will be thousands of males wishing the same thing.”

“If it’s meant to be, it will be.” I shrugged, then leaned my head against Orin’s shoulder.

Cuddled together on the sofa I peered at him. “I hope your sister likes me,” I said, changing the subject.

He touched my hair, stroking it. “She will love you, just as I do, my mate.”

Leaning back, I looked at Orin, my handsome warrior. “I know the two of you are close, and I don’t want her to be angry that I took you away from her.”

Orin took my hand in one of his and covered it with the other. “You took me from no one. She is happy I have found my K’sha. And I suspect she and her mate are relieved to have their privacy again.” He gave me a grin that told me he was sincere.

Since he claimed me and our bond was solidified, I could hear his thoughts when he left them unguarded or sent me messages. We also sensed one another's emotions now more than ever. I loved my life with Orin. Every second of it.

He leaned down and kissed my forehead. "Our bond is stronger than any I share with my sister. The mate bond is unlike all others. And I will always protect you."

I grinned. "I know you will, my love."

TREX AND GRACE ARRIVED first, followed shortly after by Orin's sister and her mate, Vrek.

She was just as beautiful as Orin was handsome, and their resemblance confirmed their relation. I was surprised I hadn't noticed it the first time I saw her. It might have saved me some tears if I had.

She hugged me, something I hadn't expected. Yet it made me feel relaxed immediately. It felt as if we'd been friends for years.

"It is good to meet my brother's K'sha. Welcome to our tiny family." She bowed her head and offered me a wrapped package.

"Thank you. I'm also glad to meet you," I said, trying not to feel insignificant next to the tall, lithe female.

Her lush dark-brown hair was plaited and showed off her pointed ears and high cheekbones.

Orin was chatting to Latza's mate with his arm around my shoulder. I could feel pride emanating from him.

His sister pointed to the package I was holding as we continued to stand just inside

our apartment door. “If you like the fabric, I am happy to sew some clothing for you and the new youngling. Speaking of which, where is she? May I meet her?” She grinned from ear to ear.

Thankfully Nala had slept quite a bit during the day, so I didn’t mind waking her to meet her new Aunt.

“Of course.... she’s resting, but I will get her. Thank you for the gift. Orin mentioned you are a seamstress. I can’t sew for the life of me.”

Latza’s eyes rounded and I chuckled, waving my hand. “It’s a human expression.”

Orin grinned. “You will get used to them,” he said, rubbing my back.

His sister smiled. “I’d be honored to make you anything you like.”

When everyone was seated in the main room, I went to get Nala from her crib.

She fussed until I passed her to her aunt Latza who gazed at her, besotted.

“Vrek and I are pleased to welcome you, Nala.” She looked over at me.

“She is beautiful and precious. It warms my heart to know Alara will be enriched by younglings once more.”

I smiled. It was clear she didn’t mind that Nala wasn’t Alaran.

She must have read my expression because she added.

“I understand she is human, but she is still family. And you are my new sister.” She gave me the warmest smile.

“Anytime you want someone to look after her, just ask. I would love to spend time with her.”

Grace chose that moment to pipe. “It looks like you won’t lack for babysitters.” She looked at me and I grinned.

“It’s great.” I laughed.

Latza’s joy was evident as she sat taller, speaking to Nala before looking over at me. “You should drop in with Nala and visit us at our home.”

“I’d like that.”

Orin interrupted, his voice deep and growly. “She won’t be going anywhere without me escorting her and Nala. And only when it is safe.”

“Things are much calmer out there now, with new technology in place to monitor for cloaked ships. You told me no one has tried to enter our airspace for weeks,” I said to Orin.

He knew I spoke the truth, but his protectiveness prevailed. “I will take you to visit my sister. You have only to ask.”

I kissed his cheek. “Thanks.”

Orin’s sister rolled her eyes. “Little brother, I would never put your K’sha in danger.” She made a face and looked at me and smiled. “If you don’t mind, I would love to visit and help you with the youngling?”

I caught Grace smiling from the corner of my eye. “I’d like that,” I responded.

The males began to chat to one another while Grace, Latza, and I turned our

conversation to clothing, Alaran food, and cooking.

It turned out she loved to cook as well.

I heard my name and turned my head when Orin said, “Vrek is asking when we’re having our bonding ceremony?”

We hadn’t discussed it, but now is as good a time as any. “We will set a date soon. Now that the baby is born.” I mentioned looking at Vrek then glancing at Orin for confirmation and he nodded.

Latza’s voice was filled with joy. “You must let me make your clothing for the ceremony. I have just the thing.”

“I’d like that. Thank you.” My new family was beyond what I could have imagined.

My life with Orin was my true happily ever after.