



# Royal Mate

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** How can I stand by while she chooses another, when my heart, my soul, and everything I am screams that she was born to be mine?

She appeared in Alpha Station like a lightning strike—unexpected, breathtaking, and utterly unstoppable. A human woman, demanding answers, demanding to go back to Earth. But the moment Paige stepped into my world, I knew the truth, she belonged to me.

As a male of honor, I tried to honor her wishes and send her home. The Coalition Fleet refused to allow her return to Earth, and then revealed the truth about her past.

She's not human. She's Insurian royalty, stolen as a child and believed dead for twenty-five years, and raised on Earth. Her sudden return has shaken the planet, and the throne she never knew she inherited comes with a dangerous legacy. The same traitors who murdered her parents are still here, watching, waiting for their chance to strike.

The long-lost princess is betrothed to a prince, bound by a contract written before she was born.

She's not mine to claim, but I can't let her go.

**Total Pages (Source):** 28

1

Paige Spencer, Interstellar Brides Processing Center, Miami, Florida

I pushed the cleaning cart down the empty hallway, the squeaky wheel the only noise this late at night. This place was a zoo most days. Right now, it was eerily quiet. I glanced at my watch. It was after two in the morning and no brides or soldiers were here to be matched or transported at this hour. Heck, no one was even awake. Out of all my assignments through my employer, Trus-T-Kleen, the Coalition Center was the most unusual.

The bookkeeping firm I'd finished cleaning earlier didn't have a security station with huge Atlan beasts—real life aliens—standing guard. Here, there was literally what I thought of as a portal to another dimension that I dusted and mopped.

When I passed the entry to the last room on my list—the Interstellar Brides' processing room, a brawny Atlan stood from behind the counter. Up, up, up he went, and I had to tip my head back to see his smile.

“Hello, Miss Spencer. It is good to see you again.”

“Hey, Stohn.” I offered him a grin in return as I pulled a Laffy Taffy from my pocket and held it out. “I didn't forget. Here.”

He scooped up the treat with his huge dinner plate sized hand. “Yellow. What flavor is this?” he asked, unwrapping it and popping the chewy candy in his mouth. “Banana.”

He nodded, although he may not know what a banana was. I had no idea what they fed these guys. I'd never seen any of them leave the grounds. They all lived and worked here, using their transporter things to make everything they needed, even their food. Every time I came to clean all the gadgets and alien tech made me feel like I was walking around inside an episode of Star Trek.

He flipped over the wrapper and read the joke aloud. "How do you make a tissue dance?" The piece of candy created a little bulge in his cheek as he lifted his eyes to mine.

I shrugged. "I don't know. How?"

He frowned. "You put a little boogie in it."

I couldn't help but laugh, not just at the ridiculous joke, but Stohn's almost childlike confusion. Before interacting with these guys, I'd never put much thought into how bizarre our language could be.

I explained the two definitions of boogies and that it was also a dance step, which made him grin.

"Do you have much more to do?" he asked, glancing down the hall. "Cleaning this entire wing is a big job for one female."

I shrugged. "It's not too bad. I only clean two places instead of four or five in one night."

His dark brows winged up. "My female would not have to work so hard during sleeping times." His smile widened, becoming something feral. "I will pleasure her every night and make sure she rests. My mate will not work as hard as you do, Paige Spencer."

I sighed. “Your future mate will be a very lucky girl.”

“You should be matched. Allow a worthy male to care for and protect you.” He studied me, although not in a creepy way. He treated me like he was my space alien version of an older brother. We’d become friendly over our shared shifts the past few months. “You would honor any worthy male.”

I swallowed hard, because his words were kind even if I didn’t believe them. How could a worthy male, a big, protective, alien warrior, think being matched to me was an honor? More like a burden. Men and I didn’t mix. I’d had exactly zero luck with men on Earth. Not just men, everyone. I had a few friends, but no besties. No boyfriend. No lover. I’d given my virginity to an old high school crush and been sorely disappointed in the whole experience. The one boyfriend I’d had since wasn’t much better. One romantic weekend getaway, and he’d ghosted me even faster than he’d...yeah. That. Even my parents barely tolerated me on holidays and usually asked for money. I was pretty much alone, and I’d been that way for a long, long time.

For being almost eight feet tall and something like a Viking in a romance novel, he had fantastical thoughts. Dreams. Unrealistic ideas about what it meant to live on this planet without a family or a husband. No one was going to take care of me or buy me groceries. I had bills to pay. A second job that expected my arrival in just over six hours. I needed to finish here and go home so I could get at least a few hours of sleep. “I just have to do Warden Egara’s testing rooms and I’ll be out of here.”

Twenty minutes, tops, and I’d be on my way home. Thank god. My feet were killing me, and I was about ready to collapse.

He nodded, stepping back to give me—and my cleaning cart—space to push past his security desk. “Thank you for the banana treat. I shall make sure my boogies don’t dance.”

As I pushed the squeaky cart further down the hall and around the corner to the bride testing rooms, I couldn't help but smile.

I pulled out my earbuds and tucked them in place, getting my upbeat tunes going again.

The pulsing tempo of one of the songs on my 'Kick Ass' playlist perked me up when all I wanted to do was sleep. I grabbed a clean cloth and the cleaning spray and began to work my way clockwise around the room, wiping down monitors and hard surfaces. All was quiet except for a screensaver with the IBP logo on the displays.

I imagined what it must be like to volunteer to become an unknown stranger's bride. Not just any unknown man, but an alien. To come into this room, find a match, and never walk back out again. The women who entered never left, instead they were transported to a new planet. A new life.

Would I go to space for a guy? Not a chance. What would happen if I was tested and found lacking? Just my luck, I'd volunteer and not match with anyone. How mortifying would that be? No one on Earth wanted me. Why would I assume outer space would be any different?

Nope. No way. I wouldn't risk the devastation of discovering I wasn't chosen by a single male in the entire universe.

Done with my wipe-down, I reached for the mop. Leaning down, I wrung the excess water back into the bucket and began to clean the floor.

The end of the mop bumped into the wall, so I pivoted and began to swipe back and forth in a different direction.

Left. Right. Step back.

Left. Right. Step...

My hip bumped a lever and the wall behind the chair made a whooshing sound. A bright blue light outlined a large section of the wall as it retracted, revealing a larger room with a blue pool.

Warm air rushed into the testing room, and I shrugged. I needed to clean that space next anyway.

I walked around the testing chair and turned to face the beautiful blue water. It was strangely enticing. I knew they had a special cocktail of medication in the water that entered the newly processed brides through their skin. Whatever was in there helped them relax. The mixture also included something to help their bodies adjust to the stress of the Coalition's transport technology. I knew all this because I was curious, in general, and because I'd asked once. There had been a technician working on the system one night. Cute, too. Said he was from a planet called Viken. Anyway, he'd lost me after the first few sentences of sci-fi jargon. All I knew was that whatever was in that sparkling blue water helped their bodies heal. Made them stronger, so they could tolerate transport. And completely got rid of their anxiety and stress.

"Maybe I should just dip my toes in," I laughed at my own silliness. Sometimes, working hours and hours and hours alone in the middle of the night made me feel a little crazy.

I stared at the water. It was damn near irresistible. I could use a little healing. My back and my feet ached...all the time. I'd been working long hours for months, barely sleeping. Stressed didn't begin to cover it.

What would it hurt? What if it helped? Like, a lot?

"Just for a minute. No one's here. No one will ever know. Right?"

I set the mop aside and toed off my shoes, put them neatly on the edge of the pool, and pulled off my socks. I stuffed the dirty socks into the scuffed, once gleaming white tennis shoes and rolled my pants up to just below my knees.

Just like sitting on the edge of a swimming pool in the summer, right? I'd just dip my feet in and see what happened.

I settled myself carefully on the floor before lowering my feet into the water, then scooted forward until the water came halfway up my calves and leaned, bracing myself with stiff arms as a delicious heat surrounded my feet and toes.

"Ahhhh. This is nice." Totally relaxed, I sighed as the heat climbed up through my lower legs, through my thighs, to my aching back. As I'd hoped, my feet stopped aching. My back felt warm and cozy, like I'd just gotten a massage. Eyes closed, I smiled in relief. "Good call, Paige. Totally worth it."

I'd cycle the water through the filters when I was done, and no one would ever know.

Behind me, something hummed. I ignored it. Things in this place always seemed to have a life of their own.

Something hard shoved me from behind. I tried to scramble to my hands and knees so I could crawl out of the way, but it was too big. I was too slow.

"Ahhh!"

**SPLASH!**

I was so startled that it took me a second to realize what happened. The testing chair had activated and shoved me into the water. Shit!

Popping to my feet, I stood and grabbed my floating shoes that had also been knocked into the water. Great. They were soaked, too. I shoved the socks deeper into the toes, held the shoes against my chest with my forearm, and stepped back. And back. The chair was still moving. If I didn't get out of here, I was going to be pinned to the wall. There was nowhere to crawl out on the opposite side, just a straight, smooth wall on the far side of the pool. To my right was the scary machine with all the needles and gadgets. To my left? Another wall. I had nowhere to go but over the chair, back the way I'd come.

Great. I was soaking wet.

The warmth I'd been enjoying spread through my chest and my racing heart calmed. By the time it reached my head, I was laughing. What a disaster. But did I care? No. I felt great.

The water was almost shoulder height. At least I wasn't going to drown. I pushed my hair out of my face and saw that I'd somehow activated one of the processing systems. Maybe it was another filter? I had no idea, but the water was moving, almost like a gentle whirlpool. The water was brighter now, illuminated by recessed lighting. The entire room glowed blue, like I was in a fancy spa.

"Well, better get back to work," I muttered. I was going to drip water everywhere. Hopefully I had enough clean rags to dry myself off a bit. I'd have to drag the mop behind me the whole way back to the storage closet. Ugh. What a pain.

Pushing through the water, I grabbed the edge of the big chair. It looked like something my dentist had, except now it was partially submerged in the water. If I climbed up over it, I could get back to the edge and, hopefully, drag myself out.

Using the chair's armrest as a grab bar, I hoisted myself up and onto the chair. If Stohn could see me, he'd change his mind about me being matched to anyone. I



couldn't even clean an empty room without messing it up. I probably looked like a drowned rat. With blue hair.

I glanced at my bare arm. Was my skin actually turning blue or was it just the light? "I look like a Smurf." I giggled, the sound echoing around the room and back to me, making me laugh harder. Whatever they put in this water was good stuff. So good. Normally I would be annoyed, stressed about falling behind schedule, worried about losing my job. Instead, I flopped onto the chair, stared up at the strange designs on the ceiling, and giggled.

I adjusted my soggy butt in the seat, so I'd be more comfortable.

Suddenly, a metal restraint came out of the arm rest and looped over my wrist.

I tugged at it. "What the—"

Shifting, I tried to squirm my way out, but being wet, I was slippery and fell back. Immediately, a second restraint appeared, securing my waist. Then the other wrist. Then one ankle. Ha! It missed the other one, although flailing my leg about did nothing but make me want to start laughing again.

"Let me go!"

"No testing data collected." A robotic female voice came from somewhere in the room. I stilled.

"Let me go. There is no testing data. I am not an interstellar bride."

"Acknowledged. Speed scan implemented."

A bright, glowing white light appeared in the ceiling. It moved up and down my body

like a laser in a light show.

“I don’t need a scan. Just let me go.”

“Negative. Scan is not complete.”

“Oh fuck.” I wiggled some more. The restraints were snug.

“Processing... Processing... Processing...” The voice kept saying that over and over, like I’d broken it or something. This wasn’t right. I didn’t want to get in trouble, but whatever the computer was doing, I didn’t want any part of it.

“Stohn!” I shouted. He could help me. I’d be embarrassed for the rest of my life, but I wouldn’t be stuck in this chair. “Warlord Stohn! Help me!”

“Scan complete. Planetary match identified and confirmed. Protocol C-R-4-2-5 initiated. Requesting transport coordinates.”

“What? No! Do not transport me! Where are you sending me?”

“Transport coordinates received. Initiating transport calculations. Non-Coalition planet. Non-hostile species. Safety protocols confirmed. Female match to the planet Insuri, verified. Transport request accepted.”

I froze. Female match to the planet Insuri? I glared at the tiny orb in the ceiling I hadn’t noticed before. The bright laser scan had stopped, but there was a little blue light pulsing in the center of the orb, like an eye watching me. Listening to me.

“Abort!” I shouted. “Abort! Stop! Reject! Un-identify!”

“Initiating NPU implantation. NPU required. No additional modifications required

for transport to Insuri.”

The strange machine I’d wiped down hundreds of times appeared on my right, the long, needle-like projectile coming toward my head.

“No! Stop!” I tried to turn away, but a large hand-like device locked onto the top of my head with a tight grip, holding me in place as the needle thing poked my skull in the bone behind my ear. I was shocked when it barely hurt. Guess the drugs in the blue water were still dulling my pain.

“NPU implantation complete. Female ready for transport.”

“Help! Stop! Abort! Deny! Cancel!”

Silence. The metallic grip released my head, and I glared up at the blue light winking at me from that weird alien eyeball in the ceiling. The computer wasn’t listening to me, and Stohn wasn’t coming. I had to keep trying.

“Cancel! I do not consent! Transport is not allowed!” I felt like I was tearing my shoulder out of the socket trying to get my hand free of the restraint. “Let. Me. Go!”

“Negative. Interplanetary regulation C-R-695 requires any non-Earthling to be transported immediately and directly to their home planet.”

“Home planet?” I shouted at the machine, angry and scared. I guessed there was only so much anxiety and stress the blue water could overcome after all. Asshole alien computer. “You are NOT transporting me anywhere! My home planet is Earth! I live at five-four-seven Willow Road, apartment four, a mile away! CANCEL TRANSPORT! STOP!”

“Request denied. Interplanetary regulation C-R-695–”

I tuned out the rest because the computer was repeating itself.

“Transport to Insuri begins in three, two—”

Everything went black.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:34 am*

2

Paige Spencer, Insuri Planetary Defense, Station Alpha, Transport Room

Did the obnoxious ringing in my ears mean my head was still attached? I felt like I'd been thrown into the back of a garbage truck, compressed, smashed, stirred up and spit back out into my current position lying on my back on the cold, hard floor. I didn't smell grass or trees or anything outdoorsy. There was no breeze. I was definitely inside. Somewhere.

I patted myself down, starting at my over-sized breasts under the hot pink T-shirt. The ugly brown pants and scuffed white tennis shoes I'd worn to work had survived the trip, my shoes and socks perched neatly on the floor next to me. Stifling a groan, I put them on as quickly as I could. Nothing seemed to be broken or bleeding. That was a win. Other than the pain roaring through my skull, everything felt normal-ish.

The imaginary knife shoved into the center of my head faded away as I rolled onto my side and then pushed myself into a sitting position. The agony level changed from an 'I-can't-function' to a solid 'I-could-run-if-I-was-being-chased-by-a-lion'.

I looked up to see two bright discs of light directly overhead blasting me like two small suns. I stretched my neck side to side and looked around.

I was on a very large, flat surface. Huge. Someone could park a large jet airplane on what I assumed was an alien transport pad. The disk-shaped lights above me were placed at even intervals all over the ceiling and hung directly over the hard, cold floor. I felt like I was sitting on ice cubes.

“Hello?” I yelled, but no one answered.

Migraines weren’t really my thing, so I assumed the fading pain in my head was a side effect of whatever the hell had just happened to me.

C-R-695, that’s what. The peeling alarm hadn’t stopped, the noise worse than obnoxious high school fire drills.

“Interplanetary regulation C-R-695 requires any non-Earthling to be transported immediately and directly to their home planet.” Too bad my perfect mimicry was wasted, since there didn’t seem to be anyone around to hear me. The alarm was bad, but the flashing blue lights weren’t helping my headache either.

“I can’t believe women volunteer for this shit.” Stabbing pain. Cold, hard floor. No alien hottie to welcome me and tell me I was his destiny, his perfect love, his one true mate.

Like that was real.

I hauled myself onto my feet and took a couple steps, just to make sure I could. True love? Forever mates? No. I was too much of a realist for that fairy tale. I’d watched my parents get divorced—twice each—every time they saw each other they argued about who was going to pay for me, the poor little orphan they’d adopted to try to save their marriage.

A shiver raced through me, and I wandered toward what looked like a control station of some kind. There were three chairs large enough that I could crawl onto the seat, curl up and take a nap, multiple monitor screens mounted both to the control array and the walls—I had to assume they were like computer monitors since they were currently empty and blank—and an assortment of symbols printed in a language I’d never seen before. I ran my fingertips over one of the figures. It was beautiful, like a

mix between a Chinese character and hi-tech, glittering, gold foil art. Hundreds of symbols covered the raised platform, which came up to my chest. I was about average height for a woman, but whoever made these were much, much taller than I.

“What is this place? Where is everyone?” Wherever I was, it wasn’t where I wanted to be. Goosebumps rose on my arms as I caught a reflection of my image in one of the blank screens.

I looked scared. Eyes too big and a bit manic, wild tendrils of hair had escaped my braid so that I looked like I’d just ridden on a motorcycle without a helmet. I was still wearing my work clothes. Oddly, they were dry. I distinctly remembered falling into that stupid pool of blue water.

“At least you’re not naked, girl.” I’d sunken to talking to my reflection. I wiggled my legs and arms, shrugged my shoulders. Everything seemed to work. I could think. I could talk. Now I just had to find someone who knew how to run these controls and ask them to send me home.

“Hello? Anyone here? I need to go home!”

No one answered. Was the alarm ringing because of me?

Where the hell was I? Was this truly another planet? I hadn’t seen anyone yet, so I had no idea if I was about to see regular humans or ten-foot-tall green monsters.

Shouting sounded from the other side of what looked like a massive, four-part sliding door, each section larger than the lift door for a double garage.

I hunched down to hide behind one of the massive chairs as one of the giant doors lifted, disappearing into the two-story ceiling. Oh, boy. I was about to meet an alien.

Warlord Stohn at the bride center wasn't bad. Maybe these aliens would be nice?

I peeked through the armrest as two large males—they looked human, thank god—wearing dark blue military uniforms ran into the room, guns of some kind in front of them like they were ready to kill anything that moved, including me.

Shit.

I plastered a smile on my face and rubbed my suddenly sweaty palms on the worn material covering my thighs. What would I say? Hi, I'm Paige from a planet called Earth and there's been a huge mistake?

Yes. That would about cover it. This was a mistake. I wasn't supposed to be here, wherever here was. Planet Insuri. Some other Coalition planet. Didn't matter. I wanted to go home. Now. Right now. My birthday was in a week, and I'd already been invited out to dinner with friends. I'd splurged and ordered a small, triple layer, dark chocolate and cherry birthday cake from the local bakery; the expensive one.

I waited three years to be able to afford that cake. Damn it. I was going home.

"Come out! We know you're in here!" Security guard number one called out as the second pushed a series of buttons near the door. The blaring alarm went silent, and a sigh of pure relief left my body.

"There's been a mistake!" I called out to the two guards. "I just want to go home. I'm not armed!"

The guard who'd yelled at me appeared to be shocked. "Show yourself, female."

Slowly, I rose to my full height and stepped out from behind the chair with my hands up in the air so they wouldn't think I was trying to hide anything. "Don't shoot! My



name is Paige Spencer. I'm from Earth. There's been a mistake. I'm not supposed to be here. I just want to go home."

The guard who'd turned off the alarm settled his rifle on his shoulder and kept it pointed at me. He stood behind the first guard, who'd lowered his weapon and held his hand up, palm out, as he tried to coax me into moving closer. "We're not going to hurt you, female. Come forward and we will take you to the general."

"Can your general send me home?" I took a step forward, my entire body shaking with relief. They weren't scary looking, ten-foot tall, green monsters. They looked like the other aliens I'd met, big, muscular, and gorgeous. Not quite Atlan big, but close.

"He is the only one here who can authorize your transport."

"Okay. Good, because I want to go home." I took another step.

The guard standing closest to the door fired his weapon and a stream of bright white light flew through the air. I ducked behind the chair and the control panel behind me burst into flames.

"What the fuck are you—" The first guard yelled.

The second fired again. "The intruder pulled a weapon. She is a threat!" He fired a third blast as I screamed and leaped behind the control station, out of his line of sight. His shot hit a panel in another set of large doors, shattering a large glass section closest to the floor.

Shit! So much for them being friendly.

"Cease fire!"

“The intruder is running!” Another blast hit the glass—or whatever the stuff was—behind me, widening the opening until it was big enough for me to crawl through, if I had to.

“Cease fire! That’s an order!”

“I am under direct order of the queen to secure this transport station against intruders.” He fired again, his heavy boots hitting the floor as he moved closer. I was running out of time.

The edge of the control panel exploded above my head. He wasn’t stopping. He was going to kill me!

“Shit, shit, shit!” I eyed the newly created opening in the wall behind me. I could make it. I had to make it. “I can do this. I can do this.” Muttering my new mantra, I ran for the opening. From the corner of my eye, I saw the first guard tackle the second just as he fired his rifle. The blast whizzed past my head, the sound like singed meat in a hot pan. I dove through the hole.

I rolled onto my hands and knees. Scrambled to my feet. I was in a long, dark hallway. Right or left? Did it matter?

I ran toward the dark end until I came to a door with a standard looking lever. I pushed on the lever, grateful when the door swung open to reveal a large office complete with an oversized black desk with three chairs facing it as well as a meeting table on the opposite side of the room that seated ten people. There were no decorations or personal items that I could see. Maybe this was an extra room, and no one would bother me for a while.

I closed the door behind me as quietly as possible and pushed a button that I hoped was the door’s lock. Seconds later, the two guards’ voices sounded from the other

side of the door, still arguing.

Apparently, one of them still wanted to kill me.

I backed away from the door and looked around for a place to hide. There was nothing except the desk. Luckily, the front facing piece went all the way down to the floor.

I darted behind it and crawled underneath, pulling the large chair back into place behind me.

My breath came out of me in loud, ragged gasps that I fought like hell to control. One of the guards jiggled the door handle and I clamped my hand over my mouth and held my breath until they moved on.

What the hell was I going to do now?

I settled my forehead on my knees and waited. I huddled under the desk for what was probably ten or fifteen minutes, but it felt like an eternity. The door opened, the alarm once again blaring in the outer corridor.

“Someone turn off that fucking alarm. And get Faolan and Peadair in here. I want to know what the fuck is going on.”

“Yes, General.”

The door clicked closed and I drew myself into as small a ball as possible as the general pulled the chair back and sat down.

Oh, my god.

He was huge. His thighs were the size of small tree trunks. Typical of most men, his legs were splayed wide and the bulge in his pants was too big to be real.

Holy shit, this guy was hot from the waist down. He smelled like the most amazing cologne I could imagine, so good I wanted to bury my nose in his thigh and snuggle in. His cock was huge. The muscles in his legs bulged beneath a form fitting uniform that left nothing to my imagination, not that I would have been able to come up with anything better.

What did he look like? A compulsion I couldn't seem to control came over me and I shifted so I could peek up at his face.

He was freaking gorgeous. Drop dead, take-me-now gorgeous. White hair so bright it looked almost silver fell to his shoulders and framed a cut jaw, high cheekbones, and eyes the color of sapphires, eyes which were staring straight at me.

General Addan Natosi, Insuri Planetary Defense, Alpha Station

This was new. A female was on her knees beneath my desk. It was impossible not to get instantly hard at the way her blue gaze had been eyeing my cock like she was running hot, as if she needed to climb in my lap and use me for her pleasure.

She certainly wasn't here to service me. It was my role as a male to service her. Unless this scenario was a fantasy of hers. Or perhaps she wished to take on a submissive role for once? A female's burdens were heavy. They ruled the planet, governed, led learning institutions, places of business.

Perhaps this one wished to give over her thoughts to me. For me to carry any of her hefty responsibilities. My shoulders were broad. My muscles were sturdy enough to handle anything.

First, I had to know her intentions. I was instantly hard and ready for whatever her answer may be.

I pushed back with my feet, allowing my desk chair to shift to give her some room.

"Hello," I murmured.

Her throat worked as she swallowed. "Hi."

The one syllable was soft and the apprehension I heard in it matched the expression

on her pretty face.

When she didn't move from her hiding place, I crooked my finger and offered her a smile. "My lady, are you on your knees for a reason?"

Her blue eyes lowered to my cock again. She licked her lips and I felt that caress of her tongue in my balls. I stifled a groan.

"I... I—"

"You are drawn to my cock."

Her eyes flared wide, as if my words were too bold. I only stated truth. She couldn't seem to look away.

My hands slid up my thighs to the front of my uniform pants. The dark color did nothing to hide my desire. I took a deep breath, scented hers. "You wish to inspect it before you ride it?"

I pushed my chair back a little further, as if coaxing her out from under the desk, and perhaps of her shyness. I had never met an Insurian female so timid before. Usually, they were bold, brazen even, in slaking their lusts. If she wanted my cock, it would be in her hands, mouth or pussy right now.

Tentatively, she crawled forward so her head came out from beneath the desktop. Hair like fire caught the room light. Her features were delicate and soft, her bright blue eyes wide, her pale cheeks flushed pink. Perfect rosy lips accentuated the refined edge of her jaw. Without doubt, this female was of noble blood. Which would explain her boldness in being here.

"Who are you?" I didn't much care what family she belonged to. She was beautiful

and I had not been with a female in some time. I rarely left the building, too busy dealing with never-ending pirate attacks and other threats to our planet. The queen's constant isolation of Insuri created problems I had not been able to overcome. Corruption was rampant and many of our soldiers had joined the pirate crews. Better pay and far fewer rules.

I reached down and rubbed her bottom lip with my thumb. Fuck, she was as soft as she looked.

“Paige. My name is Paige.” A deep inhale stretched her blindingly bright top—a color I'd never seen in a garment before—across her ample breasts. I imagined cupping them, sucking on them, tugging or even biting to slake her desire.

I had not heard the name. Perhaps she was not noble, but a commoner. Irrelevant. She was a female in need, and I was willing to provide whatever service she required.

I opened my pants and with each inch that spread, her eyes widened further and further. Reaching in, I grabbed the base and pulled my cock free. I couldn't stop the sigh that slipped past my lips at the relief of no longer being confined.

“Wait!” she squeaked, her gaze shifting away. Then back. Then away. I was big. Plenty for her to study.

“This is an interesting fantasy, my lady,” I murmured. “Playing the shy virgin?”

She huffed and the corner of her mouth tipped. No woman over the age of nineteen was a virgin, having partaken in a cock-servicing then, if not well before, that time. Sex was a primal need for a female.

“You wish for me to be the dominant?” I asked. It was a first for me, however the idea was appealing. To see her apprehension mix with growing curiosity, then my

cock altering her expression to bliss...

Gripping the base, there was no way I could resist stroking it from root to tip. A pearly gleam of seed oozed from the slit. I caught it with my thumb.

"I need your help," she said.

"I know," I agreed. "I will help you. Your pleasure is my—"

"Not with that. Although..."

"Although?" I prodded. Reaching out slowly and carefully, I returned my now seed-soaked thumb to her mouth and spread the liquid over her plush lower lip.

Her eyes fell closed and she whimpered.

Rushing footsteps pounded down the hallway outside my office. Her eyes shot open and she startled, retreating back beneath my desk.

Whoever was coming this way was in a hurry.

Two guards came to a halt outside my door. I wheeled my chair forward to hide my cock from their view. Servicing a female, anytime and anywhere, was not uncommon, but perhaps not at my desk.

"Sir. You sent for us?" Faolan and Peadair stumbled into my office. The first stood at attention. He was a good soldier. The second moved as if intending to sit in one of the chairs across from my desk. I caught his gaze and shook my head. He froze, then moved to stand next to Faolan.

"What, exactly, is going on? What triggered the alarm?" I asked, adding authority to



my tone.

“General, there was a breach in the transporter bay. A female arrived unscheduled and without an assigned escort.”

I flicked my eyes down for a moment, past my bare cock to see the female’s panicked gaze pinned to mine. I didn’t know why she was concerned about transporting. Females in high positions—government and commerce—traveled frequently.

“Did any of the warning systems detect weapons or illicit or illegal substances entering with this breach?”

“No, sir.” Faolan shook his head.

“Then why the fuck did you fire your weapon? Why is there a gigantic hole in the corridor wall?” I’d walked through shattered crystal on my way to my office. “And why did I just receive a report of damage to the transport control systems? I have to call in a tech team to fix it. They’ll be lucky to have it operational for our transport window tomorrow.” These idiots hadn’t just fired their weapons once. They’d wrecked the entire area.

Faolan looked straight ahead without responding. Which meant he wasn’t the one who’d discharged his weapon.

“Faolan, did you open fire?”

“No, General.”

I turned to the other idiot, ready to punch the smug look off his face. “Peadair, why did you open fire on an unarmed female?”

“I was following orders, General.” Peadair’s gaze met mine. Held. He was under the mistaken assumption that whatever he’d done was authorized.

“You shot at an Insuri female without cause?” I asked, my voice booming with the command I’d earned. Why would he fire upon this female? Even from the briefest glimpses of her, I knew instantly she was not a danger. I had no idea whose orders he was following. Not mine. If anyone at this facility issued that order, they were gone. I’d send them to the far reaches of the planet, to the smallest outpost I could find.

A small, feminine hand on my leg had my muscle flexing. What the fuck was this female doing? Was she still playing her game? Was she afraid? Or was she simply trying to distract me?

Both soldiers shifted uncomfortably. With their mid-level ranks indicated on their epaulets, they should know better.

“I have shoot-to-kill orders,” the brash one said.

“From whom?” I questioned with a frown. “Not me.”

“Queen Alienor.”

Of course, he did.

The mystery female’s hand slid higher, as if learning my thigh and distracting me. Then it moved higher still toward my—

“There was no transport plan and no one was at the pad to escort the new arrival,” he continued. “Per the queen’s orders, we are to assume any unscheduled arrival is either invader or pirate and act accordingly.”

“So, you shoot to kill an unarmed female?” I countered.

“The arrival was illegal,” he explained. “Queen Alienor’s orders are clear. The pirates have grown bold, General.”

Indeed, they were a problem. But how had the queen infiltrated this facility, my facility, and issued commands, to my soldiers, behind my back? The mention of Queen Alienor again had my cock waning, although not for long because the female’s hand settled over mine, which was still wrapped around the base.

Fuck me, I was going to come all over myself.

Think about the queen. The miserable shrew. She was not a pleasant woman and had driven Insuri toward dark times these past two decades. I could do nothing about her rule, but I was in charge of these two.

And, possibly, the woman between my thighs. I slid my hand away from the base of my cock and wrapped hers around me. She instantly began to stroke me, root to tip.

“Sir?” Faolan’s narrowed gaze darted repeatedly to his fellow guard. He looked like I felt, ready to shoot the asshole himself. No male with a shred of honor would shoot an unarmed female. “General? What are your orders?”

I realized I hadn’t said anything further, too distracted by the female and her newfound eagerness.

I cleared my throat. “As you can see, no one is in this office. I will contact you directly if I come across the female. Station guards at every door. If she has not left the building, she will eventually come to us.” I glared at Peadair. “Give me your weapon. Leave it here until I have had a chance to review the security footage.”

“Sir? General, I was following the queen’s orders. You can’t?—”

“I can. This is my command, my building. You will leave your weapon until I determine you can be trusted not to murder innocent females.” When he opened his mouth to protest again, I slammed my free hand down on top of my desk. “Leave your weapon or spend the night in the brig. Your choice.”

The small hand wrapped around my cock squeezed. Stroked. I had to get these idiots out of here. Now. I looked at Faolan as his companion reluctantly laid his rifle flat across the top of my desk and stepped back. “You have orders from me not to shoot. Any soldier who fires on an unarmed female will be disobeying a direct order. Spread the word. You are not to use your weapons again.”

“Yes, General.” They nodded at the order. If someone armed and dangerous really had transported unannounced, my soldiers were expected to shoot to kill. However, the only thing dangerous about the woman who was stroking my cock was the way my body responded.

“Peadair, I will make a note of your use of a weapon on an unarmed Insuri female.”

Sweat began to dot my brow as I felt my orgasm brewing at the base of my spine.

“Yes, sir,” they said in unison, even though I was speaking to the overzealous one. The one whose allegiance clearly rested with the queen. The gleam in his eye was dark and seething, but he said no more. Turning on their heels, they left, their heavy footfall indicating they followed my orders, heading in the direction of the soldiers’ operational center on the other side of the base. No one would be asleep. Not with that infernal alarm blaring for so long.

With one hand wrapped around my cock and the other on my knee, the female pushed my chair back. I was large and could easily stop her, but why should I? If she wanted

my cock, I would not deny her. She crawled out from beneath the desk and knelt before me, her lips inches from my hard length.

“I don’t know why, but I need this,” she breathed, eyeing my cock like a precious gift she’d been denied. “You. God, your cock is so big.” She stroked me, root to tip with a bold twist. “I’ve never been a fan of giving BJs but I want to taste you.” She licked her lips.

“It is I who taste, my lady.” With her hands on me, I didn’t want to talk about anything but pleasuring her, but I was the general here. I needed answers. “Perhaps we should talk about your transport and your reason for returning to Insuri without a security escort?”

Her gaze flicked up to meet mine. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes filled with arousal and need. Fuck. I’d never had a female look at me in such a manner. My cock jumped in her small hand as the scent of her arousal reached the special receptors in the back of my throat, driving me to the edge of control, making me need to taste her.

“You wish to talk about that right now?” she wondered. “I have my hand on your cock, which is insane, because you’re you and I’m me.” She began to squirm, and I watched as she licked her lips again. “My pussy’s dripping. I can’t believe I’m telling you this.”

My hips bucked involuntarily at the velvety words. I cleared my throat. “The soldiers on patrol will remain by the entry doors for the remainder of their shift. We are alone. Come out further from beneath my desk.”

“I can’t believe I’m doing this,” she whispered. “I can’t believe I’m manhandling a cock. I need to think about the transport and what happened. It’s got to be a dream.”

“No dream, my lady. I assure you, every inch of my cock is real.” I studied her. Her

breath escaped in little pants, her heat, potent. Her need, tangible. “If I didn’t know better, I’d think you’ve been activated? Am I your Resonant? Is this a claiming? Or do you simply require pleasure?”

“Claiming?” she countered, her gaze flicking up to meet mine, then back to my cock. “No. What are you talking about?”

Decades of practice made it easy to hide a level of disappointment that shocked me. I had never wanted to be claimed by a female. Once the Resonance period was activated, the energies of our bodies aligning would drive both male and female mad with lust. I’d heard of females whose Resonance had been activated, they’d claimed their mates, and the chaos of the mating periods lasted weeks before their bodies returned to equilibrium, before they could be in the same room without wanting to tear the clothing from one another and fuck until they were unconscious.

I’d never wanted to be that out of control, that desperate for the touch of another. Seemed a massive inconvenience. I had work to do.

However, it was every unmated male’s duty to pleasure a female in need, unless he had good reason to deny her. I had no reason to deny the beautiful creature kneeling between my legs. “Tell me what you need, female.”

“You. I want you to fuck me because I can’t think straight. I think it’s from the transport. My body is totally out of control. I need your cock inside me. I need to come. What do you say to that?”

I had never heard of transport arousing a female. However, she’d just been shot at and chased through the building. That was a lot of excitement, and this female appeared to thrive on a bit of danger. “I say you’re wearing too many clothes.”

For a moment, I thought they were stupid words because her hand lifted from my

cock. But then she grabbed the hem of her bright shirt and pulled it off, tossing it to the floor beside us.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:34 am*

4

P aige

Oh my God. Holy shit. Fuck. Every swear word I could think of was going through my head. My adrenaline was buzzing. I'd somehow transported to another planet, been shot at by guards, hid under a guy's desk only to be found and now...now I was ready for Pound Town.

I'd never say that out loud because coming from a klutzy, overweight person with frizzy red hair only sounded stupid. But I was ridiculously aroused. It was like this guy, this alien, was pumping out the pheromones like water from an open hydrant. And that only made me think of his cock, the one I was stroking. Talk about hydrant.

There was something wrong with me. Every single cell in my body seemed to be humming with raw energy. I couldn't control it, couldn't calm down, couldn't stop wanting the hunk of alien male in front of me. I was a pervy hussy all of a sudden. Brazen. Naughty. I would never talk to a guy like this back home. Never ever ever.

But I needed this guy's cock. Needed it. In me. Hard. Deep. I literally felt like I was going insane.

"Please," I whimpered and dropped my bra to the floor. I gasped as his hand reached out to cup my bare breast. His thumb rubbed the sensitive peak, sending little jolts of pleasure to my clit. I arched my back, pressed the soft mound into his hand.

"Do you wish for me to be receptive or dominant?"



“What?” His wording was weird, but the guy didn’t have to talk at all. He’d told two underlings off for shooting at me. He protected me. Hid me. Of course, I’d had my hand on his cock, so why would he turn me in now?

“I am well versed in both forms of pleasure. Receptive?” His hand wrapped around mine where I held his cock and squeezed. “Or Dominant?” The hand cupping my breast tugged on the nipple, just hard enough to make me squirm and cream my panties.

“Yes! More.”

I guessed the yes was what he really wanted because his hands went to my hips and he lifted me onto his desk. “I am well trained in all pleasure zones. Tell me what will make you come.”

With a hand on my chest, he gently pushed me onto my back. He issued a verbal command to lock the door as he settled his hands on my knees and parted my thighs, my lower legs dangling off the desk.

A stylish midnight blue uniform covered him from head to toe. Now that he was standing over me, I realized he had to be close to seven feet tall. Silver thread had been woven through the fabric of a thick, heavy tunic, forming what looked like constellations that covered his shoulders and chest. They reminded me that he was connected to the cosmos, to another world. The color mirrored his white hair and added a touch of elegance. The same strange symbols I’d seen on the control panel were embroidered in a lighter shade of blue on the stiff, high collar, pirate style cuffs, and along the seams of both the tunic and pants. His uniform had more symbols woven into the fabric than the uniforms worn by the two guards who’d been chasing me. Perhaps that was how they indicated their rank? Instead of with bars and pins, like the military back home, their rank was woven into the uniform itself. His feet were covered in knee high, midnight blue boots adorned with silver buttons.

He looked like he'd just stepped out of a high fantasy novel, silver hair falling to his shoulders, striking blue eyes, cut jaw and full, almost cruel lips. Wouldn't be difficult to believe he was elven royalty. The more I looked, the more I wanted, my pussy already wet and aching. He smelled sooooo good. Indescribable. I didn't know if the scent turning me into a mindless, horny animal was powerful alien pheromones, special cologne, or just him. I didn't care. Everything about him made me want him more.

With his cock exposed, all I could focus on was getting it inside me. Stretching me. Pounding into me as hard and fast as he could go. I wasn't amazing with a ruler, but that had to be porn star inches. It was going to break me. My inner walls clenched.

Yes, please.

He shouldn't be into me—I should've thought about my outfit. My cleaning uniform. Ugly khakis and the fuchsia tee shirt and my cheap three-pack cotton panties. I probably smelled like industrial soap, my hair had been dunked in water before transport, I had no idea what was in that blue water, and even worse, I'd been chased by soldiers. My deodorant had to have failed light years ago.

He really shouldn't be into me, but somehow, he was. His cock was proof. No way this guy was desperate. He was big, brawny, smelled good, had a growly voice and seemingly protective nature. Everything about him seemed... perfect. Fucking perfect. I didn't know him, but somehow, by some miracle, he'd convinced me that it was safe to trust him. Touch him. Want him. Proposition him. Come on. I'd never just grabbed a guy's dick in my life. Ever.

Thank god he seemed into it.

But why was I so into him? Sure, I had needs, but I'd never had a one-night stand. I wasn't a virgin, but no one had ever wanted me like this and I'd never wanted a guy

so viscerally in return. He'd used the word heat, and I couldn't argue, my body was out of my control. I had an itch only he could scratch. I wanted him to suck my nipples, lick my pussy, pull my hair, pound into me until I couldn't walk right. Oh, and orgasms. I needed, needed, needed some RIGHT NOW!

He pulled off one of my sneakers, let it drop to the floor. Then the other. Socks were flung over his shoulder. Then my pants were tugged down my legs and my panties went right along with them.

"Foot here." He lifted my ankle and set my bare foot on the edge of the desk right where he wanted. Then the other.

Oh my god, I was open and he could see everything and—

He could see everything. Every roll, ridge, ripple.

The way he was looking at me, he saw every single bit.

"Um..." I realized then I didn't know his name.

When he dropped to his knees, set his big hands on my inner thighs and put his mouth on me, I called him God.

That tongue. Holy shit, his tongue.

He was talented and focused and ruthless. I was so needy that with a few well-placed flicks, I came. My back arched over his desk, toes curling as I cried out. If my mind wasn't made of cotton candy fluff from what had just happened, then I'd wonder how a woman who'd never had an orgasm from a guy before suddenly came with a little oral. But I couldn't process. I didn't care. I just needed more because it didn't cut the edge of my need.

Pushing up on my elbows, I looked down at him—at the glistening wetness on his mouth and chin. That was me. I did that.

His eyes, so eager to please and fierce to fuck.

“I need more,” I practically begged.

“Fingers this time,” he said.

I frowned, but he didn’t explain, only showed. Two thick digits slid into me and found—

“RIGHT THERE!” I shouted as I rolled my hips. Holy hell, that felt good. What was that spot?

I might have heard him snicker, so I reached down, took hold of his silver hair and pulled his mouth right onto my clit.

He got the point and worked me up to a second orgasm in record time again with his fingers and mouth.

Then a third.

When I was a wilted, semi-sated mess, he stood, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. His cock was even harder than when I had a hold of it. Angry and a dark red. Fluid wept from the tip.

“Fuck me,” I said on a growl.

He manhandled me with ease, flipping me onto my stomach so I stared at the cold, hard surface. My toes barely touched the floor. A hand settled on my butt and opened

me, then a foot kicked my feet wide.

I glanced over my shoulder at him. He set a hand on the desk beside my head and loomed over me.

And thrust.

In one forceful motion, he filled me to the brim and then some, hitting spots and places I didn't know existed.

"Yes," I hissed, my eyes falling closed. He felt soooo much better than my vibrator back home. "More."

One thing about this guy, he obeyed. He fucked me until I came, not once, but twice more, then went blind, then hoarse from screaming from the pleasure when I heard him growl, grip, then fill me to overflowing with his cum, then—

I passed out, only waking up who-knew-how-long later in his lap.

"Better?"

I blinked, breathed in his familiar, spectacular scent. "Wow. Um, yeah. Did I faint?"

"Mmm hmm."

His big, warm hand stroked my back, bringing me back slowly. The feel of his pants against my bare thighs stirred my brain. I was naked. Completely naked. He was still in his uniform. I felt his cock, as hard as ever, against my bare hip. That was the only part of him exposed.

I'd come to another planet and the first thing I did was have sex. Amazing sex. This

planet was worth staying on just for that.

No. I needed to go back to Earth. I knew nothing about this planet other than there were guys with guns after me, a big shot military guy knew how to fuck, and I learned I could come like a porn star.

“I sense your thoughts have shifted from orgasms to something else,” he said. His voice was a deep, reassuring rumble.

“Transport.”

“Ah.”

“I need to go back to the transport room,” I told him.

“Did you leave something behind?”

“I need to go back,” I clarified. “To my planet.”

“Your planet?”

“Earth.”

“You are from Earth?” he asked, surprised. “I assumed you were Insurian.”

“I was sent here by mistake. This has been fun and all” –I wriggled, nudging his bare cock– “but I can’t stay here.”

“You can’t go back, either,” he replied.

I sat up, turned to face him. He was so, so handsome. “Yes, I can. Just push the send

button or whatever.”

“Let me clarify,” he added. “You can’t go back now. Our planet’s orbit only allows for transport from this facility once a day.”

“No transport until tomorrow?” I asked, disappointed. Although, I definitely had reason to stay another day.

He shook his head. “No.”

Shifting on his lap, I straddled him. Then boldly, with my newfound slutty self, I gripped his cock and slid down onto it so I was impaled by his potent masculinity. What was another day? The hussy that I was, I asked him, “Whatever shall we do until then?”

Paige, Insuri Planetary Defense, Station Alpha, Transport Room

How could so much have changed in just a day? I'd been demanding to go home, back to Earth, from the moment I'd arrived on this strange planet. Yet now that I had remained for a day and was about to leave Addan—yes, Addan, the guy who fucked me without me knowing his name—behind, part of me wanted to stay. A huge part. I felt like I was being torn in two over a man I'd just met the day before. Which was insane.

I was smarter than that. Right? True love, fated mates, the idea of a “soul mate” was the stuff of fairy tales, not reality. My parents taught me that. Every loser I'd dated since I'd turned seventeen had reaffirmed the truth. Dating was a game to most men, a competition to see how many women they could stick their dicks into. They didn't stay around, and they didn't want anything other than sex.

A few rounds of Pound Town and I was turning into a romantic? That would be stupid. And I did try not to live up to my mother's expectation of me. If she'd told me once, she'd told me a thousand times, Never make life decisions because of a man.

Did an alien count? One with a huge cock, talented mouth and who happened to smell like heaven?

“Are you ready?” Addan's deep voice was brisk and matter-of-fact. Considering he'd had his cock buried balls deep in me less than an hour ago, the abrupt change in his demeanor made me want to cry. Stupid.



“Yes.” No. Hell, no. Why was I so upset at the idea of leaving him? Sex? Was it just about the sex? Because Addan was incredible. Dominant. Sexy. Everything I’d ever thought I wanted in a man, I’d found in an alien general on a planet I wasn’t even supposed to be on.

He’d told me that Insuri wasn’t part of the Coalition and Earth brides weren’t matched here. Except somehow, I’d arrived.

After the night we shared in his quarters, if he’d asked me to stay, God help me, I probably would have said yes. But he hadn’t. Instead, he’d insisted it was his duty to service a female in need. Like he would service any female who hid beneath his desk, whether he wanted to or not. He even told me the males on Insuri were trained, like going to Driver’s Ed, as soon as they came of age, in multiple ways to pleasure a female, should they require attention. He probably didn’t even like me all that much. He was just doing his duty. His fucking job.

He claimed all unmated men on the planet believed it was an honor and responsibility to give pleasure to any female who needed a few good orgasms. So, basically, he couldn’t turn me down? When I’d lost my mind under his desk and jumped him like a rabbit in heat, he serviced me out of obligation? That was depressing as hell. Made me feel dirty. There was no other word for it. I couldn’t claim he’d used me, not after the way I’d begged for it.

I wanted a little connection, even though I was the horny slut who’d jumped him first. It was so confusing! He gave me exactly what I wanted, and now I was upset about it because he wasn’t begging me to stay? I’d grabbed his cock. I was the one who told him to fuck me. I was the one who’d woken up after round one, straddled his lap and fucked him without even asking.

What ridiculous kind of planet was this anyway? The orgasms were great. My pussy was so sore and swollen that the tenderness between my legs was a distraction as I

walked up the stairs onto the transport pad. Totally my fault because I literally couldn't keep my hands off him. It was like I was an addict, and he was my personal drug of choice. Over the past day, if he was close enough to touch, I was touching. My reaction didn't make any sense, but as I was only here for a short time, I didn't fight my compulsive need to keep touching him.

Turned out I was an undersexed, super-horny wench. Who knew?

Addan turned to the male behind the controls, the guard I recognized who had not tried to kill me. "Initiate transport to Earth."

"Yes, General."

Addan's bright blue gaze locked onto mine. It took every bit of self-control I possessed to force myself to stare blandly back at him and not burst into tears.

What the hell was wrong with me? Why was I so upset after an epic one-night stand? Wasn't the point of them to never see the person again? Since I was on my way back to Earth, I knew that was exactly what was going to happen.

Energy gathered around me, and I knew if I hadn't braided my hair, I'd have a dark red halo floating around my head like a mermaid in water. Crackling electricity raced over my skin.

I bit my tongue to keep myself from blurting out anything embarrassing. We'd said our goodbyes before we left his quarters.

Addan didn't have a wife, or a mate, or whatever they called their significant other on this planet. I knew that. He'd told me himself. I didn't know his age. I hadn't asked. It took me all of a minute in his arms to realize the more I knew about him, the harder it would be to leave. So I didn't ask questions. A night of pleasure was all this would

ever be. I wasn't his. He hadn't pounded his chest and said mine, or turned into a beast, or put a mating collar around my neck like a Prillon warrior would have. No Atlan bracelets, either. He'd said nothing about claiming me or keeping me. He'd just fucked my brains out, made me come until I'd lost count of the number of orgasms, and turned my body into a sweaty, satisfied mess. Then he'd fed me, bathed me with his own hands, and started the whole process over again.

I wouldn't walk right for a week.

Now he stood like a soldier at ease, his legs shoulder width apart and his hands clasped behind his back as he waited for me to disappear from his life forever. Sex was just an obligation to him. A duty. A service unmated males performed for any female in need. I wasn't anything special to him. I really needed to remember that.

A burning sensation gathered behind my eyes, and I realized I was about to start crying. Shit. I needed this transport thing to hurry up.

"General, sir, there appears to be a problem," the guard said.

Addan turned away from me and the air left my lungs in a whoosh. I couldn't breathe properly when he looked at me like he wanted me naked. "Explain."

"I don't know why, but the transport has been blocked."

"What?" The word blurted from my lips before I had a chance to think. "Why?"

The guard's hands moved over the control panel, and he glanced down, reading something. "Incoming message from the Coalition, high level security code, General. I can't access the message."

"What the fuck is going on?" Addan frowned and strode over to the control panel. He

spoke a series of code words and numbers. When he finished, one of the blank monitors activated. I didn't recognize the alien male whose face appeared, other than the fact that he was a Prillon warrior, which made sense, as the entire Coalition Fleet was under the command of Prime Nial, the ruler of Prillon Prime. As far as I knew, all their battleship commanders were Prillon as well.

"What is the meaning of this?" General Addan moved out from behind the control panel and stood facing the oversized head and shoulders of the very attractive Prillon who filled the entire screen. I'd seen a handful of Prillons at the processing center, although most of the security force there was made up of Atlans, like Stohn, or the more human looking races from Viken, Trion and Everis. I'd seen enough aliens to recognize a Prillon warrior. Although, this one looked a bit off. More human than he should have.

Did they have hybrids?

Of course they did. Interstellar brides from other planets were matched to Prillon warriors all the time. They would have babies, right? Babies who grew up to look like this very attractive alien. He had the light copper colored skin of a Prillon, but his hair was dark brown, almost black. And his eyes? Warm. Brown. Human. They looked strange and didn't quite match the rest of him.

"I am Commander Zeus. I oversee this sector of space, including enforcing the terms of our agreement with the Queen of Insuri. Whom do I address?"

"I am General Addan Natosi, head of Insuri Planetary Defense. I serve Queen Alienor. Why are you blocking transport of this human female? She asked to be returned to her home planet. Why do you interfere with the lady's request?" If I'd thought Addan's tone businesslike before, the crisp, demanding voice I heard sent a shiver down my spine. With me, he'd practically purred, whispering all the ways he was going to make me come. This was a side of him I'd not seen. Commanding.

Dangerous. Moreso even than when he'd dressed down those soldiers the day before for shooting at me. My sore pussy pulsed to attention, wet heat soaking my freshly laundered panties.

I'd put my Trus-T-Kleen uniform back on for the trip home, beige pants, hot pink t-shirt and all. Addan's staff had cleaned everything. Even my old white tennis shoes looked brand new.

The Prillon commander's gaze left Addan and landed on me. "Your Highness, my apologies for any confusion. Our transport system scanned you when you left Earth and entered your biological signature into the system. As stated in the Insuri Accords, a decades old treaty between Insuri and the Interstellar Coalition of Planets, no Insuri citizen of royal blood is allowed to leave the planet without explicit permission of the queen herself."

"I'm not from here," I explained. "I'm human. From Earth. There's been some kind of mistake."

Commander Zeus's scowl could have flash frozen an ocean as he looked away, obviously reading something on a screen we could not see. "There has been no mistake, Your Highness. You are Princess Edelene Merrienne Peigi of Insuri. Our DNA scan indicates you are a direct descendant, in fact, the daughter of Queen Madallaine Edelene Peigi, and you are the rightful ruler of Insuri. You are betrothed to Prince Martainn Ailbeart Seppani and are to be wed in three days' time, on your twenty-sixth birthing day."

I blinked. Then again. "I'm WHAT?!" I walked forward as if I could shake some sense into the Prillon through the screen. "No. My name is Paige Spencer. I'm from Miami, Florida, in the United States, on planet Earth."

Commander Zeus tilted his head, the pity I saw in his eyes more disturbing than if

he'd yelled at me. "Apologies, Your Highness, but that is not correct." He turned his gaze to Addan. "General, I leave this matter in your capable hands. Transport is denied."

Addan cleared his throat, studying me in a whole new way. "Very well. If I may ask a favor, Commander?"

"Yes?"

"Her Royal Highness must have been transported off planet on The Day of Steel and Blood, when her mother was murdered. As you know, the infant princess was said to have died with her. You have access to records I do not. Please ask your Intelligence Core to investigate how the princess was taken, and by whom? I would very much like to know how she arrived on Earth with no protection or knowledge of her true identity."

The Commander's narrow gaze drifted from Addan to me and back again. "I will inquire."

"Thank you."

The screen went blank.

I reached my hand out as if I could grab hold of the Prillon. "No. Wait! Come back." My heart skipped a beat then raced in a panic of anxiety and dread. I'd just been dismissed by a Prillon battle commander. The commanders of their battleships were their highest-ranking officials, except Prime Nial himself. No way was the leader of more than two hundred and fifty planets, and a massive, interstellar military operation during an active war, going to worry about a little orphan girl from Earth.

I was screwed. There would be no arguing, no calling back and asking to speak to

someone over Commander Zeus's head. I'd been left behind by the Coalition. Abandoned. A pawn. A chess piece. No, not even that. Less. Completely disposable and already forgotten.

Again. Just as my birth parents had done when they gave me up in a closed adoption. Just like my adopted parents when they used me to get at each other during their divorce, and during every holiday after. I'd been a weapon to be wielded by one or the other, used to inflict maximum emotional—or financial—pain on their former spouse.

The Coalition was not going to allow me to go home. They thought I was royal? As if! I'd cleaned more toilets than any princess in the history of princesses. And betrothed? To some stranger I'd never met? Getting married in six freaking days? On my birthday?

No. No. And hell no. This couldn't be happening. I was supposed to be home, eating overpriced chocolate cherry cake. This was all wrong.

"What just happened?" I asked. "Why does the Coalition think I'm a princess? I'm not. I promise you, I'm not. Get him back."

I turned to find Addan and the guard both on one knee, heads bowed low like I really was royalty.

Oh, shit.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:34 am*

6

A ddan

Fuck. As much as letting her go tore at my soul, the idea of her taking Prince Martainn as her mate made my blood boil.

“Paige.” I corrected myself. Fuck. “Your Highness, the laws are clear. You cannot leave.”

“This is insane,” she replied. “He’s wrong. That Zeus guy has to be wrong.” Her foot moved as if her body held too much energy to remain still, the odd white shoes making a tapping noise as she lifted and lowered her toes over and over again. “Has this ever happened before?”

“No. Not once since the accords were signed.” Not since Paige’s mother was murdered and her aunt, Alienor, was forced to assume the throne. At that time, Queen Alienor had approached the Coalition and negotiated The Coalition Accords. She did what she needed to do to protect the planet without committing us to being full members of the Interstellar Coalition of Planets.

So far, we’d been lucky. Commander Zeus and his battlegroup protected this sector of space, and we’d had very little threat from the Hive invaders. I could count the number of times we’d eliminated Hive Scouting ships on one hand over the last twenty-five years. I’d only been in command for a few years, but I knew our planet’s history.



I also knew Queen Alienor had proclaimed the female who stood before me to be dead, murdered along with her mother all those years ago.

Now that I knew the truth, Paige's resemblance to her mother was undeniable. The same dark red hair, pale green eyes and heart-shaped face. Paige was the same age now that her mother had been when she'd been murdered. In fact, they could be twins.

How had I not seen the truth? I'd seen countless images of the former queen. Fuck me, a large portrait of Paige's mother hung in the entryway of this very building.

I hadn't wanted to see the truth, too consumed with fucking Paige and feasting on her sweet pussy to acknowledge her true identity.

Still, why had the queen lied all these years? Not just to the public, but to me? Was it to protect her claim to the throne? Or had she feared planetary unrest if our people knew the truth, that an infant princess had not been murdered, but taken? Gone missing?

Did she truly believe the princess was dead? How would she have come to that conclusion without proof? Without seeing the infant's dead body? If there was any doubt, why keep the possibility a secret?

The answer came to me before I'd finished thinking the question. The former queen's loyal guardians would never have given up the search. We would have turned the galaxy inside out to find the missing princess. They never would have stopped looking. I'd been young then, a lad of ten, just entering my training at our military academy. Even then, I'd been devastated by the loss, as had the entire planet. The noble houses had erupted. We'd been on the brink of civil war.

Queen Alienor had been a steadfast and responsible leader. She'd routed out the filth

who'd attempted to end the royal line and stabilized the planet in a time of extreme unrest. Her son, Prince Martainn, had only seen five summers at the time. The fact that he'd grown into a spoiled, arrogant ass was irrelevant to the law. If Paige was who Commander Zeus claimed, Prince Martainn was, in fact, her betrothed.

He didn't deserve her. Yet I knew the laws of Insuri better than most. The only way for a royal princess to break a betrothal was if she found and claimed her Resonant, the male whose energy signature and DNA both activated and resonated with her own. Her perfect match.

The day before, when she was between my thighs and her hand stroked my cock, I'd asked her if it was her intention to claim me. She'd said no.

I was not hers. I was not her Resonant, not her perfect match.

There was nothing either of us could do about that biological fact. I had failed to activate her mating instincts, her need to claim me, the primal, instinctive need all Insuri females experienced when they met the male destined to be theirs.

It was not me.

The queens of old were not cruel, they allowed their offspring twenty-five years to find or select a mate of their own. However, to ensure the continuity of the royal bloodline, all female heirs were betrothed at birth, just as Paige had been. Should they fail to find and claim a Resonant mate by their twenty-sixth birthing day celebration, they were wed to their betrothed.

A few females grew to love their betrothed and eagerly awaited the day. Some were lucky enough to stumble upon their Resonant mate before the deadline.

Most hoped, but did not claim a male for their own, and had no choice but to obey the

Queen's law. Paige, though, was different. She didn't seem to know the rules. Didn't know anything about Insuri. Didn't know about her betrothed. Living on Earth, she'd had no time to know him or find her true mate.

The female before me, whose sweet pussy and cries of pleasure drove me mad, would not only remain on this planet, but share another male's bed within a matter of days.

Lost to me forever. Not gone, where I would mourn her as a memory. Right fucking here, in front of me, where I would be forced to watch Prince Martainn put his hands on her. Watch his child grow in her womb. Know, every night as sleep eluded me, that his cock stretched her tight pussy, his seed filled her, his lips kissed her skin. Made her scream in pleasure.

I would go mad.

I knelt, head bowed, before the female who would never be mine as my mind raced with dark thoughts. Dangerous possibilities. Rage and hatred for Prince Martainn swelled to fill my black heart. Days ago, my opinion of him had been nothing more than mild disdain, if I bothered to think of him at all.

"Addan? Stand up. What are you doing?" Paige walked to me and placed her hand under my chin. With a gentle touch, she lifted my chin and forced me to look up into her pale green eyes. "What happens now?"

I rose, as ordered, and towered over her soft body and luxurious curves. The need to protect her rode me hard. Mine or not, she was vulnerable and confused, about to enter a political arena she was not prepared for.

One question persisted, one dark suspicion I could not quell. "Faolan, erase all records of contact with Commander Zeus. Also, delete transport records of the princess's arrival. I want every image, every report, every bit of her existence deleted

from our system immediately. Do you understand?”

The guard glanced from me to Paige as if asking her permission, as if he truly believed she was going to be his queen.

I wanted to smash his skull for daring to defy me, but he was a good male, upholding the law and respecting the wishes of a royal princess. No, make that queen. Her mother had been queen, and upon her death, the role fell to Paige’s shoulders. It only went to Queen Alienor because Paige had died, too.

Except, here she stood. Alive. Our rightful queen.

Thankfully, she seemed to understand the importance of my words. The predicament she was in was perilous. Her return would unbalance the entire planet.

“Do what he says, please.” Her small hand wrapped around my forearm, and I looked down into the eyes of the most beautiful female I’d ever known. “What are you doing?” she asked. “I trust you know what you’re doing, but why? What am I supposed to do now?”

“Your existence will upset the balance of power on the planet. You will need time, my queen, to gather your allies and make plans.” I rolled my shoulders back. “Now, I take you somewhere I can keep you safe until you are ready to claim the throne.”

“Where? Isn’t this a military fortress? Where could be safer than here?”

I imagined she finished her statement by saying... with you.

“My mother was Queen Madallaine’s best friend and confidante. For centuries, our family has served the true royal line. If anyone harbors any ill will toward you, my family estate is the one place I am sure could withstand an attack.” My mother, in

fact, my entire family, was extremely wealthy with a large military force and the latest weapons. My mother was not shy about purchasing advanced Coalition weaponry. We were not part of the Coalition, but Prime Nial and the Coalition Fleet did not want us to be defenseless in the event of a direct Hive attack.

“My mom and your mom were best friends?”

“Yes. They grew up together in the palace. They were separated when my mother married my father and moved onto the ancestral estate, but they remained close until Queen Madallaine’s death.” Those were dark days. “My mother mourned for months.”

Saying the words made me once again feel like the young male desperate to help his sobbing mother. I’d tried everything. Sweets. Flowers. Begging her to walk with me in the gardens. We’d lost the queen, who had been like a cherished aunt to me. My true terror had been fueled by the fear of losing my mother as well. She’d become a shadow of her former self, having taken years to recover.

“I’m sorry.” The hand she’d placed on my forearm slid down until her fingers laced with mine. Fuck. I should let go and stop tormenting myself.

Like a fucking heartsick fool, I wrapped my hand around hers and accepted the comfort of her touch. “You were an infant.”

“Did we know each other? Do you remember me?”

“Yes. I was a boy of ten on The Day of Steel and Blood.” I couldn’t look away from the longing in her gaze, her need to belong so strong I wondered what type of life she’d lived on Earth to make her so vulnerable. “The queen would spread a blanket in our garden, and I would dangle Moon Blooms over you as our mothers gossiped. The sparkling petals always made you laugh.”

“Do you still have those flowers in the garden?”

“Yes.”

“I’d like to see them.” She squeezed my hand. “I know it’s stupid, but maybe I’d remember something.” A shudder passed through her and we both turned as the guard, Faolan, interrupted.

“All traces of Princess Edelene’s arrival have been deleted, General. I have deactivated all security between here and the vehicles for ten minutes, so there will be no record of her leaving with you.” He cleared his throat as he glanced at the princess before quickly lowering his gaze. “There is one potential problem, General.”

I did not need problems. “What problem?”

“Peadair, General. He disappeared last night, and we have not been able to locate him.”

Fuck. The guard who’d fired his weapon at Paige, claimed he’d been following the queen’s orders. Why would Queen Alienor order one of my men to shoot any female who transported to the planet? Unless she knew the truth, that Paige was alive and a threat to her throne.

“Alert the others. If he attempts to enter the facility, have him detained and notify me. I would very much like to speak to him.”

“Understood, General.”

“Fetch my car, Faolan, and wait for us. I trust no one else.”

“Yes, General.” Faolan bowed to Paige. “Blessings, Princess. I mean, Queen.

Welcome home.”

Were those tears in Paige’s eyes? Why would such a simple statement drive her to tears? Unable to resist the urge to comfort her, I released her hand and placed my palm on the small of her back. “Come, Princess.” I paused, added. “You are the rightful queen, however I shall in the interim until we reestablish you on the throne, call you princess, if that is acceptable.”

She blinked, then nodded. “I’m Paige.”

“Yes, to me you are, but you are now more. I will take you to meet my mother. You will be safe in her home.”

“Isn’t it your home, too?” Paige leaned into my touch as Faolan left the transport room. Damn my stupidity. I should not have ordered him to leave me alone with her. My control was in tatters. She leaned to one side and peeked around me, making sure we were by ourselves before speaking. “What am I going to do, Addan? I’m not a queen! I’m a maid. I work three cleaning jobs. Need a toilet to sparkle, I’m your girl. A queen? I can’t balance my checkbook, let alone rule a planet. I can’t.”

She turned and pressed her forehead to my chest, leaning on my strength. If she were mine, I would be beside her every moment, guiding and protecting her. Now that duty would fall to her betrothed. I would be nothing but a soldier. I could do nothing but serve her in that way. “I will keep you safe, Princess.”

“Paige,” she corrected.

“Paige,” I agreed. “You have my word.”

I wrapped my arms around her even as my conscience screamed at me that she belonged to another. I was not her Resonant. She had not claimed me. Would not.

And in a matter of days, on her birthing day, she would take Prince Martainn Ailbeart Seppani, the pompous ass, as her mate.

If I didn't kill him for touching her. Fuck. I couldn't control the violence of my thoughts. How would I react when he touched her in front of me? Kissed her?

"This is all a huge mistake." She pressed her curves against me, her warm arms wrapping around my waist as if in my arms was exactly where she belonged. "I just want to go home."

Her words were like ice in my veins. She did not want me, did not want to stay and claim her throne. Unfortunately, I had no choice but to let her be mated to the Prince, just as she had no choice but to remain on Insuri and rule. "You are home, Princess."

I stepped back and cursed myself for wanting to pull her into my arms once more as she wiped a tear from her cheek. "Paige," she whispered.

"Come. We need to leave before the security system resets." I led the way out of the transport room, stopping just long enough to grab one of my dress coats from its hook. I wrapped the heavy garment around her, pleased that it fell past her knees—and hid her very alien attire. Now that I knew who she was, I needed to be more careful about safeguarding her. The fewer people who saw her, the better.

She snuggled her nose into the neck of my coat and breathed in my scent, making my cock instantly hard. She looked perfect wearing my coat, wrapped in my scent, my protection. Ignoring my body's reaction, I led her down the long corridor toward the vehicle I knew would be waiting for us with Faolan at the controls. The Coalition had complete dominion over transport technology throughout the galaxy. If Commander Zeus would not allow her to transport, she was going nowhere unless I took a spacecraft and flew her myself. I had no idea how far Earth was from Insuri, but even with a long-range spaceship, the journey would potentially take years. Decades. Fuck,



centuries, depending on the distance.

I chose a path that would take us through the grand entrance, past the portrait of her mother, Queen Madallaine Edelene Peigi. When we stood directly in front of the archway over which her mother's portrait hung, I stopped and pointed so she would look up.

"You look exactly like your mother. I cannot believe I didn't see the resemblance. I should have known. My apologies, Princess. I have already failed you." I never should have touched her. Never fucked her. Never tasted the addictive flavor of her wet pussy.

Paige lifted her gaze and gasped. "Oh my god." She swayed on her feet, her cheeks deathly pale. "That's my mother?"

"Yes." When her knees collapsed, I lifted her in my arms and resumed walking. "Do you not see the resemblance?"

She shifted in my hold, craned her neck so she could look back over my shoulder at the portrait of the female whose blood ran in her veins. "Yes. I can't believe it. We could be sisters." Her words slipped away like sand sifted through open fingers. "I—I've never looked like anyone before. I was adopted."

"There will be no doubt, Princess. Your mother's allies will rally to your side. You will not be alone."

What I could not promise was that I would be at her side, protecting her, pleasuring her, holding her in the dark when her duties became too much.

I turned a corner, the room with the portrait no longer visible. Paige shifted in my arms, her delicate face lifting, her vulnerable green gaze focused on my face. "You

can put me down. I can walk now. I'm sorry. It was just a shock."

"We are nearly there. I will carry you." This might be the last time I would ever hold her in my arms. I was in no hurry to let her go.

If an attack came from Queen Alienor trying to keep her seat on the throne, my family estate was the only stronghold with enough soldiers and weapons to keep Paige safe from a direct military assault. As word of Paige's existence spread, more allies and friends would rally to her side. I hoped a civil war would not be necessary. I hoped Queen Alienor was innocent of any wrongdoing in Queen Madallaine's death.

If Queen Alienor stepped aside peacefully, surrendered the throne, there would be no need for violence. Until I was sure, I would protect Paige with my life. "You are Princess Edelene, you are now the rightful queen. You must be protected. Your mother, Queen Madallaine, had friends and loyal allies on Insuri. Even after all this time, they have not forgotten her. They will protect you and help you claim your throne."

She shook her head. "I don't want to claim the throne. And I am not marrying some guy I've never met in less than a week. That is not what I want to do on my birthday. No way."

I held her tightly to my chest, tormented by the small, chilled hand that rested against my neck, and spoke the truth neither of us wanted to hear. "I'm afraid, Your Highness, you have no choice."

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:34 am*

7

Paige, House Natosi, Queen's City

General Addan held out a hand to assist me as I stepped out of what I could only describe as a space-limousine, with two armed guards in the front seats. One of them I recognized as the guard from the transport room. The other, I had never seen before. Two more armored vehicles had surrounded us, one traveled in front and one behind, like Secret Service protecting the president.

“Thank you.”

“Welcome to my home, Princess.”

All the warm fuzzies I'd been feeling sitting next to him in the back of the luxurious vehicle, at the soft rumble of his voice as he answered my questions about everything I saw passing by on the other side of the window, evaporated with his words. They were formal. Stiff. For public consumption.

He spoke to me like he hadn't just had his dick inside me a few hours ago. Like I hadn't grabbed his hair and screamed his name. Like he didn't still have the taste of my wet pussy on his tongue.

Rude. Because my pussy still ached from the hard pounding he'd given me. I still craved his touch. His taste. His attention. I felt like a love-starved puppy desperate for pets. Which was foolish and illogical, and I was soooo freaking over myself. I had more control than this. More self-respect. I was about to meet my mother's best

friend, someone who knew me when I was a baby. I needed to get a grip and not make a complete fool of myself.

Addan dropped my hand immediately the moment I was out of the vehicle. Gigantic double doors, easily three times my height, swung open and a group of guards dressed in uniforms nearly identical to Addan's, except dark gray and black instead of blue, jogged forward to surround me, Addan, and the vehicle.

"Greetings, General. Welcome home." An older gentleman with dark streaks at the temples of his bright white hair, stepped forward. He wore the same gray uniform, but I recognized the fact that he had more symbols embroidered in his collar and cuffs than the others. Very similar to Addan's.

"Thank you, General Niemini. Has my mother been informed of our arrival?" Addan and Niemini clasped one another's forearms like medieval warriors in a documentary I might have watched on The History Channel.

"Of course. She, your father, and your sisters await your arrival in the gallery."

"Thank you." Addan released him and turned to me. "General Niemini, may I present Princess Edelene Merrienne Peigi, daughter of our late queen."

The elder gentleman bowed low, his dark blue eyes suspiciously shining, like he was about to cry. "My greatest honor to meet you, Princess. You are the spitting image of your mother."

"Nice to meet you, too. You can just call me Paige." I held out my hand to shake his, only to drop it when he stared at it, confused. Addan and Niemini talked about soldiers and security while I stared at the monstrous fortress before me.

House Natosi, Addan's childhood home, and apparently a place my mother had spent

many happy days, wasn't a house. It wasn't even a mansion. It was like three mansions, five watchtowers, and a four-story European stone castle had all been mashed together around a courtyard. We'd even driven across a bridge that spanned what I'd assumed was a river, but Addan told me was a security barrier.

His mega-tower-castle-house had a freaking moat at least twenty meters wide. I wondered if the liquid that flowed through it was real water or something they could set on fire. Or acid. That would be freaky.

I thought outer space was supposed to be civilized and utopian. Not medieval warfare and castles with moats.

Of course, the rest of the city looked nothing like this place. On the drive over I'd seen skyscrapers and fast-moving train systems. A few vehicles like ours zoomed around, but not many. The people looked clean and well dressed, hustling and bustling along the sidewalks just like they would in London or New York. Their clothes were odd, of course. The people in the city looked like they'd just stepped off the movie set of *My Fair Lady*, the women in brightly colored, fancy dresses with large, decorated hats. The men wore gray or muted brown suits with vests, ties and matching hats. I'd watched that movie dozens of times. My adopted father's aunt was obsessed with Audrey Hepburn. Looking out the window as we traveled across the city made me feel like I'd been sent through time, not outer space.

Could the Coalition's transporters do that? Send someone forward or back in time?

The sidewalks didn't look like concrete, they looked like earth-toned brown, green and gold marble stamped with geometric designs. The sky was clear and a shade of blue that made me think of frigid winter days in Montana. I'd tried my best to take in all the sights, the strangely beautiful flowers of every color imaginable, and some I'd never seen before, the throngs of people who looked like they'd just stepped out of a history book on Earth, the fully armed military guards standing on every corner, in

front of every door, at every crosswalk.

Were the soldiers around because they had problems with crime? Or was there some other reason?

I tried to gauge the mood of the people walking around the city but could not. Some smiled. Some scowled. Some were animated, speaking to acquaintances. Some stared into the distance as if worried. They looked like normal people going about their day. There were tons of stores and busy open-air markets. I didn't see a single homeless person loitering on the streets. No dirty children. No pets.

Didn't these people have dogs? Or the alien version of a dog? What kind of animals did they have here?

The city, aptly named Queen's City, was where the queen's castle had been built thousands of years ago and was, apparently, the capital of the entire planet.

Addan proudly informed me that my ancestors built the city. I couldn't wrap my head around that. My mother, and her mother before her, and hers before her, had ruled an entire planet. Waged wars. Solved problems. Built mighty castles.

And here I was, gawking at everything like a three-year old during her first trip to a zoo.

"Princess. Please, this way." Addan and General Niemini were apparently finished discussing their soldier talk because Addan held out his arm indicating I should accompany them inside.

I walked into House Natosi wearing Addan's oversized coat. His scent surrounded me as I pulled the lapels closer to hide the hot pink Trus-T-Kleen shirt, khaki pants that nearly had holes worn in the knees that I still wore beneath. My white tennis

shoes felt as ridiculous as fuzzy slippers since I had a very serious military general, complete with deadly weapons and heavy boots, on either side of me. My clothing made me feel like a clown. An imposter.

Except, it wasn't the clothes.

They escorted me through a grand foyer that glittered with light from hundreds of crystals that hung from at least ten chandeliers. There were small, ornamental trees with bright orange and yellow leaves growing inside. I squinted up, way up, to see the back portion of the four-story ceiling was open, the roof of the building retracted to let the warm, butter-yellow sunlight shine down on the trees. Their black bark sparkled as if the bark itself was run through with veins of shimmering copper. I'd never seen anything like it.

I must have stopped walking because Addan and General Niemini both halted and looked back at me.

Close your mouth, Paige. Don't stare. I snapped my mouth shut and hurried to catch up.

They led me down a corridor lined with what I assumed were family portraits and floor to ceiling murals displaying outdoor scenes painted in vivid color. The floor was smooth as glass, different colored sections inlaid with more of the strange writing I was coming to associate with this planet.

Everything was too beautiful to be real. If I could have gotten where we were going without stepping on it, I would have. Walking on it with my rubber soled, toilet-water-industrial-cleaner-dirt-soaked shoes felt wrong.

General Niemini came to a halt in front of a set of double doors twice my height and nodded to the two guards standing at attention on either side. These doors were made

of black wood streaked with shimmering copper, inlaid with intricately flowing branches and leaves.

Without a word, one of the guards opened the door. General Niemini entered first. Addan held out his arm, indicating I should follow. I did and he fell into step behind me. A shiver of apprehension raced down my spine when the door closed with a quiet click of a lock that sounded like thunder in my ears.

Three women—aliens—holy shit, I was an alien!—turned to face us. I did not need to ask to know these were his mother and his sisters. The resemblance was uncanny.

All three had long, shimmering white hair like Addan and bright blue eyes. They wore what I assumed were gowns, but when they moved, I realized the bottom halves of the gowns were split in two so they could walk freely. Their gowns were different colors, Addan's mother wearing a pale, shimmering silver lined with a gray so dark it looked almost black. I could totally see Audrey Hepburn wearing the high collar and fancy cuffs on her wrist. His sisters wore rich burgundy decorated with gold embroidery and a vibrant, bright blue accented with a darker, midnight blue lines that made her eyes appear ethereal. Their clothing made me feel even more like I was living inside a fairytale with queens, armored knights on white horses, wizards and dragons. The ladies were what humans would consider classically beautiful, if a bit on the curvy side. Like me.

Just like my resemblance to my mother in the portrait Addan had shown me. Seeing her face—my face—on a decades old portrait had been a real sucker punch to my gut. I'd never looked like anyone in my adopted family; never knew where I got my laugh, my mannerisms, or my curvy hips. Seeing my real mother's portrait had settled something inside me I'd given up ever soothing. I knew where I came from, who I took after, the reason my hair was curly and red and my eyes pale green. I had answers I never, ever thought I would have. I belonged somewhere. Had a past. History.



A shocking, out-of-this-world, alien history. As crazy as it all seemed, part of me was glad. Most of me was freaking the fuck out, but part of me— the lonely little girl who wondered why my mommy and daddy didn't want me, wondered what was wrong with me, wondered what I'd done wrong? —she was oddly silent. Content.

Addan's mother rushed forward, hands extended, practically shoving General Niemini out of her way.

8

P aige

“Welcome, Princess. Welcome!” Tears clogged her voice as Addan’s mother grabbed me and wrapped me in a hug so tight I couldn’t breathe. “The Creator has been kind to bring you back to us! Addan tells us you have been in hiding on a planet called Earth?” She stepped back, looked at me, sobbed and yanked me against her. “I’m Fiona. Oh, how I loved your mother. You look just like her. So beautiful.”

I hugged her back, a bit awkwardly, unsure of how much to squeeze or where to put my hands. This wasn’t exactly what I’d expected. I’d expected to meet a regal, reserved lady who spoke to Addan about politics and war and strategy. Not be mauled in a crying, squeezing, mom-hug.

I’d never had a hug like this back home. An I’m-so-happy-to-see-you hug. No one had ever been so happy to meet me that they cried.

If she didn’t stop, I was going to burst into tears and embarrass myself.

Desperate, I looked to Addan for help.

“Mother. Don’t you think you should introduce our guest to my sisters?”

“Of course. Of course.” She released me and I took a deep breath, forced a smile on my face that I was not feeling as his sisters, both probably a few years older than me, gawked at me. Guess my Trus-T-Kleen shirt wasn’t what they were expecting.

“Princess, may I present my daughters, Catriona—” The silvery haired beauty wearing the burgundy dress bowed. “And Sorchu.” The stunning sister in blue bowed in turn.

“Nice to meet you.”

A deep voice echoed from the far side of the room. “Princess, I am Kaisin, Fiona’s Resonant and father to these three. Welcome to our home.”

How had I failed to notice the large, muscular man who had been sitting in an oversized chair next to what looked like a faux fire? Or maybe the fire was real. I didn’t know. It burned with blue and orange flames, but I wasn’t close enough to feel any heat. Like Addan, he was handsome. Huge. Muscled. He wore a uniform nearly identical to General Niemini’s, but all black. No gray. Was that because he was the lord of the house rather than a soldier? Why did Addan wear blue? What did all these colors mean? I had no idea. Kaisin was built like a damn tank, just like his son. He moved silently as he came forward to bow before me and I knew, like Addan, this man would be a very dangerous enemy.

“I—Nice to meet you.” I bowed a little, not sure if I was supposed to bow or nod my head or what.

And what was a Resonant? Was that what they called their husbands? Maybe that stupid translator thing the needle on Earth shoved into my skull wasn’t working properly.

“Come, Princess. Sit with us and we will discuss your future.” Fiona hooked her arm with mine and led me to the seating area where she’d been waiting with her daughters. There were two large sofas, each long enough to seat at least six or seven people, as well as multiple chairs all facing the center of the room. They all sat and looked at me expectantly. I wrung my hands in front of me, sure my smile looked

more like a grimace. “I’m sorry. I’m just too anxious to sit down right now.” They all stood at once. With a sigh, I shook my head. “No. Please. Sit. I just need to move around a little.”

Slowly, they each resumed their seat in turn, Addan last. I wanted to go curl up on his lap and let him hold me. That’s what I wanted. But that’s not what I was going to get.

Addan’s father cleared his throat and looked from his wife to General Niemini. “So, how are we going to remove Queen Alienor from the throne without starting a civil war?”

Addan

Civil War. My father was correct. The Peigi family, Paige’s mother in particular, had many stalwart allies who would flock to Paige’s side the moment they learned she had survived. But Queen Alienor would not be so welcoming. She had more than twenty years of rule to fortify her position as queen and wouldn’t willingly give up such power, even if it wasn’t rightfully hers any longer.

I knew what it was to have others die in my name, under my command, following my orders. As queen, every death would be Paige’s to bear, every decision, hers. The fate of our planet now rested on the shoulders of a female whose softness made my cock hard as a rock, whose passion made me want to devour her, whose humble nature would inspire more to sacrifice their lives to see her claim the throne.

No matter how much she refused the role, she could not escape it. And I couldn’t escape the role of loyal soldier. Nothing more. I would fight for her. Kill for her. Protect her with my life. But I could not hold her. Comfort her. Fuck her.

She was not mine. I needed to make those words a mantra so my heart and my cock would behave accordingly. Not. Mine.

Paige's fair face paled at the true seriousness of the situation. "Civil war? What are you talking about? How on Earth... God, that saying doesn't work here, does it?" she muttered. "Why would anyone fight over me?"

Yes, she didn't understand the power she had.

Over an entire planet.

Over me.

I needed to touch her. Soothe her. Pull her into my arms and vow to protect her from all enemies. I could not. I leaned back in my chair to get closer but stopped just short of reaching up to grab her hand. To my shock, she slid it close until her fingertips grazed my shoulder, the lightest contact. So close and yet so far out of reach because she had not claimed me.

I was not her Resonant.

She was betrothed to the current queen's son.

He was a spoiled, arrogant ass, but he was no fool. The moment he learned of Paige's existence, he would demand entrance to our home, press his rights, demand she obey centuries of law and tradition and wed him at once.

I would need to make sure I was far, far away on that day. On another continent.

Fuck, another planet. The urge to kill him would be nearly impossible to resist. If I were forced to watch him touch her?

A shudder raced through my system at these continued thoughts.

My mother answered Paige. “We will do everything we can to prevent a war, but not everything is up to us.” She turned to General Niemini. “Send word to our allies immediately. Use men you trust, General. No transmissions. Nothing in writing. If Queen Alienor learns the princess survived and is here on Insuri before we are ready to?—”

“No. Stop.” Paige interrupted and the three elders—my mother, my father, and General Niemini—turned to her as she continued. “Why do we need to remove the queen? I don’t know anything about being a queen. What’s wrong with letting Queen Alienor continue to rule?”

I turned to study Paige over my shoulder as she waited for someone in the room to answer her question. It could not be me. I was neither impartial nor logical, not when it came to her.

My mother, the matriarch and ruler of our family, cleared her throat. “Princess?—”

“Paige. Call me Paige.”

“Paige. So close to Peigi.” Mother’s blue eyes drifted away for a moment as if she was lost in a memory.

“Page-E.” Paige’s confused green eyes sought mine. “I still can’t believe that’s my alien last name. Is that my father’s last name? Who is my father? I’ve only heard about my mother.”

“No, dear. The royal line is passed through the mother’s family. Your father was Ambassador Lorient. His family is one of our staunchest allies. We will summon your father’s brother and his wife to meet you.”

Paige’s shoulders slumped. “Was? My father is dead, too?”

“He died in a tragic accident a few months after you were born,” my mother confirmed.

“That was no accident, Lady Fiona.” General Niemini’s grumbling made Paige gasp.

“No one was ever charged with murder,” my father insisted. “You are speculating, General.”

“My mother and my father were murdered?” Round, sad eyes met my gaze. “What kind of planet is this?”

Before I could begin to come up with a response, Paige turned her outrage on one more likely to know what happened all those years ago.

“Who did it? Who killed them, General? Who murdered my parents?”

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:34 am*

9

Paige

I waited for the general, or anyone in the room, to answer me.

My parents were dead.

Fine. That sucked, especially since this was the first I ever learned anything about them. But murdered?

Why? How? Who?

Who took them from me? I thought I'd just found them, but they'd been gone since before I could ever remember.

A low simmering rage narrowed my eyes and made my entire body shake. My hand clenched into a fist at Addan's back.

"I believe—" the general began. The older man seemed tentative in answering. Why?

Fiona interrupted before he could finish his sentence. "We do not know. There are security feeds at the queen's residence, however we have never been granted access—not only to those feeds—but to the rooms in the palace that have computer access."

"Your cousin, Queen Alienor, has many enemies," the general said finally.



I scoffed. “So? Apparently, so did my parents. These enemies murdered them, didn’t they? Does Queen Alienor have the same enemies? Have they tried to kill her, too?”

General Niemini moved to stand before me, hands clasped behind his back. He cleared his throat. “Princess, there are rumors—”

“We have no proof, General. Choose your words wisely.” Kaisin’s words made me nervous.

“No proof of what?”

“Suspensions. But to speak them aloud is treason and could cause everyone in this room to be executed at Queen Alienor’s command.”

My mouth dropped open.

General Niemini seemed to have warmed up to sharing information because he dropped a small bomb. “There are those among your mother’s allies who believe it was your mother’s cousin, Queen Alienor herself, who was behind the attack that took your mother’s life.”

Blood drained from my face. My own cousin? If it weren’t my parents who were dead, I’d laugh because it sounded so much like a daytime soap opera.

“What?” I sputtered. “Why didn’t you lead with that? And I’m supposed to marry her son? You are insane.”

I looked to Addan. His jaw was clenched, his gaze narrowed and if thoughts could kill, I assumed my soon-to-be-husband would be dead. Good. I’d love to see Addan tell the guy off. Say I was his and—

No! Bad thoughts!

“Prince Martainn is classically handsome, Paige,” Sorchu offered. To this point, she and her sister remained silent. “Well trained, too. Many females on our planet would sell their very souls to claim him, but he will wed you.”

Sorchu looked like a woman who read too many romance books that had the heroine falling for a prince. Sounded more like an incestuous frog to me, and no way was I kissing it.

If I was kissing anyone, it was Addan. His kisses were likely drugged, they were that potent. Addictive. God, my nipples hardened thinking about them.

“Princess—” Addan began.

I raised my hand, getting frustrated, in more ways than one. “Call me Paige. Please, all of you.” I glanced at Addan. “I think we’re way past this princess stuff, don’t you?”

His lips turned, but otherwise he remained stoic through all of this. No holding. No touching. No pulling me into his lap. No eating me out. No orgasms.

I wanted him to wrap me in his arms and tell me everything was going to be okay, then fuck me. Then tell me everything was going to be okay while he fucked me.

Yet we had an audience and even my horny vagina drew the line at exhibitionism with his family.

Addan tipped his head. “Very well. Paige, there is no proof. No evidence has ever been found to implicate Queen Alienor. As for the prince, your own mother betrothed you to him when you were an infant.”

“But?” I circled my finger in the air to get him to continue.

“There are many who believe she was behind the attacks. Queen Alienor had the most to benefit. She sabotaged Insuri’s membership in the Interstellar Coalition of Planets, revoked many of your mother’s laws within days of the attacks. She became very powerful when your mother died. And–”

“And what?”

Addan looked like he wanted to kill something with his bare hands. Or touch something. His gaze wandered to my breasts, clearly displayed by the very tight, hot pink shirt. “And wealthy.”

“The richest in five sectors.” Sorcha confirmed.

“The richest in five sectors?” What the hell did that mean?

“Yes,” Fiona agreed. “Rich enough to buy and sell your Earth ten times over.”

“Earth? The entire planet?”

“Yes.” There was not a trace of humor on Fiona’s face. She was dead serious. Who could buy and sell planets?

I processed what they were saying. It was like my brain was a computer and it was getting overloaded. Took me a minute. They all stared like I had two heads.

“So, my cousin, my mother’s cousin, who happens to be the queen of your entire planet–”

“Your planet, as well, Paige,” Addan gently reminded.

Whatever.

“My mother’s only surviving family might want to murder me on sight. Or, she might be innocent, and genuinely happy to see me, and excited by the thought that I am supposed to marry her son, who is also my cousin? Which is kind of gross to think about.”

General Niemini nodded. “Either outcome is possible, Princess. However, the choice may be taken from you.”

I frowned. “What? Why? What if she’s perfectly nice, and innocent, and doesn’t want to murder me? You’re saying I have to be queen anyway?”

“There are many who are suffering under her rule,” General Niemini spoke the traitorous words softly, as if Queen Alienor’s bad guys were listening. “Many of our people will be overjoyed to see her replaced by a true heir.”

My eyes widened, surprised. “Even me? A total stranger raised on another planet?” I glanced down at myself. The pants and shirt felt like armor now, like a reminder of who I was and where I came from. The clothes somehow kept me grounded in reality, because this place—this planet— was crazy.

“Even you,” the General confirmed. “Although Queen Alienor may not resist once you are married to her son. Do not worry that you and Prince Martainn are genetically close. You are no more than fourth, perhaps fifth cousins.”

I cringed. “I have no intention of marrying my cousin, or anyone else.”

I flicked my gaze to Addan, to his body and the clear bulge in his uniform pants. The bulge I knew oh so well. My mouth watered to taste it again.

To feel it filling me.

God, I was horny.

What the heck was wrong with me? After pretty much non-stop sex since I got here, how could I want more? My pussy was sore, but it was more of an ache now. A need.

Too bad Addan didn't want me as much as I wanted him. He hadn't said a word this whole time, not about wanting to be with me, not protesting about me marrying someone else. Not. One. Word. Dammit.

I had to shake my head to clear my thoughts. To get them back onto murder and overthrowing a monarch, not getting railed by a gorgeous, well endowed, skilled, dirty talking alien who seemed perfectly content to let me go, watch me marry some stupid prince.

GAH!

Think about the bad people! If this cousin really did kill my parents, then I wanted justice. I wanted revenge for her taking them from me. For pretty much ruining my entire life.

I took a deep breath, stiffened my spine. "If you all want me to actually consider being queen, then I want to see everything. Every report. Do you have video of my mother being killed? Or of my father's accident? I want to see it."

Fiona shook her head vehemently. "No, Paige. You cannot—"

"Absolutely not," Addan swore.

Kaisin shook his head.

“You should not be subjected to such violent, bloody images,” the general added.

“Oh, yes, I can. I’m the new queen, remember?” I set my hand on my chest. “On Earth, a queen gives orders and everyone else obeys. I want to know everything. I grew up dirt poor. I lived out of my car for two months when I was nineteen. I don’t think you people realize who you are dealing with. I’ve seen things no one should see.”

“What have you seen?” Addan whispered the question. “And who should I go to Earth and kill?”

“What do you mean you grew up with no money? You lived out of your car? Alone? What have you been doing on Earth all these years, if not training to rule? The module from the pod would have instructed whoever found you of your identity and true purpose. Why were you not properly prepared?” Fiona clasped her hands in her lap and got a look that would rival most police interrogators.

I sighed. “I was adopted. My parents never told me about an escape pod or anything else. I mean, it’s not like I’m Superman. No one found me on the side of the road in a space pod.” At least, not that I knew of.

They stared at me, blank faced.

“Okay, so no Superman here. My adoption records were sealed. I have no idea where I came from. My parents—the ones on Earth who raised me—divorced when I was young and neither one of them wanted the financial burden of raising a child that wasn’t their blood. I’ve worked since I was old enough to mow grass and hold a paint brush. Mostly, I’ve worked as a commercial cleaner that specializes in large offices and corporate buildings.”

“You are a...maidservant?” My sister’s voice held disbelief.

I pointed to my uniform shirt. “Trus-T-Kleen. ‘For a clean you can trust.’” When both of Addan’s sisters’ mouths dropped open, I cringed with embarrassment. Not for working. No. They knew nothing about Earth or how to survive there. But that I was so different, so... behind on everything here. I felt like an imposter, not a queen.

“To answer your question, Lady Fiona, I’ve cleaned a lot of toilets. Mopped a lot of floors. I’m not special. I have no idea how to be a queen, but if Queen Alienor had my parents killed, then I will use whatever power I have to finish her.”

10

A ddan

My cock couldn't be any harder.

Paige was one moment shy and wary. Another lost and overwhelmed. And another fierce and filled with the need for vengeance.

It was a potent combination that I could hardly resist.

I eyed Paige with need. As if she was the very source of my every want.

I craved her.

The more I learned of her, the more fiercely I felt our connection. Not a real one. Not a Resonant bond, no. But I wanted to teach and awaken her to her new life here on Insuri. To show her, one orgasm at a time, how powerful she was. And to protect the wise, powerful ruler she would soon be.

Of her transformation, I had no doubt.

My mother stood in the center of the room like a statue, commanding attention as easily as she drew breath. "Well, your motivation is... impressive. Let us leave this discussion for now as it will take two days for the general's messengers to arrive and then escort your allies to our home. No one knows you are here. We will use the time to educate you about our laws and your responsibilities as queen."



That was a logical answer. We could remain and talk and talk, but we had no proof. No allies. No plan. We had nothing but time and I knew how I wanted to spend it.

Between Paige's thighs.

"I am sure you are exhausted from your transport."

Mother didn't know that she was more likely tired from me fucking her without pause since I found her beneath my desk.

"The General will send his messengers to your father's family and the rest of your mother's loyal supporters. Sorcha will summon our best dressmakers and stylists to arrive tomorrow. We shall furnish you with gowns and personal items."

Paige glanced at me, and I tried to imagine her in royal ballgowns with a crown on her head. My imagination failed me. All I could see was her bare skin, her wet pussy open and ready for me, the way her lips looked, swollen and puffy after I'd kissed them. No matter what clothing she might wear, I would always prefer her completely bare.

"For now, Catriona will show you to your rooms," Mother said as I kept thinking about our new queen naked and riding my cock. "You can bathe or nap. Catriona will help you find some things to borrow until your wardrobe is ready. Anything you require in order to feel comfortable in our home this evening, speak it, and Catriona will make sure you are taken care of."

"Do you have any history books about my family? I'd like to know more about my mother and father. The planet. Everything." Paige frowned and seemed to transform into an entirely different person, changing from defiant and determined, to playful between one heartbeat and the next. "I'd also like a toothbrush and some comfy pajamas." She ran her hand through her riot of red curls. My hand twitched at my

side, eager to repeat the motion. “Shampoo? Slippers? I’m not really hungry, but I could really use some dark chocolate right now. And maybe a margarita.” She grinned, the mischief back in her eyes. “Or a few shots of whiskey? An entire bottle of wine? I’m not picky.” She rubbed her hand over her eyes and sighed. “I know it’s what, mid-afternoon here? Is it too early to start drinking?”

Catriona came forward and held out her hand. “Come, Princess. I will show you to your rooms and make sure you have everything you need.”

To my disappointment, Paige took my sister’s hand and allowed herself to be led away... out of my reach.

First time in my life I felt the urge to do harm to one of my sweet sisters.

Paige, Ten Hours Later

For some reason, with a little distance from Addan, I had clarity. Some, at least. I was still driven by the lusty need to have him bend me over every posh horizontal surface in my bedroom. It had high ceilings, a supersized bed with plush and sumptuous bedding that would be perfect to be tucked beneath with Addan.

What was wrong with me? Addan, Addan, Addan!

Yes, that was what I sounded like when he made me come.

Focus. The room. It had a fireplace. Thick area rugs. Glossy floors. Floor to ceiling windows that looked out upon... well, it was too dark to see, but I was sure the grounds outside were also aristocratic and spectacular.

I couldn't settle. The bed was going to swallow me with the thick goose down. Wait. Did they have geese here?

"Geese," I muttered. "I'm thinking about geese. And sex with Addan. All the sex with Addan."

Thankfully he was somewhere else in this gigantic castle—probably planning their stupid war—and couldn't hear my stupid thoughts or the whimpering need of my desperate vagina.

I might have been born to be their queen, which was ridiculous all by itself. However, that meant I was also supposed to rule an entire planet. Again, ridiculous.

I could barely pay my bills. Keep a roof over my head. Remember to buy milk or pick up quarters for the old-fashioned laundromat I used to wash my Trus-T-Kleen uniform. At home, I didn't have time to rest. Lounge around. Think about how to rule an entire freaking planet.

Yet here I was, idle. I didn't like to be idle, even for a night.

I didn't know how to be idle. I'd spent as much time as I could stand reading about the royal family and the history of Insuri. Despite the fact that all the women in the history books looked shockingly similar to me, I still felt like I was reading about strangers. My brain was full of random facts and images going back hundreds of years. Mentally, I was exhausted. Physically, I had energy to burn. I was used to working all day, not sitting around sipping tea and reading books. Chill and relax were two words not in my vocabulary.

"Two jobs does that to a woman," I grumbled. My night with Addan had me craving more. I needed to do something. To stop this ache.

Food. I could shove food in my mouth instead of Addan's dick.

Although, he tasted so good. Then he'd reward me for my efforts, shove that glorious dick in my—

"Gah!" I tossed my hands in the air. I had to stop. If he wanted me, he would already be here, in my room. In my goddamn bed, like he was last night.

I was hungry—and not for dick. The meal Addan's mother served—or her servants served—had been something from a five-star, gourmet restaurant. Beautifully

presented with tiny portions and fancy sauces.

It was delicious, but I had no idea what I ate. Did Insuri have cows? Chickens?

“They have geese,” I said aloud.

What had I eaten? Not dark chocolate. That was for sure. And the wine they brought me tasted like someone stirred the contents of the glass with a piece of charred wood. In the end, I’d settled for water and a cup of tepid tea made from the bark of some fancy Insuri tree leaves. Bitter and unsettled. Like my nerves.

I’d all but squirmed in my seat in my pretty borrowed dress as I watched Addan eat and lick his lips. And swallow. And... breathe.

I needed junk food. Something sweet and salty and could take care of all my cravings.

I stared at the closed double doors that led into the central hallway. I could go out there. I was the queen. Surely, they wouldn’t mind if I found their kitchen and had a late-night snack.

My stomach grumbled again, louder this time. “Food. I need food.” My pussy clenched. “I need sex, too. But food. I’ll take food.”

Determined, I opened the door, peeked out. The hallway, with the chandeliers and glittering embellishments on the walls, practically sparkled. But it was deserted. Grabbing a flowing pale pink robe, I slipped it on over my matching simple nightdress. They were completely unadorned, but no embellishment was necessary. The fabric was gossamer soft and slightly transparent, as if made by... hummingbirds or unicorns.

I stepped out, quietly shut my door behind me. Looking left, then right, I didn't know which way to go. I chose right since I knew left led to the entry of this huge-ass alien mansion.

The sound of my footsteps was swallowed by the rugs. There was a back stairwell, less grand than the front curved one, but still something to be proud of.

"How many people clean this place?" I whispered, making my way down one floor, then the next. Once I went below ground level, the stairs lost the carpet and became more serviceable. I recognized the shift between family and servant areas. I felt confident the kitchen would be on this lower level. I couldn't imagine Addan's mom getting a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or making beef stew. Ever.

Meandering through the serpentine hallways, I found the kitchen. It was expansive with not one, but two, center islands. Stainless steel appliances were all over, although I doubted Insuri had stainless steel, and I didn't know if they cooked like I did.

Opening and closing doors, I finally found the fridge. Pulled out a pitcher with a pink liquid inside. Sniffed.

"Fruity."

I might rule the planet—ha!—but I didn't dare drink from the pitcher, so I set it on the counter to grab a glass.

I inspected and sniffed various food items until I found what seemed like cheese. "Yes, cheese."

A collection of rolls was under a small glass dome on one of the islands. It took a few minutes, but I found a knife, a pan and figured out how to turn on the stove, which

didn't have a flame, but the surface glowed a bright blue. It grew hot as I held my hand over it.

I prepared the cheese and bread, then set it in the pan. While letting it start to crisp up, I returned to the fridge and found leftover... salad from dinner. Something else that was red and yellow and smelled good. I set my snack on the island, then flipped my sandwich. It sizzled and the scent of melting goodness filled the air.

It made me smile. I wasn't the type to complain. My mother had taught me that lesson, the hard way. When I was young, I either ate what we had in the house, or I starved. The day I moved out and got my first job, I swore I would never go hungry again. No reason to break that promise to myself just because I was on another planet.

Going down the line of cabinets, I found the drinking cups. They looked like fancy crystal that would cost a fortune to replace if my clumsy-ass dropped one, but I was going to pretend they were regular, cheap glasses. I poured the pink liquid into the bottom of one and took a sip.

Oh, yes. Perfect. Like strawberry lemonade but sweeter. I downed every drop and reached for the pitcher.

“What are you doing?”

Addan's voice had me jumping and fumbling my crystal glass. I nearly dropped it, caught it against my stomach with my forearm, and thanked god the glass was empty.

“You scared the shit out of me,” I said, setting my hand over my heart. I took a deep breath and tried to calm my out-of-control pulse. The scent of him mingled with the aroma of melting cheese—or I hoped it was cheese.

He bowed ever so slightly. “I apologize, but why are you in the kitchen?” His eyes

flicked over the room as if he'd never been here before. Maybe he hadn't.

I went to the stove and checked my sandwich. Seemingly done, I pushed a few buttons, and the blue light went off.

"I'm making a snack."

"We have cooks for that," he replied matter-of-factly.

"I can cook my own grilled cheese."

"What is cheese?" he asked, his brow forming a deep V.

"It's, um... milk from an animal that's been processed and fermented and made melty and gooey."

His head cocked as if he didn't know those adjectives.

Grabbing the pan, I tilted it so the sandwich slid onto the bare, clean counter. Picking up the sandwich, I tore it in two.

I smiled. "See? Melty and gooey."

"That is not milk from an animal. It is craver, a—"

I held up my hand and half a sandwich. "I don't want to know what it is. It smells good and I'm hungry." I took a bite and closed my eyes. Whatever craver was, it was good. Better than cheese.

Addan's growl had my eyes opening. "Do not make such sounds while eating," he demanded. "Else I will think you have more needs than just slaking your hunger."



Yes, I had more needs than slaking hunger. So many more.

I licked my lips, and his gaze dropped to follow the action. “Try it.”

He took the half I held to him, then took a bite.

“Good, isn’t it?” I asked, shoving a huge bite into my mouth.

He swallowed and nodded; his blue gaze laser focused on my mouth. “You taste better.”

I blushed, which was ridiculous since we’d done all kinds of very naughty things.

I squirmed at the memory, wanting him to do that again. And again.

“I shall make you a plate,” he said, heading around the island to get the rest of the mystery items I pulled from the fridge.

“I can do it.” I ate the last of my half, then wiped my hands on the luxurious silk pajama pants Sorcha gave me. Did they have silkworms? I’d add them to geese and stainless steel. The matching top hung off one shoulder like an oversized T-shirt. The fabric was soft, a rich brown color that made me think of milk chocolate and clung to every curve. Did nothing to hide my suddenly perky nipples. What could I say? My boobs liked this guy. A lot. So did the rest of me.

“You are the queen.”

I frowned at that answer.

“A queen has to eat,” I countered.

“Food that someone has prepared for you.”

“Addan, I’m not going to wake up a cook when I can make a late-night snack on my own.”

“You are—”

“If you say queen, I’ll get really mad.”

He pursed his lips.

Who was I kidding? I was already mad. And hurt. On the verge of tears, when moments ago I’d been just fine without him.

Grabbing the dirty pan, I went to the sink and turned the water on. My movements were jerky, irritated as I scrubbed the melted goo from the pan. Was he only here to lecture me? Reprimand me for what I was not doing right when he already fucked everything up? He should have been with me all night, at my side at dinner—not seated on the opposite end of the long table, explaining the history books to me instead of making me figure out how to ask my NPU to read them inside my head—which was really freaking cool and totally freaky at the same time.

Besides that, he had practically ignored me at dinner. And after. When he should have been naked in my bed, holding me after we were both wrung out and exhausted from too many orgasms, promising to help me figure out how to be queen of his stupid planet.

The pan banged against the sink when I fumbled it. Shit. Now everyone in the house would wake up.

Addan came up behind me, pressed his front against my back. His arms came around

me to take the pan away.

“I won’t have my queen washing dishes like a common servant.” His gentle words made the pain in my chest tighten from ache to burn. How dare he be nice to me now? Pretend he cared now?

I let him take the pan. He set it in the sink, turned off the water and pried the sponge-ish thing I’d been using to scrub it from my fingers. “Princess...Paige.”

“What?”

“You are upset. Tell me what you need.”

Hah! As if. No way I was going to beg him to act like he was madly in love with me, couldn’t keep his hands off me, and wanted to spend the rest of the night giving me orgasms. He didn’t move away, and I had just enough room to spin around and face him. Then poke him in the chest. Seemed safer than wrapping my arms around him and begging him to care. That tactic never ended well, not for me. Not with my parents, or anyone else. Ever.

So, I focused on what I could deal with right now. I won’t have my queen washing dishes like a common servant...

“You remember what I was wearing when I got here? My uniform for my job on Earth. I cleaned businesses, entire buildings. I scrubbed toilets, mopped up all kinds of messes. I’ve had cooking jobs. Dishwasher jobs. Receptionist jobs. Any job so I could pay my rent.”

“That was on Earth, where your true identity was hidden.”

I shook my head, poked at him again. “The Earth me is my true identity. I wasn’t

pretending to clean the Brides Center. I wasn't pretending to make ends meet. I might be queen here, but this is the queen you get. One who makes her own grilled... whatever sandwiches."

"Craver." He was quiet, his dark gaze attentive and fixed on me. Assessing. "You've barely slept since your arrival. You should be in bed."

With him, yes. We'd had sex more times than I could count in his quarters. Last night, he hadn't let me sleep. Not that I'd complained. Now, everything had changed. He started calling me Princess. Hadn't touched me since he found out I had a betrothed, even though I told him—and everyone else—I was not marrying my stupid cousin.

"Is your room not to your liking?" he asked.

"It's beautiful. My mind is a little overwhelmed," I admitted. "There's too much to think about. It would be great if I could make my brain stop."

Reaching out, he rested both hands on the counter, trapped me in the circle of his arms. As if I'd even try to escape. "If the Princess commands, I could assist. Ensure you cease thinking for the rest of the night."

I huffed. "I don't think that's possible, but it's a nice idea."

"Say it, Paige. Command me to assist you."

What was he up to? The way he was staring at me made me think he wanted to get me naked. No, more than that. That he wanted to ravage me. That he was holding back. But if that was the case, why didn't he just say so? Why had he acted like he was indifferent all night? Like I was nothing to him?

Was it because I was engaged? Because I was going to be his queen? Did finding out who I was make him not want to be with me again? Gah! I hated being in my head this much. Thinking. Forget thinking. I was over it. Besides, what was he going to do? Pull out alien Monopoly or a deck of playing cards? Well, fuck it. Even that was better than sitting alone in my room, staring at the ceiling, wondering if my cousin, the queen, wanted me dead. “Okay, Addan. I command you to make me stop thinking.”

He leaned down and tossed me over his shoulder.

“Addan!”

“By your command, I vow you won’t remember your own name when I’m done with you.” The sexy growl in his voice made my pussy instantly wet.

“Put me down! I can walk!” I whisper-shouted as he carried me out of the kitchen and up the stairs. The hand he used to rub my bottom through the thin pajamas was driving every sane thought from my mind already.

“Not tonight. Tonight, I will service my queen. It will be my pleasure.”

12

A ddan

It will be my pleasure.

It would be. Finally. Finally, I had her in my arms. After spending the day so close and yet unable to touch her... I was soothed, but also unbelievably aroused. I didn't want to put her down. I wanted to keep right on walking and kidnap her away, so she was all mine. Yes, over my shoulder in... fuck. I couldn't carry my queen like this! What the fuck was wrong with me? Carefully—yet while not slowing my steps toward her rooms—I shifted her until she was held close to my chest, her head tucked beneath my chin.

Much better. I grunted in satisfaction.

When the door to her chambers was shut behind us, leaving us alone with the most sumptuous bed in the land, I grudgingly set her upon her feet.

Carefully.

She stood before me, skin flushed, breaths ragged as I ran my fingertips up and down her arms. She was covered from neck to ankles in a simple translucent pale pink robe and sleeping gown, yet she had never looked more alluring. Her nipples were pebbled, and their dark color could be seen even through the two layers of fabric.

My mouth watered to taste. To lick and suck and bite—

No. She was my queen. I wanted to defile her, give in to every filthy thought I had about her, but I must be reverent. Undoing the sash about her waist, I slipped the robe from her shoulders, letting it fall whisper soft to the floor.

“Addan?” she whispered. A gentle shiver ghosted over her.

“Yes?” Her skin was so soft. Warm. I couldn’t stop looking, caressing.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

My hands stilled. “Preparing you.”

She looked up at me through dark lashes. “Preparing me for what? Don’t you...don’t you want to any longer?”

I blinked. Saw her confusion and need in her gaze.

“Of course.” I opened my pants and pushed them down enough for her to see how much I did want her.

As she looked at me, her tongue flicked out and she licked her lip, which made my cock pulse and pre-cum spurt from the slit.

“Then why aren’t you bending me over that desk?” She pointed to the writing table in front of the tall window. “Or pushing me against the wall? Or fucking me in the bed?”

I practically growled at all the options she shared. I knew how responsive she was to my touch. To the deep thrusts of my cock. I knew what she looked like, how she sounded when she came. How amazing it was to see her and fuck her, in all the positions she mentioned. Because we’d already done all of them. But that was when

she was Paige from Earth, not the long-lost queen of Insuri.

Gripping the base of my cock, I stroked it from root to tip. “I shall service my queen.”

Her mouth fell open and she took a step away. Watching me work myself, she said, “You... you want to service me?”

I nodded. “Yes, it is my greatest honor.”

“And if I want you to service me like you did in your quarters? Rough. Hard. Where you took control?”

Fuck, I was going to come from the memory alone.

“If that is what you wish.”

“You’re holding back. This is because I’m a princess... or the queen now?”

“Yes. I forgot my place in the kitchen.”

She took another step away, then her fingers went to her shoulders and the little straps there. Gently, she worked them down, the sleeping gown falling, first to catch on the tips of her perfect breasts, to her waist, and then skim down her long legs.

She stood before me bare. Perfect. FUCK.

“As you said, I’m your queen.”

I nodded, transfixed. “Yes.” Her stunning body had reduced me to single syllable replies.



“Then fuck me like I’m your queen.”

My eyes flew up to meet hers. She was giving me an order. As a male, as her subject, I would comply. I wanted to be her Resonant, to give her exactly what she needed to curb her insatiable need for the rest of our lives, but that was not to be.

That was why I held back. Why I had to service her. I would not think about her betrothal. I would not think about Prince Martainn touching her. Fucking her. Planting his seed in her womb. I would not.

“You know how I want it,” she said. Fuck, did I. “You’re the only one who does.”

I was the only one.

I stared at her for a moment. Debated her words. Saw the need. The truth. I’d felt and fucked her until she was sated and replete with orgasms.

I did that. Only me.

Yes, only me. The prince might wed her, but I’d always have her body. She’d remember I was the one who satisfied her. Who gave her everything she desired. I’d make her beg and scream, writhe and whimper. No because no one else would ever give her greater pleasure. More orgasms. More anything.

Resolved and my mission fortified, I dropped to my knees on the thick carpet. Hooked a hand around her hip and pulled her to me. Fuck, she smelled good. Like the stickiest, sweetest candy of the land.

Sliding my hand down her bare thigh, I lifted her knee and set it on my shoulder. “I shall worship my queen from my knees.”

Then I put my mouth upon her and made her wild.

13

P aige

With his big hands cupping my bottom, Addan held me in place for him to eat me out. He'd done it before, but this time? It was as if it was his goal in life to get me off. His tongue was flicking over my clit in some magical way. My hand was in his hair, holding him in place because if he moved, I might die.

Yeah, he was servicing me. But that term was bullshit. Some Insuri male thing where they subjugated themselves to women to meet their needs. That was what sex was in general. Good sex, at least. To satisfy a lover. To see to their needs.

And boy, was Addan doing that. Instead of calling him general, I should call him a gigolo. This was what it was. He was servicing me. He had at the transport center as well. On his desk and in his quarters.

That term was what he believed. I loved that he wanted to take care of my sexual needs. Loved. Men on Earth should be so driven.

His actions stung at first, especially when he didn't want to service me as a woman any longer, but as queen. Queen! He should be doubling down and fucking me unconscious, but apparently he thought it meant I was to be fucked under the cover of darkness with my nightgown pulled up. All missionary and boring just to satisfy me. That he couldn't debase the queen. Couldn't defile her. Or treat her roughly.

Well, that wasn't going to satisfy me. Hell, no. Not after the night we spent in his

quarters when he did all those things.

“Addan,” I cried, when I came a second time because of his persuasive tongue and fingers. This was satisfying the hell out of me.

But it wasn’t enough.

My legs gave way and he gently lowered me to the carpet. I watched as he wiped his glistening mouth with the back of his hand. His gaze practically burned into me. His cock was hard and curved up toward his abdomen. Practically purple and angry because he was neglecting his own needs for mine.

“More,” I said. It was a plea. A beg. But to Addan, it was an order. He wanted to please me. He wanted to fuck me hard and wild and in all the illegal-in-America ways, but he was an Insurian male. He’d do all that, but only after I gave him the proverbial green light.

Oh, he had all the green lights. I just had to... what? Train him? Teach him how a queen liked to be fucked?

Maybe. Because the only other queen around was Alienor. I didn’t know anything about her, but I was very confident Addan didn’t want to fuck her. So this was new to him. Hell, I was the only other queen on the planet. I would give him grace in his thoughts, but I would also use my newfound power to get him to do what I wanted. What I knew he wanted, too.

And that was to put that huge dick inside me and fuck me hard.

A smile spread across my face. Even though he was the only one who truly knew, I’d show him—again—how I liked it. How I wanted it. To get him to see me not as a queen, but a woman who liked to get dirty.

Rolling over, I pushed up onto my hands and knees facing away from him. Tilting my hips, I showed him everything. I glanced at him over my shoulder. “Fuck me, Addan.”

With a swipe of his thumb across his lower lip, he looked his fill. Because I knew he could see everything.

“Now,” I ordered. I might have all the power, but he would be the one in control.

His gaze flared, then darkened impossibly further. As if the tether on his control finally snapped, he grabbed my hips, nudged my knees wide with one of his own, lined himself up and...

Thrust deep. It moved me up the carpet, but he pulled me back. He went so deep he bottomed out. There was a bite of pain along with the insane stretching my pussy had to make to fit him in. Fit? Crammed, more like it.

And it was exactly what I needed.

“Yes,” I hissed, pushing my hips back onto him. “Fuck your queen.”

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*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 5:34 am*

14

A ddan

Fuck your queen.

Gods, she felt amazing. Hot and wet, so tight her walls rippled to adjust to my size. Holding her hips, I had her right where I wanted.

Where, it seemed, she wanted to be as well.

Turning her head, she glanced over her shoulder so her eyes held mine. I felt her looking into my very soul. This might not be how a queen should be fucked, but she was my queen, and this was what she wanted.

No, demanded.

I pulled back so my cock was barely inside her snug channel, then rammed home.

Yes, rammed.

She buckled, falling to her forearms, but I held her in place. This was even better, the angle. The depth I could reach.

“More.”

More? I stilled, but then her pussy clenched around me. Hot. Tight.

“Fuck,” I growled, then took her hard. It felt too good. She felt too good. I wasn’t going to last.

But then she moaned. Low and deep, the same sound she made when I took her every time we were tucked away in my quarters. As I gripped her and fucked her into the carpet, I didn’t see a queen. I saw Paige. Wild. Responsive. Eager.

“You want more?” I asked, practically a snarl as I drilled her. Flesh smacked against flesh. She moaned. Whimpered. Even pleaded.

“Yes.”

I pulled out.

“NO!” she cried, not knowing my intentions.

She learned them quick enough when I used my legs to push hers together, then pinned them tight between mine. Then, then, I worked my way back into her pussy.

“Oh my God!”

“Yes, Paige. Take me. All of me.”

This position made her impossibly tighter. She’d feel every inch even more.

“Addan,” she moaned. Her head popped up, her long hair falling over her bare back. I took the opportunity to reach and grab those long silky strands and wrap them around my fingers.

To pull slightly.

To anchor her in place.

“Take me. You’ll come on my cock like this, then when you’re filled with my cum, your greedy pussy wanting more, you’ll ride me. You’ll—”

“Oh my God, I’m going to come from your dirty talk.”

I grinned as I thrust deep. My balls tightened and I felt the orgasm building at the base of my spine. I crushed the feeling with years of discipline. Held myself back. A female came first, no matter her royal standing.

Instead of playing with her clit, which I knew would be sensitive from my mouth, I raised my hand and licked my thumb, then grabbed her again. This time, I set my hand so my thumb slid between the taut cheeks of her ass and found that tight little hole.

“ADDAN!” she cried.

Her pussy flooded with arousal at the touch.

“You want me here, Paige? Does my queen want me here?” I pressed slightly as I moved the pad of my thumb in tight circles.

“Oh... God?—”

“My queen. Mine. Come for me. Now.” I hadn’t thought about issuing the queen a command. Giving her an order. Queens of old had executed foolish males for less. But I could not regret them. I meant them. She was mine. I knew the law. Didn’t fucking care. My words were true. She would always be mine.

As she had in my private quarters at Alpha Station, her body responded as if it, too,



knew she was mine. A scream tore from her throat as she strangled my cock with her pussy. Her ass clenched as well, her whole body going taut.

Fuck, she was amazing.

There was nothing I could do to hold off my own orgasm. It took me with such force I felt like I'd been hit by a transport shuttle. My grip tightened as I held myself deep inside her. Spurt after spurt filled Paige until I was empty, my soul poured into her.

If I only had a few more days to do this. To seduce her. Pleasure her. Activate her resonance. If I did not, her birthing day would arrive. Insuri law, and her royal blood, would dictate her fate. And mine. I would have no choice but to give her up.

So be it. I would make the most of the time we did have. Do everything in my power to activate her resonance, addict her to my touch. My body.

This time, I was the one who said it "More."

15

Paige

I stared at the mirror, blinking like my reflection might change if I focused hard enough.

The woman looking back at me wasn't me. Not really. Sure, the green eyes and riot of curls were the same—well, not exactly the same. My hair was magically tamed into an intricate up-do, a crown of braids threaded with tiny golden chains and jewels that sparkled under the soft, golden lights of the room. The gown, too, didn't belong to the me I'd been back on Earth. It was so far from my Trus-T-Kleen uniform it was laughable.

This was the queen's uniform. Ha!

At least if I looked like this, maybe I could actually get inside Queen's Castle and try to figure out who murdered my parents. I thought about what Addan's parents had said. The others too. What they'd hinted at since they had no proof. On Earth, I'd have to sneak about, searching drawers and desks and even laptops for incriminating letters and emails.

I wasn't a private investigator, and this was space. SPACE.

That meant fancy, complicated computers. Technology I couldn't even imagine. I'd transported across the galaxy! There had to be some proof in the palace about my parents' murder and the overthrowing of the royal family. Right?

If Queen Alienor really was guilty, then the information would be in her home. Queen's Castle. The most protected place on the planet. Which meant the data was safe from people like me who wanted the truth.

I didn't want to believe my own cousins were killers. I refused to believe it without proof. I needed access. Needed to snoop. Needed to know what happened. Desperately. And I wasn't getting inside the palace wearing my hot pink work polo and threadbare khaki pants.

The skirt fanned out like something from an old fairy tale, layer upon layer of shimmering gold fabric swirling around me. Light as air and cool like the richest satin. The dark blue bodice was snug, the design simple yet commanding, with intricate, golden embroidery at the neckline. I had no idea my boobs could look so good. The shimmering accents caught the light as I turned slightly, reminding me of stars sparkling against a midnight blue sky.

I'd never, not once in my life, compared my clothes to... anything.

Behind me, Sorchia adjusted the hem of her dress. She was dressed in a deep black gown, fitted through the bodice and waist but with a cascade of gauzy, shimmering fabric that trailed behind her like liquid light. The silver of her hair, left loose to frame her delicate features, glittered with tiny star-shaped pins that matched the silver filigree of her necklace. It was obvious this was normal for her. She didn't stare at herself as if she was on a makeover show or if someone was impersonating her.

Me? I felt like an impersonator. A very well dressed one.

"You look... incredible," Sorchia said softly, stepping up beside me. Her smile was kind and open, not a hint of mean girl spirit where she'd tell me the color made me look sallow or it would look better on her. No, she was just downright nice. And she looked like her brother, which was a problem because I spent the night with him

getting hard-core railed.

Naughty and nice. This planet was giving me whiplash. And amazing orgasms. And stunning clothes.

“She looks exactly like the queen,” Catriona added, her voice quieter, more wary.

Catriona, standing just behind Sorcha, wore a gown of rich emerald, its elegant lines emphasizing her statuesque frame. The neckline, subtly adorned with jewels, reflected the blue of her piercing eyes. Her silver-white hair was twisted into a sleek chignon, with a single emerald comb holding it in place. She stood with her arms crossed, a faintly guarded expression on her face.

She didn’t mean Queen Alienor. It seemed she meant the queen her entire family wished was still alive and still on the throne. The queen Addan had spent hours this very morning teaching me about. He’d brought me more books and spent hours answering every question I could think of, and some that hadn’t crossed my mind until he was already answering them. It was as if he could read my mind. With all the sex and orgasms he’d been giving me, maybe he could. He seemed to know exactly how to touch me to make me lose my mind.

I swallowed, not seeing any part of my former self in the reflection staring back at me. His sisters were right. I’d seen the portrait of my mother before Addan brought me to their home. I’d thought it was like looking at another person, someone unreachable and perfect. Now, standing here, I felt like I was staring at her ghost. Tears threatened as I felt close to her in this moment. That I was where she wanted me to be, even though she’d sent me in an escape pod to a far-off planet. That I was in the role I was destined to have. To follow in her footsteps. To not only look like her but perhaps rule the planet with her gentle and ordered approach that had been revered and loved by all.

“Wow,” Sorchia said, stepping closer, her silvery hair swishing around her shoulders as she studied me. As if she, too, now truly believed I might be more than some random woman who’d accidentally arrived on her planet. “Paige, have you ever seen yourself like this?”

I shook my head and swallowed hard.

“Not even close,” I admitted. My voice wavered as the seamstress and the ladies responsible for my hair and makeup bowed deeply and left the room. They should be really dang proud of themselves for this transformation. To them, I was the ugly duckling they turned into a well-dressed swan.

Since this afternoon, when they’d led me into the bath, they’d all been bowing and acting like I was made from spun glass. They were afraid to meet my eyes or even talk in my presence. If it wouldn’t have hurt their feelings, I’d have laughed at the absurdity.

They had no idea who I really was. None. I never felt fragile when I was scrubbing toilets or arguing with my landlord about the broken water heater. It probably took them twice as long as usual because of my rough hands, horrible nails and hair that never once had a hot oil treatment or quality cut.

Standing here looking like a Holiday Barbie didn’t magically turn me into one. Looking like a queen didn’t make me feel like royalty, either.

But none of them knew that. It was clear I was now a visible reminder of a political shift for the entire planet.

Me.

ME.

Catriona straightened and stepped back with a disapproving frown. Her tone shifted. “If you don’t mind a suggestion, princess.”

I gave her a gentle glare.

“Paige,” she corrected. “You’ll need to carry yourself differently now. People will see you as royalty, whether you feel like it or not.”

Was she reading my mind or what? Did it matter? She wasn’t wrong.

“Okay,” I said, wondering specifically what she was talking about.

“If you’d... if—”

“Spit it out,” I said on a laugh. “Do I have a boogie or something?”

She frowned, clearly not knowing what that was. Didn’t Insurians get them? God, if they didn’t, I was going to feel even more out of place.

“Roll your shoulders back.”

I blinked and did as she requested. “That is what you find wrong with me?”

She laughed. “There is nothing wrong with you. But making that small change makes you taller and more... queenly.”

If only that was all it really took.

“And it makes your breasts look spectacular in that dress,” Sorchia added with a grin.

“While you want me to own it, I feel like I’m in a costume,” I admitted. “This outfit

on Earth is only seen in fairy tales.”

And I definitely wasn’t in one of those.

This wasn’t me. I curled my toes inside the soft slippers and wished I had my clunky, white leather tennis shoes back. At least in them, if I had to kick someone in the shins, I knew it wouldn’t hurt me. If I tried to kick someone in these, I’d probably break a few toes.

“Then wear it well,” Catriona replied. Her tone wasn’t harsh, but it wasn’t soft, either. “It matters more than you realize. Our family risks much, supporting you.”

Oh, well, if that ominous tone and wording didn’t add unwanted pressure.

“What do you mean?” I asked, confused.

“Catriona, no. We are not talking about politics and war right now.” Sorcha lifted her skirt and fluffed it a bit, admiring herself in the long mirror. “Let’s talk about something else.”

It was as if she could just... fluff her skirt and her problems could be forgotten. Or at least pushed aside. It was clear to me, staring at my own reflection, that good hair products and clothes weren’t going to make any of my thrust-upon-me problems go away. Maybe I was supposed to roll my shoulders back because more issues were going to fall right on them.

“What, instead, do you wish to discuss, sister?” Catriona’s frown deepened, but at least Addan’s super-serious sister wasn’t directing her anger at me.

Sorcha bounced a little on her heels, clapping her hands together. “So, tell us about men on Earth. What are they like?”

“What?” I turned, startled.

“You want to talk about aliens?” Catriona asked, looking appalled.

I bit my lip at how they thought Earth guys were aliens. To them, they were. Since I’d never really had any success dating any of them, maybe they had been for me, too.

“Aren’t you curious?” Sorchia asked her sister, who looked sheepish and actually blushed. “See?!”

Sorchia laughed. “Come on! It’s just us girls, Paige. Tell me—what are Earth men like? Are they tall? Muscled? Handsome? Romantic?”

Romantic? I snorted, then shrugged my rolled back shoulders. “Some, sure. But most? Not so much.”

Sorchia tilted her head, a curious look crossing her face. “What do you do when you find one you like? Do you... claim one for yourself like we do here?”

“Claim a man? No, not really. Or I don’t think so,” I said, confused. “They ask you out. Maybe take you to dinner. Eventually, if they’re serious and a lot of time has passed to get to know each other, they propose. But it’s not... instinctive.”

Sorchia gasped. “They ask you out?”

“They wish to take you places. Do fun things,” I clarified.

“They propose?” she asked next. Her mouth opened and closed like a fish. “With words? The males?”

I frowned. “Well, yeah. How else would they do it? I mean, I’ve heard about some



grand gestures like putting a ring in a cake or skywriting, but it's pretty much the same thing."

Catriona cut in, her tone sharper. "So, you expect a man who's interested in you to make it clear. To ask you to be his mate?"

"Yes." I hesitated, catching the weight of her question. "Why do you two look like I said puppies on Earth have two heads? Isn't that normal dating practice here?"

"For you, maybe." Catriona's eyes narrowed slightly, studying me. "For us, Resonance speaks louder than words."

"Resonance?" I asked, feeling a prickle of unease. Addan's father introduced himself as Fiona's Resonant.

I was about to find out what that meant. Was it an alien thing?

"Resonance," Catriona repeated. "When an Insuri female is in the presence of her perfect mate, her body reacts. It's... undeniable. The pull, the desire. That's how we know who we belong to. Once Resonance happens, there's no turning back. The bond must be honored. Denying it can cause physical pain."

I froze. When I first arrived on Insuri... when I'd been on my knees beneath Addan's desk.

Am I your Resonant? Is this a claiming?

He'd asked me that, but I'd been too overwhelmed by transporting and being shot at to understand his question. I'd ignored it because of being so horny for his big cock.

Oh shit. The ache I'd felt since meeting Addan... the way my body reacted to his

presence...the way I couldn't stop thinking about him...couldn't stop wanting him. His touch. His kiss. His cock inside me.

Even now, my mouth watered, and my pussy clenched in want.

"Wait," I said slowly, my pulse quickening. "You're saying...your bodies decide for you?"

"It's not just physical," Catriona said, her voice softer now. As if she dreamed about meeting her Resonant since she was a little girl. To find her Prince Charming. "It's deeper. Resonance means you've found the one who completes you. It's rare. Not everyone experiences it."

"I want that," Sorcha whispered to herself.

"Which is why the royals have the rule about taking a mate if you haven't found your Resonant by a certain age," Catriona clarified.

Sorcha shrugged, oblivious to the undercurrent passing between me and her sister. To my roiling thoughts.

"And some of us have." Catriona's gaze met mine, sharp and knowing, and I felt the heat creep up my neck. My heart pounded as memories of Addan filled my mind—his mouth on my pussy, his scent driving me crazy, the way his gaze seemed to pierce straight through me. The fact that no matter how many freaking orgasms I had, it was never enough. I always wanted more.

Not from just anyone, though. I wasn't running around the place looking at every guy with a dick like I wanted them to fuck me. Because I didn't. I only wanted one man. One alien. Naked. Inside me. Addan consumed my thoughts. My dreams. Everything.

Oh, no.

I knew exactly what she was saying.

Did Addan know he was mine? Was that why he asked me if I was “claiming him”? Did he want me to claim him? Or was he simply doing his duty, as all males on Insuri did, and giving me what he thought I needed because he was a good little soldier? Like he had the night before, trying to gently fuck the queen. As if.

Was he doing it because any guy I asked on this planet would “service” any female in need of a good orgasm? God, he’d used that word.

Service. We’d even argued about it. He’d even insisted that I order him to make me stop thinking last night. He had. Holy shit. I could barely walk when I woke up this morning. But was he doing it because he wanted me? Or because it was his job? Ugh!

Sorcha tilted her head. “Are you all right, Paige? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

I forced a laugh, shaking my head. “I’m fine. Just... it’s a lot to take in.”

Catriona didn’t look convinced. Her gaze lingered on my face, as if she could see the truth I was trying desperately to hide. Perhaps she even knew.

“Well,” Sorcha said cheerfully, oblivious to the tension. “I am hopeful of finding my Resonant. Who knows? Maybe he’ll be at the dinner tonight? We’re hosting quite a few of your mother’s allies who’ve come from all reaches of the planet. Many have already arrived.”

“Wait—already?” I asked, blinking. “How many are here?”

“Lady Kaelthra of the Zyr Council,” Sorcha said brightly, ticking the names off on

her fingers. “And her mate, Lord Zyren. Oh! And Lord Lorient—that’s your uncle—and his wife, Lady Iressa. There are a few others, but I don’t remember all their names. But they’re unmated. Or their sons are. Most of them brought the whole family. I think everyone is curious about you.”

I stared at her, not interested in unmated males. I had a betrothed I hated and a general in my bed last night who was most likely my Resonant. I had more males than I could handle.

Except I definitely handled Addan the night before.

“They’re all here?” What the hell was the Zyr Council? It sounded like something out of a sci-fi TV show. God, it wasn’t fiction, it was real.

“Yes,” Catriona said. Her tone was more serious, the caution returning. “Time is of the essence. Your arrival will only remain a secret for so long now. There are spies everywhere, Paige. If we don’t act quickly, Queen Alienor will learn about you before we’re ready.”

Act quickly doing what?

The weight of her words settled over me. This wasn’t just a dinner. It was a strategy meeting. Every lord and lady sitting at that table tonight would be assessing me, deciding whether I was worth fighting for. Worth committing treason for.

The thought made my chest tighten and made me roll my shoulders back even more.

No wonder they wanted me to look exactly like my mother. I could be her twin in this dress. The hair. I looked almost exactly the way my mother did in that portrait.

Was I just a pawn to the Natosi family? A clone to get the people to accept a

replacement queen? Or, an even more terrifying thought, were these people—Addan's people, his family—responsible for my parents' deaths, for overthrowing hundreds of years of my family's rule? Was I blind to their true intentions because all I could think about was the way Addan's dick made me forget my own name?

I'd always heard that men thought with their "little head". What if I was thinking with my vag instead of my brain? What if I was, right now, surrounded by traitors who wanted to use me to take control of the planet?

The only way I was going to find out the truth was to get inside Queen's Castle and find cold, hard evidence about who murdered my mother. Just because Addan gave me mind-numbing orgasms didn't mean his family, or their so-called allies, were innocent. I knew nothing about this planet. I'd just arrived. And, of the little time I'd been here, most of it had been spent in Addan's bed. Or on top of his desk. Or on the floor. Up against the wall...

Jeeez. I really was a horny wench.

A soft chime echoed through the room, and Catriona straightened, rolling her own shoulders back, brushing invisible wrinkles from her gown. "It's time for dinner. Everyone will be waiting."

I glanced at myself in the mirror one last time. The girl staring back at me looked regal, composed... powerful. But inside, my thoughts were anything but. Besides my I-now-rule-the-planet problems, I now had a guy issue. A double guy issue.

I was marrying a prince in a few days. Not Addan.

Yet Addan was my Resonant. Or at least, I thought he was. That was the only explanation that could explain why my body was in a constant state of arousal. Why

all I could think about was getting him naked and inside me.

But what if his family really were the bad guys? They'd been so kind to me. So welcoming. But in truth, I knew nothing about them. Not really. I couldn't tell Addan until I knew for sure. What if I claimed him and then discovered his mother was the traitor?

No. God, no. If I found out Queen Alienor was evil, and that Addan's family was telling the truth, then I could tell him. But I had no way of knowing who was lying. Not yet.

Not until I figured out how to get into the palace and find the answers I needed about my mother's murder. If Alienor was a traitor, and she suspected I was going to betray her, Addan's life—my life—could be in danger. No way would she want to lose a queen for a daughter-in-law. She probably wanted to make sure the future heir to the throne was her grandchild. Her family line. She wouldn't want to lose the power of being royal because I decided to claim a random general instead of her precious son. As long as she believed I would go through with the wedding, I should be safe. Trusted. I should be able to get inside the castle and access the security feeds that General Niemini and the others had been talking about. Figure out what the hell happened on this planet all those years ago. Figure out who betrayed my family and left a baby girl for dead.

Gah! I wasn't cut out for all this royal intrigue. I felt like I was on a soap opera. What was I going to do if Addan's family were the traitors? Marry the prince? Marry the guy my mother chose for me when I was born? Walk away from the man I was falling in love with?

If Addan was part of the plot to destroy my family—and now me—would I have any other choice? Great sex was great sex, but I would never be able to forgive him if he had anything to do with my parents' deaths. He was older than me. I wasn't sure of

his exact age, but he was definitely alive—and probably already in the military—when I was born.

Dammit! No.

I didn't want him to be one of the bad guys. But an entire planet was depending on me to be smart. To think with something other than my lady dick. And the truth was, I didn't know anything about anyone on this planet. Hell, if I hadn't seen my mother's portrait with my own eyes, I probably wouldn't believe them about that either.

So, I couldn't tell anyone Addan was mine. But that meant walking into the dining room and pretending I didn't know he'd activated my resonance when all I wanted to do was push back his chair, straddle him, and then fuck him while he was eating his soup. Pretending I didn't want him—and that fun fantasy—as much as I wanted to breathe. Pretending I wasn't his.

How could I pretend? How could I ignore a physical need that was so... potent?

The thought made my chest ache, but I straightened my shoulders—again—and forced a calm expression onto my face.

As we walked down the gilded halls toward the dining room, my heart pounded. I wasn't sure what scared me more—facing Addan in my new form or keeping this insane secret from him. He was mine. But... I needed to know if it was Queen Alienor, or Addan's mother, who murdered my parents. Or, an even more disturbing possibility, an unknown enemy. Someone I had yet to meet.

16

A ddan

The room stilled the moment Paige entered. I felt her presence before I saw her. My skin prickled, my heart soared, and my cock throbbed. The last wasn't a good thing in a roomful of people.

I'd been standing near the far wall, watching General Niemini quietly exchange words with one of the guards stationed at the double doors. The other guests, all allies and close friends of Paige's long dead parents, were scattered in small clusters around the receiving room. Because they'd been gone for over twenty-five years, the crowd was older. They remembered life on Insuri under the old queen and saw every change since.

I'd been young, a new arrival at the military academy, so I only remembered some of the old ways. Even so, I was more than eager to see Queen Alienor dethroned. And the spoiled Prince Martainn... he could be transported to some far-off trading post. Permanently.

While I had thoughts that could have me executed, others sipped sparkling drinks from the trays of gliding silver service bots, their polite chatter just loud enough to mask the tension crackling in the air.

Yes, everyone felt it. They might be excited by Paige's sudden return, but their cocks didn't get hard for her like mine did. They better fucking not.



When Niemini returned from summoning the allies, I spoke to him at length. The initial reaction to the news that the Princess was still alive was shocked disbelief when they learned the news. Then joy. Then...unease. Whispered questions prevailed.

What would Queen Alienor's reaction be?

Her son's?

Would these people be forced to choose sides, or would Paige assume the throne without resistance?

No one knew.

While I sensed Paige's entrance, I had to look twice. A female I barely recognized descended the spiral staircase like a vision from the stories my mother used to tell of our world's greatest queens. Like a goddess.

Paige.

Or, rather, Princess Paige. No. Tonight even that wasn't right. Tonight she was Princess Edelene Merrienne Peigi, heir to the throne, future queen of Insuri.

Not. Mine.

Except my cock spurted pre-cum at the sight of her, knowing what was beneath. How her calm demeanor hid the insatiable appetite for orgasms that only I could give her.

Fuck, I was in trouble here.

She stood at the top of the staircase for the briefest of moments, and it was as though

the air itself paused to take her in. Silence fell.

This was the moment everyone had wanted for decades. Hoped for, but never expected.

Finally, the day had arrived. She had arrived.

Her dark blue gown shimmered, the gold overlays sparkling like moonlight scattered across rippling water, the rich blue bodice snug against her perfect figure. Her crown of braids glinted with golden threads and jewels, catching the glow of the crystal chandeliers overhead as if she already wore the crown. She was... magnificent.

No, she wasn't just magnificent. She was radiant. She didn't have the crown of a queen upon her head—she was a queen. The queen.

And I was struck dumb.

I couldn't breathe, couldn't think, couldn't do anything except watch as she descended, each step slow and deliberate. It was as though she'd been born to command this room, and every person in it.

For a moment, she looked my way. Her gaze swept over the crowd below, and something in her expression shifted when her eyes met mine. Or perhaps it was my imagination, desperate as I was to find meaning in her smallest glance.

I didn't know what it meant. It wasn't lust. I knew what she looked like in the throes of arousal. I knew what she looked like angry. Sad. Frustrated.

This? It was new to me as well, and I felt I knew her the best of anyone on the planet.

The sound of a clearing throat snapped me back to reality. General Niemini stepped

forward, bowing deeply as Paige reached the last step and came to stand at its base. “Princess,” he said, his voice steady and strong. “May I present your mother’s loyal allies.”

The guests throughout the room bowed one by one as their names were called, a litany of lords, ladies, and council members who had come to pledge their support—or at least their hope—in her cause.

They couldn’t help but stare a little too long, as if she wasn’t real and had to take an extra moment to confirm it really was the long-lost princess.

I didn’t blame them. I couldn’t look away from her either.

Every smile she gave, every polite nod, every soft “Thank you for coming,” sent a fresh pang through my chest. I knew what she was doing—she was performing, playing the role she’d been thrust into. I had to wonder about the lessons my sisters had bestowed upon her since I saw her last. Because of this, she did it so effortlessly that I felt a swell of pride, followed swiftly by something far more dangerous.

She should be mine.

My fists clenched at my sides.

I should be her Resonant. Surely the burning in my gut, the need to touch her, protect her, fight for her, fuck her until she stopped thinking and fell asleep in my arms...surely that all meant something.

Cock buried balls deep, I’d demanded the truth from her last night, asked if she intended to claim me.

Again, I’d been denied. My heart twisted to a black, charred mass in my chest. Seeing

her like this, with the wealthiest, most powerful leaders on the planet bowing and fighting for her attention, I realized the truth. She was so far out of my reach now that it hurt to breathe.

Everyone would want a piece of her until there was nothing left to give to me.

I shifted uncomfortably, hyper aware of the blue of my uniform. The color marked me as a soldier of the transport station, nothing more. I may have been a high ranking general, but I was the lowliest plebe in comparison to others in this room. To others she would now be surrounded by.

I didn't wear the deep black of my family. I did not wear a color that would match her gown perfectly, make it clear that I belonged at her side. No, I was the only one in the room wearing military blue. I should have listened to Catriona and worn black as my mother and father did. Instead, I'd chosen military dress, not noble. The contrast only made me feel more isolated. More out of place.

I was a soldier, not a royal.

Not her Resonant.

Nothing.

"Princess," Lord Lorient's voice carried through the room as he and his wife, Lady Iressa, approached. "You look just as your mother did the first time she addressed the council."

Paige smiled, but there was a flicker of uncertainty in her eyes. I doubted anyone else noticed it, but I knew her well enough to see the cracks beneath her polished exterior.

"Thank you, Uncle," she said softly. Of course she remembered the name, realized

who this man was to her.

“You look like your mother, but I see your father’s spirit in you,” Lord Lorient added, his tone warming. “He was a great leader—strong, fair, and wise beyond his years. He was the youngest ambassador ever chosen. And you, Princess, carry that same strength. Combined with your mother’s spirit and ruling prowess, you will be formidable. It is an honor to stand by your side.”

Paige’s lips parted, as though she meant to say something, but all that came out was a quiet, “Thank you.”

“Your mother and I were dear friends, Princess. I loved her.” Lady Iressa stepped forward, taking Paige’s hands in her own. “I want you to know that. I loved her. Loved your father, too. You are not alone, my dear. Not now, and not ever.”

I expected Paige to falter, reveal her emotions, perhaps even shed a few tears. She did not. She lifted her chin, and for a moment, I saw not the confused female I’d brought into my family’s home, but the queen she was destined to be.

“Your support means more than you can imagine,” she replied. “I say this to all of you.” Her gaze swept across the room. “I know this is an unexpected and difficult time for all of us, but together, I believe we can build a better future for Insuri. A future that honors my mother’s legacy—and my father’s strength.”

Pride swelled in my chest, pushing back the ache. She was remarkable. A force unlike any I’d ever known. Perhaps a force too powerful and perfect to belong to a simple soldier like me.

She didn’t know from experience how Queen Alienor ruled. She had no traditions or understanding of Insuri culture and how the past two-plus decades had changed all of that. What she did assume—with strong validation—that the queen was most likely the

one to orchestrate her parents' murders and the coup to take over their rightful roles.

This gave Paige motivation to transform, to become someone other than the woman who suffered profound loss, not only of her parents, but of her planet. The poor, struggling young female living alone on Earth, unaware of who she was, until now.

"Indeed," a new voice said, smooth and sly. Lady Kaelthra of the Zyr Council stepped forward with cautious steps, aided by a gold cane, her golden hair cascading over her shoulders in intricate waves. She wore a deep crimson gown that matched the striking red jewels embedded in her cuffs and collar. She was nearing a hundred years old, but her mind, and her tongue, were as sharp as ever. Her gaze lingered on Paige before shifting to General Niemini and my mother. "A bold vision, Princess. Though some might say boldness requires more than words. I hope you are not relying too heavily on others to see it realized."

The room tensed.

Lady Kaelthra smiled at Paige, the expression sharp as a blade. "Of course, the general's and his wife's loyalties are commendable, but loyalty does not always translate to influence. I trust, as we are being asked to participate and support your claim to the throne, you understand the complexities of the game, Princess."

What was this old fucking bitch trying to do? Intimidate Paige? Scare her? I reached for the weapon strapped to my side, relieved when my palm curled around the hilt. I couldn't shoot the old ass, no matter how badly I might want to. I would protect Paige even from verbal attacks.

Paige stood quietly for a moment and held Lady Kaelthra's gaze. The Princess didn't flinch. "I understand that loyalty is a foundation upon which all strength is built."

Lady Kaelthra's eyes gleamed with amusement. "A fine answer."

I wanted to throttle her.

She stepped back with a graceful bow, but her words lingered in the air like smoke, leaving us all to inhale her doubts and criticism long after she'd finished speaking.

I was so focused on her that I almost didn't hear the commotion at the door.

The sharp click of boots on marble caught my attention first, followed by the hiss of the heavy doors opening. I turned, the clawing in my gut the only warning I had before the young, handsome male marched into the room as if this were his home.

Fuck.

Prince Martainn.

Not just him, but a contingent of guards dressed in the queen's blue walked with him. He needed eight fully armed guards? For a dinner party? Perhaps this asshole wasn't as stupid as I'd believed. Or their presence was a deliberate show of power.

Or a threat. He strode to the front of the room as though he owned it, his golden sash glittering over a pristine white uniform.

I hated him. Plain and simple. Not only because he avoided work and responsibility like a child would, but because he was betrothed to the princess. My Paige.

My mother stepped forward to greet him. "Prince Martainn. Welcome to our home."

"Forgive the intrusion, Lady Fiona," he said, his voice smooth as silk but loud enough to silence the murmurs around him. "I wasn't aware you were hosting a formal gathering to welcome the Princess. I guess the royal couriers must have lost my invitation."

Mother didn't flinch at the passive aggressiveness of his words. "Of course. You are always welcome in our home."

Wasn't aware? My teeth clenched. Liar. He knew exactly what was happening. He was also dangerously close to accusing my mother of treason.

More importantly, how had he found out about Paige? How did he know exactly when to appear and take notice of who was in the room, and who was not?

Martainn's gaze swept the room, cataloguing and then dismissing everyone as inconsequential until it landed on Paige. The smug curve of his lips deepened. And his gaze darkened.

My fists clenched even tighter.

"Princess Paige," he said. "My betrothed. What a surprise to discover you are alive and well. I am honored to meet you. However, I am curious as to why my mother and I did not have the opportunity to greet you at the palace."

Paige's mask didn't falter. I had to admit, the man was attractive. Females would easily be satisfied by looking upon him. Even Paige should be pleased with the appearance of the male her mother had betrothed her to.

"Prince Martainn," she said, inclining her head. "I'm afraid that was my fault. I took advantage of Lady Fiona's hospitality and asked for a few days of quiet to adjust to my new life. I've never transported across the galaxy before, and it was quite tiring. This is all so new to me, I suffered a shock when I arrived."

The lie slid effortlessly from her lips, but I caught the briefest glance she shot my way. It was so fleeting I almost missed it, but it was there—a spark of something. A message? A warning? Fuck. I didn't know.



Maybe it was the hope that I would announce to everyone exactly why she was so tired after her arrival.

Martainn's smile widened. "Of course. I understand. I've been told you grew up on another planet and did not know your true identity? How remarkable."

Was he asking her to confirm what his spies had told him, or letting all of us know that he and Queen Alienor knew everything already? He bowed to Paige with a flourish and gave her a bright smile I had no doubt he believed to be seductive. A glance at my sisters and I could see by their dazed expressions that he was as entrancing as he hoped.

"Do not worry, Princess. I am here now. Soon we will be married, and I will take care of everything."

"I see. How...reassuring." Paige smiled but there was no answering sparkle in her eyes. Surely she was not going to believe this idiot's lies. After all her talk about refusing to marry him, she was remarkably silent. Why didn't she refuse him here and now in front of all her allies? Why didn't she step on his balls?

"My mother, Queen Alienor, is eager to meet you," he continued. "I've come to escort you to the Queen's Castle, Princess."

What? The palace? Alone?

Fuck no.

"She insists on meeting you tonight. She is most eager to receive you in the palace and get you settled where you belong. As am I." His eyes lingered on her in a carnal way that made a monster stir within, claws scratching at the edge of my mind. Martainn was eager to touch what was mine.

MINE.

“She is not ready,” I said before I could stop myself, my deep voice echoing off the walls.

Prince Martainn’s gaze snapped to me, his expression hardening. Narrowing. “And who are you to decide?”

I took a step forward, set my hands behind my back so as not to reach out and punch him.

“I am General Addan,” I replied evenly, keeping my tone measured despite the heat rising in my chest. “I discovered her in the transport station and have been responsible for her safety since her arrival.”

“Her safety?” Martainn scoffed. “What danger does the long-lost princess face on her home planet? Any of your concerns will be allayed once she is safe at the palace where she belongs.” He tipped his head and set his hand on his chest, as if offering an oath. “I shall assume responsibility for her safety. Or do you presume to question my ability to protect my own betrothed?”

My hands clenched. Yeah, punching was an option. Shooting him worked, too. I’d be incarcerated for life, but it would feel so fucking good.

“And I question your need for an armed escort to a formal dinner.” Did I just openly challenge Prince Martainn in front of a room full of nobles? Fuck. I needed to stop letting my cock do the talking.

“General Addan.” Paige’s voice cut through the tension, her tone calm but commanding. “Prince Martainn. I thank you both for your concern. I assure you, Prince, the general has done an excellent job ensuring my safety, as has Lady Fiona

in seeing to my comfort.”

Martainn turned back to her, his expression softening into something that might have been admiration, had it not been so thoroughly coated in entitlement. “Forgive me, Princess. I did not mean to cause a scene.”

The fuck he didn’t.

Fucker walked right up to Paige and held out his hand. Expected her to place hers...

Fuck. She touched him. Allowed him to hold her hand. Pull her off the step so he could tower over her smaller frame.

“Princess, I am afraid there is one matter that cannot wait.”

He leaned in. Close to her. Their faces were so close he could kiss her. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. With an act of will, I forced myself to stay where I was.

If I was dead or in jail, I couldn’t protect her.

“Tell me,” he said, his voice dropping just enough to feel intimate, even though the entire room could hear him. “Do you have a Resonant? Has your body claimed another as your mate?”

My heart stopped.

Paige’s gaze flicked to mine—just for an instant—and my chest tightened. Was that a signal? A plea? Or was I imagining things, grasping at straws to make myself believe I still mattered to her?

I’d asked her more than once if I belonged to her. Were the feelings we shared that of

a true resonance or just the unbelievable chemistry between a male and female with the need to fuck? Each time, she said no.

And again—

“No,” she said finally, her voice steady. “I have not claimed anyone.”

The words hit like a punch to the gut. Maybe it would be worthwhile to kill the slimy bastard and spend my life in jail. Without her, I would feel that way every single day.

Martainn’s smile returned, brighter than ever. “Then it is settled. You will accompany me to the palace tonight. We shall be married on your birthing day. We will host a grand celebration.” He waved his arm around the room to indicate everyone present was included. “You’re all invited, of course.”

Paige hesitated. For a moment my heart leapt. She wasn’t going to go with him. She couldn’t. Where would she go with the male she’d once refused to wed?

“Queen’s Castle?” she asked.

“Of course,” Martainn murmured, as if appalled she’d think he lived anywhere else. “I promise you will be well taken care of, Princess. I give you my word.”

Finally, she nodded, and it felt as if my soul left my body. “Of course, Prince Martainn. It will be an honor to meet Queen Alienor and plan the wedding.”

What. The. Fuck.

Any hope I had was gone.

My body felt hollow, an empty shell as she allowed him to lead her from the room,

her gown flowing like liquid starlight around her; every step a knife twisting deeper into my chest.

She didn't look back, only rolled her shoulders proudly, looking more regal than ever.

When the doors closed behind her, the room fell silent. My sisters stared at me, their expressions a mix of confusion and pity. I couldn't move as the ache in my chest spread like poison.

And loss.

### Paige, The Queen's Castle

The gilded double doors swung open, and I stepped into a room that practically hummed with power. The ceilings stretched impossibly high, painted with shimmering constellations that pulsed faintly, as if they were alive. Rich golden tapestries lined the walls, bearing the royal insignia I was beginning to resent. Beneath my feet, the polished obsidian floor reflected my every step, reminding me there was no hiding here—not from them, and not from myself.

I wasn't sure if this was the dumbest thing I'd ever done, or if that award belonged to falling into the pool in the bride testing room. I was here. I needed to be here. I needed to find evidence about what happened to my parents.

A computer, or even some simple desk drawers could yield answers.

At the far end of the room sat Queen Alienor, poised like she was carved from the very stars themselves. Her gown shimmered as she stood, each fold catching the light like liquid silver, her hair a sleek coil of gold, not a strand out of place. Her eyes made my stomach twist—a pale, piercing blue that saw far too much.

Instead of feeling like I was in a fairy tale with the fancy gowns and gold thread, I felt like I was in Louis XIV's court, ready for my head to be chopped off.

“Ah, Princess Paige,” she said, her voice like the sweetest honey drizzled over something sharp. Like a guillotine blade. “What a miracle! The jewel of our kingdom

has returned.”

I forced a smile, dipping into a curtsy as protocol demanded. I didn’t need to be schooled by Sorchia and Catriona to know this. The weight of my new gown—the cascade of deep blue and gold—pressed heavily on my shoulders. The ones I was told to ‘roll back and stick my boobs out’. “Queen Alienor.”

Before I could straighten, I caught the sound of confident footsteps behind me, the distinct click of polished boots against the obsidian floor. Prince Martainn might as well be my shadow. He hadn’t been out of arms’ reach since we’d left House Natosi. It was as if he feared I would disappear.

My betrothed. I had to admit, he was handsome. No. Fucking gorgeous. His eyes were a dark shade of blue-gray, like storm clouds. His hair wasn’t quite as white as Addan’s, the shoulder length strands glimmered with a bit of gray, more the color of steel than silver. He was young and fit, his body filling out every inch of his tailored white suit. If I wasn’t obsessed with Addan, marrying the prince would not have appeared to be a bad option.

He carried himself with an easy arrogance, even if his forced smile was too wide, too self-assured, as he looked me up and down like I already belonged to him.

Of course, he believed we were to be married. That he would be my husband. Rule at my side. Father my children. Ugh.

I hid the shudder that coursed through my bones at the thought of him touching me. God help me if Addan’s family turned out to be the traitors. I wasn’t sure I could honor my betrothal to Prince Martainn, even if my Addan ended up in a prison cell. Then again, I would have no choice. I would have to choose someone, and my mother had chosen...Martainn. Ugh.

“You are stunning. A true beauty.” His voice was low and smooth, but the desire I heard in his tone made my skin crawl. I didn’t want anyone but Addan looking at me like that. “Even more radiant than I imagined.”

How could he imagine me being anything at all if he thought I’d been dead all these years? I straightened, keeping my tone as neutral as I could manage. “Thank you, but how did you imagine anything at all unless you knew I was here? How long have you known I was alive?”

Martainn didn’t respond. His mother did.

“Oh, child, I am the queen. We knew about you within a few hours of your arrival. My loyal guard, Peadair, informed me that same day. But you have been... indisposed since then.” Queen Alienor’s lips curved into a smile that seemed almost maternal. She gestured for me to sit on a plush settee near her throne. “Come, my dear cousin. Sit with me. We have much to discuss.”

Her hand settled lightly on my arm as I complied, a touch meant to reassure, but it felt like a shackle. She had me where she wanted me—at her side—mere days away from being married to her son and bred to make future queens.

I sank into the cushions, every instinct screaming to stay alert. I would bet this palace had a dungeon and I suspected that, despite their smiles, both Alienor and her son might be happy to lock me up in one.

“This transition must feel overwhelming,” Alienor began, her tone soothing. “But I want you to know, Paige...may I call you Paige?” When I nodded, she continued. “You’re not alone in this. I will be here for you every step of the way. The throne is a heavy burden, but there’s no need to rush into it. You are young. There is so much to learn before you take on such responsibility. With your background, it could take some time.”



There it was—the velvet-coated blade. She may not be the one who killed my parents, but she was the one who benefitted most from their deaths. Did she expect me to believe she had no problem ceding power to me? I nodded, keeping my expression carefully neutral, and tried to unclench my jaw. “I appreciate your wisdom and guidance, Aunt.”

Her smile deepened. “Please, call me Mother. You and Martainn will be wed very soon, after all. You will be my daughter. We are family.”

Family. The word twisted in my chest like a knife. She and Martainn were my family? I suspected the knife I was feeling wasn’t in my chest, it was in my back.

No. Technically, they’d done nothing wrong. Not yet. I had no proof. No evidence. Nothing to go on but General Niemini’s suspicions and warnings from the Natosi family, who could just as easily be my enemies as these two.

Although, even without Addan clouding my judgment, his family made me feel a lot more at ease than these two. Of course, my nerves could be due to the three-story open ceilings, stony-faced guards stationed every few steps around the room, and the way Martainn’s eyes kept dropping to linger on my breasts. Or it could be the fact that I knew my mother had been murdered in this castle.

If I believed in ghosts I’d be screwed. Never sleep again. Not here.

Was this where it happened? In this room? Had my mother’s blood pooled on the floor? Had her screams echoed off these very walls? I swayed on my cushion as all the blood drained from my face.

“Oh dear. Are you unwell?” Alienor’s hand wrapped around my arm to steady me.

“You’re scaring her, mother.” Martainn made a noise of impatience. “You’re

overcomplicating things,” he said, sauntering closer. He leaned down and tilted his chin up to look me in the eye. “Paige will be fine. Won’t you? She just needs to trust us.” He reached forward and placed his hand on top of my bent knee. “Isn’t that right, darling?”

Darling. My jaw clenched trying not to vomit, but I managed a tight smile as I turned, breaking contact. “I trust that the two of you have the kingdom’s best interests at heart.”

That was, at least, the truth. I hoped they did. I didn’t believe it, but I could hope they weren’t total assholes.

Alienor’s hand squeezed mine gently, as though rewarding my diplomacy. “Exactly. And on that note, the wedding arrangements are already underway. Even with short notice, it will be the grandest celebration this kingdom has seen in decades. Of course, you won’t need to worry about a thing. My staff and I will handle all the details.”

She waved her free hand in the air as if the complications of a wedding were like butterflies.

“That’s... very kind of you,” I said carefully.

“Kind?” Martainn stood tall. He looked like a proud peacock. “It’s tradition. You’re lucky to have Mother organizing this. No one does it better.”

I wasn’t sure exactly what he meant by it, not when it came to her.

I didn’t trust myself to respond, so I could only nod. I doubted the queen would lift a finger to do anything herself. She probably had an army of staff taking care of every detail, scurrying around like elves at the North Pole in December. As I had no

intention of going through with the ceremony, I didn't feel like wasting energy arguing. If I were marrying Addan, however, I'd want to select everything myself. A dress. Flowers...

If Addan's family was implicated, if I were forced to choose the prince, I doubted I would give a shit about the ceremony. I'd do my duty, do my best to be a good queen, continue my mother's bloodline, but I'd be too broken-hearted to care about something so frivolous as a wedding.

Alienor's voice softened further, as if she were delivering a gift. "While we prepare for the wedding, I would like us to spend some time together, Paige. It's important that you are fully prepared to take on the responsibilities of queenship—when the time comes, of course. There is no need to rush this transition. Stability is key for our people, as you will someday understand."

Stability. Continuity. Control. The meaning beneath her words couldn't have been clearer. She was the one who kept things stable. She'd still be queen. She'd still be in control.

I was an unexpected blip on her ruling radar.

I swallowed the angry knot rising in my throat. I had to remember I was acting. Playing a role. "I understand. I don't know anything about how to be a queen."

God. I didn't want to be in this place, not when I suspected she was behind my mother's death. But I had to be here. Alone. I had to snoop around. I had to keep their trust, make them believe I was putty in their hands. If I got caught wandering, I could play dumb. She made me out to be a twit, which in my search for the truth, her belief would only help me.

To start, I needed her to dismiss me. Not just from her presence, but as a threat to her

power. I needed freedom from suspicion and prying eyes if I was going to sneak around the palace, break into her security system and find out who murdered my mother.

If she thought I was a lost, clueless ding-a-ling from Earth, then I'd roll with it.

Alienor beamed at me, but her eyes betrayed nothing. "Good. You are so much like your mother. She would be so proud to see the woman you've become."

I tried not to let the words mean anything. I failed. The mention of my mother hit me like a blow. I bit the inside of my cheek to keep my composure.

"Thank you." I tried to call her Mother. Nearly choked on the word. I had no mother. And coming to this planet, learning that I looked like my dead bio-mom? That she died protecting me? That she died because of a conniving traitor, one that could be smiling and patronizing me right now?

Fuck, the thought made it really hard to act all familial. It also made me sad. I'd longed for a real family my whole life. I didn't want Alienor to be evil. I didn't want to marry her son, either. But that didn't mean I didn't still long for family. If they were innocent, not traitors, maybe we could all be friends.

In fact, I hoped Alienor was half as kind and innocent as she was acting. Even if she were innocent of my mother's murder, I didn't doubt that this warm and fuzzy bit was an act. She was a queen. Of an entire planet. She had to be tough as nails. Right?

Her son, however... Did he just fondle his junk in those tight white pants? My nose crinkled before I could stop it.

GAH! He did it again, his erection on full display. Well, at least the prince's desire for me was not an act. Unappealing, but genuine.

Shit. To be fair, if it was Addan grabbing his erection I'd be panting with lust. The only dick I was interested in was Addan's, and he wasn't here. My pussy clenched with longing for him. For my Resonant.

No matter how hard Martainn's dick got, it would never satisfy me. Hell, I wasn't letting it anywhere near me. Maybe I'd sleep with a knife.

Martainn, apparently bored with the conversation his mother and I were sharing, leaned closer. Too close. His hand brushed against mine, and his grin returned, sharp and wolfish. "You and I should spend some time alone, don't you think? We need to get... acquainted. After all, we'll be husband and wife soon."

My stomach churned. I smiled politely and slid my hand away, folding it neatly in my lap, wishing I had that knife now so I could stab his hand.

"Of course. I'd like that." I swallowed down the bile rising into my throat at the idea of anyone touching me but Addan. "When time allows. I was hoping the queen would give me a tour of the castle. I did once live here. I'd love to see the rooms my mother used to favor. Maybe the nursery where I slept as a baby?"

His grin faltered, a flicker of confusion crossing his face. Apparently, he wasn't used to being evaded. He was young, at least a decade younger than Addan. Next to my general, he looked like child, not a grown man. Before he could press the issue, Alienor spoke again, her tone light and commanding.

"Martainn, darling, give her some space. There will be plenty of time for bonding after the wedding."

Martainn scowled, then shrugged as if the slight didn't matter. I had no doubt he took bonding to mean fucking. "Fine, fine. But don't keep me waiting, Paige."

He sauntered to his seat, draping himself across the armrest like a butt hurt king in waiting.

Alienor rose gracefully, extending a hand to me. I couldn't miss the way she held her chin, the way her shoulders were rolled back. Regal. Elegant. Commanding. "Come, my dear. Let me show you about, as you requested. I will introduce you to the staff as well and show you to your mother's old chambers. I had them prepared for you. I thought you might like to sleep in her old bedroom?"

"I'd love that." It was the first truth I'd spoken since I walked into the building. It might've been the first truth anyone had spoken.

I followed her through another set of towering doors, down a corridor lined with more of those ever-present tapestries. Martainn trailed us at first, then eventually wandered off, evidently bored as we toured for over an hour. I met so many people, I would need a decade to memorize all their names. Every step felt heavier as we approached my parents' former chambers. Their private quarters were situated at the end of a very long hall, where a pair of ornately carved doors awaited.

Alienor pushed them open with a flourish.

"These were your mother's chambers," she said, her voice almost reverent. "I thought it fitting for you to have this space. A place to connect with her memory."

I stepped inside and the air seemed to shift, wrapping around me like a whisper. I'd come across a galaxy to be here. To be in the place where my parents lived. Where I was sure, as a baby, I'd spent time with them.

This was the closest I'd ever come to them. Or perhaps ever would.

The room was exquisite—too exquisite. The bed was draped in silken sheets that

rippled like water, and a grand window overlooked the glowing gardens, where flowers pulsed faintly in the twilight. The slight scent of a flower that smelled like jasmine lingered, mingling with something metallic and cold.

I swallowed hard, my throat tight. “Thank you,” I managed. “I hope I’m not putting you out.”

She shook her head. “Oh, no, child. My rooms are on the second floor. These have been thoroughly cleaned but have remained unaltered. A tribute to your mother’s memory.” Alienor smiled, the picture of maternal grace. “Rest, Paige. I have ordered a meal delivered to your rooms. Eat. Sleep. Tomorrow, we’ll begin your training.”

She swept out, leaving me alone.

Training.

Training. It didn’t sound like it was going to be anything like the makeover and girl talk I’d had with Sorchia and Catriona.

The silence that followed felt like a living thing, pressing against my chest. I let out a shaky breath and leaned against the door. My gaze roamed the room. The weight of grief and frustration pressed down on me, but so did something else—a spark of determination.

I moved around the room, brushing my fingers over the various pieces of furniture. As if by touching them, I could touch my parents. The air hummed softly, and to my surprise, a faint glow appeared on the wall to my left as I walked by. I froze. Stared.

What was that?

I stopped and went to it, discovering a panel had shifted to the side, revealing a

glowing handprint that looked like some kind of scanner.

There really was fancy computer technology on this planet! Holy shit.

“Please confirm your identity,” the voice directed.

Oh my god.

I lifted my hand and pressed my palm flat against the smooth surface. As I expected, it looked like about a dozen lasers moved over my palm. Just like fancy access panels in spy movies.

“Princess Edelene Merrienne Peigi, welcome home.” A serene, feminine voice filled the air. “I am at your service.”

“Who...who are you?” I froze, my breath catching in my throat. “How do you know who I am?”

“I am the Royal Interface System, designated caretaker of the royal archives,” the voice replied.

Holy cow, it was space artificial intelligence. A computer talking to me in a legit conversation. What else could it do?

“Your genetic signature has been scanned and recognized. How may I assist you, Princess?”

“Do you... do you assist Queen Alienor?” I asked. I didn’t dare poke into things if I knew the queen would find out. Even more spy films taught me that the bad guy always found out.



“No, Princess. Access to the RIS is restricted to Queen Madallaine, her Resonant, Ambassador Lorient, and you, Princess Edelene Merrienne Peigi, heir to the throne of Insuri.”

It didn't make sense if the RIS gave the royal family access to royal archives, and Queen Alienor was royal... “Why not anyone else?”

“I assist the royal Peigi bloodline. Per Queen Madallaine's command, this access only responds to Queen Madallaine, her Resonant, Ambassador Lorient, and you, Princess Edelene, heir to the throne of Insuri. To activate my systems, I must identify and confirm royal DNA with my biosensors.”

“What about Queen Alienor?”

“Per Queen Madallaine's command, this access only responds to Queen Madallaine, her Resonant, Ambassador Lorient, and you, Princess Edelene, heir to the throne of Insuri.”

The voice was lovely, but I wanted to throttle it for repeating itself. A hidden access panel only opening for me? Since my parents were dead, it had been... waiting for me?

Did Queen Alienor know about this?

“Doesn't Alienor have royal DNA?” I was not taking any chances. This could be a test. Or a trap. “Do you talk to Queen Alienor?”

“Princess, I do not recognize Alienor of House Seppani as queen of Insuri. Alienor does not qualify for access to the RIS system. Queen Madallaine's instructions were very clear. This access only responds to Queen Madallaine, her?—”

“Enough. I got it.” My pulse thundered in my ears like a herd of wild horses. This was it—my chance. I paused, thinking of what information I wanted.

“I need access to security footage,” I said, stepping closer to the glowing panel. “Specifically, the days leading up to my parents’ deaths. I need to identify who killed them. How. Why. Where, exactly. How I ended up in a pod on the way to Earth.”

The AI hesitated, its light flickering faintly. “Accessing restricted files. Files located. However...”

I leaned closer, pressed my forehead against the wall next to my hand. I hadn’t removed my palm even though I was pretty sure the system was done doing whatever it was going to do as far as scanning me. “However?” I barely breathed the word.

“Queen Madallaine Edelene Peigi stored private messages for you in the royal archives. Would you like me to retrieve them as well?”

What? Private messages? From my mother? Oh my god. Yes! My heart pounded and I felt lightheaded.

“Yes.” So proud of myself for not shouting. “Yes, please!”

“Please step away from the illumination table.”

“The what?” I stumbled back three steps and suddenly a circular column rose from the elaborate pattern inlaid in the marble floor. I would never have noticed it. Not in a million years. And that was probably the point. Go, Mom. Secret access panel. Secret scanner. Secret messages. I really was in the thick of a spy movie now. Hopefully I didn’t get myself killed.

The panel’s glow intensified, lights shooting out of the panel as a holographic

projection began to form on the top of the column before me. My heart pounded as fragments of a story I had waited my entire life to uncover finally began to unfold.

The holographic projection shimmered, its edges wavering like mist caught in a breeze. Then, as if drawn from the very air, a vision of my mother appeared.

18

A ddan

The screen in my quarters flickered to life, bathing the dark room in a cold blue light. I stood stiffly, arms crossed, my jaw set tighter than it should have been. After Paige left with Martainn, I didn't know what to do. I felt like I was coming out of my skin. I wanted to smash plates and glasses, upturn table upon table of the finest food. I wanted to roar in anger. Most of all, I wanted to go after her.

I did none of those things. I fled the house and returned to work. To Planetary Defense. Alpha Station. To my quarters where I had control. Where I could do the one thing that might help. I could be a general. I could do my job.

The light copper face of Commander Zeus appeared on the screen, his oddly human brown eyes and dark hair glinting under the lighting of his ship's command center, his gaze as sharp as the edge of a blade. Even less forgiving.

"General Natosi," he greeted, his voice neutral, but there was something in his expression—something heavy. Before I'd requested a meeting, I'd done a little digging about the commander, discovered Zeus was half human and had somehow managed to win his command in a combat duel against full-blooded Prillon warriors.

I would not make the mistake of underestimating him. Which boded well because I needed every bit of his sharpness and his ruthlessness.

"Commander Zeus," I said, inclining my head briefly. "Thank you for agreeing to this

call. I trust you've received the updated reports from Insuri."

"I have." Zeus paused, his gaze narrowing slightly as he studied me. As if he could see through the light years between us that I was on edge. "You're not the type to waste time, General. Let's get to it. I assume you want answers about the princess."

The knot in my chest tightened. The princess. It was easier when I could just call her Paige, back when she was here in this room... hell, beneath my desk looking up at me. Before the palace and the betrothal to that arrogant prince. Before she left me behind.

The memory of her lingered like a shadow that refused to fade. I could still see her defiant gaze when I teased her, the way her lips would press into a stubborn line when she fought back against the weight of everything crashing down around her. The sound of her voice begging me to make her come. The gasps and moans deep in her throat when I fucked her. Feasted on her. Filled her with my cock. She was fire and resolve, so much more than she knew. And now... she was gone.

Thank fuck the commander couldn't see me shifting my cock in my uniform pants. Even though she'd left me behind, annihilated my heart, I still desired her to the depths of my being.

"Yes." I forced my voice to remain steady. "You told me you would investigate how she ended up on Earth. I want to know who betrayed her mother and why she was left to fend for herself for twenty-six years. That doesn't happen by accident. Someone planned this."

Zeus leaned back slightly, his expression darkening. "The situation is... complicated. We don't have the full investigation complete yet, but we've uncovered pieces. Enough to paint a picture, though there are still gaps."

“Then give me what you have,” I said.

Zeus nodded, steeped his hands, and began. “It starts with Insuri’s former queen—your princess’s mother. When she was assassinated during what you call The Day of Steel and Blood, chaos reigned in the entire sector for several weeks. We know now that there was a deeper game at play, and it involved illegal weapons and technology trading.”

Holy shit.

“The Hive’s integration tech was—still is—coveted throughout the galaxy. Insuri’s neutral stance, and the fact that your planet is not part of the Interstellar Coalition of Planets, made it an ideal hub for smugglers to operate under the radar. We suspect Queen Madallaine’s murder has ties to that illegal trade. Specifically, to someone involved in the operation who wanted her eliminated.”

The bad guys wanted the ability to continue, and the queen stood in the way. So they removed her. Was that the basis of all this?

“Why?” I had to know.

“It was not widely known, but at the time of her death, Queen Madallaine was in negotiations with Prillon Prime and had been granted approval to officially join the Coalition.”

I stared at him, stunned. Processing the seriousness, the hugeness of what he just said. “What?”

My mind raced with the implications. If Insuri were part of the Interstellar Coalition of Planets, we would be required to abide by their laws. Send fighters and brides to support the Coalition Fleet.

We would also have full access to their advanced transport technology. S-Gen machines. ReGen pods. Their healing technologies were far ahead of our own. Our planet did not suffer, exactly, but we did many things the old way. We did not simply tell an S-Gen machine what we wanted to eat and watch it magically appear. We had seamstresses and tailors who made our clothing. Our weapons would not penetrate Hive or Coalition armor. I knew because I'd been part of a unit that tracked down a Hive Scouting team on Insuri nearly ten years prior. We'd managed to find and destroy them. Barely. At great cost.

Queen Alienor had hidden the incident from the people. Buried the truth. Avoided demands from a frightened and outraged public that we join the Coalition. I'd accepted her decision at the time—without question—because peace should reign along with the queen. Or because of her.

Now...?

I stiffened. "Someone wanted her dead. Wanted to keep Insuri out of the Coalition. What about Paige?" Fuck. I corrected myself. "Princess Edelene? She was an infant. It wasn't as if she could rule or sign treaties."

Zeus sighed, dropped his hands and leaned forward. "We will never know why the queen believed sending the princess away was her only choice." His voice grew colder. "Our Intelligence Core has tracked the arrival of the escape pod to Earth. We believe an operative from Rogue 5—likely connected to the traitors who murdered your queen—followed the escape pod and arrived on Earth within a few hours of the pod. Whoever was on that ship most likely had a direct kill order on the infant princess. But, for reasons that we can only speculate, they grew a conscience at the last moment. Instead of killing her, they destroyed her escape pod and left the baby somewhere they knew humans would find her."

The words hit me like a hammer. My mind raced, picturing a child—the rightful heir

to a throne, helpless, abandoned, and left to survive by sheer chance. By being left. Abandoned. The thought of her—tiny, fragile, unaware of the forces aligned against her—made my stomach churn. And yet... she survived.

“So, they thought she’d never know who she was. They thought they’d erased her. Let her live her life on a far-off planet while having eliminated the threat to Insuri.”

“Exactly,” Zeus said. “Whoever it was likely believed it wouldn’t matter if the infant was allowed to live. Insuri would either fall into chaos, or the new queen, Queen Alienor, would consolidate power. A baby left on a backwater world like Earth would never find her way back. It was clean. Final.” He paused, his gaze sharpening. “Or so they thought.”

I clenched my fists at my sides, the ache of something I didn’t want to name tightening in my chest. Paige had been with me last night. Under me. In my arms. Screaming my name.

And now she was in that glittering palace, surrounded by traitors, wearing a crown that would feel more like a noose. She hadn’t wanted any of this. She hadn’t even wanted me.

I’d let her go because it was a woman’s choice, because she deserved the freedom to decide what path she’d take. Because she was the future queen, and I was no one; a soldier who followed orders. A servant to the crown.

I was not her Resonant. She had not claimed me. But that didn’t mean I’d stopped wanting her. I’d wanted her every moment since she’d left, her absence like a wound that wouldn’t heal.

“If all this stems from a smuggling operation, is it still going on? Are the same people using Insuri’s moons to trade in Hive tech after all these years?”



I forced myself back to the conversation.

“We do not know, and that is a problem.” Zeus’s tone was hard. “It’s very likely. Hive technology is leagues ahead of Insuri’s, but the Hive’s proximity to this sector of space makes your planet a prime location for staging illegal operations. We have recently discovered that Earth’s moon—the dark side of it, specifically, has become a hub for similar activities. The humans don’t have the technology to detect or intercept what’s happening there, which makes it the perfect place for the smugglers to operate undisturbed.”

“Just like Insuri,” I murmured. Like Earth, we were not part of the Coalition. We did not have the most advanced tech. “Has Queen Alienor ever tried to negotiate with Prillon Prime? Reopen the talks?”

“No.” Zeus glared at me like I was a fool. “In fact, she pulled out of all prior agreements within days of Queen Madallaine’s death.”

“There have been many here who suspected Alienor was involved in the events that led to the queen’s death, and to Paige’s disappearance, but there was never any evidence. Are you saying your spies have proof that Queen Alienor was involved?”

Paige, as a baby, had disappeared. Been followed by an assassin. Found on Earth. Helpless. Small. The very idea burned like acid. Paige had grown up without her family, without knowing who she was, because of a decision made by an evil that, to this day, remained hidden in the dark.

“No. We can prove Paige’s pod was deliberately destroyed. That is all. Whoever did it wanted to ensure there was no trace of her origin. They intended for her to disappear—permanently.”

I supposed I should be grateful for the fact that whoever had been sent to murder

Paige hadn't been able to go through with it. The air in the room seemed to grow colder as I wondered how many assassins lurked within the walls of Queen's Castle. My chest ached with the weight of knowing Paige was there now, in danger. Nothing compared, though, to the helplessness I felt because there wasn't anything I could do about it.

"I need proof, Zeus," I said finally, slamming my hand on my desk. "Give me something to go on. A lead. A suspicion. Anything. I won't stand by while Paige is in danger!"

Zeus studied me for a long moment, his expression grim but thoughtful. "I'll do what I can," he said. "Tread carefully, Addan. The smugglers operating around Insuri are dangerous. We believe they have connections to the Silver Scions."

Fuck. The Scions were the most notorious—and deadly—trade guild in the galaxy. They traded in Hive tech, weapons, body integrations, genetic engineering, cloning, slaves, drugs. There was nothing they wouldn't do. Nothing. Even the criminal Legions of Rogue 5 gave the Silver Scions a wide berth and a healthy dose of fearful respect.

I had to warn Paige.

I quickly changed my mind. No. Right now, her innocence was her shield. Her enemies—whoever they were—believed her to be naïve and malleable. I'd seen her analytical mind at work. Sat with her for hours as she studied Insuri history and asked question after question. She would be a powerful and effective queen. If she lived long enough.

"I don't care what it takes," I said, my voice low but unwavering. "Someone betrayed her family. Betrayed our people. I'll find out who it was, and I'll make sure they pay for what they did. To her. To her mother. To all of Insuri."

Zeus inclined his head, something almost like respect flickering in his eyes. “A queen’s life, in my sector, was, and probably still is, in jeopardy. It is my concern as well. I’ll be in touch with updates. For now, watch your back, General. There’s more to this than what we’ve uncovered, and I think whatever we learn will be even worse.”

19

Paige

My breath hitched at the 3-D, holographic, Star Wars-like image of my mother. In the soft glow, she was younger than I expected, her dark red hair swept back in a style that spoke of elegance and quiet strength. Her emerald-green eyes—eyes I had inherited—shone with an intensity that made my chest ache. The figure was about two feet tall. She looked directly at me, and for a moment, I forgot how to breathe.

I'd wanted to talk with her my entire life. And now, I was. Sort of. It was enough. It had to be.

"Edelene. Little one." My mother's voice surrounded me, steady and clear. It was as if she were standing in the room with me. "If you are seeing this, then something has gone terribly wrong."

My knees weakened, and I sank onto the edge of the bed, my gaze riveted to her image as tears streaked my cheeks. It felt like a part of me that had been missing snapped into place. I knew I'd heard her voice before, when I was a baby. I strained to remember the softness, sighed with disappointment when not even a whisper of a memory came to me.

But now?—

"This message is for you and you alone," she continued. "I cannot explain everything, but you must trust that the choices I made were for your protection—and for the

survival of our planet. One day, you will understand.”

Her expression softened, and she reached out, as though she could touch me through the shimmering light. I wanted to reach back, to feel her warmth, but my fingers only met empty air.

“You are stronger than you realize, daughter,” she said. “The truth will test you. It will challenge everything you believe. But I know you will find the strength to do what must be done.”

Her voice faltered slightly, and I saw her take a steadying breath, her gaze unwavering. “There is no one else I would entrust with this task. You were meant for this, my darling girl. The blood of a hundred queens runs in your veins.”

A hundred queens? My family was old. Ancient. The weight settled inside me, soothed the lost, uprooted feeling I’d had my entire life. No more questions. No more wondering about who I was or where I came from. Why my parents gave me up. Who they were. What they were like.

I would never need to wonder ever again.

“This will not be easy, daughter. But I have no choice but to share it all with you.”

Tears blurred my vision, but I refused to look away as my mother revealed the truth about a series of events all those years ago that led to her death, my exile, and Alienor taking the throne. I tried to keep up. Pay attention. Still I had to ask the house to replay the message several times because I couldn’t focus through my watery tears.

My mother had been beautiful. Smart. Kind. Loving. Strong. So strong. I didn’t blame her for what happened to our family, but that didn’t make the truth easier to hear. I played it through one last time. When the projection flickered, and her image

began to dissolve, I let it go. I'd heard enough. I really, really hoped there were other messages for me. Videos from when I was a baby. Images of me with my mother. With my father. Private family moments I could review later. Images from a life filled with love instead of danger.

Now wasn't the time.

"Remember." My mother's voice drifted away as her glowing image faded and disappeared. "Trust your instincts. And trust no one—until you are sure."

The hologram vanished, leaving the room aching empty. For a moment, I couldn't move, couldn't think as the column sank back into the floor, all traces of it gone. My mother's words echoed in my mind, heavy with implications I wasn't ready to face.

I knew everything now.

Everything.

I wasn't the naive woman who'd mistakenly been sent here from Earth.

I wasn't the long-lost princess clueless about her home planet.

I wasn't... well, I wasn't Paige any longer.

My mother had empowered me to be what she'd known about me from birth.

I was Queen Edelene.

What was I supposed to do now? I knew the truth, but what the hell was I going to do about it?

I swiped at my cheeks, clearing the tears before any more could spill. I couldn't afford to fall apart. My mother was counting on me to protect her people. My people.

No matter how alone I felt, I had resources. Ways.

"System," I said, my voice shaking but resolute.

"Yes, Princess?" the AI responded, its crystalline glow pulsing softly from the wall.

"Can you communicate with the Coalition Fleet?"

"Of course."

"Privately? Can you make sure no one can intercept the message? Not even Queen Alienor? Or the military? No one?"

"Of course, Princess. My system has advanced quantum encryption. Anything you request of me is top secret per Queen Madallaine's request."

Thank god I had this mega-computer on my side. I was going to need all the help I could get. "I need to contact Commander Zeus in the Coalition Fleet. I don't know where he is, but he has his own battleship."

The panel shimmered for a moment, and then the room dimmed as a large screen descended from the ceiling, bathing the space in a pale blue light. The face that appeared a few minutes later was one I hadn't seen for a few days, but one I would never forget.

Commander Zeus was as imposing as his name suggested, his dark hair cropped close and his brown eyes sharp as cut glass. His light copper skin was common among the Prillions, but his eyes and hair looked very...human. His coalition uniform was

pristine, adorned with insignias marking his rank and years of service.

“Princess Paige,” he said, his voice steady and calm despite the flicker of surprise in his expression. “Insuri is a busy place today.”

What did he mean by that?

“How can I assist you, other than returning you to Earth?”

I swallowed hard, steadying myself. I rolled my shoulders back, just as my mother had held them in the video.

“Commander,” I said, my voice firm despite the whirlwind inside me. “I need your help.”

His eyes narrowed slightly, and for a moment, he studied me as if gauging the weight of my words. Then he gave a single nod. “I’m listening.”



### Addan, Two Days Later

The royal palace loomed ahead, a glimmering fortress of crystal and gold against the dawn. I sat rigid in the transport, my mind a tempest as the vehicle glided silently toward the ceremonial entrance. My parents rode in the vehicle ahead. A contingent of guards in the one behind. My sisters sat on either side of me, their presence grounding yet irritating, as Sorchia hummed some cheerful tune under her breath.

“Addan, your jaw is so tight I’m afraid it might snap,” Catriona stated from my left. Her tone, as always, was sharp. She cared. A lot. Didn’t bother to pretend otherwise.

“I’m fine,” I replied curtly.

“You don’t look fine,” Sorchia chimed in on my right, her tone lighter, teasing. “You’re thinking about her, aren’t you? About Princess Paige?”

Her name shot through me like a lance. Of course I was thinking about Paige. She was all I could imagine. With the information Commander Zeus had shared, I thought about her even more. About how she’d barely escaped the planet. How she’d been close to being murdered on Earth as an infant. Then left to fend for herself for the next twenty-five years. And miraculously—and only by mistake—transported to Insuri to be swept up into a betrothal she didn’t want.

To that wedding that would keep her from me forever.

Yeah, I thought of her.

I turned my head sharply toward the window. “She’s marrying Prince Martainn,” I said bitterly. “It’s my job to keep her safe. Find out who killed her mother. What I feel doesn’t matter.”

“That’s not true, and you know it,” Catriona said, her piercing gaze locked on me. When she didn’t look away, I flicked my gaze to hers. “You’ve been brooding, Addan, and don’t think we haven’t noticed. This isn’t like you.”

To pine for a female? I had never once done so.

“It’s not just her,” I said through clenched teeth, the words spilling out before I could stop them. “I’ve come upon obstacles in the investigation into Queen Madallaine’s death. Commander Zeus hasn’t uncovered anything new, and it’s driving me insane.” I felt like coming out of my skin, so I rolled my neck around in a circle to try to ease some of the tension. It didn’t work. “Someone betrayed Paige’s mother—someone on the inside—and I can’t prove it. There are no clear leads, no names. I’m hunting shadows.”

“And that bothers you why?” Sorcha asked, though her tone wasn’t mocking this time. “Because you want to avenge her or—”

“Of course!” I snapped.

She was undeterred. “—or because it’s a way to stay connected to Paige?”

My silence was answer enough. The way I opened and closed my fists in my lap was also a sign. And the way I ground my teeth together.

Sorcha tilted her head, her playful demeanor softening. “You care about her, Addan.

We can all see it.”

Catriona leaned forward, her expression serious. “Do you have a plan in place to protect her? I assume you didn’t bring the extra guards for nothing.”

I nodded stiffly. My personal security detail from home—veterans I trusted with my life—followed discreetly in a separate transport. I’d arranged for them to be stationed strategically around the palace, disguised as visiting nobles’ guards. If an attack happened, they’d act immediately. I’d even gone so far as to arrange for an extraction route through one of the palace’s service corridors.

I could leave nothing to chance, not even at Queen’s Castle where she should be completely safe since it was her palace.

If it came to doing something extreme, I’d get Paige out, whether she liked it or not. I’d toss her over my shoulder and carry her away. Never look back.

“I’m not leaving anything to chance,” I said. “If there’s trouble, we’re getting Paige out of there. I won’t let her fall into someone else’s hands. Not the queen’s. Not her enemies’. Not anyone’s.”

“And you think she’ll come with you quietly?” Sorchá asked, raising an eyebrow.

“She’ll have no choice,” I said, though the words felt hollow. “If it means keeping her alive, I’ll do anything.”

My sisters exchanged a look I couldn’t quite decipher.

“You’re a brute,” Sorchá said finally, though there was a hint of a smile in her voice. “But an honorable one.”

“It’s not just about protecting her,” Catriona said softly, her gaze searching mine. “You’re in love with her. You don’t want to lose her.”

I swallowed hard, staring at the palace gates as they drew closer, reminding me that time was running out until she would be lost to me forever. “She’s marrying someone else,” I snapped, stating the obvious. “She is not mine to lose.”

“Has she actually chosen him? Prince Martainn?” Sorcha’s voice was uncharacteristically serious. “Or have you just failed to tell her she has another option?”

I turned to look at her sharply. “She voluntarily went with him,” I reminded.

She leaned closer, her expression both mischievous and sincere. “She’s from Earth, Addan. Earth girls don’t know about Resonants. They don’t grow up knowing about the bond. They have no such thing on her planet. Quite the opposite, actually. She might not even realize what you are to her.”

“What are you saying?” I asked, my voice rough.

“She’s saying—” Catriona sighed “—that you’re being an idiot.”

“We talked to Paige,” Sorcha continued. I felt like I was being assaulted from both sides. “Asked about Earth men. It seems they’re very different. Earth girls expect the man to make the first move,” Sorcha continued. “On Earth, it’s the men who usually initiate the claiming. They pursue. They initiate sex. Then, after a ridiculously long time of doing things together like walking and eating, which makes no sense to me, she said the men do something called a proposal. That’s when the male asks to claim the female. The male has to say that he wants to be with her. Declare it to her. Vigorously.”

Catriona piped up. “Their mating customs are strange and completely backward, and it was clear when we talked that she has no knowledge of our ways. She probably thinks you don’t want to be with her.”

“That is not possible.” I thought of all the ways I’d pleased her. Touched her. Made her come all over my cock.

“Sex is one thing, big brother. Did you tell her you wanted her? Or were you simply doing your duty and—umm—” It was unusual for Catriona to blush, but her cheeks turned a bright red as she blurted out the rest. “She might think you were just servicing her. Because that’s what Insuri males do.” Catriona cleared her throat as if relieved to have the uncomfortable words set free. “Please tell me you didn’t tell her about that Insuri custom.”

It is my job to service you.

Of course I’d said that to her. I’d then made her command me to fuck her the night I found her in the kitchen.

I paused.

Stilled.

Thought back to the first time I saw her, under my desk. How confused she’d been about her desire. She had insisted that she was acting strangely. Out of character. That she didn’t understand why she was so eager to fuck me, especially so quickly.

I’d believed at the time that she was playing a role, behaving the way I’d seen other noble females act when in the presence of a healthy, virile male they desired. Demanding. Aggressive. When her transport was delayed, I’d fucked her all night. Insisted it was my duty to service a female in need. She’d been insatiable. Her body

overly sensitive. Responsive. Greedy for more.

Did Paige now believe that's all she was to me? Every touch a duty I was obliged to perform? Every orgasm I gave her a service I felt obliged to fulfill?

My mouth dropped open, realization dawning.

I stared at my sisters, one then the other, my mind spinning. Could what they said be true? Could Paige's initial actions have been because we were Resonants, but she had no idea what that was? Or that the concept even existed?

Had she—as the Earth woman she was raised as—been waiting for me to declare my feelings and intentions? Waiting for me to claim her? All this time, when she'd said no, she'd done so because she didn't know what yes meant. Of course, she said no.

FUCK!

I'd thought I was giving her space, respecting her freedom to choose like an Insuri female. But had my silence been a mistake? Were the mating customs on Earth truly so different? I tried to imagine an entire planet where the females did not select their mates, instead waited and hoped the male they cared for might choose them. That the male was in charge. That—

Oh fuck.

No wonder she wanted me to take charge from the very beginning. She hadn't been playing at being submissive. She hadn't craved to have me be the dominant because she did so herself on a daily basis, like Insuri females.

No. She really did want me to take control because that was her nature. I missed it all and that was incomprehensible. And unforgivable. Fuck.

I growled. Actually made a sound that made my sisters stare at me wide-eyed. It was me who now had his eyes wide open.

“Then why is she marrying Prince Martainn? If we’re Resonants?” I asked aloud.

“Because she doesn’t think you want her, Resonant or not,” Catriona said. “Because her mother made the match. Because she’s been told since she arrived that she had a duty to the planet. That she had to follow our customs now.”

Fuck. Was it too late?

The transport slowed as we approached the palace gates, the glittering spires casting long shadows over the cobblestone courtyard. My sisters shifted in their seats—a little nervous now that I was behaving like a... a crazed male whose Resonant was about to be wed to another—and smoothed their dresses and adjusted their hair.

I barely noticed. All I could see was Paige. How I could get to her. Keep her. Steal her away. Gods, steal a transport ship.

The transport came to a stop, and the doors hissed open. Catriona and Sorcha stepped out gracefully, their gowns catching the morning light, but I stayed frozen in place.

“Addan?” Catriona glanced back over her shoulder, brow furrowed.

“I can’t do this,” I said, my voice low.

“You can’t do what?” Sorcha asked, though her tone suggested she already knew.

“I cannot allow her to bind herself to Prince Martainn.” The words tumbled out before I could stop them. “I can’t stand there and watch her claim him. I must speak to her first.”

Sorcha's bright eyes softened as she placed a hand on my arm. "Then go to her. Find her. Tell her how you feel. Stop the ceremony."

Catriona's gaze was steady, her voice low. "This isn't just about her safety anymore, Addan. This is about you. About her. About the bond you share. You are her Resonant. I've seen the way she looks at you. If you don't fight for her now, you'll regret it for the rest of your life."

I stared at them, my chest heaving. Their words pierced through every wall I'd built around myself. I'd been so focused on protecting Paige, on finding out who murdered her mother, on doing the right thing, the honorable thing, that I hadn't allowed myself to think about what I wanted. It hurt too fucking much.

I wanted her. She was mine, even if she didn't know it yet.

Thank fuck no male on Earth had mistakenly triggered her resonance. She didn't belong to someone else.

She.

Was.

Mine.

More importantly, I was hers, her Resonant.

The decision solidified in my mind like stone. I stood abruptly, stepping out of the transport and turning toward the palace's main entrance.

"What are you going to do?" Sorcha called after me. I could hear the grin in her voice.



“Stop the wedding.” My heart beat sure and steady for the first time in days.

“Be careful, brother. The Prince will not give her up so easily.” Catriona’s warning fell on deaf ears. I already knew the prince would not want to let her go. What male would?

Not me.

He wanted a queen. Power. Status. He’d go from being the queen’s son to being the king. That was his goal now, not the woman herself.

My heart pounded as every step I took carried me closer to her. Closer to the woman who had upended my life and changed everything I thought I knew.

The security team I’d assembled flowed into the palace behind me and disappeared, scattering among the guests, vanishing down long corridors. I was not alone. Every soldier knew their primary purpose was to protect Paige. I didn’t believe Alienor—or whoever had killed her mother—would make a move on Paige before the wedding. Not when she was behaving, obeying, following along with the law and her dead mother’s betrothal contract.

I didn’t know what I would say to her or how I would convince her not to claim the prince. To claim me instead. I knew one thing with absolute certainty, I couldn’t let her go.

Not to Prince Martainn. Not to anyone.

Paige was mine. She was my Resonant, my fucking everything. And I was going to make damn sure she knew it—before it was too late.

It was time to stop a royal fucking wedding.

21

P aige

The gown felt like a dream. If I'd been about to marry Addan, it would have been better than a dream.

Ivory and gold silk cascaded over my body, layers of fabric shimmering as I moved. The skirt flared out dramatically from my hips, its intricate folds edged in dark blue—the royal family's colors. Embedded in the fabric were tiny flecks of crystal that caught the light, creating the illusion of stars sparkling in a midnight sky. Golden threads wove an elaborate pattern of constellations across the bodice, while the high neckline dipped slightly in front to reveal a delicate chain of diamonds that shimmered against my skin.

The sleeves—long, fitted, and tapering into a point over my hands—were translucent and adorned with more golden constellations, creating the illusion that the stars had settled on my arms. A train stretched out behind me, so long it required two attendants to manage it as I moved. It flowed like liquid light, heavy yet ethereal.

My hair, a riot of red curls, had been swept up into an intricate crown of braids pinned with sapphires and gold. Curls cascaded down my back, their rich color contrasting beautifully with the gown's pale tones. Around my neck rested a statement piece—a heavy choker of gold and dark blue gemstones, perfectly matched to the earrings that dangled against my neck. The final touch? A delicate tiara perched atop my head, a symbol of the new role I was reluctantly stepping into.

A week ago I was cleaning offices and now I was...a queen.

I raised my wrist, fingers brushing the bracelet hidden beneath the sleeve of my gown. The cool metal hummed faintly against my skin, a piece of alien technology crafted to look like a simple gold accessory. But it was so much more than that. The Coalition's transport tech really was spectacular. The bracelet had appeared in the middle of my bed as if materializing out of thin air, a gift from Commander Zeus. When the moment came, a single touch would signal Commander Zeus that it was time to act. And when we were finished with this mission, I was told to keep the bracelet. Any time I needed assistance, for the rest of my life, I would have an entire battleship full of warriors at my disposal at the touch of a button. It paid to be queen of a planet, because when I asked for help, I had the entire Coalition at my back.

I would not be caught helpless like my mother had been. Ambushed. Murdered without a weapon or any hope of defending herself. Rage and grief poured into me like molten lava in my veins, making it hard to breathe. To think. I'd watched the video of my mother's murder twice.

Once with shock, grief and tears blinding me to the scene.

Once with the stone-cold heart of a queen who would bring the traitors to justice someday.

Today was that day.

I ran my fingertip over the bracelet, over the activation switch coded to my DNA. I longed to activate the beacon, make the people who'd murdered my parents face justice.

I sighed and dropped my hand to my side. Not yet. Not until all the players were in position.

It was reassuring, but I was still nervous as hell.

What if things didn't work and I ended up married to Martainn?

No. That was not going to happen. I'd push the hell out of the button on the bracelet before I said "I do". Even if the Coalition didn't answer my call, I wasn't marrying the prince, no matter how good looking he thought he was.

I took a deep breath, forced myself to focus. Shoved down the nerves and the constant ache. I missed Addan. Craved him. Longed. Pined. Whatever the word, I felt it.

When his sisters told me being separated from one's Resonant could cause pain, I hadn't really believed them. Now I knew the truth. I fucking hurt. My heart. My chest. There were moments I could barely speak past the pain in my throat. It squeezed like angry, desperate fists. Made it difficult to breathe without him. His touch. His voice. Just...him.

Soon. Soon this would all be over and I could go to him. Claim him.

The small waiting chamber was quiet except for the faint hum of distant music and the soft murmur of voices filtering through the walls. My heart raced—not with nervousness, but with anticipation. My plan was in motion. Everything had been accounted for.

I simply needed to make sure everyone was here.

I turned to my lady maid, who hovered nearby, her expression a careful mix of deference and curiosity. The guards posted at the door stood silent, their gazes fixed forward.

“Have all the guests on the list I gave you arrived?” I asked, my voice steady despite the storm raging inside me.

“Yes, Your Highness,” she said with a bow. “The last guest was seated moments ago.”

“Excellent.” I smiled faintly. “Please inform Queen Alienor and Prince Martainn that I’m ready.”

She curtsied. “At once, Your Highness.”

I nodded, and she turned to leave. Before she reached the door, it swung open, startling her. And me.

General Addan strode in, his presence dominating the small space. His gaze locked onto mine instantly, dark and intense, and my breath caught in my throat.

No, not General Addan. My Addan.

“General Natosi,” I said, swallowing hard. Could he hear the pounding of my heart? Every cell in my body responded to his presence. I was suddenly, desperately eager. Needy. It took every bit of self-control I possessed not to run to him and fling myself into his arms. Instead, I gestured to the guards with a royal wave of my hand. They had their hands on their weapons, ready to protect me, even from one of their commanders.

“It’s all right,” I said. “Leave us, please.”

The guards hesitated, but I shot them a firm look. Once the maid and guards exited, the door closed with a soft thud, leaving us alone.

Addan's gaze swept over me, lingered on the gown before meeting my eyes again. He looked torn—his usual command replaced by something raw and unguarded. This was hurting him, and I hated myself for it.

“You're really going through with this?” His voice vibrated over my skin, low and rough. I'd heard this tone before, when he was making me beg, feasting on my pussy, when his emotions were raw, and he was on the edge of losing control.

Like I was right now.

“I have to do this,” I replied. My heart ached at the frustration, the hurt in his tone, but I didn't dare say what I was thinking, not when I knew there were dozens of strategically placed sensors and security feeds recording every moment, every whisper. I knew the entire palace had extensive surveillance technology. I knew, because I'd spent hours over the last two days—with help from the house's AI system, who had revealed several more hidden screens and gadgets in my royal bedchamber—eavesdropping on Queen Alienor and her clueless, arrogant son. My betrothed. My prince.

The guy was a total player, had a new girl in his bed every night.

Logically, I could blame that on Insuri custom, on their societal expectation that an unwed males' duty was to service a woman in need. Wasn't difficult to imagine a new woman asking the prince to take her to bed every night. Still, he was a prince. Surely, he could have said no if he wanted to.

Then again, he was young. Rich. Royal. I wasn't sure I knew any men who would turn down that kind of action. Didn't make me want him, not when the man I desperately wanted stood before me.

“You cannot bind yourself to him.”

“My betrothal to the prince is the law.” I spoke, not for him, for the security feed I was quite sure was being monitored by one of Queen Alienor’s loyal minions. “My mother’s final wish. She promised me to Prince Martainn when I was a baby. I must honor her promise.”

I should get a fucking Oscar for this performance. Most actors had to learn how to cry on command, but I had to work hard not to burst into tears. They were stuck in my throat, and it ached.

He took a step closer, his broad shoulders tense. He loomed. Big and foreboding. Yet I knew he would never hurt me. “I know you don’t understand Insuri ways,” he began, his voice faltering slightly. “But I believe I’m your Resonant, Paige. I’ve felt it since the moment I touched you. And I—” He exhaled sharply, his jaw tight. “I love you.”

I love you.

My heart thudded painfully in my chest as he continued, his voice growing hoarse. “I can’t allow this. I can’t stand by and let you marry another.” His eyes darkened, his voice dropping to a low growl. “The thought of him touching you makes me want to tear this place apart.”

“Addan,” I whispered, my throat tight with emotion.

He took another step closer, until there was barely a breath of space between us. “Tell me I’m wrong,” he said, his voice breaking. “Tell me I’m imagining the connection we have, the resonance between us, and I’ll walk away.”

I reached up, my hand brushing against his cheek. “Hermione?” I said aloud, speaking to the house’s computer system.

Silence.

Damn. I forgot. The system would not reveal itself to anyone without my express permission. It was very used to hiding its existence. “Hermione, it’s okay. I trust Addan. You may reveal yourself to him.”

“Yes, Paige? How can I assist?” It responded immediately, as I’d known she—it had a female voice—would. I’d caved in and told the intelligence system that operated the castle that it needed a name. I was tired of saying “computer” or “house.” And Hermione Granger was one of my all-time favorite book characters. She was smart, brave, loyal and a kick ass witch. Seemed fitting, especially with all the magic the alien technology could do.

I was quite sure if my cousins knew Queen’s Castle was instantly loyal to me, they never would have let me set foot inside the place. In fact, the house itself had hidden knowledge, and blocked vital information, from Queen Alienor, her son, and all her staff. Thank god the house was on my side. Or, should I say, my mother’s side. My family’s side.

“I need total privacy for a couple minutes,” I said. “And delete our conversation from the records.”

“Of course, Paige.” I smiled at the frustrated tone of Hermione’s voice. I’d insisted she call me Paige, not Princess Edelene. I wouldn’t be having it call me Queen Edelene either. “Privacy shield in place. I will monitor all exterior entrances for your security.”

“Thank you.”

I caressed Addan’s cheek with my thumb and looked up into the face of the man I was totally, hopelessly in love with. The second he’d walked into the room, my body



lit up like a rocket blasting off. “Addan, you’re not wrong,” I said softly. “You’re my Resonant. I realized it the night Prince Martainn came for me.”

His eyes widened in shock, disbelief flickering across his face. His pale gaze roved over my face as if memorizing me. “You... you knew? For two days, you’ve known and said nothing?”

I nodded. Two and a half days and two very long, lonely, sleepless nights. But I didn’t correct him. “I realized the truth after talking with your sisters.”

“You said nothing.”

“I didn’t know if you felt the same,” I admitted. “And—” Shit. How was I going to tell the man I loved that I considered his mother a murder suspect?

“And what?”

“I didn’t know who to trust. I trusted you, of course. But I don’t know your family. I didn’t know any of the people at your house. There was no proof that Alienor was a traitor. I had to be sure.”

His jaw clenched as he stared into my eyes. I watched him process everything I’d just told him. Emotions flashed behind his eyes, then vanished. Disbelief. Shock. Rage. Resignation. Frustration.

Desire.

“My family would never betray House Peigi.”

“I’m sorry. I?—”

“Shhh.” Addan placed his finger over my lips, and I bit my tongue not to suck it into my mouth. “I understand why you had to be sure.”

My knees nearly gave out in relief. “Thank you.”

“But are you sure now?”

“Yes. And I know you’re mine. I thought I’d have to wait until all of this was over to ask you if you wanted me to claim you. I can’t believe you’re here.”

A loud pounding came from the door. “Princess Paige?”

Shit. Talk about bad timing. I hesitated, glancing a little desperately toward the door. “Addan, I have to go. The ceremony needs to start.”

His brow furrowed, his hand catching mine. “You can’t mean that. You’re not seriously going to marry him?! We’re Resonants. Are you confused as to what that means? Perhaps my sisters did not explain properly.”

I shook my head. “No, I understand. Trust me,” I said, holding his gaze. “I have a plan. Everything is going to be fine. But I really, really need you to trust me.”

He searched my eyes, his grip tightening. “I can’t be by your side. I can’t protect you. I don’t like this.”

“I know,” I said softly, then smiled, hopefully healing the sting to his Insuri male pride and protective streak. I understood because I was equally protective of him. “But you will.”

The intensity of his gaze burned into mine, and before I could say anything else, he leaned down and kissed me.

It wasn't gentle. It was fierce. Hungry. Full of everything we hadn't said until now. Equally potent, but nothing like any kiss we shared before. I melted into him. My hands clutched his shoulders as the world spun around us.

A sharp knock at the door shattered the moment.

"Your Highness!" a voice called urgently after trying the door handle. "It's time!"

We pulled apart, both of us breathing hard. Addan's eyes blazed with frustration and longing. I placed a hand on his chest, felt his heart pounding, maybe even harder and faster than mine.

"Trust me," I whispered.

The knock came again, louder this time.

"Princess, are you all right? Do you need assistance?"

"Just a moment! I'm coming!" I shouted toward the door, my heart hammering in my chest.

Addan caught my wrist, his voice a low growl. "Paige?—"

The door burst open, three very agitated guards burst into the room, weapons drawn. I gave them a stern look as I stepped away from Addan. "I'm fine. Put those away."

My hand lingered on Addan's shoulder. "I'll see you after the ceremony," I said firmly. "Trust me." I slipped free of his grasp, forced myself to step away.

I gave Addan one last glance before they whisked me away.

22

A ddan

The ceremonial chamber was too bright, too crowded. The air was thick with tension, or it sure as hell felt that way to me, the low murmur of conversation bouncing off the polished stone walls and gold-veined columns. I stood near the back, blending in with the other nobles, my jaw clenched so tightly it ached.

Then the music started, and the grand doors at the end of the aisle opened.

She appeared.

Paige.

The breath left my lungs.

The sunlight streaming in behind her turned her gown into something otherworldly. Ivory silk and gold shimmered with every step she took, the dark blue accents catching the light. The train of her dress flowed like liquid starlight behind her, making her look like something out of a dream.

My dream.

Her hair was a crown of fiery curls and intricate braids, glinting with sapphire pins. A few loose curls framed her face, her green eyes so vibrant they almost glowed in the light. She was stunning. More than stunning—ethereal. Like she belonged to the stars

themselves.

My chest tightened. I couldn't breathe, couldn't think.

Trust me.

Fuck. The taste of her kiss lingered on my lips, and the memory of it burned. She loved me. She'd said it. I'd felt it in the way she clung to me, her lips soft and fierce all at once. And now she was walking down the aisle toward another man.

Every instinct I had screamed at me to stop her. To charge down that aisle, throw her over my shoulder, and carry her out of this cursed chamber.

But I couldn't.

She'd asked me to trust her. And damn it, I would. Even if it killed me.

My fists clenched at my sides as she moved down the aisle. The music swelled. A haunting melody filled the room. I barely heard it. All I could see was Paige.

She didn't look afraid. Not nervous. Not defeated. She looked calm. Steady. In control. Her gaze was set straight before her. She should be smiling brilliantly at Prince Martainn, lost in his gaze. The room and everyone in it slipping away to their love and bond.

But they had none. She didn't like him. She loved me. She was my Resonant.

It made no sense. What kind of female walked into the arms of her enemy looking like that?

A queen. A fucking queen. That's who.

I tore my gaze away, scanning the room. My guards were in position, just as I'd ordered. Two stationed near the main doors, two more up on the balcony. The rest scattered among the crowd, blending in with the other noble families' attendants. Each one armed. Each one ready to step in for... something.

I didn't know what Paige had planned, but if anything went wrong, they'd act. Fast.

I couldn't shake the feeling that I should have brought an entire squadron armed and ready for battle, regardless of whether it would have been blatant and a threat to the throne.

Paige reached the dais and stopped beside Martainn. The bastard smirked, his posture smug. Just seeing him so close to her made my blood boil. He reached for her hand. I had to dig my nails into my palms to keep from lunging.

If he touched her, I'd kill him.

My gaze flicked back to my team. I counted them again, noted their positions. Balcony. Doors. Side exits. Everything was covered.

I should've felt reassured, but I didn't.

And then Paige moved.

She turned away from Martainn, her back to the dais, her gaze sweeping over the room. She rolled her shoulders back and lifted her chin. The shift was so subtle, so natural, that it almost didn't register at first.

Until she spoke.

"My esteemed guests." Her voice hovered in the room, clear and commanding. It

rang out over the crowd, silencing the whispers in an instant. Prince Martainn stared at her wide eyed, his mouth open to interrupt her. To wonder why the hell his wedding ceremony was stalled.

The male might be smart after all because he shut his lips and pressed them together into a thin line.

“Before we begin the ceremony, I have a special announcement to make.”

The room stilled at Paige’s words. The returning princess wanted to speak?

Everyone listened.

Murmurs rippled through the nobles as heads turned and curious glances were exchanged. Martainn and his mother also exchanged confused looks.

Interesting. So, this wasn’t part of the royal wedding plans.

I straightened, my muscles tense as I waited for Paige to reveal all.

Paige didn’t falter. She didn’t hesitate. She met the eyes of the assembled nobles in a wide pass, her expression calm and unyielding.

“This is not a wedding,” she said, her voice steady. “It is a reckoning.”

The room exploded into verbal chaos.

Paige’s voice carried to the very back of the room and I realized the castle’s intelligence system was assisting, amplifying her voice, making sure every single person heard every single word. That no one could interrupt her.

“Our friends from the Coalition Fleet will be joining us now.” She squeezed her wrist before raising her arm to reveal a gold bracelet. It was flashing with bright green light—the color of transport system lights. I saw them every day at Alpha Station. The same color that flashed on our control panels. Coalition Fleet communication lights.

What the fuck was going on?

As if summoned by magic, dozens of Coalition Fleet fighters, most large Prillon warriors—and one really pissed off Atlan in beast mode—appeared out of thin air all around the perimeter of the large ceremonial chamber. They were dressed in full battle armor—black and gray camouflage space suits—and heavily armed. Commander Zeus moved to stand just off to Paige’s side with a feral look on his face. He was more than happy to be here. He was...hunting.

Somehow, Paige had summoned them all. With her bracelet? Had she conspired with Commander Zeus? How? I had not seen nor spoken to her in over two days. How had she managed to pull this off? Why had Zeus not notified me? I found him and willed him to meet my gaze. He did so with a knowing grin. He knew all right. He knew what she was to me.

I’d kick his smirking Prillon ass later.

Paige’s calm voice rang out over the agitated and confused guests like a clarion call, clear and distinct as a ringing bell. “As I call out the names of the traitors who conspired against, and murdered, my mother—Queen Madallaine Edelene Peigi—and murdered my father, Ambassador Lorient, and tried to kill me when I was an infant, please stand and be recognized. Some of you have been involved in smuggling and selling illegal Hive tech with the Silver Scions. Some of you have profited from breaking other Interstellar laws involving the drug trade, selling slaves, or stealing from the people. Whether you betrayed my family, or the Interstellar Coalition of Planets, you will now be taken into custody by the Coalition Fleet to face justice.



Should you be set free from the Coalition Fleet's prison, you will be returned to Insuri to face judgment, and punishment, for treason to the crown."

Fuck. Me.

My little Paige had some claws. Teeth.

And fifty Prillon warriors who looked ready to haul every single traitor from the room and beat them into submission.

Trust me, she said.

Fuck. This was incredible.

Paige raised her chin as the first name rang out. "House Arrant." Her tone was sharp as a blade. Play time was over.

Gasps filled the chamber as a Coalition warrior stepped forward, his gleaming armor catching the light. The Arrants—middle-aged nobles dressed in their finest—slowly and warily rose to their feet. The husband stammered something incoherent, his wife clinging to his arm, both of them pale as ghosts.

The warrior didn't care. He motioned, and two more soldiers surrounded them, escorting them toward the exit. The condemned couple didn't say anything, didn't shout that they were innocent. That Paige was wrong, and they'd loved the former queen.

They did none of that.

The whispers grew louder. People shifted uncomfortably in their seats, their gazes darting between Paige and the soldiers, as if they were to be plucked up next.

“House Fenral,” Paige continued, her voice cutting through the noise.

This time, the reaction was louder. The Fenrals were younger, bolder. This time, the wife shouted her protests, but it didn’t matter. Coalition warriors appeared at their side, moving with precision. The murmurs in the room turned to frantic whispers.

I barely heard them.

My focus was on Paige. On the calm determination etched into her features. She intended to out every single enemy to her family and have them arrested. Not by Insuri guards, where there might be enemies within who would be complicit, but Coalition fighters.

Coalition fighters. She’d spoken to Zeus. She must have.

She called the next name, and the next, each one like a death knell to the assembled nobles. Every time a Coalition warrior stepped forward, I saw the crowd grow more restless. Shifting in their seats. Glancing toward the exits.

Young Lord Reijoni bolted from his seat and sprinted toward one of the doors.

The Atlan beast calmly picked the young man up and broke his neck with just one hand. Tossed him aside as his elderly mother screamed.

Paige followed the activity and gave a slight nod to the beast. He bowed his head, his gaze resolute. Loyal. As if he would do anything she asked, even defy Commander Zeus, if she asked it of him. Did they know one another?

“Thank you, Warlord Stohn.” Paige’s soft note was nearly a caress. I didn’t like her speaking to any male that way. That soft, grateful tone belonged to me.

“Kill. Traitor. Hurt Paige.” I’d never heard the deep rumbling tone of an Atlan in beast mode. The sound was like rocks rolling down a hill.

Fuck. They did know each other. What was he to her? Was that beast going to try to claim her? At least he was loyal. Or appeared to be. Wouldn’t stop me from killing him to keep what was mine. Paige was mine. I wrapped my hand around my weapon and hoped it wouldn’t come to that.

Paige turned away from the beast and I could breathe again as she called out the next name. “House Reijoni.” No wonder the boy had run. He knew. The dead man’s sobbing mother was escorted out of the room along with her elder son and her elderly sister. Lady Reijoni’s husband had been dead for several years. Apparently, her sons had followed in their parents’ corrupt footsteps.

Holy fuck. So many traitors. How had Paige managed to find them all?

I could do nothing but stand ready to protect her as I watched it all unfold.

23

Paige

Everything was going according to plan. Commander Zeus was taking these evil traitors, one by one, to outer space and would turn them—and all the evidence Hermione, the brilliant house computer, gave me—over to the Coalition's Intelligence Core. They would investigate further, punish them for their crimes, and, if there was anything left for me, send them back to Insuri for trial.

I didn't really want to deal with that. I'd told Zeus as much. Let them all rot for the rest of their cold-blooded, cruel, baby-killing, mother-and-father-murdering lives in some prison spaceship. There was only one person I needed to take care of myself, and Zeus gladly left her for me.

She was family. My mother's own blood. I couldn't let her off so easily as a life sentence off planet.

No. She would pay, and pay where the entire planet knew what she had done. Who she was. How she'd fooled, tricked and used the entire planet.

Something dark and cold rose inside me as I studied Queen Alienor.

She'd taken everything from me.

Everything.

My parents. My identity. My history. My inheritance. She'd betrayed her own blood. Her own family. And for what?

Money? Power? Control?

I stood tall, my heart racing, but I forced myself to hold steady. The Coalition warriors moved with swift precision around the edges of the chamber. Their strange space armor gleamed black and gray under the ceremonial lights. Their armor lined with more weapons and gadgets than I ever could have dreamed up. I'd thought Insurians, and their high-tech cars and sentient house AI systems, seemed like something straight out of a sci-fi TV show, but my people had nothing on the Coalition warriors.

Each name I called—every single one had been memorized, burned into my brain—sent a ripple through the crowd, their gasps and whispers blending into a rising storm of disbelief.

It proved the deceit ran deep. How had all of these people remained innocent and free, so sure of their deception that they felt free to attend royal weddings, confident no one would learn of the part they played in corruption and a coup. These assholes came here to look me in the eye, smile, and congratulate me on marrying the son of the woman who had murdered my parents. Fucking cold-blooded scum. I had no mercy in my heart for any of them. Not one.

“House Vallen.”

I didn't waver. Name after name I called felt like shedding a weight, like breaking chains I hadn't realized I'd been carrying. These were the people who had betrayed my mother, the ones who had torn my family and my kingdom apart for their own gain. They didn't deserve the titles they wore, the wealth they flaunted, or the trust they had broken.

Nobles shifted uneasily in their seats, their gazes darting toward the exits as if calculating their own odds of escape. I allowed my gaze to sweep the room, linger on the faces of those who still sat frozen in their chairs, their expressions ranging from shock to fear.

Fear. Those were the guilty ones. They knew what was coming for them.

Me.

And then there was House Natosi. Addan's parents' and his sisters' expressions ranged from his mother's approving smile to young Sorcha's shocked excitement. Catriona gave me a slight nod of respect. Addan's father was beaming like a proud papa. The nobles surrounding them preened and cackled with glee. My true allies. The faces I recognized from our brief introductions at Addan's home.

Lady Natosi hadn't invited a single traitor to her home that night. She was shrewd. Intelligent. A very strong ally. Since I fully intended to marry her son, it was a good thing I wasn't going to have to arrest her.

Talk about problems with the in-laws.

Finally, my gaze landed on Queen Alienor where she sat on a throne off to the side of the dais to watch the wedding. She was motionless, her lips pressed into a tight, pale line. Her mask of composure was cracking, the faint tremor in her hand betraying her carefully constructed facade.

I turned back to the gathered nobles, my voice unwavering. "To all of you gathered here, let today serve as a warning. Insuri will not fall to greed. We will not fall to corruption. The traitors among you chose greed over honor, power over loyalty, and now they will face the consequences."

24

A ddan

Name after name was called. Everyone watched as they were taken away by Coalition soldiers. But my gaze was affixed to only one person.

Martainn. The one whose name would, no doubt, be called by his betrothed.

He would be revealed as the traitor he was.

He would face justice, but that wasn't my concern at the moment. He was the evil who stood at my Resonant's side.

His smug grin had twisted into something else—fear. He stood stiffly beside Paige, his eyes darting to the crowd, the exits, and finally to her. While I suspected he was guilty, if I'd had any doubts, his face gave him away. He had only been a small child at the time of Queen Madallaine's death. He'd certainly been too young to be part of the coup and murders. He was a child no longer. He had either committed crimes since, or he'd known the truth about his mother. The Silver scions. The illegal activities I'd discussed with Commander Zeus. How could he not? The precious prince had abetted the continuation of a crime against the entire planet.

His hand shifted toward the ceremonial blade attached to his belt as if no one would notice among all the noise and upheaval.

Except me. Paige might be saving the planet, but someone needed to save her.

It wasn't a fleet of Coalition soldiers who would do that.

No, it was going to be me.



25

P aige

Beside me, I heard the faint rustle of fabric, the sharp intake of Martainn's breath. My skin prickled with unease.

There would never be a wedding—not between him and me, anyway—and his look said he knew it. He'd lost. This was a gathering for the guilty to be collected.

I turned to the prince.

He stood beside me, still as stone, the arrogance he'd carried earlier was gone.

I called out the last name on my list. The most important name. Alienor's name.

“House Seppani.” The final words hung in the air like a blade. The room went silent.

Suddenly, Martainn's grip wrapped like iron around my arm, yanking me back so hard I stumbled. The sharp edge of a blade pressed cold and sharp as ice against my throat. His arms were hard. Unyielding, as if he had nothing left to lose. “I'm no traitor.”

I didn't believe him. He had been a child when my mother was murdered. That was true. But I couldn't believe he'd lived in this castle, under his mother's rule, and remained innocent all these years.

The truth would come out, in the end. He would stand trial. If he was guilty, he would either go to prison, or face execution. Either way, life as he knew it was over.

He held me trapped in place, his chest heaving. I couldn't move. Couldn't escape. Could barely breathe as the room erupted into gasps and shouts. Coalition warriors snapped to attention, their weapons raised, forming a wall of killing precision.

Martainn could kill me if he wanted to. Slit my throat. It wouldn't matter. There would be no escape. Not for him. Not for his bitch mother.

"Stay back!" Martainn bellowed, his voice breaking. "Stay back, or I'll kill her!"

I forced myself to breathe. My heart raced, my mind spinning with the sudden danger. I should have kept my distance, expected this. Too late now. But I refused to let him see my fear. I held my chin high, kept my voice steady. "This won't end the way you think it will, Martainn. Let me go."

He laughed, the sound wild and bitter. "I did not betray you."

"I don't believe you."

"It's true." Alienor's bitter words shocked us both. Martainn gasped and the blade bit harder against my skin, a sharp sting that sent a spike of adrenaline through my veins.

"Mother? What did you do?"

"I made you a king."

I clenched my fists, refused to flinch, even as his breath burned hot against my ear. Was this a charade? Were my cousins playing a sick and twisted game? Trying to convince me to spare Martainn's life?

“You were supposed to be dead. Shade swore to me that you were dead.” Alienor sounded bored now. Slightly confused. “I paid Siren Legion double their usual fee, since you were an infant. They wanted to take you, sell you to the highest bidder. But I needed you dead.”

“Well, I’m not.” I squirmed and kicked, tried to break Martainn’s hold.

“Kill her, son. Kill her and the crown is yours.”

The blade shifted in Martainn’s hand so the cold, flat edge pressed to my skin. Shit. Was this asshole really going to kill me? Wouldn’t that be against the law? Would the Coalition intervene? I wasn’t sure. The only reason Commander Zeus and his warriors were here now was because these Insuri nobles had broken Interstellar law, too. Would they interfere if the current heir to the throne slit my throat? Was I going to die?

And then I saw him.

Addan.

He moved like a shadow through the chaos, silent and focused. His dark eyes were locked on Martainn with a lethal intensity that made my chest tighten. The crowd, the soldiers, the shouts—all of it faded away. All I could see was him.

He would save me. I knew he would. Perhaps because we were Resonants, but more likely because I loved him.

And he loved me.

He wouldn’t let what we shared die.

He quickly closed the distance between us, his movements deliberate, measured. I stayed perfectly still, barely breathing. Martainn was so worried about the Prillon warriors in front of him—who wouldn't be?—that he didn't notice Addan circling behind us.

Nor did he notice when Addan approached.

Addan struck in a blur of motion.

His hand clamped down on Martainn's wrist, pushing it away from my throat, then twisting it sharply. The blade clattered to the floor, his grip on me broken. Before I could step back, Addan drove his elbow into Martainn's ribs, the force of the blow sending him crashing to the floor.

I stumbled, gasping for air as Addan stepped in front of me, his broad shoulders blocking out everything else. He formed a wall between me and all danger.

"Are you hurt?" he asked, his voice low, fierce. His pale gaze raked over every inch of me.

I swallowed hard, my voice shaking as a group of Insuri soldiers I didn't recognize swarmed Martainn and dragged him to his feet. "I'm fine."

I didn't look away from the Addan, not even as the Coalition warriors closed in. They dragged Queen Alienor off the throne. The Queen remained silent. Regal. Cold as fucking ice.

For the first time since I'd been at the castle, I saw the evil face of the woman capable of plotting murder.

"You'll destroy everything. Make Insuri weak. Poor." Queen Alienor's voice was

calm. Unperturbed. The voice of an unrepentant, murderous psychopath. “When you came back, I should have killed you, but I let you live—for my son. You were supposed to marry my son. Give him an heir. A future king! You’re nothing but a foolish, stupid girl?—”

Martainn interrupted, snarling, “Shut up, mother. You betrayed us all.”

“Enough,” I said, stepping forward, but Addan’s strong arm wrapped around my waist. Held me back. He was at my side.

Where I wanted him.

Where he belonged.

“Get him out of here.” Addan issued the order to his men and the soldiers complied at once. Martainn’s mouth snapped shut. Opened. He took a deep breath. “I never would have killed you, Princess.”

Addan punched him. Hard. He slumped in the guards’ arms, and I watched as they carried him from the room, his feet unable to support his weight as they dragged him out of sight. His mumbled protests faded into the distance, swallowed by the tense silence of the chamber. Even if he was found innocent in a trial, there would be no escape from the scorn and hatred of the citizens of Insuri.

Queen Alienor remained frozen, her pale face an emotionless mask as the last remnants of her legacy, her only son, was hauled away.

I turned to face her at last. Woman to woman. Queen to queen. I’d seen the videos. I knew exactly who had murdered my mother. “She trusted you.” We both knew exactly who I was talking about.

Alienor scoffed. “Madallaine was weak and stupid. She wanted to join the Coalition. Send our best soldiers off to fight their war. Our women to fuck their fighters. Breed with them. Such a waste.”

“The Coalition is all that stands between you and integration by the Hive.” Commander Zeus’s voice sounded ten times calmer than I felt. I wanted to punch her. Kick her. Scream. Stomp on her head. Violence swelled within me as I played the image of my mother bleeding out on the floor—Alienor standing above her—over and over in my mind. I’d only watched it twice, but the images were tattooed onto my brain. Vivid. Horrific.

Sad.

“For twenty-five years I’ve ruled this planet. The Hive do not bother us. The Silver Scions do not raid our ships. The Legions of Rogue 5 do not steal our goods or take our people. Do you know why that is?”

I walked to stand a few paces in front of her, grateful for the strong-armed Prillon warriors holding her in place. “Why is that, Alienor?”

“Because I saved us all. I work with them, not against them. Insuri is rich and prosperous. Our people lack for nothing. Our men don’t die in battle on distant moons, and our young women aren’t forced to breed with beasts.” Her gaze drifted to Warlord Stohn on the last word. His soft growl proof that he heard her.

Fucking bitch. And she was wrong. So wrong. I’d learned much the last few days, first with the Natosi family’s help and history books, then my new AI friend’s access to vast amounts of knowledge. I knew far more about this planet and its history than Alienor suspected. And I knew about her. What she’d done. The way she’d lined her own pockets and made the people, my people, suffer.

“You are a liar and a fraud. Some of our people starve, when S-Gen technology could feed them. We pollute our air and water when the Coalition offers free, clean energy. You grew rich, Alienor. Not the people. Our citizens are watched and catalogued like stock animals. Monitored. Controlled. You are evil and an oppressor. And your reign is over.”

“Your mother was weak and stupid. You’re just like her.”

Oh no, she didn’t. I was so done with this bitch.

I nodded at the two guards. “Release her.”

“Excuse me?” One of the Prillons looked confused.

Addan protested. “Paige, what are you?—”

“Release. Her.” It was an order. From a queen.

The two Prillons released her arms and took half a step back.

Good enough.

I walked forward and slammed my fist into Alienor’s arrogant, condescending, evil, ugly fucking face.

She staggered back. The Prillon guards’ reflexes were fast enough to catch her, but I watched with extreme satisfaction as they let my dear cousin fall onto her ass on the floor. Blood poured from her nose, dripping on her royal gown. I walked to stand over her and yanked her crown, my mother’s crown, off her head.

Like my mother, she bled.

Unlike my mother, she'd live. Maybe for a very long time. Maybe not. I thought for sure I'd have her executed. Now I wasn't sure. Seemed to me death would be the easy way out.

I glanced at Addan and gave a slight nod. "Do I have a dungeon?" Why hadn't I asked Hermione about that?

"Indeed, Princess, you do." He ordered several of our guards to take her away.

When she was gone, Commander Zeus stepped forward, his voice calm and clear. "Your Highness, I believe all of the traitors have been taken away. The queen... the former queen, and the prince have been secured. Justice will be served, both on this planet and in a series of Coalition tribunals. Is there anything else you require of the Coalition at this time?"

I turned to Addan. His dark eyes met mine, still filled with that same unwavering focus. But there was something else there now—love. He was mine. I didn't have to question it. Or deny it.

I could now embrace it. And him.

"Yes," I said, letting a smile tug at the corners of my lips. "I'd like you to stay. I'd like you to witness my bonding ceremony." I looked up at Addan. "That is what it's called, right?"

Addan froze, his expression unreadable. "Paige," he began, his voice rough.

"I can claim you now, can't I?" I asked, taking a step closer to him. "As my Resonant?"

His throat worked as he swallowed hard. Nodded. "If you'll have me."



“I am totally in love with you, Addan.” I reached for his hand, my smile widening. “I’ll have you. Always.”

In any room. Any position. Day. Night. One touch and I melted. He was mine, but I was his, too. Body and soul. This resonance business was fucking incredible. For the first time since I’d fallen into that soothing blue water at the processing center, I was actually glad I was an alien.

The room erupted into murmurs of confusion and surprise. Good ones, this time. I didn’t care. My enemies were defeated, my throne was secure, and for the first time, my future felt like it was mine. Mine and Addan’s.

Addan stared at me, his dark eyes wide with something between disbelief and awe. Slowly, a smile curved his lips, soft at first, then growing into something that made my chest tighten.

“Are you sure about this?” he asked, his voice low. “I’ll never be able to let you go.”

“I’m sure,” I said, squeezing his hand. “It’s you. It’s been you since the moment we met.”

Commander Zeus cleared his throat, drawing the attention of the room. “By royal decree of Princess Paige, General Addan Natosi is her Resonant and will be King Consort upon her ascension. The Coalition officially recognizes this union.” He inclined his head, his expression warmer now. “It would be our honor to witness it.”

Addan took a deep breath, his gaze steady as it locked onto mine. “You’re claiming me, Paige. Don’t think for a moment I won’t claim you back.”

I smiled. “I’m counting on it.”

The murmurs grew louder as I stepped forward, still holding Addan's hand. The nobles began to murmur, their shock changing to relief.

The officiant, who had been cowering near the dais, rose uncertainly to his feet. He glanced between us, clearly unsure of what to do.

"It's all right," I addressed him with a calm authority I hadn't realized I possessed. "The ceremony will proceed. Perhaps not as planned, but as needed. I will obviously not be marrying Prince Martainn." I turned to Addan, the only man I wanted by my side. "I claim General Addan Natosi as my Resonant."

A collective gasp rippled through the room, followed by silence so thick it felt like the entire palace was holding its breath.

Addan stepped closer, his hand tightening on mine. "I accept your claim."

The room erupted in cheers. That was more like it. More the vibe I wanted at my wedding. No, not wedding. Bonding Ceremony. Better than a wedding. Weddings ended in divorces. This was primal. Biological. Magical. Better than anything I ever thought I would have.

To have found it so randomly, so quickly, was scary. And amazing.

To think. If I hadn't been a Trus-T-Kleen cleaner, I'd never have been here.

I reached up, brushing my fingers against his cheek. "I love you."

He nodded, his jaw tightening as he fought to keep his emotions in check. "I love you." Then, with the same quiet confidence I'd come to love, he turned to the officiant. "Proceed with the bonding ceremony."

The man fumbled with his ceremonial book, his hands shaking slightly as he adjusted his robes and turned the pages looking for the correct rite, the right words. This wasn't a wedding, this was a bonding, the claiming of a Resonant. The two ceremonies represented very different things.

This was real. Forever.

He cleared his throat, his voice quivering as he began. "Under the laws of Insuri, and by the will of the crown..."

The rest of the room melted away. It was just Addan and me now, standing together at the center of it all. His dark eyes locked onto mine, filled with emotions that made my heart ache. In the good way this time.

When it was time to exchange vows, I spoke first, my voice steady and sure, repeating the words I was prompted by the officiant. "I claim you as my Resonant, Addan Natosi. My Resonant. My protector. My love."

His throat worked as he swallowed, his voice rough with emotion as he replied. "And I claim you, Princess Edelene Merrienne Peigi. Paige. My Resonant. My queen. My heart."

The officiant continued, his voice growing steadier as he reached the ceremony's conclusion. "By the power vested in me by the people of Insuri, I now pronounce you bonded for life. May your union bring strength and prosperity to the planet."

The room remained silent, stunned. But when Addan leaned down, his lips brushing mine, the applause began—hesitant at first, then building into a roaring tide of approval as Addan's kiss consumed me.

I barely heard the noise. All I could feel was him.

26

A ddan

I endured for two hours. Two long, excruciating hours where I had to talk and mingle. Socialize. Accept congratulations for the surprise bonding ceremony but also for, well, a coup. The only perk was that I had Paige at my side. Not just that, I held her hand and didn't let go.

Not once since the kiss that finalized our bonding.

That kept my beast at bay, kept me from throwing her over my shoulder and exiting out the nearest door and fucking her up against a wall in some private corner somewhere in the palace.

But enough was enough.

Paige would be queen for a long, long time. These Insurians could visit with her later.

It was time to be selfish. Fuck, yes.

Across the room, I gave my mother a look that said everything.

No more.

It's time to take my Resonant the hell out of here.

I need to fuck Paige in the next five minutes.

While I certainly didn't need her permission, I needed her help. She could deal with any repercussions from what I was about to do.

She nodded and I couldn't miss the small smile playing about her lips.

Even though Paige was speaking to Lady Piriana as if they were new best friends, I leaned down and whispered in her ear. "Are you ready to be fucked, Resonant?"

"—seven sets of—" Paige's words cut off. I had no clue what the two females were discussing, and I didn't care.

Her cheeks flushed and she looked a little stunned. Slowly, she turned her head and glanced up at me. Then licked her lips.

"Ye—," she whispered.

She didn't finish that syllable because I said... no, not said, shouted, "The queen bids you all a good day!"

Then I tugged her hand—which I still held—and pulled her across the large room. Guests parted for us. I heard voices. Laughter. Whispers. I didn't pay attention to anything except the door.

Thank fuck a guard opened it for us and we were free. Except I didn't know where to go. I'd been in the palace before, but never in the private chambers.

At the bottom of the grand staircase, I paused. "If you don't point me toward your rooms, I will fuck you here on the stairs."

The look Paige gave me had me groaning. The look that said, Yes, please.

I was bonded to a very dirty female. I was done. D.O.N.E.

She pointed upwards. She may have been the queen of the planet. She may have been the female and the dominant one in our bonding.

But my cock was thinking for me now.

It wanted to satisfy Paige. Immediately.

I did what I longed to do ever since she walked out of my family's home.

I bent at the waist, tossed her over my shoulder and stole away my royal mate.

Paige

Like the hero in a sappy romcom movie, Addan threw me over his shoulder.

If I wasn't already desperately aroused, that would have made my panties damp.

But they were already soaked. Ruined.

And that was from standing beside him. If I hadn't known it was because he was my Resonant and my body literally craved his, I'd have been embarrassed.

But I'd pretty much gobbled down his cock within ten minutes of meeting him, so a dripping pussy after watching him be all strong and macho was nothing. It had been two days since I'd kissed him. Rode his cock. Had him fuck me. I ached for it. The need was urgent. A hunger, and I knew he felt the same way.

He'd pretty much announced to all the guests that he was taking me away to fuck. No polite farewells. No staying until everyone left.

No. Just... chest beating and tugging me from the room.

And now this.

After I pointed our way—from upside down—to my rooms, he kicked the door shut behind us and set me on my feet.

His pale blue gaze was dark. So potent I caught my breath.

I stood there, my chest heaving—as if I'd run all the way up those steps and across a huge palace instead of being carried—and unsure of what to do next.

Because he wasn't kissing me. He wasn't dropping to his knees, pushing up the layers of my dress and finding me wet and aching for his mouth and fingers.

No, he was... undressing.

Okay, this was good. I liked this.

Button after button, he opened his uniform jacket. His broad shoulders shrugged it off.

As he undid the buttons at his wrists, he toed off his boots. How he did that without falling down, was impressive.

It was also like watching a Magic Mike strip tease.

Only better, which I hadn't thought was possible.

I backed up a step, then another, until I was able to lean against my bed. The support was needed so I didn't slide to the ground in a puddle of well, my own arousal.

He didn't linger or tease. No, he seemed to be on a mission. To get naked.

Within seconds, he was. Then stalking toward me. Blue gaze like ice cold heat. Silver white hair flowing around his shoulders like a mythical god's. Body taut. Cock hard.

I swallowed and licked my lips.

When he stood before me, he still didn't kiss or touch me.

"It is time to complete our bonding," he said, his voice rougher than an unpaved road back home.

"Um... okay." Yes, please. Since he was naked, I had a good idea of what that was going to be.

He held his hands out in front of him, wrists together. "Bind me, Resonant."

I blinked. Then again. "What?"

"Tie me up. As your bonded Resonant, you shall now have your way with me."

O—kay.

Addan

The look on Paige's face was equal parts eagerness and confusion. Not what I wanted at this moment. It was my fault though.



My cock was thinking for me, not remembering she knew nothing about how the bonding was finalized. She wasn't raised on Insuri. Didn't know what I wanted or expected from her.

She thought we were going to fuck.

We were, but as custom dictated. A custom she knew nothing about.

"Is this because I'm queen?" she asked.

I shook my head. "No, because you are my female, and you lead our family now. You and me. Family Peigi."

"Oh." She paused. "So I tie you up because of that?"

"Because you take what you wish from my body. I'm offering myself to you without reservation, as is customary after a bonding ceremony."

Her gaze raked down said body and my cock pulsed, then wept pre-cum.

"Okay."

I glanced around, realizing I didn't have any binds. But my shirt would do. Swiping it from the floor, I moved to the bed, climbed up upon it and settled with my head on the pillows. "Use this. Bind my wrists together and then knot it about the headboard."

She stared. Didn't males on Earth enjoy the pleasure of being bound and at their female's mercy?

"Do not be afraid."

“I’m not afraid.”

No, the way she was eyeing me didn’t hold a hint of fear.

“But Addan, I can’t get out of my dress myself. If I tie you up, then—”

She raised a very valid point. I popped up and went to her, spun her so her back was to me. My haste made her laugh.

Except the tiny buttons were hard to release. I grunted with my lack of patience, then growled as I pulled at the sides and ripped the dress open. Buttons pinged across the floor.

From there, I pushed the garment down, over her hips so it pooled in a big circular poof about her ankles. Yes, that dress would have been a deterrent. Now it was ruined.

I had zero regret.

She spun about and I took in what she wore beneath. Or didn’t wear. Her pussy was barely covered in a sheer panty that left nothing hidden. Including how wet she was for me. Her breasts were bare, the nipples hard little peaks.

I clenched my fists not to grab onto her. Not this time.

Settling into position on the bed again, I held out my white uniform shirt.

This time, she took it and climbed up beside me. I held out my arms and she bound my wrists using a sleeve.

Once secured, I raised my arms over my head.

Leaning over me, she added a second knot, this time ensuring I was bound and at her mercy.

Except her breasts were directly over my face. I might not be able to use my hands, but I sure as hell could use my mouth. Lifting my head, I latched onto a nipple and sucked.

Paige gasped, then moaned.

“Addan,” she all but begged.

Finally, I released her and she sat back. “What am I to do now?” she asked.

“Anything. Anything you want. I am your Resonant and I am at your mercy. My body is yours. My cock a tool for your pleasure.”

27

Paige

Wow. Now what? I knelt beside him. I literally had the man of my dreams tied up. Naked. Begging me to claim him. Cock out, up and ready to ride.

Except, I felt lost. This was a tradition. An Insurian rite and I had no idea what I was supposed to do. So I asked.

“What now?” I lifted my gaze to his. “I mean, I know what to do, but what if I do the bonding wrong?”

He shook his head. “No. You can’t do anything wrong. You take your pleasure from me.”

I could do that, but this was our wedding night. A bonding ritual. What if I messed it up? Fucked him wrong, or out of order, or—

He must have sensed my continued doubt, he offered, “Ride my face, perhaps?”

Ride his face.

My eyes widened and my pussy clenched at the suggestion. “God, yes.”

I didn’t need further instructions. Shimmying my hips, I worked my panties off, then straddled Addan’s chest. He was so broad that I sat upon him. I knew I was smearing

my sticky juices all over his skin.

I watched as he swallowed hard, as if saliva pooled in his mouth with the need to taste. He loved eating me out, but this way would be different.

But I wanted it. So, so badly.

Reaching out, I grabbed the headboard above the knot and crawled my way up his body. Up. Up. Up, until I hovered over his head, my legs pressing into his ears.

I met his gaze, then lowered my hips.

The instant my pussy came in contact with his mouth, his tongue flicked out. Licked, sucked. He couldn't hold me in place. Couldn't sink fingers deep. I didn't need either to come.

No. I'd been so aroused and close to orgasm ever since I saw him among the guests at the wedding. No. That wasn't right.

I had been hot and frantic for him since he sat down in his desk chair. Since he'd opened up the front of his pants and pulled his cock out.

My hips started to move instinctually, and it wasn't long before I was all out riding his face, working myself on him until I came. Any embarrassment or restraint I might have had evaporated with the hungry moans coming from his throat, the aggressive movement of his tongue. The way he arched his chest off the bed to shift me closer.

“Yes. Addan!”

My head flopped down between my shoulders as I caught my breath, but remembered Addan was probably suffocating.

Quickly, I shifted back so I sat upon his torso again.

He wasn't dead from being pussy smothered. No, he was smiling, his lips and chin glistening. His eyes were glazed with lust. Desire.

"More," he demanded. "Claim me. Fuck me."

Yes. I wanted that, too.

Reaching back, I gripped the base of his cock as I moved into position. I hovered over him, then rocked so the broad head ran through my slick folds. Worked his full head back and forth through my wet heat. Rubbed the head of his cock against my clit.

"Tease," he bit out.

His fists were clenched so hard his knuckles were white. Every muscle in his body was taut. Jaw clenched. Sweat dotted his brow.

I didn't sink down. I dropped. A reverse thrust, so he filled me completely in one go. My thighs rested upon his.

"Yes," I breathed.

Addan growled. His hips bucked beneath me and I squealed, nearly falling off. Oh, hell yeah. I was riding him like a cowgirl now.

His hands might be bound, but his lower body wasn't. Shifting his legs, he set his feet upon the bed, then bent his knees.

That shift alone had him sinking impossibly deeper inside me.

Then he rocked up.

Setting my hands upon his glorious chest, I began to ride him.

Up. Down. Closing my eyes and sinking into the pleasure.

But it wasn't enough. I could come perhaps if I played with my clit. Maybe I wasn't fit enough for this because my quads began to burn.

Frustration and need combined. I looked to him. Stoic yet loving the way he filled me.

I didn't want sex like this. I didn't want Addan bound and at my mercy.

I wanted to be at his.

I was the female here. The one in charge.

Which meant I could give up control. Let Addan take the lead like he had from our very first encounter.

Yes. Yes. The idea of that had my pussy dripping.

Reaching up, I loosened the knot about his wrists, then freed him.

"I need you. I want you to take control."

He jackknifed up to sitting while still buried deep inside.

We both hissed at the feel.

“You want me to take over? To fuck you?”

I nodded.

“You wish to submit?” For any noble female to submit to her mate was unusual. Rare. But for a queen?

“I might be your queen, and you, and the entire planet, might be mine to command. But I need to feel like you want me, Addan.” I didn’t know how to explain the longing that was like an ache behind my ribs, the need to belong to him. To have him show me what I meant to him, not with words or deference to a queen, with hungry lips. Greedy hands. A hard cock thrusting into my body like he’d die if he had to stop.

I looked up into his intense blue eyes and bared my soul. “I want to feel like you’ll die if you can’t touch me. When we’re alone, I don’t want to be in charge. I don’t want to be your queen. I want to be--.”

“Mine.” Addan lifted one hand to the back of my head and buried his fist in my hair, tilting my head up so his lips hovered over mine. He held me there, unable to move. At his mercy. “Mine to fuck. Mine to pleasure. Mine to protect.”

“Yes.” My pussy clenched. I arched my back, grinding my clit against his hard abs. The whimper that left my throat was the fucking opposite of royal. There was nothing controlled or elegant about me right now.

“The ultimate bond,” he whispered as his free hand—finally—settled on my skin, palm flat across my lower back as he pulled me as close as I could get. Until I felt like we were one and the same. One body. One heart. Then he kissed the hell out of me.

Addan



She wanted me to take control.

I would do that. And immediately.

Putting my arm about her waist, I flipped us so I was on top. Then I took hold of her knee, pushed her leg up and back and fucked her good and hard.

“Yes!” she cried.

Fuck. Looking down at my mate in the throes of pleasure, pleasure I was giving her, made me want to come. But I had to hold back. Savor the moment. Make it last.

She felt so good. So tight. Wet. Hot.

It didn't take much to push her to her second orgasm, her pussy clenching my cock and trying to wring every drop of cum from me.

But I was made of strong stuff. I'd fought the enemy. Led troops. I could will my balls to hold off until my mate, my queen, was thoroughly satisfied.

Before she came down from her pleasure, I pulled out, flipped her over, pulled her up onto her knees, then slid right back inside her swollen pussy. My hips slammed into her ass as I fucked her.

“Yes. Harder.”

“As my Resonant commands,” I said, gripping her hips and making her mine, one hard thrust at a time.

Reaching around, I found her slick and swollen clit. Her pussy clenched at the contact. Then I pinched.

And she came. Wrapping an arm around her, I pulled her up so she sat atop my thighs, her back to my front. Cock so deep we were one.

I kissed the side of her sweaty neck.

“My mate. My Resonant. My queen. I am at your command.”

Her head lolled back on my shoulder. “Come.”

And I did—her command like a bolt of lightning to my balls as I filled her with my seed. My claim. Devotion. Love. Longing. Every emotion I’d felt since meeting her, needing her, poured from my body to hers as I lost control.

Holding her tight, face buried in her neck, I won...and I lost. Surrendered my mind, my soul, my heart, to her.

## Page 28

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Paige, Battleship Zeus, Six Weeks Later...

The command deck of Battleship Zeus was massive. Too massive. The ceilings soared high above, making me feel like a beetle trapped at the bottom of a glass jar. Polished metal and what looked like glass reflected the faint hum of power coursing through the ship. Walls of transparent panels looked out into the endless void of space. Stars glittered, cold and distant, reminding me just how small we were out here.

And how easy it would be to vanish.

No ground beneath my feet. No air beyond the walls. Just an endless black void pressing in on all sides. The thought made my stomach twist.

How did several thousand people live out here? All the time? I'd go crazy.

Space was definitely not for me. I had to wonder if this was like serving on a submarine. I doubted there were any of those out here, but the vastness and claustrophobia had to be similar.

What I was seeing were probably only display screens, right? There wasn't real space on the other side of those windows, was there? Real stars? Planets? Bad guys in their spaceships flying around trying to assimilate everyone and everything like the Borg in a nightmare Star Trek movie?

Before I accidentally transported myself across the galaxy, I hadn't paid too much attention to the details about the Coalition Fleet or their war with the Hive. As queen

of a planet now, I'd had a lot of catching up to do. While Alienor had admitted her sins in front of me and all of the guests at the betrothal-wedding-that-didn't-happen, the emerging details scared the shit out of me. Even after all these weeks, I couldn't believe the evil that my cousin had spread. She'd actually sold Hive technology. To bad guys. That wasn't all she did, even. Weapons. Slaves. Drugs. Nothing she'd done had been okay.

With Addan at my side, I'd let the Insurian justice system do its thing with both of them. While Alienor had lost her power the second I arrived on Insuri, she'd been officially stripped of her realm. She had been found guilty—of everything—and was now rotting in an underground prison as far away from Queen's Castle as I could send her. She was literally on the other side of the planet. She had no allies to help her. Any support she had amassed over the years was also imprisoned.

Everyone hated her. What she did. What she embodied. No one would help her escape, not that there was a possibility where she was housed.

And me? I was in flipping outer space. On a battleship. With a few thousand Prillon warriors, fighters, Atlan Warlords and the first batch of Insurian fighters who had volunteered to join the Coalition Fleet. Our soldiers stood at attention in neat rows behind me, their young faces glowing with excitement and adventure.

I wished them well, but did not envy the battles ahead. The Coalition informed us it would take several more weeks for the first processing centers on Insuri to be fully built and operational. That was fine. The fighters behind me had refused to wait.

The room buzzed with controlled energy. Commander Zeus and several Coalition officers moved toward us with precision, their every step measured. Everywhere I looked, there were soldiers in gleaming armor, armed and ready for war at a moment's notice.

Warlord Stohn walked a few steps behind Zeus, a welcoming grin on his face. Yes,

the night guard from the processing center was here with me.

He approached. Smiled. Held out his hand. In it was—

I couldn't help but laugh at the small piece of Laffy Taffy he held.

“You brought this from Earth for me?”

“Yes, Paige, Queen of Insuri.”

I took it and opened the wrapper and read the joke.

“What did the house wear to the party?”

Everyone in the control room eyed me with confusion. The question made no sense when jokes weren't something they shared.

“Address,” I replied.

Now they stared at me bewildered. I looked to Addan, who smiled, well aware there were many Earth things I did that he didn't fully understand.

Stohn, however, laughed. “A dress! That is very amusing.”

I held out the opened candy for Stohn to take. I knew how he liked his sweets.

He bowed and declined. “No, my lady. I brought it for you. It is my honor.”

I nodded my thanks and popped the treat into my mouth. It would be rude not to.

“You see, you did find a mate.” Warlord Stohn scowled at Addan with...approval? Men were so weird. “A worthy male who will protect and satisfy you.”

I blushed, remembering how Addan had satisfied me as soon as we were shown to our quarters on the battleship.

My gaze darted again to Addan. He stood at my side, calm and steady. Solid. Everything Stohn mentioned.

The tension in my chest eased. He looked like he belonged here. Like nothing in the galaxy could rattle him.

I held my breath and straightened my spine as Commander Zeus turned to us. Stohn retreated, but remained nearby, clearly ready to protect me as well.

Zeus looked a hundred times more fierce and intimidating on his battleship, with his fighters lined up behind him, than he had on Insuri. When he spoke, his voice filled the entire space. And that was without the help of Hermione's voice amplification.

"Queen Paige of Insuri. King Consort Addan Peigi, her Resonant." Zeus's sharp gaze flicked over us, his tone clipped. "Welcome aboard Battleship Zeus. Today, we formalize Insuri's place as a full member of the Interstellar Coalition of Planets."

Addan held out his arm and I wrapped my hands around the crook of his elbow. The solid heat of him, the contact, grounded me. I consistently clung to it, to him, like a lifeline. Yes, I was queen now. There had been a huge ceremony. A heavy crown plopped on my head. But most days, I still felt like an imposter, a maid turned into a princess, a maid with the sickly-sweet taste of sour apple on my tongue.

Holy shit. I was fucking Cinderella. Hah.

"This day has been a long time coming," Zeus continued. "Queen Madallaine, Paige's mother, dreamed of this day. She gave her life for Insuri's future, and I believe she'd be proud to see her daughter standing here now, fulfilling her vision."

I met Zeus's gaze. "It's an honor to bring Insuri into the Coalition. This partnership will mark the beginning of a new era for my people."

Zeus nodded, a faint smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Of course, none of this would have been possible without a certain someone's unexpected fall into a transport pool."

Addan chuckled softly. The sound sent a ripple of warmth through me, even while I blushed at my klutziness.

"The universe had a plan for her," Addan said, glancing down at me.

"Apparently, it involved me scrubbing toilets," I replied dryly.

Laughter rippled through the room, breaking the tension. Even Zeus allowed a small smirk.

Then, Zeus's voice grew serious. "Thanks to that plan, we've brought down one of the largest smuggling operations in Coalition history. The arrests of Queen Alienor's allies dismantled the illegal weapons and tech trade across multiple sectors. Corruption we've been chasing for years—gone. Justice served."

My chest tightened. We'd done it. I still couldn't believe I'd been involved at all. Me.

"And Insuri is stronger for it," Addan added. His voice was steady, but I could hear the pride behind it. He was proud of me. He loved me. He told me every day. Multiple times. How I got so freaking lucky, I had no idea. But I was never giving him up. Never.

Zeus nodded. "Indeed. The Coalition owes you both a debt of gratitude."

I glanced out the window—screen—whatever. My eyes drifted to the stars. They

stretched on forever, cold and indifferent. The enormity of it all pressed down on me again. We were a speck in a galaxy filled with danger, with threats I could barely comprehend.

As if he could read my mind, Addan squeezed my hands to his side. I soaked him in. His strength. Heat. Love.

“Well,” I said, clearing my throat. “I suppose I should thank the staff at the processing center for getting the floors so dirty. Without them, none of this would’ve happened.”

The room erupted into laughter, and this time, even I joined in.

When the sound faded, Zeus stepped forward and extended his hand. “On behalf of the Coalition, I welcome Insuri as a full member. May this partnership bring peace, prosperity, and strength to your people—and to the galaxy.”

I shook his hand firmly. “Thank you, Commander. Insuri will do everything in our power to honor this alliance and assist in the fight against the Hive.” That meant sending fighters and brides, like every other planet. Just like Earth.

Zeus turned to Addan, his gaze steady. “General, you’ve proven yourself an invaluable ally to both Insuri and the Coalition. We look forward to working with you.”

Addan clasped Zeus’s hand, his voice low and sure. “It’s a new beginning for all of us.”

I couldn’t stop staring at the stars. They didn’t scare me as much now. Yes, space was vast and dangerous, but I wasn’t facing it alone.

Addan stepped closer, his arm coming to rest around my waist. I leaned into his heat.



God, I loved this man. Alien. Addan. My Addan.

It had all started with an accident. One clumsy, ridiculous fall that had sent my life spinning into chaos. But as I stood here now, my Resonant by my side, I couldn't help but think it had been the best accident of my life.