



# The Alien Prince's Dubious Bride (Escape to Haven County)

**Author:** *Olivia Sinclair*

**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** She went looking for a story and found forever instead!

Drakkon

I didnt even know my grandmother had put me on the list of eligible warriors for a matched bride. Until I was informed that I was the first to be mated with a human from Earth. One look at her picture and I know shes perfect. Except for the part where she didnt know life exists beyond her planet and she thought she was uncovering a scam Now to convince her she can do more good for more people out beyond the stars as a true princess.

C.J.

I need a top tier story if Im going to keep my status as an independent journalist. I use that term lightly because to date its been mostly fluff pieces. But if I dont turn up something truly hard hitting for Valentines, Ill have to go work for someone else. And what could be more perfect than a scam about matching human women with alien warriors? Who would fall for such a thing?

Except the giant golden guy who shows up clearly isnt human. Hes really hot and equally determined to convince me to go live with him out there. And he is sort of sweet, in a gruff grouchy alien kind of way. What should I do?

Welcome to Haven County! Where all sorts of people and romance tropes intermingle. Their stories are all short steamy reads and you can follow along in order or read by genre:

**Total Pages (Source):** 8

I let the loud groan of annoyance in my head become audible because I'm alone in my Lake Union studio apartment. The email I'm staring at continues to announce to my disbelieving eyes that Wildwood Publishing, the parent company of approximately one hundred travel and hobby magazines, will no longer be accepting freelance submissions. They're very sorry, increasing costs, et cetera.

Flipping to the other browser tab where my bank balance is displayed, I just want to whimper. That one I hold back. I didn't get this far by giving up. They didn't say it in the email, but I know Wildwood has decided to adopt AI for all of their fluff pieces previously written by people like me. And I can't really blame them. Nobody reads them anyway, so why not let the robot do it? We aren't talking scintillating interviews here. It's things like one hundred nine-patch quilt patterns you can sew in front of the TV, and food safety on the modern Oregon Trail.

Although they're only one of several publishing houses that pay the rent, the writing is on the wall. I need to either start leveling up to the feature pieces or I'm going to have to give in and get a nine-to-five job. Which no longer exists unless it's minimum wage, as I've informed my over anxious parents a million times. It's more like six-to-nine and I don't mean a three-hour shift.

Sighing, I get up to open my last bottle of wine. It will have to remain the last until I can figure out a new sustainable strategy for remaining independent.

Pouring a large glass, I admire the deep red tones. It's a very pretty wine. Far more suitable for a fancy date than lounging in my favorite sleep pants and over-sized t-

shirt. But needs must and all that.

I sit back down at the computer to figure this shit out. Valentine's is coming up — it's about three weeks away. If I can come up with a unique angle — something AI would be incapable of imagining then maybe I stand a chance. And If I can find it in the next week or so I can at least submit it for syndication. Not the easiest thing to do, but I have made some contacts over the years that might be willing to do me a favor. Even that won't solve all my problems, but it might get enough eyeballs to secure more work.

Okay, strategy in place, but what's the angle? An image pops into my mind of the strangest ad I've seen in a while (and that's saying something) from one of the last physical magazines I still receive. It's an old science fiction fantasy publication that exists on limited print rights from authors that would say hell no to electronic distribution. But never mind that, the ad was simply a notice for a dating service, but still extremely odd. Now, where the hell did I leave that magazine?

I plow through the stack of notebooks and miscellaneous crap piled on my desk. Nope. Then I move on to the kitchenette and under the bed. Finally, I locate it beneath a stack of towels in the bathroom. I'm not sure how or why it landed there and, frankly, I don't care.

Refilling my glass, I adjourn to the small loveseat by the window and flip through until I find it.

Would you like to explore a distant planet or galaxy with a faithful, protective alien mate by your side? The Zotari Empire is now accepting applications! You must be single and over the age of eighteen to apply. More information will be provided during the matching process.

There's no phone number or address, just a website. I navigate to it on my phone.

There's no additional information there either, really, just a survey. A very personal detailed survey that has me saying hell no. But my instincts are up. There's a story here, even if it is a cult trying to lure desperate single women into its clutches.

Turning on my sleuthing skills, I go back to my laptop and start looking into the Zotari Empire. It must be a fictional reference of some kind that's being used to catfish people. Except the only mention I can find, waaay down in the bowels of the internet, is a property transfer in Washington State. Not near any major city — it's out in the boonies — some place called Haven County. And they had some money to play with because they purchased over three hundred acres.

Google Maps isn't any help. For some strange reason, that entire county has nothing but blurry trees. No street view available, not even in Nordquist or Snowberry the two largest towns. How very strange.

Maybe it's time for a road trip. That way I can get pictures as well. I send off a note to my older sister, Hannah, letting her know where I'm going. She won't read it until I'm already on the road, so she won't get a chance to dissuade me.

Suddenly, I'm excited about this new adventure. I throw the basics into a carry-on and flop into bed. I'll head out at first light and hopefully be at the door of the so-called Zotari Empire by lunch.

My eyes blink open in the dim light of my personal quarters. Someone is frantically calling my name, well, my title anyway.

“Your Eminence! Your Eminence!”

I turn my head to see who felt a sudden urge to interrupt my meditative sleep. By my internal clock, I had at least two more days coming to me.

It's Mykkal, the closest I have to a friend on this floating palace. He must have been nominated as the least likely to incur my wrath. Seeing that he has my attention, he continues, "Your Eminence, there's been a message for you. A potential mate has been identified. Your presence on the planet Earth is requested immediately."

I blink again. I must be dreaming. Not only did I not request a mate be found for me, but nobody requests my presence. Ever. They come to me. Unless it's my grandmother, of course. But she's said more than once that she's done with me. Although seeing as I'm her heir to the throne, that doesn't carry as much weight as she'd like.

Sitting up, I rub a hand over my face, trying to wash the sleep away and toss my battle braids over my shoulder. The tie holding everything up and out of the way must be somewhere in the bedding. "Say that again, Mykkal, and slowly. It sounded like you said I had a mate, which would imply I requested one and I know I didn't."

Mykkal stutters, "N-n-n-no, your Eminence, you didn't. Przzt'l checked on that first thing, to make sure the message was valid, even though it had all the proper signatures. It appears that the Empress placed the request on your behalf." He pauses to take a few steps back. "Five years ago."

"Tradz ," I bite out the colloquial word for shit. Mykkal knows I avoid using the more common and far more satisfying drak, as it's my nickname. There is one saving grace to my parents damning me with what is essentially the title of Prince Fuck. The Empire's etymologists insist the word came about because of the original Prince Drakkon's popularity with the ladies several millennia ago.

"You can still call me Drak, Mykkal. Not that much has changed from our battle days."

His gaze shifts to the side before he answers, "They have, though. The Empress may

be in good health for her age, but she's still approaching her two hundred and fifth birthday. It won't be long before she cedes the seat to you, willing or not. And I can both serve you better and maintain my own health if your enemies don't assume I have your ear."

Sighing, I slip out of the warm bed. "Fair enough. Tell me about this Earth and how long will it take to get there."

He trails me to the cleaning tube. As the fine mist fills the enclosed space, he informs me of my future bride and her home world.

"It's a relatively new planet, your Eminence. Both in development and our discovery of it. They are not a part of the Empire, but discussions so far have been promising. This union would almost certainly seal the deal."

I frown at that. "If they aren't even part of the Empire, how does this possibly benefit anyone?"

Amusement fills Mykkal's voice. "Humans are something of a universal mate, your Eminence, capable of producing children with many, if not most, of the races in the Empire. In particular, those that have seen a population decline. And there are approximately half a billion unmated females of reproduction age on the planet, sir."

Oh. I now understand the bureaucratic appeal. "Well, can't one of those worthy veterans have this girl? Hell, all of them? It can't look right for a royal to just swoop in and grab the first one, right?" I'm pleased with this line of logic. It just might get me out of the whole thing.

"I'm sorry, your Eminence, but the matching program doesn't work like that. It analyzes both genetic and personality functions. And... well, the days are gone when we can just swoop in and steal the women, sir. It looks better if they volunteer.

Things have been a little slow in that department. Knowledge of other species has been entertained but not confirmed among the populace, sir. In other words, they think the whole thing is a hoax. Your marriage would no doubt open the floodgates for all those veterans you spoke of to find happiness.”

He’s really good with the guilt trip. “Fine. How long do I have to brace myself?”

“About a week, your Eminence.”

Sighing, I flip the switch for the drying function and then accept the uniform Mykkal hands me. “Well, does this girl have a name? I suppose I’d better learn to pronounce it correctly.”

“C.J., sir. It’s two letters of their alphabet. None of the staff on site has been able to determine what it stands for.”

My eyebrows go up at that. I’ll find out. Probably in less than two seconds flat. Retying my braids at the back of my head, I nod to Mykkal and follow him out of my quarters. For better or worse, members of the Royal House are unable to travel by transport due to the inherited nanobots, so it’s the old-fashioned ways of travel for us. Which does at least give me a few days to study up on this young female and what I’m about to contend with. I’m tired of all the simpering misses hoping I’ll bed them for bragging rights. Or, better yet, elevate one of them to Empress so she can lord it over all her friends. I shudder at the thought. This girl had better understand fast that I won’t tolerate her acting like a jealous Seetle bird.

“Przzt’l has prepared a file for you, your Eminence. It’s waiting on your personal console,” Mykkal announces as we step onto the bridge. At the very back of the room is a fancy chair I’m supposed to sit in, making it look like I’m the one in charge. We all know that’s not true and I loath pretending. When I saw active duty, my skills were gunnery and hand to hand combat, hard not to be good at that last one with the

particular gifts of the Royal House. Command was never my dream, nor do I seek it now. Still, the seat is well out of the way of those who do have work to do and it has all the necessary technology. I sit and immediately key in my request for breakfast. A drone will deliver it shortly. Then I brace myself and open Przzt'l's file.



## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 2:52 am*

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Somebody once told me that the best lie is the one that sits closest to the truth. That's why I told the pretty young woman at the reception desk that I was a freelance reporter who has pissed someone off. A dangerous someone and that's why I was prepared to leave everything behind for love in the stars. She'd seemed slightly taken aback by that, but handed me a pile of reading material and a clipboard all the same.

Now I'm waking up in what feels like a fancy hotel room, grateful that I don't have to lay out cash for it. They did verify my ID, but never asked for a credit card. I'd probably have walked if they had. I can't afford to have my bank accounts drained at this point. I have a ten o'clock meeting with someone named Taz and I'm hoping I can get to the bottom of this, grab the story, and be on my way. The place is very high end but seems virtually empty. There was nobody else in the hallway when 'Liliana' led me to my room. There's a nice big window opening to the outside world, so I don't feel completely trapped. Yet.

I have a nice enough breakfast from the food provided in the small fridge and kitchenette and then promptly at five minutes to ten, there's a knock on my door. I open it to find a very green man.

Consequently, I blink several times before stating the obvious, "You're green."

The man nods, a small smile on his face. "Yes. I'm Taz. We're still a bit short staffed at the moment, so I came to escort you to my office. If you're ready?"

I'm still standing there stock still. He's green, and he's not fazed by it. "Why are you

green?” I try again.

His smile widens to reveal bright white teeth. “Because I’m not from around here. Did you think all the literature about alien cultures was one really big con?”

I nod, and he sighs.

“Not only is it not a con, but you’ve been matched with a very, very high-ranking individual. If you’re not serious about going through with it, then we need to have a talk.”

He gestures down the hallway and my feet decide to follow him. Obviously, I need more information either way.

Taz is silent until he gestures me toward a perfectly ordinary guest chair and situates himself behind a desk. There might be some slightly strange technology mixed in with the bits I recognize, but there’s no doubt this is an office.

“Miss Tanner,” Taz begins slowly. “Miss Tanner, everything you read yesterday when you arrived is true. What isn’t in the literature is how surprisingly hard it is to convince women on Earth of just that. And that there really are hundreds of thousands of men out in the universe eager for life mates, both for mating and often simply companionship.”

“Why can’t they find women of their own kind? Why do we have to put up with them?” I grouse.

“In most cases, there aren’t enough women of their own kind. In others, as is the case with the man you were matched with, there are simply some very stringent requirements that have yet to be met by another female. Not for lack of trying,” he adds under his breath.

“So, who is this stellar individual?” I ask dryly.

“Prince Drakkon will be arriving in approximately five days. I can’t tell you what an honor it is to have him come here. The Royals almost always insist on you coming to them.”

I roll my eyes. “I’m an American. I’m not a big believer in anyone being born superior due to their pedigree.”

Taz nods, his smirk back in place. “And I would agree if he were human. The Royal house of the Zotari Empire, however, is generally regarded as superior in many aspects. Size, strength, wealth, and well, some other talents mean they can both make and keep the peace. In a territory as large as the Empire that requires more than a pedigree.”

I frown at him. I’m intrigued. I can’t help it. “I don’t suppose you have a picture?”

As if he were simply waiting for that question, Taz rotates a monitor to face me. On it is the most striking face I’ve ever seen. He resembles humans pretty closely but... high cheekbones crowned by blazing golden eyes that don’t seem to have any pupils. His hair is a dark gold that’s braided into many small braids hanging down his shoulders. They only serve to heighten his masculinity. Strange swirling pale tattoos cover his skin, almost as if they’re moving under the surface. It’s hard to tell with the still picture, but something I’m not used to is going on there.

“He also stands about seven feet tall,” Taz adds dryly.

My eyes widen at that. This man is a giant. Something in me is dying to get a real look at him. I can’t tell if it’s the journalist or the woman or both.

“And he can’t find anyone he likes?” I find that hard to believe. He looks like he’d

have the pick of any female out there. And if what Taz has said is true, that's umpteen billions of them.

"He's known to be a bit... impatient with feminine wiles. He was a warrior before he was elevated to the title and all indications were he preferred that life."

"Well, I think it's safe to say that I'm not going to be much competition. He'll take one look at me and jet off again, and I'm okay with that. But I want an interview."

Taz blinks. "Umm, well, that's something you'd best discuss with Prince Drakkon. His emissary will be arriving later today by transport. You could ask him, but he may be hesitant to broach such a delicate subject himself."

"Why is the emissary guy coming by transport but the prince isn't?"

"The Royal House can physically only travel by ship. One of the many things that make them unique."

Well, hell. I'd only heard about real transporters yesterday and already I'm liking the idea.

"Well, why is the emissary coming then?"

Taz looks uncomfortable before admitting, "To school you in protocol."

"Um no. Just no. I'll meet him and I'll be polite. I think. Anything more and he can just keep looking. I don't curtsy and I don't genuflect to anyone."

The green guy looks like he's trying to bite back a smile. "I see. Maybe consider this an opportunity to ask further questions from someone much closer to the prince than I ever have been."

He makes a valid point. I can get some basic research out of the way, so when I do meet the prince, my questions are direct and to the point. I'm still not sure of my angle yet, so some preliminary discussion might clear that up. Is there still even a Valentine's aspect to this or is it straight up alien kidnapping as seen in the nearest grocery store check-out aisle?

My female is lovely. Intelligent dark eyes gaze up at me from the digital image I've been studying for the last five days. There's something so captivating about the hint of rebellion in her expression. Like it might actually take some effort to win her over. I try to imagine her pale skin dancing with the tracery of a royal consort. Without them she is beautiful, with them the Empire has never seen her equal.

My cock hardens as I think about what it will take to make them appear. The organic nanobots are transferred via body fluids, but they choose whether to pass or not. The old stories are that in the generations before the Empress who reigns in her own right, that the sooner a royal bride appeared in public after the wedding, the more virile her mate. I'm not sure that really has anything to do with it. I'm positive none of my male ancestors were virgins at the time of their wedding. And yet the royal tracteries and other traits have remained absolutely pure to the line.

Sighing, I continue with my calisthenic routine. I may no longer be allowed to enter battle, but that doesn't mean I shouldn't be ready for it if it comes to me. My stubborn Ceejay is a different type of conflict altogether, so having a clear mind is of the utmost importance.

A message pings on my communicator indicating the ship has entered Earth's orbit. It and the shuttle that will transfer me to the surface are both cloaked in technology undetectable by the primitive local surveillance. It will be millennia before this planet can even dream of this level of tech.

I dress in my casual court uniform. It wouldn't do to show my bride disrespect, but

neither do I want to overwhelm her with full court dress. As it is, the three glittering sashes that crisscross my chest have my eyes rolling. It really is time to update the fashions of the court. But honestly, getting them to cede power for a year to live in the hinterlands would be easier.

Looking around my quarters, I spy the small gift I'd selected from the treasure trove in the hold. It's a delicate orbun flower made of gemstones. A pretty little trinket to sit on a desk or a tabletop. Gathering it up, I slip it deep into the long sleeve of my outer robe and head for the docking bay.

Mykkal briefed me on his meeting when he returned to the ship last night. He was cagey to say the least, but assured me my bride was both as beautiful in person as her image and twice as smart. I have no doubts that his report was completely honest. However, it didn't require royal senses to know he was holding something back.

The trip to the planet's surface is swift. Naturally, an entire platoon of armed guards must come along for the ride. I keep insisting it's not necessary — that my enhanced personal protection courtesy of the nanobots means it's superfluous — but once again, I'm ignored. "By orders of the Empress, your Eminence," is the constant refrain.

Arguing will only make things take longer, so I settle into my seat on the shuttle and attempt to guess how my bride will react to our meeting.

Not well, it turns out. When the shuttle lands in what I understand to be a field behind the building where she is housed, there's a brief scurry of activity as everyone unbuckles and assumes their duty post. Communications with the resident team also in the building are established and messages are exchanged. My bride is unwilling to set foot in an alien vehicle, it seems. She wants me to come to her. There are whispers and gasps before someone finally clues me in as to what has everyone apologizing as they back away from me.

I appear to be the only one unsurprised by her demand. I would expect nothing less of the woman in the photo. Shrugging, I gesture to the guard and tell the nearest ship's officer, "Well? Lower the gangway then. The sooner we sort this out, the faster we'll be back in civilized space."

"Yes, your Eminence," he murmurs while bowing. I wish everyone would figure out that they're much harder to hear when they do that. They should speak and then bow, or bow and then speak, or better yet, leave the bowing out altogether.

It takes another five minutes to open the hatch and get the glide in place. Then there's a small procession from the field to the building. I swear the first individuals have reached our destination before the last have left the shuttle. Finally, it's my turn and I enter into a rather quaint and charming hall. This must be Earth architecture. I glance around, taking in the small details as well as the three waiting individuals from various races of the Empire.

"Your Eminence, welcome to Earth," they say, then bow deeply. I'm impressed. Maybe my constant harping on this has reached a few people. The tracery on my arms is swirling faster than usual, dancing almost with glee. She must be nearby.

"My bride?" I inquire, impatient to meet her and overcome her objections.

The green guy who appears to be in charge clears his throat. "Your Eminence... Miss Tanner hasn't, uh, fully committed to the match. Her distrust of the algorithms is understandable. Similar concepts exist in her culture but are notoriously unreliable."

I wave my hand. "I understand. But I can hardly convince her if she's not present."

"Yes, your Eminence." He sighs heavily. "She will be here shortly."

I don't need the gasps of those nearest the door to know the moment when she arrives

in the room.



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 2:52 am*

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Is that simpering wistful sigh I'm hearing coming from me? I suck it in and straighten my spine. The room is crowded. Far more people than I expected and most of them appear to be scary alien guards. Like with spikes on their faces that weren't applied by a makeup artist. But there's no denying the man of the hour is the center of it all. He's not just big, he glows . Gold. I don't need to be told this is Prince Drakkon, it's obvious.

The guys tried to press some fancy outfit on me this morning, but I turned them down. I'm not marrying the guy, even if my pussy is pouting at missing out on all that magnificence. Lord only knows what alien cock looks like, but I can live with myself if I never find out. I'm here for a story , and it's best to remain confident and comfortable while I do that. So I'm wearing jeans and a long purple sweater. Perfectly respectable. I can admit I appear seriously underdressed compared to this guy, but when someone has swirling glowing skin, there's not much that would compete.

I walk towards him. His smile is fierce and possessive. "My bride, I have come to you as requested. I hope that means you will be as compliant when I make demands of you." His voice is syrupy and deep. This man is used to being obeyed without question. He doesn't seem resentful that I refused to board his shuttle, but fully intends to use it as leverage. I can respect that.

"Um, Prince Drakkon, was it? I'm not your bride or anyone's. I'm here as a journalist."

One dark eyebrow wings up, but he appears unperturbed.

“Well then, we must spend some time together, no? And if in the end, I persuade you, I promise now not to remind you of it more than five, no, make that twelve times a year.”

I gape at him. Did he just make a joke? While subtly calling me spineless? Like one smile from him and I'll give in?

My small growl of irritation has his weird eyes lighting with amusement. “If you would accompany me back to the shuttle and onto my ship, dear heart, we can have considerable more privacy for you to express those animus feelings.”

Oh god. I hadn't considered that. If I insist on staying here, so will everyone else. There must be sixty aliens all standing at attention in this one room. I can't have a natural conversation even with a prickly person with that many people listening in.

“You promise you aren't going to kidnap me?”

His smile broadens. “I promise. We will not leave this galaxy without your prior approval.”

“Oh, very well,” I acquiesce with a long sigh. No doubt he has a gazillion tricks up his sleeve, but my curiosity won't let me walk away from this one.

I'm practically humming with impatience to be alone with my bride, but ship protocols are there for a reason. I insist on accompanying her into the decontamination unit. It's big enough for twelve, but few people want to attract my attention, so I'm usually alone. Ceejay glances around the all white room as if scanning it for clues.

The entire process only takes two minutes, so it's not long before I'm leading her past the long line of guards at attention and towards my personal private quarters. There, no one will dare disturb us unless the ship is literally about to blow up. And probably not even then, because what would be the point?

Ceejay's eyes widen further as she steps in and freezes, taking in the silken draperies and plush upholstered furniture. To encourage her to relax, I sink into one of the Plynos arm chairs that cost a small fortune. But they conform to your body shape over time and can even sense if certain muscles are out of balance and shift accordingly. Ceejay remains as she was.

"You can explore or sit and talk, as you wish, Ceejay." Her name is strange on my tongue.

And apparently to her ears, too. "It's C.J. two letters, not one word," she corrects idly.

"My apologies."

She waves it off. "Hey, how come I can understand everything you say, but not all those guards? Did you learn English that quickly?"

Shaking my head, I explain, "It's one of many royal talents. You aren't actually understanding the words coming out of my mouth. More that you are receptive to the matching psychic wave length. You are 'hearing' me with your brain, not your ears."

Her brow furrows. "Can everyone hear you like that?"

I nod. "When I'm speaking to them, yes. And the same will be true for you once you agree to be my bride."

Suspicious eyes narrow. "What? You can grant powers like a fairy godmother?"

I shake my head. “I don’t know what you are referring to, but it is not magic. When my cock sinks into your body, the nanobots will transfer via my cum and then begin to replicate in your system. It can take a few days to several weeks for the process to complete, apparently.”

“Nanobots? You want to infect me with alien technology?”

I stand up again to pour myself a stiff glass of Gassian liquor. “It is not a disease, C.J., All of those born to the royal bloodline have them. It is simply those that marry in that acquire them after birth. They don’t hurt.”

She’s sidling closer to the door. “Maybe this wasn’t a good idea.”

Tilting my head, I regard her over the rim of my glass. “Why not?”

“Because I should be focused on finding full-time employment or a better writing gig, not dirty talk with some hunky alien dude who wants to infect me.”

I snort. “I have no wish to visit diseases on you, dear one. Although now that you mention it, I do fully intend to mate with you sufficiently well to get you with child almost immediately.”

She sits down abruptly. “Now you’re talking crazy.”

Sighing, I reiterate. “I require an heir. The Empire requires that I produce one. Preferably more than one, as it is the nanobots that reveal the one destined for the throne.”

“It’s not the oldest boy or some such nonsense?” She almost sounds surprised.

“No. Any living member of the royal line may find themselves chosen as the next

crown prince or princess. It's true I was an only child, but I was hopeful of escaping the throne until my father died. I knew the instant he was gone because my skin lit up as you see it now." I hold out my forearm where the trceries weave and dance.

"You, you didn't have that before?" she whispers, stepping closer once again.

Shaking my head, I inform her, "No, not like this. I had some added protection, some warnings of impending danger, but nothing this dramatic. And before you walk away so quickly, consider what this could mean for your people. To have the next Empress of the Zotari Empire be of Earth will bring great respect to the women who leave here for new mates."

C.J.'s eyes widen in disbelief. "That part wasn't a hoax? Or just about you?"

"No. In fact, I asked that I not be chosen first for many reasons. There are many lonely men who have fought hard and valiantly for the Empire. They deserve a little comfort in the arms of a willing woman."

"How willing can she be?"

I smile down at her. "They will not have to deal with the nanobots and the choice is entirely hers whether to leave this charming planet or not. But you can't be telling me that all the women here are happy? That they have the protection and respect they deserve?"

"Nooo, I'm not saying that. But if these guys are so great, why can't they find a girl on their own?"

I'm positive this must have all been explained in the literature. Maybe she's simply checking to see if my story lines up. "Because there are far more men than women for the warrior races. And many of them desire children as well, which requires a

compatible female. Earth is unusually resplendent in them.”

“So only women who are willing and able to have children get to go?” C.J. is up and pacing again, but I notice she’s not trying to shut the entire project down.

“Not at all. There are just as many warriors of an older generation that would simply be grateful for the companionship. A woman he can dote on, share a sunset with. Did you know that the sunsets of my homeworld are particularly fine? There are five moons that span across the sky while the green sun turns to shades of blue and purple.”

C.J. licks her lips as if she can taste the honeyed ice traditionally served during the summer at sunset.

There’s an abrupt and rudely annoying pinging on my communicator. Not the one that signals an incoming message but an all out alarm. I glance at it and see only an urgent summons to come to the bridge.

I shouldn't be tempted to go explore outer space with a royal alien, should I? It feels like cheating, somehow. Like I'm supposed to stay home and fight an endless battle for visibility and only when I succeed do I get to do the fun stuff. Except deep down in the pit of my stomach, I know that even if I achieve 'success', the pinnacle isn't very wide and, soon enough, I'll be sliding down the other side.

Drakkon glances down at the little device in his hand with a glaring frown, which quickly turns into a sigh. "My presence is required on the bridge. Do you want to come with me or stay here?"

"I never stay anywhere if the story is elsewhere," I mutter.

His smirk is tiny but noticeable. "I'll keep that in mind, little kystra ."

He stands again, his immense height still stunning, and gestures me towards the door. "What's that you just called me?"

"Hmm? Oh, a kystra is a small pretty flower with very prickly leaves and stem. It's prized for its sweet scent but rarely plucked."

"Figures," I mutter under my breath.

Naturally, there's an armed escort waiting in the hallway. We walk down endless corridors and enter at least two lifts. I have no idea how big this ship is, but it must be the size of one of those super cruise ships. I know when we enter the bridge because

the place is bristling with communications screens. At the back are two of the menacing guards holding on to a terrified young woman. She looks ready to faint.

Drakkon steps up. “What’s this about?”

Another man, who looks more human than most, although he does have small horns extending from his head, steps forward. “Your Eminence, a stowaway was detected on the shuttle. We are still analyzing the security to discover how the breach was even possible. I would ask your mercy on her. I can detect no ill intent towards you or the Empire.”

Drakkon frowns, studying the young woman and then the man who spoke. “Mykkal... you know the protocols.”

The man pales. “I do, but on the grounds of our old friendship, I ask this one blessing.”

“You mean to cuff her?” Drakkon asks with surprise, which confuses me. Why would handcuffing a stowaway be particularly shocking? Tough, maybe, I can see that, but he seems genuinely shocked.

“Yes, your Eminence. I will bear full responsibility.”

Drakkon gives a short, sharp nod before turning to me. “What say you, C.J.? She is one of your people. Does she strike you as someone with mischief in mind?”

He’s asking me? I glance at the girl again and realize she has no idea what’s being said. She’s not following the conversation at all, nor is she looking for escape. If anything, she looks like she expects to be eaten before the day is done. “No. She seems absolutely terrified to me,” I blurt out.



“Then so be it. Mykkal, you are released from your duties to the Empire. Your new mate is to be cuffed and confined to your quarters until we reach the nearest port of call, where both of you will be discharged from the ship.”

Mykkal bows deeply. “Thank you, your Eminence.”

“C.J.? A word.” Drakkon pulls me deeper into the shadowy corner. “I promised you not to leave the galaxy without your permission, but this is a most sensitive matter. I cannot delay departing on this even for a few days. Are you willing to come with us? We can return to Earth in roughly ten days or so, depending on where Xtpol finds to leave them.”

My eyes widen. “Can’t you just send her back?”

Drakkon shakes his head. “No. The punishment for trespass on a royal vessel is immediate execution. It doesn’t matter why or how that trespassing came about. I’m already pushing at the limits by allowing this, and it’s only because Mykkal is willing to claim her as his mate. Returning is not an option, neither is delaying our departure. The crew is disciplined, but this is like an unanswered slap in the face. Someone may take it upon themselves to correct the situation. Which would be a direct insult to Mykkal and a defiance of my orders, and then we’ve got a very serious diplomatic situation.”

Oh. I can see his points, although does that poor girl know she’s marrying an alien? “Drakkon, she doesn’t even know what’s going on.”

His smile widens. “I like my name on your lips, sweet one. Mykkal will explain it to her when they’re alone. The Anapi are the most prestigious translators in the Empire. It’s rumored that they’re also psychic, but none of them will confirm it. So, are you willing to come along for a short trip? We can discuss more of your concerns on the way.”

I find my head nodding in agreement before I can get any words out. I want to see where they're taking her, maybe get a chance to talk to her directly.

Back in Drakkon's quarters, he begins taking off his many sashes and robes with a deep sigh. I perch on his previous chair, curious to see if he has any modesty at all.

Nope. Apparently not. His cock matches his size and looks familiar enough. But above and behind it are bony protrusions that vaguely resemble the guard on a sword handle. (Thanks to all those random articles I've had to write over the years, I know shit like this.)

Drakkon notices me staring and raises one elegant eyebrow. "Are your earth males so ill-equipped, then, that you find me surprising?"

"Um, well, the middle bit is similar, but not whatever that is." I make a vaguely circular motion with my hand.

Drakkon glances down in confusion. "You mean my chalsk ? Yes, I see there is no translatable word. Well, I've not heard of any complaints about Chelan males anywhere in the Empire, so I'm assuming you won't have any either. But you can give me your verdict whenever you're ready." Then he smirks at me briefly before turning away to brush his teeth in a small sink that emerges from the wall.

There is something about having my mate's gaze assess my body that is completely new and different. I'm trying to figure out why, because it's certainly not the first time I've been naked with a female when she asks, "Where am I to sleep?"

I turn, raising an eyebrow. "With me, of course."

She's up and shaking her head. "No way. I did not agree to have sex with you. Only a visit so we could talk."

Frowning, I gesture towards the one bed. "I did not mention mating. Although if you should change your mind..." When she only stares at me, I sigh and continue, "This is the nicest bed on the ship. I do not want you far from me because out of my presence you won't understand a word anyone says. And I would like to further our conversation whenever the mood strikes us. As well as hold you."

Her cheeks pinken slightly before asking, "How come you guys haven't figured out some kind of universal translator implant? Every sci-fi TV show I've seen has one."

Shrugging, I move towards the bed to pull back the cloud down. "Such a thing exists, but nobody really wants it. Languages are living things, they change and morph with every half generation. Nobody wants to have to stop in for software updates that often. Most everyone learns Common, particularly if they're planning a career away from their homeworld, so that's what's spoken on ships like this or in ports."

"Oh," she comments, looking deflated. "Well, can you put some clothes on?"

I glance down at my body, trying to figure what has caused offense. "Does something about my naked form displease you?"

She flushes. "That's not the point. Humans don't sleep with strangers and they definitely don't do it naked unless they're far more daring than me."

Ah. My kystra needs to recover from so much new information. I hit the light switch, and the room plunges into darkness. "Now you can pretend I'm wearing clothes and I will do the same," I tease her. "Come to bed, C.J., I doubt you have anything as luxurious as cloud down on your planet."

I can hear her getting ready to defend her homeworld but then with a sigh she moves slowly towards the bed. The cloud down envelops her and I hear a soft, sweet sigh. "It will feel better against your naked skin," I point out gently.

“In your dreams, alien guy,” she snorts.

“Most definitely, my sweet.” I reach out and pull her to me, the cloud down moving gently out of the way to re-surround us jointly. “Go to sleep, C.J., In the morning, I will show you galaxies you’ve never even heard of.”

And I do. Someone was thoughtful enough to bring C.J.’s suitcase up to my quarters, so she has the familiarity of her own clothes to dress in. I show her how to work the controls in the cleaning unit and then reluctantly give her some privacy. But only to the point of withdrawing to my sitting area, which is on the other side of a short partition.

Xtpol has identified a space station several light years away as the nearest, relatively safe location for Mykkal and his new bride to disembark. It will take approximately three days to reach it and another three to return, so I set about creating an itinerary of things to show C.J. that will convince her to choose this new life. I have also decreed that we will spend one full day on the space station, giving everyone a chance to do some shopping, eat different food, and unwind. J’harna rolled her eyes at me over the communicator when I informed her. She’s the one responsible for the duty roster, ensuring my personal protection detail is always fully staffed and the ship not left unattended. She brightened up when I promised her a full day’s shore leave to explore Earth when we returned. “I can’t promise you’ll be able to find anything for your anamba but I will ask C.J.”

When I hang up, C.J. is eyeing me while toweling her hair dry. “Did I hear my name?”

I nod. “I have added to J’harna’s workload. She collects fancy collars for her pet. Does such a thing exist on Earth in the shopping districts?”

She blinks at me. “Well, yes, any pet store has collars. Wait, what kind of pet is it?”

How large a collar does it need?”

“It is not big, otherwise she wouldn’t be permitted to keep it in her quarters. She frequently walks it on the star deck so that others may have the joy of interacting with it. Here — this is what an anamba looks like.” I pull up the picture from the common dictionary and show her.

Her smile stretches wide. “Oh, it’s so freaking cute! Can I meet it? I want to pet that soft fur. Or do they not like being touched?”

My smile echoes hers. Anambas are known for their love of cuddles and exude some kind of pheromone that keeps people of all species coming back for more. “Of course, I will ask her to meet us on the star deck this evening.” And I’ll have to ensure J’harna gets an even fatter bonus than she’s already expecting.

I've had my first taste of alien ship food and it wasn't horrible. And the kitchens are kind of fascinating, not that I was allowed to inspect them. It turns out that everyone's dietary needs are held in the central ship's computer and then subdivided into four major categories, each with its own assigned kitchen, so that poisoning can't occur accidentally. And thankfully there weren't any live squiggly things. The plate set in front of me in the officers' dining room has something vaguely resembling scrambled eggs and sausage. Except the sausage turns out to be some kind of grain and fruit rolled together and the eggs taste more like cheese but apparently are very vitamin rich. If I close my eyes and ignore what my mouth is expecting based on appearance, it's delicious.

"Don't you get tired of all the bowing and 'your Eminences'?" I whisper to Drakkon after the last server has backed away, genuflecting as he went.

"Infinitely," he mutters in response.

I turn to stare at him. "Well, you could stop it, right? If you're in charge?"

The rueful look he sends me has me wanting to snuggle up to him. "I'm not in charge. My grandmother is. And she's a big fan of protocol. But even if she weren't, I will never be just one of the crew again." He glances meaningfully down at the swirling patterns on his left forearm.

"Does that hurt, all that moving about?" I ask curiously, reaching a finger out to trace one of the swirls. He seems to jolt under my touch and then an even stranger thing

happens. The swirl under my finger begins to follow my lead, changing course as I move my hand along his arm, doubling back when I head the other direction. “Drakkon? What is it doing?” I inquire hoarsely.

His voice is suddenly rough with need. “Encouraging you to touch me, sweet little mate. And your touch is most... enticing. And no, it doesn’t hurt, no more than feeling the rays of a green sun on your arm.”

I jerk my hand away and sigh with relief when the swirls resume their previous course. That was weird. And kinda neat, and I sort of want to play with him like a kid’s toy — see what designs I can make before the first part fades.

And right there I’m moving into dangerous territory, wanting to spend more time with him, play with his body. Those aren’t the words of a woman eager to return to her old life on Earth.

Another male approaches, but I’ve begun to discern the differences in uniforms and if I’m correct, he’s a high-ranking officer. He leans closer to Drakkon than anyone I’ve observed earlier, and they have an intense, whispered conversation. Drakkon’s eyes swing to me and stay there, shock in his odd golden eyes. When the officer departs, Drakkon asks, “Are there people on your planet that can shape shift?”

I blink. That’s what they were talking about? I shrug. “Only in stories, as far as I know.”

“It would appear that’s how the young woman gained entrance to the shuttle. There is a race of people out beyond the Empire that can shift their form at will. Some even say to pure energy if need be. Their genetic signature is constantly shifting, so it’s a weak point in the technological defenses. It’s possible that if they interbred with humans, due to your high compatibility, that some of those descendents would inherit the traits.”

I frown at him. “You think that girl is a shifter? Why not just go ask her?”

The look Drakkon gives me could melt gold. “And expose a vulnerability? I’m trusting you with this information, C.J., because I’m confident you will join me on the throne some day.”

Ignoring my need to probe that line of questioning further, I continue with the shifter problem. If it even is one, I’m not completely convinced. “Well, you can ask the guys at the center if they’ve heard or seen anything locally? When we return? Or I can go talk to her.” I shrug as if I’m not dying to find out the girl’s story, but I don’t want to do anything that will endanger her further.

Drakkon chews on that for a minute. “That’s not the worst idea. With a guard, of course. I can’t completely rule out that she didn’t have nefarious intentions, but there aren’t any warnings flags about that.” He glances down at his arms again as if they would be written there for him to read. And maybe that does happen?

“Okay.” I bounce up from my seat, ready to go now. Drakkon looks amused.

“Finish your breakfast, little mate. And I will let Mykkal know you are coming to his quarters for a visit.”

I sigh and do as he asked, but I’m impatient to learn more. A few minutes later, three males clad in black armor approach, bowing deeply. I cast an eyebrow at Drakkon, who nods. The next thing I know, we’re standing in front of a plain door in one of the many ship’s corridors. The thing really is like a big cruise ship without the sundeck and the entertainment venues. Although those could exist somewhere. Maybe I need to learn enough Common to be able to ask?

One of the guards reaches out to knock firmly, and the door slides back to reveal Mykkal looking stressed but resigned. Behind him, seated on the bed, is the young



woman. She's still dressed in the same clothes but now wearing elaborate six inch wide cuffs on both arms. A heavy chain is strung between them, puddled in her lap. Her eyes are anxious as well.

I move past the guards to sit on the far corner of the bed. Something tells me I won't help anything if I try to get closer to her.

"Hi. My name's C.J. What's yours?"

"A-A-Anya," she whispers, still looking terrified.

"Can you tell me what happened? Are they treating you well?"

She flushes, and the very tiniest hint of a smile appears at the corners of her lips. "Mykkal is taking very good care of me. He told me the chain can come off as soon as we get off this... this... thing."

Her eyes flit to the man in question, who is restlessly leaning against the far wall. His eyes are drinking her in. Fear and adoration mingled together on his face. "She will be cherished for the rest of her life," he tells me in English without shifting his gaze from her.

Ah. He does have it bad. I hope for her sake it lasts and doesn't leave her stranded in the far reaches of the universe. Mykkal snorts in annoyance, finally bringing his eyes to me. "Anopi mate for life, Princess. You need have no concerns for her safety."

Startled, I stare at him positive I hadn't said a word out loud and then I remember Drakkon saying something about possible psychic powers. And why did he call me princess, of all things? Thankfully, Anya's deep blush and lowered gaze shifts the conversation. "Can you tell me what happened, Anya?" I ask again.

She shrugs lightly. “I honestly don’t know. Not really. I was out taking a walk in the woods. I saw a... a man who’s been pestering me in the distance, so rather than have a confrontation, I looked around for a place to hide for a while. I saw what looked like a little shed with the door open. So I went in. It was dark inside, so I just sat down and waited. Then it started moving, but I didn’t have anything on me to make a light. Then some of these guys found me and here we are. I wasn’t trying to do anything. Or leave Earth,” she adds dryly.

We arrive at the space station the next day. I’ve slipped ten thousand duran into Mykkal’s account as a wedding present. He understands I can’t congratulate him publicly. Then I escort C.J. down the docking ramp to greet the various local dignitaries. Once we’re away from the docking bay, Mykkal and Anya will be escorted to the tourist district. It might sound harsh, but ten thousand is more than enough to buy a small estate on a farming planet or a decent apartment somewhere more urban.

Although C.J. insists there are no indications that Anya is any kind of shifter, I’m confident the evidence weighs heavily in that direction. Which means I have to contact my grandmother. But having an inkling what demands she will make, I’m showing C.J. around the station first. This isn’t one of the biggest or fanciest but it has a nice little shopping district and everything is new to C.J. Her eyes keep getting bigger and bigger as I show her fancy robes and sashes which shop keepers keep pressing on us, hoping to say they were the first to dress the new princess. But it’s the toy stall that I can’t get her out of. She laughs and whoops like a widwat as the color-changing orbs zoom over her head and crystal flowers bloom by her feet before dissolving and starting over again. Sighing, I pass a few folded notes to the shopkeeper. He would empty his stall for me for nothing without me even asking, but that would be detrimental to his business. As we turn to leave, I notice with a smirk that half the armed guards have become package mules, laden down with the gifts and offerings.

“Time to head back, sweetness. We’re running out of arms to carry all the gifts,” I murmur in her ear.

Unaware I’ve acquired her favorite toys for her ongoing amusement, C.J. sighs and reluctantly puts down the animated anamba she was holding.

“No, no, you must keep him, your Excellence! I insist,” the shopkeeper pops up. C.J. looks startled but looks longingly at the little toy.

“He knows how much his business will boom if you’re seen carrying it back to the ship,” I whisper in her ear. Her bright intelligent eyes smile with the realization and she picks up the anamba again.

“Thank you! He’s truly most adorable. I will tell everyone where I found him.”

The shopkeeper beams with joy and I’m sure my face is full of pride at how swiftly she’s adapting to royal responsibilities.

“Do you see how much good you can do in the universe as my mate?” I inquire gently when we’re back in our quarters surrounded by packages.

C.J. tilts her head to one side. “What do you mean?”

“Do I look like the male that would frequent a toy shop? Your image and interests will encourage other sectors of the economy to blossom. Not to mention, as I said before, that as Earth’s residents venture into the galaxy, whether as mates or otherwise, that having you in the palace will immediately grant respect and honor to them.”

She bites her lip in consideration. “You haven’t even kissed me yet,” she mutters finally.

Sighing, I raise her hand to my lips. “I cannot. Not without your final consent. The nanobots will seize any chance to transfer, which will remove your ability to choose.”

Her eyes widen as if that thought hadn’t even occurred to her. “Well, what about my stuff? I have an apartment in Seattle, you know?”

I have no idea what this Seattle is, nor do I care. “Arrangements can be made,” I wave her objection off. Is she softening? I can’t tell. She certainly snuggles in closer to me at night, resting her hand on my bare chest.

There’s one more thing that might win my case. I check the time on my communicator. The staff must be done with the arrangements by now. “Come, C.J., I have a surprise for you on the garden deck.”

“There’s a garden on here?” She looks surprised.

“Of course. Many levels, in fact, but this one is particularly decorative.” I hold out my hand in invitation and eventually she accepts it. The touch of her hand sends tingles down my spine. By the way her fingers tremble in mine, I think she felt it too.

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I think I already know I can't go back. Not permanently, anyway. I've already seen too many strange things not to share them and nobody would understand. Plus, Drakkon is growing on me. He's so freaking sweet in a gruff, take charge kind of way.

And that's all confirmed when we emerge from the lift onto the said garden deck. The lighting is low and soft in pale shades of pink. The place is dripping with exotic flowers and leaves the size of a small car. We follow a winding path past delicate waterfalls and steaming pools to a grotto where a feast is laid out. And absolutely everything is heart-shaped.

Narrowing my eyes at Drakkon, I can't hold back the giggle. "Did someone tell you it's Valentine's Day?"

He nods, looking somewhat abashed. "Do you not like it?"

It would be trite and silly if it were anyone else. "I love it! You're very sweet for a royal prince." I lean up to kiss his broad cheek. The earlier tingling I felt only intensifies on my lips and I take in a sudden sharp breath.

Oblivious, Drakkon feeds me samples of the dishes — apparently all his favorites based on his enthusiasm and knowledge of how they came to be. I'm enjoying his boyish delight even more than the food.

"I want to get to know the real Drakkon, the guy behind the prince," I tell him softly

when neither of us can eat another bite. “What kind of boy were you? Studious or always getting into trouble?”

The arch look he sends me has me bursting into giggles again.

“I was the youngling that craved adventure and sought it out at every opportunity. Nothing new or special there. Nor was my military career, although I greatly enjoyed it.”

“And girlfriends?” I ask with slight dread.

Drakkon shakes his head. “Again, only the kind of adventures that young males are prone to.”

That has me raising my eyebrows, but it becomes clear he’s not going to provide me with any details. Sighing, I stand up and extend my hand to him. We walk slowly down the romantically lit paths. “If we are going to do this, I have some expectations to set.”

His look of surprise is almost comical. “You aren’t rushing back to pack your bags for Earth?”

I shake my head shyly. “Not yet. And maybe never if you agree.”

He sighs dramatically and leads me over to a stone bench in a fragrant alcove. “Speak then, little kystra .”

“If we become mates, then you can’t have any other sexual or romantic partners.”

Drakkon’s eyes widen. “Do such things happen on Earth?” He shakes his head as if trying to comprehend. “Mates are for life, little one. There is neither time nor interest

to look away, even for a moment.”

I nod, satisfied on that count. “And you have to provide me with language lessons or some kind of translator device, maybe both. I don’t want to be isolated from what’s going on if you aren’t in the room.”

He waves a dismissive hand. “Done. What else?”

“Do you think you can come to love me?”

Drakkon’s smile is almost sad. “I already do, C.J., It is you that needs to come to terms with so much unanticipated change. I think the real question you need to ask yourself is, can you come to love me? It is not a requirement for mating, I suppose, but I suspect you would find life very lonely if you cannot.”

His hand falls away from mine as if expecting rejection. But I shake my head again with a wry smile. “I’m already there. I can’t say why or how, but I’d really like it if you kissed me now.”

Drakkon hesitates and I suddenly worry that I’ve assumed too much.

But then he stands and scoops me up. Lowering his head to mine, he rumbles, “Do you remember I said a kiss would seal our mating permanently? Are you absolutely sure, little one?”

My brave and fierce little C.J. She has no idea how much I admire her tenacity. I can only hope that the enhancements provided by the nanobots will bring her pleasure. Lowering my lips to hers, I pause briefly. Then when she gives a little hum of annoyance, I smile and take what is mine.

She tastes sweet, like the chiga fruit at the end of summer. My ridged tongue sweeps

inside her mouth only to discover that hers is tantalizingly smooth. C.J. gives a murmur of surprise and presses closer. I linger in her mouth, sucking, nibbling, tasting, trying to learn as much about her as I possibly can.

Reluctantly, I pull back slightly to find her eyes dazed with pleasure. “That was, um, that was... Well, you’re a really good kisser,” she finally concludes, sounding almost chagrined about it.

“And you are intoxicatingly sweet, little mate. Are you ready to return to our quarters so I can taste further?”

She blushes and tucks her head into my shoulder, but not before nodding affirmatively.

Despite knowing I’ll cause a furor of gossip in the security control room, I scoop her up in my arms and carry her out of the gardens and down the many lifts and corridors to our rooms. Gazes are swiftly averted as we pass various personnel, but I know full well the news will spread fast. C.J. is oblivious, or at least pretending to be, as she still has her face pressed to my neck. Every now and then, she takes an experimental lick or nibble.

“You keep that up, little one, and you’d best be prepared to be speared by my cock the moment the door shuts behind us,” I warn her with a growl as we enter the last lift.

She giggles. “I know. I figure why wait?”

My hold on her body tightens. Dare I sprint down the corridor? Probably not a good idea for the royal image, but nobody can blame me for quickening my steps.

I set C.J. down on her feet momentarily just inside the entrance so that I can rid her of



all that pesky clothing.

“Hey, what about you, big guy?” She tugs briefly on my uniform, but I shake my head.

“That comes later, after I’ve feasted on you and made sure you’re ready for your mate.”

She pouts, but it quickly turns into a gasp when I set her down on a convenient table and bend down so I can kiss her pussy. What I find there is the sweetest nectar of all. If all Earth females taste like this, the small planet is going to be overrun with eager warriors.

I lick slowly so I can both experience every moment and learn what C.J. likes most. My tongue probing her entrance, apparently.

“You like that, little kystra ?” I murmur, stepping back slightly to admire her spread out before me.

“Mppf,” she breathes out with a sigh. “It’s got ridges!”

I forgot for a moment how smooth her own tongue was earlier. “Yes, little mate. But my cock does not. Do you want more tongue first?”

She shakes her head and nods at the same time, making me smile.

“I don’t know! Make me cum, please, Drakkon.”

Well, who can argue with such sweet pleading? My cock is hard and eager for his turn, plus I’m curious to see what she makes of being cradled by my chalsk . I quickly remove my garments, letting them spill to the floor for the first time in

decades. There are more important things at stake here and I'm loath to move away from her. Spreading her folds gently, I notch my cock at her entrance.

"Tell me if you need me to go slower, sweetness." Then I penetrate her with persistent steady pressure.

"Ugh, faster, Drakkon. Stop torturing me," she whines when I'm a quarter of the way in. She is taking me readily, so with a quick jerk of my hips I stretch her wide.

Her responding moan is one of deep satisfaction.

I pull her up by her hands slightly from her recumbent position. "You should watch my claim on you, little one."

Her eyes widen as her gaze drops to focus on where my cock is embedded. I slide the rest of the way in, bringing her flush against my chalsk .

Oh my freaking God! That bony ridge I saw earlier above his cock is pressing flat against my clit. I can't hold back the orgasm sweeping over me. Despite my pussy tightening down on him, Drakkon is unperturbed in his mission. He pistons in and out of me, but never far enough to remove the pressure against my clit. Or that other rear bit that's cupping the area below my pussy, rubbing nerve endings I didn't even know were there. It's like he's coming at me from all directions. It's delicious and overwhelming at the same time. My fingernails dig into Drakkon's broad shoulders as I shatter into a million pieces.

Only when I'm sagging against his chest does Drakkon let loose. I can feel the heat of his cum filling me up, marking me as his mate. And that's the exact moment when I glance at my arm and notice the first faint platinum swirls under my skin.

"Drakkon?" I raise my arm in front of his eyes even as he scoops me up, still deeply embedded, and moves us to the bed.

His expression is pleased. "You are a most worthy mate, C.J., Tales of your speedy transformation will reach the far outposts of the Empire within a week."

I blush. "Seriously? People talk about this sort of thing?"

Drakkon shrugs as he lies down with me on top of him. I push up on his chest with my hands so I can meet his gaze directly.

"They did. The current Empress has been on the throne for over one hundred years,

so it's been a while since there was a royal bride.”

“One hundred years! Are those earth years?”

Drakkon's eyes shift as if doing an internal calculation. “No, it would be more like one hundred and fifty in your units. You will live equally long, my C.J.,” he says softly.

I blink, trying to take it all in. “Over one hundred years of sex like that?” I ask faintly.

His grin is blinding. “We might take it a bit slower in the last half century,” he concedes with a twinkle deep in his strange gold eyes.

Moving to shift my weight off of him, Drakkon stops me with a hand to my hip. “No, stay, sweetness. The nanobots will still transfer with my cock buried deep inside you. And besides, I've a mind to fuck you again shortly. Do you have any complaints about my chalsk ?”

He asks it as if knowing I won't. I frown down at him. “Ass.”

His smile is wickedly angelic. “I thought not.”

I think he's trying to distract me from the steadily growing swirls under my skin. Or should it be in it? I'm not entirely sure. It doesn't hurt, but it's weird and I have a heightened sense of awareness suddenly. The number of people moving about the nearby corridors, that kind of thing.

You'll learn to push it into the background soon, my mate. The thought appears in my mind just as Drakkon rolls us over.

“You can talk in my head?” I squeak out loud, not daring to believe it isn't my

overactive imagination.

Yes, comes the response as he pulls out of me in order to bend down and fasten his lips around my nipple. It means I can both feast on you and converse at the same time . Along with the words comes a wave of emotions — pride, sexual satisfaction, possessiveness, and love. I tug on his long braids.

“Drakkon?”

Yes, my sweet? He moves to nuzzle my other breast.

“Make love to me?”

He smiles as he repositions to do just that. “You have only to think the thought, my C.J.”

His cock slides home, and this time I experience it from both his perspective and mine. It’s at least five times more intense and the first time had me gasping for air. I can feel my eyes rolling back into my head as he slowly teases my pussy with his chalsk , making leisurely shallow strokes with his cock.

He must sense when I’m close because he surges forward, burying himself deep. I’m so full the keening sensation of joy and life he’s emanating has me clutching him tight even as I explode with something equally strong but more feminine.

When both our heart rates have slowed to something approaching normal, he asks me quietly, “What does C.J. stand for? Initials mean a longer name behind it, correct?”

“Yes, but you don’t need to know them. I only go by C.J.” I’m certainly never going to let on that it stands for Clorinda Jacynth.

“I yearn to learn every detail about you, Clorinda,” he practically purrs into my ear.

“What!” I screech, sitting up abruptly.

Drakkon falls back laughing, one muscular arm covering his eyes as if that’s going to keep him safe.

“There’s no keeping secrets from your mate, little kystra . Better get used to it now.” He pulls me down on top of him and claims a kiss. His ridged tongue teases mine expertly and sends any thoughts of revenge (temporarily) out of my head.

“As members of the Imperial staff, you have the privilege of being the first to be introduced to my mate, Princess C.J.” I announce with due solemnity to the video broadcast set up on the bridge.

C.J., looking lovely but nervous in an elegantly simple and very short garment designed speedily by the ship’s tailor to show off her many intricate tracings, steps forward and gives a hesitant wave accompanied by a slight smile. I assured her earlier she didn’t have to say anything as nobody would understand her that wasn’t physically near me anyway. This is simply an opportunity for everyone to verify the rumors and note the strength and density of her designs indicating a strong and fast union. Then we can go back to fucking in our quarters for several weeks until we reach the Imperial Palace. Protocol demands that my grandmother be the next to meet the future empress.

Since we are only a day out from the intended return to Earth, I agreed to have C.J.’s apartment boxed up, but only if the most human-appearing crew members were dispatched and she remained safely on the ship. “You don’t exactly look human anymore, my darling mate,” I point out when she pouts at me.

She wrinkles her nose but sighs in agreement. “I suppose you’re right.”

“I am always right. Not only am I your mate, but also your Crown Prince. That makes me twice as right.”

Her brown eyes light with the predictable fire before she realizes I’m teasing. Sort of. “The other thing I’m right about is that your pussy is feeling lonely and neglected,” I assure her, watching with delight as her beautiful eyes narrow.

“How could it be when you were stuffing me full not twenty minutes ago?”

I wave a dismissive hand. “That was twenty minutes too long. Your pussy is happiest when clutching my cock.”

Her smile threatens to break through. “There might be some truth to that assertion. But we’re miles away from our bed.”

Nodding, I gesture around the garden deck. “This is, however, quite private. The lift door is locked for this level.”

Her eyes widen with interest.

“Perhaps you would like to kneel on this bench and admire that sirti flower in the nearby bed?” I point to the raised planting area behind the bench. It is time to demonstrate a different perspective to my mate by taking her from behind.

There’s plenty of side eye from C.J. as she kneels on the bench and braces her hands on the stone wall of the planter. She must have some idea what I have in mind because her ass is pushed out and twitching.

After pushing her delicate robe aside, I make swift work of removing her human underwear. Sliding a finger down her slit, I hum with satisfaction to see how wet and ready she is. “You are an endless source of satisfaction, sweet C.J.” Slipping into her

warm depths, I know the instant the rear extension of my chalsk makes contact with her clit because her mental squeal of delight has me grinning from ear to ear. From this angle and with the help of the artificial gravity of the ship, her clit will remain under constant stimulation even as I rock into her channel over and over.

When she has come three times and I've deemed her thoroughly satisfied based on her constant mental hum of pleasure, I gather her up and carry her into the lift. C.J. raises both arms to clasp them around my neck. "I suppose..." she mumbles into my chest. "That maybe they got that whole mate matching thing right after all."

Such a concession deserves a reward. And as soon as we're back in the privacy of our quarters, I proceed to deliver it by licking her pussy clean and leaving C.J. whimpering with satisfaction.



## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 2:52 am*

Two years later

Can you believe it? Life exploring the galaxy and the strange and exotic cultures actually means buying a mansion in Haven County and spending six months of the year here.

Mind you, to the guards and crew of the ship, this is strange and exotic, but I'm still highly amused.

It seems that what little knowledge was gained about shifters was extremely interesting to the ministers of the Empire.

So much so that they wanted a royal presence here on Earth to facilitate more information gathering.

Not surprisingly, the shifter community (which does exist after all) is the least inclined to leave the natural environment of Earth.

So instead the researchers have come to them.

But only in Haven County because that was the deal struck ten years ago with the U.S.

Government.

Other women, though, are now flocking to the Center to apply to be mates.

A handful are deeply disappointed that they won't be getting my tracteries, but there is only one Crown Prince, and he's taken.

And about to take me if this speech will ever end.

Drakkon has made good use of our mental link and whenever there's a boring function where he must maintain proper royal protocol, he's taken to dreaming up new sexual fantasies.

He mentally numbers them and then makes me pick a number before we leave the event.

And they've gotten sillier and more crazy over time.

Technically, he's supposed to be working on getting me pregnant, but I have a feeling the nanobots are letting me wait for a few years.

Which do you think I should choose?

The pool with the lights turned off where he pretends to be a pussy-eating shark, the garden gazebo where I'm a blindfolded captive taken against the wall, or the one where he covers every inch of me in raspberry jam? Rolling my eyes discreetly, I send back option number four.

The one where he's blindfolded and handcuffed in our perfectly comfortable bed and I'm torturing his cock with my mouth and my very smooth tongue (which he continues to be fascinated by).

There's a low growl at my side.

As soon as the clapping starts, Drakkon stands and makes our excuses.

I can't quite hold back the grin as we exit the lecture hall at Snowberry College and, escorted by our security entourage, make our way to the line of waiting vehicles.

"You'll be paying for that one, Princess," Drakkon mutters as we take our seats in the back of the SUV.

I twinkle at him, noticing his trceries are swirling with arousal.

"I look forward to it, your Eminence," I murmur, pretending to be fascinated by the scenery out the window so I won't burst into laughter.

Despite the boring speeches, life with Drakkon so far has been... everything.

Everything I never knew to imagine.

A closer bond than I could ever previously believe exists and, well, fun.

That's really the best word for it.

Two years ago, I thought I was exposing a romance scam preying on women desperate for love and instead I found love and all the wonders of the galaxy.

Not bad for a sudden career shift, right?

Unexpected love happens right here on Earth, too! Up next we're headed back to Ridgeline Security with Protecting the One He Can't Have .