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## The Eye of Alloria

Rae Lori

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Dear Readers,

If you find any grammar flaws or typos, email me at: Rachel@Raelori.com.

I'd like to offer the cleanest copies possible but sometimes the eye misses small errors here and there! Thanks!

Praise for The Eye of Alloria

~ \* ~

"The Eye of Alloria" is a fun, short tale. Ms. Lindley manages to pack a great deal of description and depth into her story. I highly recommend it and I hope that there will be a series developed from this story. "

-Paige Lovitt

<http://blog.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view&friendID=110672657&blogID=278058248&MyToken=26>  
Multiverse Reviews

"This book has a beautiful dedication. I was moved by that alone. Next, I must say that Rae Lindley has a wonderful imagination. This is an incredible tale. I have been reading genre fiction since the 1970s and this is something new. Also, the artwork here, by Rachel Lindley belongs in a gallery.

...covers both Fantasy and Science Fiction with this tale and uses a new voice with entirely fresh ideas."

Buzzable and Buzzalicious!

~Buzzy

<http://buzzelle.com/Fantasy.html>

"Merging ancient civilization with current technology, Ms. Lindley creates an engaging plot that joins science fiction with fantasy.

...a unique though captivating story possessing spectacular characters that seem genuine while building the story's suspense..."

A dedicated reader,

Pamela Jenewein

<http://romanceatheart.com/review/eyeofalloria.html> Romance at Heart Magazine

"Lindley has penned a novella that encompasses both fantasy and science fiction. Her characters are interesting and distinctive. She has a great imagination as well as the ability to ignite the imagination of her

readers. The Eye of Alloria contains two of Lindley's talents; her artwork enhances the plot, each complimenting the other."

Terry South

<http://qualitybookreviews.wordpress.com/2007/04/25/the-eye-of-alloria/> Quality Book Reviews

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*Dedication*

*For my parents*

*who taught and gave me*

*the true and pure*

*definition of love*

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The Eye of Alloria

Saron's Reign

Earth Years 3010 - 3030

I

Exit to Alloria

Year 3030

Saron Bravewind stared at the grey brick ceiling in the darkness. The fire that spread orange, red and yellow light throughout the room was now dying to an ember. The position of the moon meant it was the middle of the night, only a few hours until morning.

He had been trying to figure out the cause of the commotion that spread across his kingdom. In one night, all of the crops in the land had been marked with the same strange symbol: a winged jet resembling a lizard-like creature, layered over a strange hybrid resembling a man and a wolf hunched over Earth. He couldn't figure out what it meant or who could have created it. No man has ever been beyond the Earth's atmosphere since the year two thousand and four. Since he was a little boy, he had wanted to venture to the stars. He heard stories during the age of technology of how man sent machines to record data as they learned about other planets in the solar system. Not long after this 'space age' funding for space discovery stopped due to loss of money and the increase of greed in its investors.

Money. He chuckled to himself at the notion of paper having value. Especially over another human's life, as some believe.

The time would come when he would enter the stars to explore. His ship would be ready soon enough once the repairs were finalized and he would find the answers he needed. All would be well in the morning, as it should be.

He pulled his wife, Jacina onto his bare chest and inhaled the vanilla almond scent of her dark hair, splayed across her cinnamon brown shoulders. He held her close to him and in minutes, his mind finally rested enough to fall into slumber.

The next morning, Saron stood amidst the cool greenery of the landscape that decorated the exterior of the palace. He nodded at the palace guard who wore white silk around his thick waist and the Bravewind insignia of a lion on a gold band around his neck. He admired the silk material that was created in a village not far from the castle and held the guards that wore it as his highest command. Once he dismissed the guard, he turned back to the beauty that stood before him.

The design was of a steel-like material never used before. The exterior was sleek and well defined in the shape of a silver bird. He circled the ship and looked upon it as a proud father would upon his newborn child. The thrusters sat on each end while the front pointed toward the skies.

Saron looked up at the fields ahead and saw his young daughter, Saria, playing. Her long black hair flowed behind her like a sheet of silk. She was a mixture of both his wife and his lineages. A proud ancestry that reached back to the beginning of the western civilization before the industrialization of the lands and people. Now, Saron rebuilt a war torn nation when there was barely life. In the past, he would have caused an uproar when he took the hand of an African princess whose own lineage was hanging by the thread of the former world before the wars. Today, their differences were nonexistent while their union was more than beneficial to the survival of their nation. He smiled as he looked upon the result of the union of him and his wife.

Saria's skin was a warm beige tint that glowed under the yellow sun's rays. He saw himself in her visage and his wife in her hazel eyes and fiery spirit. Her laughter was like a soothing melody to his ears. She had been ailing previously during the past weeks and he was overjoyed to finally see her out and playing again.

He peered up at the window near the top of the rectangular castle-like structure. The fortress, like many of the new structures, harkened back to the ancient days before the war. Its mixture of societies: Ancient Egyptian, the Far East, Medieval Europe wove into every aspect of the people of Orland's lives. This was a great symbol of their progression and he was proud to be their leader.

Just then the silhouette of a woman in blue silk stood in the open brick window, bringing him out of his thoughts. He smoothed out his tunic and proceeded back to the fortress as a smile crossed his lips.

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The green grasslands surrounding Orland castle swayed in the warm breeze. Jacina looked down from high within the stone walls. She laughed as she watched the children running in circles. Saria was the oldest at seven years of age. She proudly waved her sword around and jabbed the air like a young warrior.

Jacina was surprised by a gentle kiss on her neck. "I see you're up and about rather early," she said without turning around.

"I had to make sure my baby was coming along well."

She laughed, "Nice to know I'm always second on your mind."

Saron wrapped his large arms around her waist and pulled her close to him. She smiled, knowing he was breathing in the scent of her hair that was like fruit trees growing in midsummer. She always wore it elegantly during the day, like the Queen she was, braided and delicately designed on top of her head. On this morning, she left it in loose waves down her back against the blue velvet and silk lined dress adorned with gold threads.

"Never second, my love," he responded. "I didn't want to wake you."

She peered over her shoulder to look into his round, warm eyes. "I saw Saria playing nearby."

He craned his neck over the windowsill and she followed his gaze. Under the cool shadows of the tall green trees, Saria lifted her wooden sword, blocking the moves of a young boy her age. "Her future doesn't belong in sport, but in-"

"What?" Jacina turned to face him. "She is a strong girl. She can handle herself as well as any boy. Maybe even better. You saw how she handled young Brickman's son."

As expected, the memory of hearing how his daughter outwitted a boy who had tried to manipulate her feelings, brought a smile to her husband's face. She knew he was proud to call Saria his. He looked up into a pair of impatient Egyptian eyes.

"I'm listening," he said.

"She is to rule Orland one day on the throne. Why not learn to defend it?"

He moved away from his wife and crossed the room to his desk near the fireplace. Silence filled the air except for the sound of his dark blue robe sliding across the stone floor. "Her husband shall learn to defend the kingdom if need be," he finally said.

"She should as well," she shot back. "Would you rather have her standing for what she believes in or cowering and whimpering in the corner from oncoming foes?"

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Maybe it wasn't *his* sharp tongue that Saria had inherited. He was beginning to believe it was Jacina's. He looked at his wife as he descended into his large wicker chair. Far be it for him to deny her. Her conscience had pulled him out of many political problems and even a hard time shortly before Saria's birth. Now, he couldn't bear to lose his daughter, especially in battle.

"We can't speak of this now," he said. "I have duty."

She walked to him and placed her hands on his shoulders. Gently she moved her fingers along his back muscles and bent down to place her lips to his ear. "We can't speak of this ever. Saria is heir to the throne and will rule. It's time not only she but you understand this as well."

A knock at the door silenced them. Jacina moved from Saron, allowing her hand to linger for a moment before slowly sliding off his shoulders. She eyed him with a flirtatious smile as she walked to the door. He cleared his throat and straightened himself, forcing his mind to think about business and not pleasure at this time.

Another palace guard, draped in red silk entered and bowed when he saw Jacina.

"More documents," he said noticing the large pile of papers. "Bring them here, please."

Jacina returned to the window, probably to overlook their daughter, Saron speculated. A smile crossed her face as she watched the children running about.

He sighed and turned his attention to his work, stamping and flipping through papers. "Another symbol was left in a field of crops. This time in another land far from Orland," he announced.

She turned to face him. "Something otherworldly is at work here," she said softly. "Believe me, I've been trying to figure out its meaning, too."

He flipped through papers and continued signing. "That is why I feel I must get this mission underway. The heavens are calling. The answer lies within the stars."

"And you know this how?"

He thought back to the dreams he had so vividly of a woman, skin of ebony, hair of honey, entrenched in a white glow around her. He could hardly make out her facial features or anything that would give him a clue as to who she was. He hadn't told anyone of the dream or of the woman who haunted him. He knew something was pushing him toward the stars, but the time wasn't now. Something was going to happen soon that would set things in motion. He would know when.

Saron felt his wife's eyes watching him for a moment as he fumbled through the papers. "And to think at one time humanity couldn't function without machines."

"How wrong they were," he said. "I don't need a flawed machine to do my thinking. If I wanted to make mistakes I would make my own."

He heard the contained laugh in her throat at his words.

What was left of the history books from the past told of a time when artificial life forms created by man solved problems for humans. Man

no longer thought for himself, but instead focused on the pursuit of pleasuring himself and feeding his every want. These machines joined with man to create superior beings, yet it backfired--destroying most of humankind. Machines were quickly destroyed as well thus sending mankind back to the days of kings.

"Saria's not moving," Jacina's words brought Saron out of his thoughts.

He rushed to her side. When he saw Saria's still body yards away, he didn't speak. He turned on his heels and flew down the spiral stairs with Jacina right behind him.

The bright yellow sun fell behind a single gray cloud. The large doors opened and a wind of cold met their warm faces. They ran into the thick, green grass until they found Saria's body amidst the children. Her small body shivered violently.

"What happened?" Jacina asked the children.

"She just grabbed her heart and fell to her knees," the tallest boy answered.

Saron scooped their daughter up in his arms and rushed back to the castle. Jacina turned and looked up at the sky, now beginning to turn gray with dark clouds. She stood still for a minute, listening as the wind blew. Something was set into motion and she had to pay attention. Her gaze fell to the ship near the edge of the forest.

"My lady?" Banier Hersh approached her with one hand over the sword at his side. His hazel eyes looked upon her with curiosity. "Is young Saria well?"

She slowly shook her head in silence.

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Saron paced outside of Saria's room. His soft, velvet boots clicked and clacked between the coughs. He had a

strong face of a warrior and a thick chest beneath his robe of violet silk and velvet lining. He'd been told it many times before. Yet, as he stood waiting to hear, his muscular arms folded behind him and his eyes remaining on the floor, he felt helpless.

Alin Udel, his first officer, had arrived within the hour hearing of Saron's dilemma. Like Banier and his partner in arms, Idel Mor, Alin wore armor of silver and velvet draped over his chest. The seal of Orland was engraved on the officers' armor and they wore it like a banner. Alin was a fair man with a short mane of red hair and cold, green eyes. Although, they looked nothing alike, Banier a dark skinned serious man with soft eyes and Idel a fair man with a rugged square face, a red moustache, the soldiers had joked that they were mistaken for each other at times.

"My lord," Idel kneeled before him. "If I may. The matter involving the Westlot lands remain unresolved. Two more crops have sprouted over night."

Alin turned toward the two. "The king's matters lie with more important concerns at this time. Trivial affairs will have to wait."

"It's alright, Alin." He gestured for Idel to rise.

"How is young Saria?" Banier asked.

He looked at Saria's dimly lit room. Yellow light from the candles within flickered across the walls. A small breeze blew through all of the rooms. The hairs on his arms stood on end, but he wondered if it was from the coldness of the wind or the possibility that his young daughter may be beyond help.

"I have yet to know," he finally said.

Jacina appeared at the doorway. She rubbed her arms, covered in the soft green dress she wore. He knew she had the same feeling he did. "The doctor says you may enter."

Idel placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder, before he walked to Jacina and slipped an arm around her waist. As he looked into her glazed eyes, he saw the tears slowly falling down her cheeks. She laid her head against his chest and began to cry.

"There isn't anything they can do," she said softly.

"Her heart is failing. He said there isn't enough blood being pumped to stabilize her. He doesn't believe she may live much longer."

"They said when she was born, she carried a weak heart."

She shook her head. "I thought it had gotten better. That it had healed itself because she had no problems. None at all. I should have been more alert to not let her strain herself."

He tightened his grip on her waist and looked deep into her eyes. "I will find something to make her better," he whispered. "We won't let anything happen to her, my love."

"How?" she asked.

He gently caressed the tears away from her soft cheek and smiled. "I'll find a way."

He walked into the room.

The physician stood, gathering his instruments in his pouch, and Jacina held her arms out to the old doctor. "I'll see you to the door."

Saron's mind blocked out all sounds except for the steady breaths his daughter took. Her hair fell across her shoulders. He kneeled down

to her side and took her tiny dark, shaking hands into his large ones. He was still amazed at how much she looked like Jacina. He wanted to hold her at that moment and make her pain go away. He would do anything to make it go away.

"Father." Her voice brought him out of his trance. She gripped his hand.

"Yes, Saria."

"It hurts," she said weakly. "I'm not ready to die yet." Her black eyes quivered as she spoke. "There is so much I want to do."

He took a deep breath and tried to remain calm as he looked upon his daughter. "I won't let you die, Saria. That is a promise."

He bent down, placed a kiss on her forehead and never looked back as he exited the room. He stopped in the doorway and looked down the stone hall where Jacina stood among the line of guards against the wall.

"Our medicine is beyond help for Saria," he said softly as he bowed his and closed his eyes.

"But we can help your daughter live," a small ethereal voice like a whisper entered his ears and his brain. His eyes flashed open as he heard the words intrude on his mind. He now knew what he had to do.

He shook his head. "I'm not giving up. I refuse to stand by and watch the slow death of my daughter. It's not her time to die." He looked up at his two guards. "We have to venture among the stars for help. Pray for guidance to lead us to safety for my daughter."

He entered her room again and gently scooped Saria into his arms. Jacina met his gaze when he returned to the hall.

"You're leaving for the expedition early? Saron, nothing lies beyond the stars."

"Trust me Jacina, I must do this."

"I won't let you take our daughter from her home to an unknown destination to fulfill a boyhood dream. She belongs in bed resting. And you belong here to watch over this kingdom."

He turned to her and thought of the only way to make her understand. "Do you remember your instincts, my love? I always trust your intuition in decisions of the state and in settling disputes. All I ask is that you trust mine now."

Her wrinkled brow softened as she looked in his eyes. Those few moments seemed like a lifetime to him as his heart beat rapidly in his ears.

Her hand caressed his cheek and she smiled. "Then we will wait for you."

With a kiss from Jacina to his daughter, he turned on his heels and left the palace halls.



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Daylight crept into the land within hours. The bright sun gleam in the clear blue sky, absent of any clouds from the previous day. He felt a glimmer of hope ahead. His eyes remained on the blue skies above. His mind ran with wonder of the undiscovered land that sat so far away for so long.

The ship held a small legion of a hundred guards armed with swords, shields, and armor of blue steel. He watched as Banier and Idel took the front of the controls. He placed Saria in a small bed that was attached to the walls. The ship was large, made of silver steel on the outside and stabilized with marble and chrome on the inside. He had made sure the walls were built to withhold the force of the atmosphere and space. He was hoping the shield would hold when they shed the outer walls. Now came the ultimate test.

"Ready at your command, my lord," Banier said. He arched his head to look up at Saron who wrapped his arms around his blue steel plated chest that sat under his satin robe.

"Let's go."

The ship hummed as it revved up. The lights in the cockpit dimmed as the controls illuminated. For thousands of years, humanity wondered about life on other planets. Saron took a deep breath hoping to confirm existence and suspicion in the next few days, as well as find the source of the soft voice like bells that rang in his brain.

"Take off in 5...4...3...2..." Once the countdown finished, Banier pushed the controls to lift the ship into the air. Saron took one last

look ahead at the tall green forest that stretched into the sky. Slowly, the world became smaller with each minute as they ascended. The blue rivers glistened across the lands surrounded by green. Debris still covered part of the lands from the tall cities that had been built in place of forests. Now the greenery was taking over the same grounds it once owned long before man.

He turned to watch Saria sleeping in her bed. He hoped they would find someone, anyone, out there to help. He watched around him as the ship pierced the blue sky and passed small smoky clouds that spread around the blue blanket of sky. Soon the blue turned to black sprinkled with small white, stars that appeared like coins against a velvet background.

"Commencing space enveloping," Idel announced.

The sturdy walls disappeared, allowing a complete view of space all around them. He reached his hand out and felt the cold, shiny invisible surface keeping them intact from space's atmosphere. He was

surrounded by space. Idel and Banier, sitting in their stations across the way, appeared to be floating among the stars.

The stars. Many wondered what beings dwelled there for centuries. Some have even claimed to have been visited by beings from other worlds.

"Can you see any life in the surrounding areas?" he asked.

Banier typed in a code and waited. A soft beep alerted him. He shook his head. "Nothing."

Saron sighed. "Pick up speed. At this point we won't reach the moon until centuries have passed."

Idel typed in the code to apply hyper speed. The ship suddenly began jolting the men as it sped

forward. The stars wrapped around them, forming a vanishing point toward the space ahead.

"My lord," Idel said. He eyed the trajectory on the screen. "There."

Saron leaned forward, trying not to lose his balance as he kept his grip. The moon appeared among the stars, light blue and green as their own planet had been.

"That can't be," Saron said.

"Father!"

He looked up at his daughter who had awoken. "Reverse ship enveloping, Banier."

"Father, what's going on?" Saria asked. She looked up at him, her face paling by the minute, her eyes becoming blacker.

"I don't think I can hold it together for much longer, my lord," Banier yelled through the loud hum. He rapidly typed in new codes.

"Apply more speed."

Banier turned to face him. "Sir?"

"Apply more speed! We need to get to that surface as soon as possible."

He felt the ship rock side to side, hoping it would stay together. A high-pitched hum covered the walls as they continued ahead. Saria's scream soon pierced the air, a higher pitch than the clamor of the ship.

The view port soon filled with the large blue and green atmosphere of the moon as it grew closer.

"I can't slow it down!" Idel yelled. Banier and Idel worked hard, their hands flying across the keypads as the atmosphere collided into them. The ship turned to one side, tossing Saron and his daughter hard against the wall. Saron felt his head hit metal...and then blackness.

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A pure bright light. Illumination. Saron opened his eyes and focused his gaze on a gecko-like lizard creature that was hopping along part of the ship's debris. Its shiny green and purple spotted skin flexed and moved over its tight muscles as it walked around in front of Saron. Its head flicked to the side to watch him. To Saron, the creature felt strangely familiar. Just as he thought these words, thin, translucent wings sprouted from the gecko's back and it flew off. Sunlight hit his irises and on instinct, he squinted beneath the yellow light. He scanned the area to take a quick inventory of his surroundings and the cockpit's condition. Banier and Idel were nowhere to be seen. The side of the ship where Saria's bed had been attached was clearly torn off leaving a gaping hole in its place.

He forced himself to his feet. "Saria!"

The hallway leading to the back of the ship had been ripped away to about 30 feet away from the cockpit. Too many of his guards lay dead in the back of the ship.

"Saria!"

He climbed over the debris and onto the grassland. He looked around. It almost appeared like home. But there was something

different. The trees were not green, but shiny with turquoise leaves that waved back and forth. At first appearance, the trees looked like water. Small clouds of rivers sat upon tan branches like hands. He breathed. The air was thick with moisture and heat.

"Saria!"

The trees caressed the blue skies, allowing only small rays of sunshine to push their way to the ground.

He kept his eyes on the small path ahead where a trail of fallen gold leaves among the green beckoned him forward. Farther up the hill, he stumbled on a path and a clearing up ahead. There in front of him was a forest suspended in the sky. Silver streaked ships of all shapes and sizes zoomed beneath him in and out and between the clouds. Further on and to his right, there were small huts in little villages. Behind him, he heard footsteps following him, but when he turned, no one was amongst the wreckage.

"You are tampering among sacred ground," a soft woman's voice boomed into the air.

Slowly, with his hand on his sword, he continued up the hill. As soon as he reached the top, a sudden blinding light surrounded him. Tall, gray silhouettes loomed ahead. When the light passed, seven tall figures stood before them. The soft, green tunics over strong warrior like forms, fitting brown pants and matching leather gloves and boots reminded Saron of the days long past on Earth. Masks of animals carved in brown stone covered their faces. Three were aligned on each side of a beautiful hooded woman with her hand on her sword. He staggered closer to see her as he pushed the fear back inside of him.

"I mean no harm to you," he said. As he looked upon her, he noticed the sword of blue jewels at her hip.

She slowly approached him, removing her soft hood. His breath left him. Her skin was of brown, appearing to glow even without the rays of the sun. Her hair was that of platinum, catching the sun's rays as it swayed from side to side as she moved. Dark, pointed ears peaked from between the white strands. Her eyes illuminated a clear brown hazel as she stared at him. Her soft garb was like that of a warrior or hunter consisting of a long sleeved robe and matching pants.

He slowly descended to his knees and lowered his head.

"Forgive me, but I have come to seek the aid of anyone who would help. My daughter has fallen ill and I need assistance."

"We've been waiting for you Saron Bravewind of Orland," she said. "Follow me." She nodded to her men and they backed away, still holding their bows and arrows in defense.

He cautiously followed the creatures through the forest, still surrounded by the masked guards. As they walked deeper into the forest, what little sunlight that shined upon them was now gone. Shadows fell like a blanket and darkness crept upon him. All the while, he wondered where Saria was.

They soon came to a clearing and sunlight burst through the darkness. Before them stood a city within small clouds of fog. Against the brightly lit blue sky, a grand gold and glass castle sat draped in thick green vines. It stood tall and arched over the smaller cities down below in a ravine where inhabitants walked around the lands. The beings moved with grace and gentleness even as they sneaked quick glances at the new visitor.

"What is this place?" Saron wondered aloud.

The woman remained silent as she led him toward the castle of glass and vines. They walked along the pathway above the houses and toward the large castle ahead. The clearing brought a ray of sun and he looked around the area. The large castle loomed among the green mountains that surrounded it. Below the castle was a village of humanoids, some with dark skin and platinum hair, like his host, and others with fair skin, hair black as midnight. Large beasts like that of sabers walked among the people, some transporting large items.

They circled the pathway over the village and walked ahead to the large cone-like structure. The large gray doors opened with a soft hum and Saron kept close behind the woman.

She stopped in the front hall and turned to face them. "The aid you seek is for your daughter," she finally said.

"Yes." He perked up at the mention of Saria. "Her heart is failing. She needs help. Do you know where she is?"

The woman nodded to the guard who led him deeper into the castle. They headed through the thin halls, turning corners until they stopped outside a room with open windows and luminescent lights in the ceiling. Books lay placed around the room and in the walls. A single bed lay draped with thin material toward the back of the room.

"Father."

Saron rushed inside the room and the adorned silk bed where Saria rested. He rushed to her and wrapped her in his arms.

"I knew it was you," she told him.

He looked into her eyes. "How did you get here?"

"They brought us here," a voice said behind him.

He turned to see Alin standing in front of Idel, Banier and one his guards named Rigel Tir.

"Alin." He greeted his men with a pat on their shoulders.

"We tried to save as many men as we could," Banier said softly. "Before we could get to you, they came and took us."

"Thank goodness they were humanoid," Alin said rather loud.

"Thank goodness they took care of us," Idel said, glaring at Alin.

Saron looked back at Saria who was now sleeping peacefully.

"The woman brought us here shortly after the crash," Idel said softly.

"More like forced us here," Alin interrupted as he walked to Saron. "They held us at the end of their blades and marched us here like convicts."

"We are strangers in their land, Alin," Saron said as he looked into his guards' green eyes. "They took a big leap of faith in bringing us here. I can see why they were taking precautions beforehand. I'd do the same if this was Orland and they were the newcomers."

He looked toward the hall where the woman had left him. "Stay here," he told his men. He walked outside toward the guard with the mask of a condor. The guards stepped in front of him. "I need to speak to her," he said.

The guards didn't budge in that moment.

"Please," he pleaded. "Concerning my daughter."

"I'm here," the soft voice invaded his brain, mesmerizing him. That voice. The woman approached him, her boots caressing the shiny floor as she walked. Past her stern expression something was wrong. He took a step toward her and felt Idel's strong hand on his shoulder.

"Sir," he began. "Are you sure about this?"

Saron turned to Idel and the rest of his men watching him with curious eyes. He placed a hand on Idel's shoulder and nodded in assurance. Following the woman down the hall, he noticed the walls

were smooth and gray as if it was made of pure rock that aged with each of the changing seasons. His steel-heeled boots clicked against the smooth ground behind the woman's soft step.

She stopped in the arched doorway of a room and turned to him. She gestured for him to enter. A fireplace crackled in front of the room. Candles sat along the mantle and around the room despite the sunlight shining in through the window.

He gently walked across the floor to the young figure in the bed near the back of the room. He resembled the woman who stood behind him; only his glow was fading. His breath was slow and he continuously clenched his left shoulder that was wrapped in cloth and stained with red.

"My brother was wounded shortly before you arrived," she said.

"I assure you, this was not our doing," he said facing her. "My men and I came here to seek help, not bring war."

She looked at him with sadness in her eyes. "He's not to survive the night."

"I am sorry," was all Saron managed to say.

"He means much to me. Much like your daughter to you, I suppose."

"She means everything to my wife and me. We still don't know what exactly ill's her."

"My physician is still studying her structural anatomy." She walked to him. "I can feel her heart weakening. But she is strong."

He smiled. "Yes, she is."

She looked deep in his eyes. "We've studied you for centuries, Saron. Your wars, so many deaths."

His forehead wrinkled. "I don't understand. We've ventured upon the moon's surface centuries ago. It was nothing like this."

"Saron," the woman led him outside into the hall. "Our history is rich. Forgive me if I don't trust to tell you

our past just yet."

He nodded. "I understand. May I know your name?"

Her full lips raised in a smile. "My name is Mellinia Salestar. Welcome to the Alloria Moon. Home of the Elven world."

He smiled. "There are many stories of you written in our past."

"We ventured upon your planet a long time ago to study your species. I'm afraid we weren't as discreet as we thought considering the indentation our ships left on your lands. The recent indentations, however, are no accident. The time has come to alert you of our presence."

"Why now and not earlier?"

"Humans tried to destroy themselves in wars over territory, differences of opinion, even difference of appearances. How would

your kind react to an alien race who, at the time, looked completely different than themselves?"

She held her hand up as a puzzled expression crossed his face.

"I'll explain more later. Right now, your race is in danger of extermination."

"Mellinia--I..."

"Saron!" a voice sounded in the hall.

He turned, recognizing Idel's voice. He rushed out to the front hall and saw his men and the mystical creatures both aiming their weapons at each other. Alin held one of the creatures' necks in a head lock.

"Your majesty!" Alin said. "We can leave. We can return home if we force our way out of here."

"Alin, let him go," Saron commanded.

"We don't know what they may do to us!" Alin said, releasing the guard. "They may try to keep us captive here!"

"Even if we wanted to, it is not in our nature," the woman said behind him. "We are Allorian Elves."

Banier froze. "Elves?" he said. "Such creatures' existence has not been proven."

"Then if that were true, you are speaking to your imagination. And it is you who are keeping yourselves captive." Mellinia looked upon all of the men. "We'll try to repair your ship so that you may return home. But know this: it is not us whom you should fear. Your world will be invaded soon."

"Mellinia, you said our race is in danger. Why? By whom?"

From the way it was told to Saron and his men, Alloria was a moon originally outside of their galaxy. The Allorian elves moved their people across space to be closer to the humans, to study them and to join with them. The elves were rather peaceful and, from what Saron saw, a beautiful race. He was astounded at the elven women who took their place at the forefront of the village. Even later, at dinner that night, Mellinia took

the head of the table.

"You have come a long way," Mellinia said, breaking his gaze. She was dressed in a white cloth like that of silk and above her long mane of platinum hair sat a crown with different colored jewels carved into various shapes.

"We have been traveling a while before we reached Alloria's atmosphere," Saron said. "I'm not sure how we're going to get back since our ship was nearly destroyed." He placed his napkin on his lap. One by one, the robed elven men and women came through the doors and sat bowls of water and towels next each of the members at the table.

Saron thought he caught sight of a boy peering around the corner from the doorway. His jaw was moving slowly, obviously chewing on the round half-eaten purple fruit he held. When Saron turned to follow the image, there was no one there.

"Your people have had a long history of battles with your technology."

Saron nodded. "Although it has done many good, it has also destroyed us in many ways."

Mellinia set her hands on the table in front her. Her gesture straightened as she spoke the next words with a quiet sharpness. "Perhaps it is man's inability to control his own hubris."

Banier cleared his throat, causing the two to look toward him.

Mellinia lowered her head, and took a few breaths before speaking again. "Forgive my forwardness. My people are still learning more of your people. I should not be so quick to criticize especially after such a world ending war has brought new unity and peace to your lands."

Saron peered down at the food placed in front of him. "I like to believe we have been humbled due to the massive amounts of war we have placed upon each other. Perhaps peace has finally found a resting place within our walls as it appears to have found in yours."

"If only it were that simple," Mellinia said softly.

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Jacina stood gazing down at the dark grasslands in a haze. A promise repeated in her head. Not Saron's promise to save Saria, but rather her own promise she made to keep Saria alive. Part of her was afraid Saron wouldn't return. She truly believed he would give his own life to save his child's. At that moment, she noticed slight movement among the tall stalks of grass.

Working on instinct, she turned and flew down the stairs through the front door. She assured herself their young daughter would be safe now that Saron had returned. Nevertheless, something else was still wrong. She opened the front door and exited through the large doors. Right away, she spotted an armored man a few yards away. Although he still wore his helmet and she couldn't see his face quite clearly, the blood on his arm sent chills all over her.

"Saron!" she breathed.

The figure fell to his knees and she could finally see the large hole now caked with blood on his side. She rushed toward the man and quickly lifted his helmet to reveal a bearded soldier. His dark hair was matted against his head and his face was worn and sullied with the signs of battle.

"I saw a strange figure," he said tiredly. He coughed.

She helped him lay down and cradled his head in her arm.

"He had skin of pale white scales," he continued. "I didn't know what it was, but it came after me..."

He coughed once more. "Then a whole legion of them descended from the stars like a flurry of ants."

"Save your strength," she said softly. "I'll get the guards to help you in the castle."

She turned to the guards approaching her through the tall blades of grass. She signaled them to hurry, and turned back to the fallen soldier. His eyes were now absent of the life that was there only minutes ago.

Slowly, she closed his eyelids and backed away as her guards took his body and carried him to the palace.

As she turned she peered down at the grass, watching it wave back in forth as the thundering sound of a thousand heavy feet pounded in the distance.

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He slowly inched across the room, careful not to wake the sleeping girl. He looked down at her as she slept. Long wavy hair of dark brown and red hues fell around her shoulders. He reached out to touch her dark skin and smiled at its softness. He couldn't take his eyes off her. Slowly, he took her hand and wrapped his own around hers.

Her eyes flashed open and she looked up at him. At first she seemed startled at his closeness, as she jumped away from him. But as she looked into his eyes, she saw something. A sort of warmth and closeness in him that she hadn't felt in a while. Slowly, he reached out and caressed the side of her face with the softness of his fingertips. Her eyes closed, and she leaned into his hand as she placed her hand over his.

Then his thin, pink lips lifted in a smile.

\*\*\*\*\*

The shiny marble floors echoed softly with Saron and Alin's voice. The elven guard ducked behind the walls and assumed his stance, careful not to be seen even as he kept his mind and ears open.

"I do not think it's wise to attack these people," the one named Saron said. "They are here to help us. To help Saria."

"They are keeping us hostage here. I want to return to Earth if it's true about these other creatures. How do we know they aren't the ones to hurt us?" The companion's voice was full of annoyance.

"They wouldn't be warning us if they were, Alin."

"Not even to throw us off?"

Saron shook his head. "I can't fully explain it. It's a feeling, like...something is about to happen. I don't know what, though."

"If I may suggest something." Alin paused, his voice no longer floating back and forth along behind the wall. "We should not put ourselves in the middle of all this. Who knows how big can it get?"



"I'm afraid this isn't something we willingly entered. Nor are we able to get out of easily."

\*\*\*\*\*

Saron stared out into the night sky over Alloria. The thick air still remained warm even in the night. Down below in the village, the Elven inhabitants walked around the dark city lit from small sparks of light within the small dome houses. He breathed in and felt a peace surround him in the clear air. Under any other circumstances he could find himself happy living here. His mind wandered to Jacina and he hoped she was well and not worrying herself too much since he left. But he knew otherwise. He would do anything to feel her soft body against his in that moment.

He jumped, noticing that he wasn't alone on the veranda.

Mellinia held up her slender hands as a smile crossed her lips. "I did not mean to startle you. I thought I would explain to you what is going on now that we have some time together."

She moved as if she floated on thin air. She stopped at his side. "The creatures are called Aurans. They are the ones you should fear. Many decades ago, before our dispute, my husband used to be the one to give human criticism. He was very wary of your people because of your history."

"I understand."

She peered down at the city. He angled his head to look at her, and wondered where her husband was. He could read the sorrow in her eyes and decided not to press on the subject.

She faced him, in that moment as if on cue. Slowly, she reached out to him, and he flinched, instantly moving back as she neared. When she moved toward him, he felt her inside his head. Her voice, her being, all of it soothed him. He allowed her to run her hand along his arm, her fingertips brushing wisps of hair. Her warm skin collided with his, yet he couldn't help noticing her smooth, brown skin was absent of any hair. He wondered what her eyes saw when she looked at him.

"Human," she said under her breath, as if to answer him.

In that moment, he felt home with her. If he closed his eyes, he swore he could feel Jacina right next to him. He wondered if he brought back the feeling of her husband as he stood close to her.

"The part of your brain that divides senses into memories is intriguing," she said after a moment. "Your wife must be something special. Like my husband was to me."

He smiled. "She is. She's very special."

Her hand dropped away from him, even as her eyes remained on him.

"Your actions and thoughts are noble, Saron." Her voice was like a calm sea over him. He couldn't help but be mesmerized by it. "I can tell you rule your world with the same love you have for your daughter and your mate."

He turned his attention to the forest where they entered earlier. Before he could respond, he noticed small specs of light moving through the forest like ants toward an anthill. He grabbed his sword from its sheath.

"Your majesty!"

Mellinia placed her hand on his sword. A small horde of elves emerged from the dark forest and headed toward the castle. She breathed a word he could not understand. He turned to her and for the first time that day, he noticed her face had dropped into worry.

The Elves moved across the land with grace and elegance, as they held swords and packs of arrows strapped on their backs. Mellinia raced down the stairs and to the entrance and met the leader of the pack, with Saron following closely.

"There was a flock of Aurans on the horizon," the tall, dark haired elf said.

"Where?"

"Not to far from here," he responded. "I saw their ships in the sky. I believe they were headed for the blue planet.

"Who exactly are these Auran creatures?" Saron asked.

"Creatures who thrive on war and destruction. I cannot explain fully now for we've run out of time. We must gather a team to send you back to Orland before it is too late."

The sound of swords, arrows, and spears colliding caused Saron to turn toward the battle below.

"I can't leave you here to fight against these creatures."

"We've fought these creatures for many years. We know their war tactics. But for your people, I fear it's too late."

Just then, a large fire erupted in a line near the edge of the forest. Mellinia turned into the castle and raced toward the back of the hall with Saron on her heel. "My physician will ride with you. Take a small army and one of our ships. Your daughter will be well."

He turned and rushed into the airy halls of the castle. Idel emerged from the dinner hall and almost collided with him.

"My King, what is happening?"

"Alloria is being attacked." Saron placed his hands on Idel's shoulders. "I need you to return to Orland to help defend it. The elves will help us. Take Saria with you. She needs to be home as she gets better."

"What about you, sir?"

Saron thought about jumping aboard the nearest ship to ride back with his daughter. He would be reunited with his wife as soon as possible and in time to get both of them to safety. Still, Mellinia had helped bring his family back to him. He knew he couldn't just thank her and go on his way. His hands slid off his friend's shoulder and to his sword. He turned to Mellinia "I'm staying here."

Idel's eyes grew wide. "My lord?"

"I would give my life to the elves for their help to my daughter," he said as he turned to Millenia standing behind him. "I would give anything to give my thanks."

Idel nodded slowly.

Millenia whispered something to the elven leader. He left shortly after.

"Forgive me, if I ask," Saron said, approaching Mellinia. "But if you can help my daughter, why can't you help your brother?"

"An ailment is simple to cure in a mortal body because it is simply replacing your natural defense. A wound made by an unknown weapon in an elven body is difficult when one does not understand the metal in the weapon."

"Then we will have to obtain one of their weapons," he declared.

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*My Dear Jacina,*

*It's been days since I've seen you. I have some good news coming. I've found a cure that will save our daughter. Take it and give it to her. I will be home in time to see her run, play, and laugh once again.*

*In the mean time, keep her safe with our warmth and love.*

*My thoughts are always with you. I can't wait to return to you and hold you in my arms again. I love you always, Jacina.*

*I shall return to you soon.*

*My love,*

*Saron*

Jacina sat in her lounge parlor in the dark as she watched the sky. The sun was slowly beginning to descend with a ray of yellow and red light trailing on the horizon. Night was not far behind. Ever since the soldier had returned, she had a guard keep watch all night and day in case of the creatures attack. The thundering footsteps still haunted her, even in her sleep. She looked down at the plains just as a villager ran toward the castle to one of the guards. Waving his hands, he frantically turned to tell the guards something as he pointed ahead into the forest.

She looked up and saw a strange ship landing in the middle of the forest surrounding the castle. The guards quickly ran in the direction the village boy pointed. Jacina turned toward the door as one of the guards entered.

"They've returned," the guard in yellow said. "The creatures have returned to the village. I have sent men to ward them off and protect

Orland, my Lady. There is also suitable protection surrounding the castle."

Her gaze dropped to the floor. "These creatures...have you seen what they look like?"

"No, my Lady. I'm afraid the only one to have seen them is being buried near the castle as we speak."

She sat down, holding her stomach. In the distance, she heard sounds of war cries, screams and the loud clash of weapons in the midst of battle.

\*\*\*\*\*

Saron had watched the castle lift into the air. The four legged beasts that helped the villagers were placed in large vine and silk cages and the throne and village Elves climbed in their homes and ascended into the air. He peered through the front hall window and watched the whole village, which appeared to be thousands, follow the castle toward the stars.

He turned to face the Elf Queen in white robes. Next to her was a man, whom she introduced as Paol, one of her trusted arch men. His hands remained clasped in front of him.

"My people shouldn't bring you any harm, Mellinia," Saron said. Orland is near the outskirts of the southern hemisphere. My castle is near the river."

She nodded to Paol. "That is where we will head."

The large castle entered the blue planet's atmosphere. Saron waited patiently hoping Saria had made it home safely.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Take cover!" Banier carried Saria in his arms toward a shady section of a tall tree. Orland's villagers threw weapons, rocks, and anything they could find toward the Elves that had just arrived. The green Auran creatures were nowhere insight.

"Stop this! All of you!" Idel yelled over the battle. But his voice was lost in the air. He took cover as he descended from the ship and followed Banier to safety as he set Saria down amongst the grass.

"Why are our own people firing upon us?!" Idel said.

"Perhaps we aren't ready for progress after all." Banier took a small water pouch from his belt and lifted Saria's head, helping her drink. "I imagine those creatures Mellinia warned us about have already landed here. They may have linked their ships with the Elves."

"Can't they see they're different?"

Banier looked up at Idel. "Different...I think you hit the main reason right there."

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The Elves yelled orders to each other in a strange language as they returned to their ship. The villagers continued throwing and firing at them, even as they lifted into the air. Slowly, the ship turned, producing two cylindrical chambers on its sides. The chambers filled with fire.

"Wait! Stop!" Saron ran toward the villagers with Mellinia on his tail. Behind them, the Allorian castle stood high reaching as tall as the trees in the forest.

"Have we not learned anything from our ancestors?" he yelled, anger erupting inside him. The ship hovered behind him, blowing his hair but he stood his ground amidst the strong wind. "War only brings more war and countless deaths will follow. Cities have already been burned to the ground because of war. All that is left is what we have here. These people are here to help us!"

The villagers stood staring at him with their weapons at their sides. Some dropped their rocks and weapons to

the ground. The Elf soldiers behind him slowly lowered their arrows and spears.

"Where is my daughter?"

"Here my lord," Banier called from the trees.

Saron rushed to her side and kneeled to pick her up. As he stood, he noticed the ground littered with the dead bodies of elves near the ships and humans on the other end towards the Orland palace.

"I wish peace to rest upon these lands. We've come together to help my daughter's life. And now you've taken the lives of your fellow

brothers. Too much blood has already been spilt among these grounds. It stops here."

He turned and headed toward the Orland castle. He looked down and noticed his daughter had awoken from the sounds and was looking up into his eyes. Mellinia's voice was faded in the distance as she ordered her men to return to the Allorian castle. Only one thing mattered now as he looked into the eyes of his daughter. And it was time to finally bring her home.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jacina saw movement in the bushes ahead and then a man holding a little girl appeared before her eyes. She exited through the large open doors of the castle.

The minute she saw Saron, her heart jumped and she ran through the bushes toward the two. Saron fell to his knees, placing Saria on the grass before him. Tears of joy filled Jacina's eyes as she hugged her daughter and filled her small face with kisses.

"Saria," she cried. "I was so worried."

"We couldn't have done it without the help of Mellinia and her people."

Before she could question him, she looked up toward the beautiful woman behind Saron. Jacina blinked as if trying to confirm the dreamlike image in front of her.

"We are indebted to you," she said. "You must allow us to repay you."

Mellinia held her hand up. "We were seeking no repayment. Just to help."

"You must at least stay for our feasting. We must celebrate the arrival of our king and his knights. Besides, I'm sure you are tired from your journey."

Mellinia smiled. "We would enjoy that very much."

"Perhaps we can determine the meaning of the battle that took place as we arrived," Saron said. He turned to Mellinia. "Come, I have a room where your brother can rest as well as your men."

## II

### Two Worlds Collide

The long dining hall was lined with silver walls that joined at the top of the ceiling forming an angle. Colorful

yellow flowers were placed on the table at the front and back of the table. Saron greeted his guests for the night and waited near the doors of the hall with Jacina.

"Sir," Alin bowed before him. "My lord, if I may speak freely of my concerns."

Saron took a deep breath. "Forgive me if I am not eager to see you, Alin. Your actions on Alloria have made me wary of your ability to wear that armor with a clear head."

Alin stopped in front of him and lowered his voice. "Forgive me, my lord, but I had to do what was best for our people."

Saron stood his ground looking into Alin's blue eyes. "The last time I read the documents of this planet, it was the king's duty to do what was best for his people."

Alin's lips pursed and his jaws flexed. "Saron, these beasts invaded with no prior warning. I believe it was our people's right to defend themselves."

"Beasts?"

Silence filled the hall outside of the dining hall in those moments. Saron narrowed icy eyes on Alin, who stood his ground.

"These beasts saved the future ruler of your kingdom."

"And for that I thank them. But they are not welcome here."

"I am the one who decides who is welcome and who is not."

"Look at them, Saron! Magical powers? Elves? Who's to say they weren't the ones trying to use Saria for some experiment to find our weaknesses so they can exterminate us themselves! They are not like us! How can we know we can trust them?"

"By first removing our veil of prejudgment and stepping outside of our zones of comfort we have lived behind for thousands of years. I suggest we start with you."

He and Alin stared eye to eye with each other moments before Saron finally spoke. "Please, keep guard outside of the palace walls."

Alin's eyes narrowed. "Keep guard outside? You're demoting me?!"

"Pray that it doesn't get worse in the next few seconds. You have your orders."

Alin said nothing as he turned and exited the hall.

"Is everything well?" Jacina's voice softly entered the air behind Saron.

He turned to face her. "Yes, my love," was all he said. "Everything is well."

"Good. I believe our guests have arrived."

Mellinia was dressed in a satin gown of blue. Saron held his breath, as he hadn't seen her in a gown so regal. Only her warrior garb that he first set eyes on still stood in his mind. He could feel his heart racing as he

looked upon her. Even as he had returned home, he still had her in his thoughts as he had before their trip to her planet. He loved Jacina with all his heart and he knew he wanted to be with her. But his mind had been filled not only with one woman, but another now as well.

Saron dismissed this.

After all, Mellinia was his friend and had come through for him when his beloved daughter was dying. This was clearly platonic. Wasn't it?

"Mellinia Salestar," Saron said. "Thank you for being our honored guest this evening. I would like you to meet Pau Temon, Mayor of the village Elmsburrow in the North."

A squat, aging man with gray hair and white and gray bushy eyebrows stepped forward and offered a short bow.

Saron continued. "And Mayor Jacon Harlo of the village Teil."

A lanky bronze man in a brown robe and red sashes bowed before the Elf Queen.

Mellinia nodded in response. She stepped forward to reveal a young boy of golden hair who appeared to be about twelve years of age.

"I would like to introduce my son, Peronin Salestar," she said.

Saron smiled at the sight of the boy, though Peronin remained stone-faced.

"I didn't--"

"We had to keep him safe within the castle until we were sure he would not be harmed," Mellinia said before he could finish.

"Perhaps one day he can meet Saria," Jacina said with a smile.

The dinner commenced as everyone was led to their seat; Saron at the head with Mellinia and Jacina on each side of him. Peronin sat between his mother and Jacon Harlo. Servants in purple wraps served a feast of bird, biscuits, corn, and fruit among many other delicacies. The sound of silverware clashing among the porcelain plates filled the air as well as various talk. Mellinia remained silent.

Saron held his hand up, stopping the dinner. "Please bring bowls of water and towels for everyone at the table," he told a nearby handmaiden. With a bow, she disappeared.

He smiled at Mellinia ignoring the strange stares from the Mayors.

"Queen Salestar," Jacon turned to Mellinia. "I must say your sudden appearance has stunned our planet. Tell me, why then did you not suddenly appear when our world was suffering famine and death in the past?"

"Mayor Harlo," Saron threw a warning gaze toward the mayor.

"I can answer," Mellinia said, softly. "Our people had to do what was best to protect each other. We did not then nor now claim to have a cure for all the troubles in your world."

"But you now chose to descend upon our lands *after* our race has been nearly destroyed?" Pau chimed in.

"That is enough," Saron tossed his napkin down before him and stood to his feet, accidentally pushing the water in the handmaiden's hands. "There is hardly

room to criticize here. The Elves were attacked upon entry of this planet."

"They started the attack upon us!" Harlo's voice raised above the others. "Soldiers were buried this night because of it!"

"The Aurans..." Mellinia's voice silenced the argument. Yet the voice was not her own, but a deeper ethereal voice that nearly shook the windows. The room went silent as she stood.

"The Aurans attacked your soldier," her normal voice said. "It was not the Elves. These Aurans have been heading here for decades to claim this land. The marks left on your crops were our warning of their attack."

"How can this be proven?" Jacon interrupted.

"We would not attack a culture we have studied for so long and defined as safe," Mellinia told him. "The Aurans must have reached this planet before us."

"They have," Jacina said. "Many soldiers died by their hands. One described them to me moments before he took his last breath. Pale, greenish scaly creatures. Almost like that of men. I have a feeling they will return."

Saron stepped from behind the table. "Well," he said gaining attention from the table. "I see we have much to discuss in the coming days."

\*\*\*\*\*

Alin stared at the dark forest ahead, lit by the pale moonlight. The darkness surrounded him, oppressed him. *Why did they come to this planet in the first place? He wondered. Who knows how much destruction they could bring with them? And these Aurans? Who's to say that they are not lying about these Auran creatures and they just made them up?*

Just as he thought these words, a wind whipped past his ear and the soldier beside him slid to the ground. Alin lifted his sword and began to yell, but nothing came out. He looked ahead at the movement in the bushes that became rapid, swaying back and forth. A dark figure stepped in front of his eyes and his brain was suddenly bombarded with a pounding noise. The shadows of the night under the moonlight covered the massive figure that towered over him.

The pale, green scales fluttered as the creature took a deep breath and exhaled. He raised a large axe that looked all of three feet long by the silhouette at his side. The creature's giant mouth opened revealing a perfectly lined set of ivory teeth all around. Alin held his hand up as he approached it.

"Peace," Alin said softly. Something inside of him told him not to worry or run. Something invited him toward the creature and as it lowered its head with every step that Alin took, he knew a large change was about to occur that evening and he knew exactly which direction he wanted to take it. "Peace, stranger. I have a feeling we can both help one another in this matter."

\*\*\*\*\*

Jacina lay on Saron's bare chest as she ran her hand along his muscles and every curve of his torso.

"I thought we left prejudice and distrust in our past," Jacina said.



"As long as human frailty remains, so will prejudice."

She rested on her arm and propped herself up to peer down at him. He was as handsome as she remembered him to be. His golden beard was beginning to grow around his jaw. As she spoke, her fingers lined his chin. "I can't bear you anymore children."

His forehead wrinkled at hearing this. "Surely that can't be true, my love."

"Saria is the last. The physician checked and rechecked." She took a moment, forcing down the tears in her throat. "I was allowed Saria. And I believe it was for a reason. I don't know why yet. But she is supposed to do something."

"She must take this kingdom," he said. He moved his free arm to the back of his head. "She is our heir."

"Yes, she is." She laid a hand on his heart. "And Peronin is the Salestar heir."

He looked up at her. She knew he caught what she was implying.

"I don't know how our people will handle this."

"It is a step in the right direction, though, right? The joining of two different lands in one marriage. I mean surely we can't expect-

He silenced her with a kiss on her lips as he pulled her to him. He pushed back the long, dark strands of her hair in the kiss and breathed in her scent that he had been long parted from for too long.

"The last thing I wanted to do," he said as he broke from the kiss, "with my wife, whom I've missed very much, is to speak politics and business."

Jacina's lips raised in a smile and a glow shined in her eyes. "I think I have a feeling what you would like to do."

Saron's laugh that followed was deep and husky. "Care to share?"

She answered him with a kiss that set his body on fire. Her legs wrapped around him before she settled herself onto him. Before she allowed him total entrance into her, he maneuvered his body, pinning her below him. He watched her below him as he felt her envelope him. Her breath was short as she received him.

"Jacina..."

Their movements synched up in waves as their bodies rocked together. He felt her arms around him, lining his muscles as he moved within her. And then there was another feeling. A presence settled between them. As he looked down at her, he could see surprise in her eyes which searched the room. The intensity was heightened as this presence overcame him.

"Oh, Saron..." Jacina's voice invaded the silence in the room.

He moaned, feeling his own pleasure heighten through his body and down to the most sensitive part of him. His thick hands gripped the satin sheets below them as the wave increased to his peak. Jacina let out a loud cry.

In the next moments, they remained still. Saron felt the presence leave him and as he looked at Jacina, her

body relaxed and her breath slowed down. He fell on the bed next to her. His wife slowly laid her head on his chest and he held her in the dark. He didn't know what to make of their lovemaking that evening. He knew he shouldn't jump to any conclusions, even though the presence was undeniably close to a certain woman who had been on his mind.

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*The grounds were covered with green grass that extended to the ends of the world. Tall blades rustled in the cool wind. From afar, the meadow would appear like any other in the midst of warm day. At closer inspection, the soil told a different story. Bodies covered each area as if they were planted there. Large white creatures with long fangs extending from their mouths and skin like thick, milky rubber lay slain next to their axes. Occasionally, beautiful creatures were nearby. Their hair was either fair like the golden sun or dark like the night sky. Their soft skin held a faint glow, different from the brightness of the living.*

*There was still darkness in the air. Something intangible and yet so thick as to cloud her breathing. She was floating along the massacred land. If only there was something she could've done. If only there was a way to stop it all. If only she had stayed.*

*Soon the darkness began choking her. She struggled to breathe. She reached out to anyone who would help, but the blackness continued to consume her.. Until she couldn't breathe anymore...*

Jacina gasped and turned on her side. She stared into the darkness of the room as she tried to catch her breath. She placed her hand on her bare chest. Her heart still beat rapidly. A cool breeze made its way through the stone window and into her room. She turned to her side and saw her husband's hand still open from holding hers.

A piercing scream erupted from the halls.

"Saria!"

Jacina rushed to her feet and quickly threw on her blue satin robe. Saron woke and questioned her, but her mind did not hold onto the question long enough to compute it.

She grabbed her hair and pulled it from under the robe, as she flew down the hall with her robe flowing behind her. She stopped at the door, her hand slipping on the frame to pull her inside. The room was completely dark until a sudden illumination of light shined near the entrance.

"My lady, I heard screams," Banier said behind her. He held an electric lamp high above her toward the room. "But I did not see an intruder."

More screams.

Jacina rushed inside and saw the empty bed. The sheets were still rumpled and thrown about. Something moved in the corner.

"There!"

Banier shined the light in the corner where Saria cowered in a fetal position. Jacina slowly approached her daughter. The young face of her precious daughter was slowly morphing.

Jacina started toward her.

"No, wait!" She felt Saron's arm in front of her before she could take another step.

"We need to help her, Saron!" Jacina yelled.

"Something is happening."

Saria arched her back as her hands formed into claws. The back of her gown ripped open to two small holes. Thin translucent, tissue emerged from the holes and slowly spanned out to large wings. Saria's screams died down as she settled from the transformation.

Jacina slowly walked to the girl. Looking closer, she noticed Saria had aged into a teenager.

"Saria," Jacina said softly. She went to her daughter and placed her hand on her daughter's arm. "What happened to you?"

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Saron walked alongside Mellinia as they went down the steps of the palace hall to the first floor. "The effects of the medicine no doubt."

"I had no idea it would act so strongly. Her body must have tried to reject it."

"I thought she was getting better. I thought-"

He stopped when Mellinia placed her hand in his. Saron looked down at their entwined hands, unsure what to say. Millions of emotions went through him in that moment.

"My physician will carefully watch her from now on. Please do not worry yourself."

He looked at her sparkling hazel eyes like liquid. The glow that illuminated her body served as the main light in the dark hall.

"I appreciate that."

She smiled at him before the smile disappeared. Her gaze fell to the floor in silence. He knew she had something to say, but he wasn't sure if it needed to be said aloud.

"Mellinia..."

"My brother died this night."

"I'm so sorry."

He always held a bright illumination around him. Even as a child. He was always ready to act with emotion before thought. Perhaps that is what caused his early death."

Saron wasn't sure what to say to help Mellinia fare better. He walked to her as a glowing crystal tear fell from her eye and down her dark cheek. With his thumb, he gently wiped the tear away and brought her body to his, but she didn't cry. There was no release as she leaned her head against his chest. She then looked up at him. A calm washed over her body and a need accompanied the feeling. The need to feel her skin against his own. Their eyes remained locked as they grew closer.

"Saron."

It took a minute for him to realize it wasn't Mellinia nor her inner mind calling him. He looked up and saw Jacina leaning in the doorway. Her expression was hard to decipher as she remained motionless.

He left Mellinia's side. "Jacina..."

He watched his wife as she cleared her throat before nervously crossing her hands in front of her. "Mellinia's physician is looking after Saria." Her eyes darted between the two.

Mellinia walked past him and stopped near Jacina. "I do hope your daughter fairs well in the coming days. We will try to do everything we can." With that, she left, her soft slippers descending from the silent room.

Saron remained still in that moment as Jacina's eyes met with his. He didn't know what to read in them, but at the same time he couldn't deny the hurt and pain she expressed in those mere second. She then turned and left him to his thoughts.

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In the morning, Jacina awoke in an empty bed. She checked the window and noticed the tall Elven structures that landed just yesterday. She wondered where Saron had disappeared to as she tied her gown around her waist. They hadn't spoken since she saw him with Mellinia. Her heart felt heavy at the thought.

They didn't even speak a word to each other as they climbed into bed and slept on their respective sides. This Mellinia person did all she can to help Saria, which ended in strange side effects no less. She couldn't help but wonder what the true intentions were of this beautiful elf queen.

Jacina exited the room and passed a handmaiden ready to hand her a morning towel for bathing.

"Where is Saron?"

The handmaiden bowed. "My lord took a morning walk toward Alloria."

She returned to her bedroom and looked out from the window where she saw Saron walking alongside Mellinia amidst the dark green grasslands of their home. Jacina took a deep breath and tried to keep her heart from sinking further as she held onto the side of the window to keep her balance.

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The Allorian village was like a market amidst the mountainous castle. Fruits, vegetables, and small treats were being traded along with long sheets of soft, silky material for clothes. Saron walked alongside Mellinia, she with her hands behind her back. He marveled at the beauty of the houses and still tried to fathom that they also served as ships.

Finally, she spoke. "It was nice there on the Allorian moon. Peaceful, calm. The lands were green and always tended to. When they came, they took some of our men, women, and children and used them for laboring on their grounds. Sidier died in the first attack. Only few have broken free from their torturous grasps."

"Sidier?"

"My husband," she said almost absent-mindedly. "Peronin's father. He doesn't remember much of him. Only small bits and, of course, what I told him."

'So he *was* dead,' Saron thought to himself. 'He knew it was presumptuous to think that maybe this is why she had cared to spend much time with him since their arrival back in Orland.'

"Mellinia," he began, "these Aurans. Where did they come from?"

She silently eyed her surroundings.

"I don't wish to impose upon your past," he assured her. "I understand your hesitation to trust us. We haven't shown much of a welcome to you and your people. I give you my word, from all that we've been through. I will never turn my back on you in your hour of need."

They stopped in front of a large monument standing to the side of the village. The building appeared like a mountain against the small town. She looked at him and in her glowing eyes he could see her defense slowly beginning to lower.

"There's something I need to show you. I think the time is right."

They approached the tall doors leading into the large building. The sun disappeared behind the large brown building and a sudden darkness fell upon them upon entering through the mile high elegant arched doors.

"The information is great," she said. "I do not expect you to learn all of our history in only days. It took us decades alone to learn yours."

"What do you know of our history?"

"Everything. From the first man and woman that inhabited the Earth and on to the wars that started the destruction of your people right before the age of the machines."

He shifted his weight at the mention of the machines. These were the wars of men. Technology advanced to the point of the creation where Man created machines to think for themselves and to work twice as hard as humans. Soon, they lead humans in war against themselves. But, the machines knew from man's history that there would be a backlash against them. Humans fear what is different. The

machines managed to reanimate human corpses and meld with them to create a new race of the two.

"Thus began the war that would destroy almost half of the human race," Mellinia finished. "Until you and Jacina's lineage discovered this damaged land with only one clue to the past."

He looked up. Even after all this time, he was quite shocked that she could still read his thoughts. He had hoped in that instant that she didn't ponder too much on his thoughts of her and the time they spent together.

He then thought back to the green and white rectangular Orland sign was found among the wreckage on these lands after the war. He always wondered about the origins of the sign and if the jagged edge had cut off the rest of the name. He assumed the name "Orland" had been a part of a former city or town in Earth's past. Either way, it was a fitting name for a kingdom rebuilt.

"Now, it is only fair you know of our history."

The tall doors creaked open and the sunlight illuminated the entire building lined with glass-arched windows. Inside the library, books were piled upon books in shelves that reached the ceiling.

"I once told you I did not know of the weapon material that killed my brother. That was not the truth. The

Aurans knew exactly what would kill us and how it would affect us."

A small glass skylight in the form of a strange figure sat near the ceiling. It was beast-like with its large eyes and claws, yet part of it seemed beautiful and delicate in its small ears and tall legs. Saron

knew this symbol from the marks left on the town crops. Below the figure was a sentence written in a language he couldn't decipher.

Then something else caught his attention. Within the eye of the being was a glass full of bluish liquid. He couldn't pull himself away from the image. Then her voice brought him back to reality.

"Long ago," she began, "I assume at the same time your people were placed upon this universe, there was a race that inhabited a moon outside of our galaxy. It was a planet much like this one. Tall, green trees and much vegetation to feed everyone. Blue streaming rivers. It was peaceful for a time."

She led him to the back of the building, past the curious stares of robed Elves listening to their story.

"One sun became two. One moon became two. And those beings became two as well. War broke out among us. And it appears good and evil had chosen its sides. We inherited the mind and they inherited the brute force of muscle, as well as the passion for war and destruction."

When she paused, he urged himself to ask the question that was burning his mind. "It isn't only the land they wish, is it?"

She finally turned to him. "No. They do want more. They want us. And that..." She pointed to the eye of the beast-shaped skylight. "The center of our people. The Eye of Alloria. Together as one, we are strong and perfect. Separated we are two very different beings, each holding powers of the mind and the body."

"What is in the vial?" he asked, trying not to sound eager.

"The blood of what we once were. If they get the blood, they will create a shadow of those beings we once were. They'll use it to their will. Who knows what we'll turn into under their power."

"Can you join together once again as one?"

"It has not been so for centuries. To do so would have to be a delicate task."

He walked to the bright window. "What do the words say below the figure?"

She spoke the words in her own tongue and he had to smile at the beauty of the language.

"The darkness that created us is that which binds us."

She turned to face him. "They are watching us always. Waiting to attack as they have all these years." A smile crossed her lovely face. "Perhaps a union will strengthen our forces against them."

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Banier surveyed the area with his dark, black eyes. His large ebony hands were clasped together over the steel railing of the Orland palace. He stood at the edge looking over the calm setting before him. Children played in the distance while a farmer quarreled with his wife. Idel walked up to him with Alin close behind.

"How is Lady Saria?" Banier asked.

"Still resting." Idel followed Banier's gaze into the city. "I thought we'd never see home again."

Banier's full lips raised in a smile. "I agree. I still find it hard to fathom Elves are here. They only existed in our minds and stories."

Idel's smile disappeared as he leaned on the railing. "We must be careful not to allow any more tension to come between us. The thread is already thin."

Banier looked down at the guards and noticed Alin was replaced by another. "Where is Alin?"

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The halls were teeming with handmaidens and guards who stood watch along the walls. Jacina would be busy with political business while Saron was out with that queen of those creatures. Those creatures.

His mind filled with the battle images that welcomed them to this world and he couldn't help but smile. They should be destroyed for Lady Saria's condition and for disrupting the human lifestyle. They should pay dearly. Saron should have never let them within Earth borders. He should have known better.

He turned the corner, his hand tight on the small rapier that hung on his belt. His blood boiled and his mind raced as he stepped in front of Saria's door where a scraggly haired man of fair skin stood with a stone face.

Alin gave a short bow, telling the man he would take over. With a salute, a fist to his chest, the guard in yellow cloth quickly took his leave. He looked to the right and to the left. Once the coast was clear, slowly he entered the bedroom. He closed the door behind him, careful to slip the lock over the slit. The room was dark despite this time of morning. Perfect for the task at hand, he thought. He slipped the chain

mail rapier from his belt and held it at his side. His soft boots clicked against the shiny floor.

She lay motionless in the bed, her body still carrying the wings when she turned from human into something else. Now it was time to stop her before she destroyed them all.

He lifted the rapier into the air. Pounding began on the door. The sound of the rustling lock was loud in the air.

The girl stirred in her sleep from the noise.

With one thrust, he plunged the knife toward her heart. Before he could comprehend what happened, the young girl had his large hand in her small grasp. The pressure of her hold was crushing the bones within his wrist.

The pounding grew louder and louder. With bright fire in her small eyes, she put all force into her arm and sent him across the room, crashing against the bookshelf built into the wall.

Alin tried to gain his composure amidst the debris that surrounded him. Through the haze he could see the small crowd of guards looking at the scene and then finally at him as they realized what he was about to do.

Jacina ran in after Banier and straight to Saria's bed. Alin did not resist when Banier and Idel grabbed him and held him up. He still clutched the knife in his hand, even as his queen turned to him and looked him straight in the eye.

"From this day forth Alin Udel," Jacina said. "You will forever be banished from this kingdom and these lands."

Alin's eyes softened as he heard these words. "My lady, my sole purpose is to this kingdom. My only interest is to preserve it. To serve it from that...that thing!" He pointed to Saria with his free hand.

Jacina stood and approached Alin. She looked upon him with dark eyes and he knew her mind filled with thoughts that she used to pierce his mind.

"I'd watch your tongue, Alin," Jacina said sharply. "Your murder attempt on my daughter has almost cost you your life. I will spare you this one chance. No more."

She looked up at Banier and Idel. "Make sure he is taken into the deep woods away from Orland," she paused. "And Alloria. Make sure he never returns."

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"Alin!" Saron threw his coat down on the bed before continuing to undress.

"Yes, he managed to break into the room without anyone knowing. Good thing Banier questioned the real guard on duty as he was leaving." Jacina took his coat from the bed and folded it. "I put two guards on duty and ordered that no one should have entry into Saria's room unless I have approved it."

"Good thing." He slipped out of his pants and threw them onto the bed. "I can't believe this. The man has been by my side for years and suddenly this? I should have known it was coming from the way he was talking against them."

"There was no way of knowing, Saron. He took us all off guard. We all trusted him." She brought him his robe. "I do wonder though if this would have happened if you were here."

He slipped his robe on, stopping as he tied the belt around his waist. "What do you mean?"

She took a seat on the bed. "You've been spending a lot of time with Mellinia. I fear you disregard your duties in the process."

"My duties? My love, this union with the Allorian Elves *is* my duty."

"Does that include the intimacy as well?"

He froze as she said this and turned to her. "Jacina, what are you saying?"

"I see the way you look at her, Saron. I'm not blind. Even the way you held me the other night wasn't the same. The way we...made love. It was like something...someone else was there with us."

Saron's eyes veered to the floor. So she *had* felt the same thing as he did that night. He walked to her on the bed and sat down beside her.

"She is a colleague, my love. A political companion."

"She does not intrigue you in the slightest?"

"She intrigues me, of course. She's alien to us and our kind. Naturally that would raise interest within me."



"I hope that's the only thing it raises," Jacina quipped as she rose from the bed.

"Jacina," Saron gripped her arm, stopping her from taking another step. He rose to his feet and turned her to face him. Taking her face in his hands, he looked into her eyes which were welling up with tears.

"I love you, Jacina. No one else. You have my vows, my heart and my word on that."

"You never think of her besides me then?"

He smiled. "You are always in my thoughts no matter where I go. As well as my heart." His hand stroked her cheek as he looked in her eyes. "And Saria."

"Then tell me, please," her voice grew more stern each minute. "Why were you both in such a tight embrace last night?"

"Her brother had died, Jacina. I was merely comforting her."

She looked into his eyes and he knew she could read him. What he spoke was the truth and he would never in his right mind do anything that would jeopardize the bond he had with Jacina. He would rather give his own life before doing so. Even still, he couldn't fully understand why this attraction, or whatever it was, toward Mellinia was claiming his mind and essence.

"We were never this apart before. Even when you hold me," she looked up at him and spoke these words as he wrapped his arms around her body. "It doesn't feel the same. Nothing does since they arrived."

He walked toward the other side of the room, trying to compose himself. "Then what, Jacina. Would you have me not have ventured out to save our daughter?"

"No, of course that's not what I'm saying. I just wish that was all you brought back."

Saron wasn't sure what to say. He watched his wife wrap her arms around her body. She didn't look at him even as she spoke.

"There is much to prepare for in the coming days, Jacina. This union is most essential during this time of change."

"I agree and it will take place." She walked back to the bed and began pulling back the covers. "For the time being, I would appreciate it if you found some other place to sleep for the time."

His brow wrinkled as he walked toward her. "What?"

She held up her hand, stopping him midway. "There are 300 other rooms within this castle. I suggest you choose one of them as your dwelling."

Saron opened his mouth to speak, but no words escaped him. He reluctantly took his leave.

SHAPE \\* MERGEFORMAT

III

Heir to the Throne

Days passed upon the two lands. No attack had come upon them, but guards still remained outside the halls. On the morning of March 15th in the Allorian castle, Saria, sat in a silk made chair now a fully regenerated young woman of eighteen. Her brown eyes stared at the beautiful white, silk dress that hung on the stone door where her mother smoothed out the wrinkles as a smile crossed her face.

She kept a still, yet somber expression on her face as she allowed her handmaiden to pin her hair in an elaborate style. She didn't want to get married now. She had so much she wanted to do, like relive the days when she used to play sword fighting in the fields with the other children like she loved to do. Although now, she knew it would be difficult concerning the fact that her friends had long moved on with their own lives since she overcame her sickness. Many of them refused to even acknowledge her since the change and had even gone to avoiding her altogether.

She looked up at her mother and watched her as she continued to focus on her wedding dress. The days seemed longer than they actually were since her mother and father were having difficulties. They tried to act like nothing was wrong around her and businesslike when in front of other people, but she could tell something was wrong. It had been wrong ever since they came.

"I don't want to do this, Mother," Saria said aloud.

"You know this in your best interest, Saria. It is the only logical step to take to bring a union to both races."

"I don't see why I have to be the instrument for this union."

"As heir to the throne you should see why."

Saria hadn't seen her mother this stern before. She always followed behind her father's rules, yet she spoke her mind if she disagreed with a decision of his. This had to be something serious.

"It's all happening so fast."

Her mother's hand stopped midway on the dress. She met Saria's eyes with her own. "I know, love. We'll be there. Right with you."

Saria had always feared taking the throne. The minute she did, her parents would step down and soon pass on. Her father was aging along with her mother who was only a girl when they married. Both had chosen to stay in the Orland castle to keep the remaining city in order. This was, after all, their home. What would happen to them if this rift continued? Where would they go then?

She sighed and turned her thoughts over to the tall blades of grass she used to play upon with her wooden sword. Time passed so quickly after she was finally over her sickness. It was as if time slowed once she grew sick and suddenly sped up as if to recapture all she lost. Even the wings she grew have changed her so much. She shifted slightly under her silk robe feeling the wings rubbing against the materials. It was a very strange feeling, as if having a second set of limbs.

"Peronin no doubt understands what you are feeling," Jacina said, folding the dress over her arms. "This is affecting all of us. Especially your father."

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," Jacina said.

Mellinia entered robed in a beautiful dress of blue and gold patterns in the form of Allorian Elf symbols. Saria

allowed herself to be hugged by the elf queen. Over her shoulder, she could see her mother shifting her weight as she watched. There was a tension whenever Mellinia and her mother were in the same room, she could feel it and always wondered what the source was. No one would tell her anything except she should mind her manners and not pay attention when it concerned adults.

"Saria," she said. "It's finally happening. Our people are becoming united under a unified rule."

"It is, My Lady," Saria replied politely.

Mellinia turned to Jacina and met her with a warm touch of her hand. "Jacina, what an important time this is."

Saria felt her mother's stiff politeness as she forced a smile. "Yes, it is. I can only hope the ceremony will be safe. I've had my share of attempts on my daughter's life."

Saria remembered the first attempt from Alin. She always felt darkness around him, but she pushed it aside knowing he was one of her father's trusted soldiers.

"We have the guards lined up outside along the castle," Mellinia said. "We should be safe from whatever comes our way."

Saria stood and walked to the window while the two women continued conversing. Her eyes focused on the tall, gray mountains against the blue horizon and she wondered what great lands were out there. She told herself she would be one of the new adventurers along those lands in the near future. She had heard the cities that once stood were now debris waiting to be joined with the earth once again. She wanted to explore those old cities. She couldn't be confined to these walls forever signing papers, looking over deeds and settling land disputes. No matter if Aurans or any other strange beings tried to stop her.

"The ceremony will soon begin," Jacina announced.

"I will go make preparations then," Mellinia said with a smile. She took her leave and Saria could see her mother out of the corner of her eye give a sigh of relief as she returned to help the handmaidens gather her wedding items.

"Saria?"

Saria finally turned from the window and to her mother whose eyes searched the room. "Yes, mother?"

"Where's your veil and crown?"

Saria looked around the room. "I guess I must have left it in my room. I'll go get it."

"No, my lady," her handmaiden jumped up. "I'll get it."

Saria knew she couldn't stay in this room any longer. It was making her lose her mind. She needed to get out.

"No, Luciana. I'll go."

Before they could protest, Saria left the room amidst protests of her mother telling her not to get her dress dirty.

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Saria grabbed the gold, braided crown and attached veil that the elves designed and created for her. Jewels hovered above the tiara even as she moved it in space of air. She didn't want to go back right away, but she knew her mother would send out a search party for her.

She left her room, closing the door behind her as she heard voices, one she was sure was her father down the hall accompanied by Mellinia. She dismissed it as boring adult talk, but her ears perked up as she caught on the conversation.

"Since my husband died I never felt as close to anyone like I do you. I loved him. More than I can explain in any tongue."

Silence for a moment.

"That night you shared with her long ago...I felt it. Through both of you, I could feel the passion, the ecstasy. A primal urge like that of an explosion that I've never experienced in my lifetime. It connected me to you, Saron. And to some extent, Jacina."

Saria heard her father sigh.

"I know not what to say, Mellinia. My thoughts have always had you in them. I wish I knew why. I love my wife with everything I am and would never do anything to harm our union."

"There is a reason for that. A reason I am somewhat ashamed to confess."

Silence. Saria leaned in closer almost on her tiptoes as she kept her ears open and waited.

"I care very much for you, Saron. You remind me of Sidier. You are a kind and noble man with a good heart and I never felt connected with anyone as I do you since my husband's demise. I did not want to break that connection because it felt...right."

"Mellinia--I..."

"Please, let me finish." She took a breath before continuing. "I understand your union with Jacina. To an extent I felt her love for you as well. Perhaps it's best if I leave Orland."

"Mellinia..."

She could hear his velvet boots across the shiny, marble floor. Strong, rough hands against soft material. "It wouldn't be right if you left abruptly. You should stay for the marriage of your son."

"I would appreciate that."

Silence.

"Well," she laughed. "I guess we have a wedding to attend to."

Saria listened as their steps disappeared. She wasn't sure what to think of all of this. Mellinia clearly had an attraction to her father and even though she knew both her parents loved each other, she wondered if her father felt anything toward the elf queen besides curiosity. Part of her wished they had never met, even if it meant her oncoming

death. As far as she was concerned, the elves were just unwelcome strangers in her land.

Mellinia passed by the wall where Saria was leaning. She kept her ground amidst the Elf Queen and tried not to chuckle when Mellinia's somewhat gleeful expression turned to slight embarrassment as she looked down at her.

"Do you love my father?"

Her back straightened at this question. "Saria, I don't think it's fair--"

"Answer the question." Saria was surprised at her own sternness. A bit of her mother was coming out of her. She raised an eyebrow and crossed her arms in front of her. Well, if her mother wasn't going to fight, she might as well take the reigns.

"I'm not going to continue my connection with your father, Saria. Your mother is right to be angry with me. I should not have intruded upon their union."

She wasn't sure how to respond as she pushed herself off the wall. She bowed as a courtesy to the Elf Queen. Then turned to take her leave.

"Saria."

She stopped short and looked over her shoulder. The woman was beautiful and illuminated a glow. There was no mistake about her charm. But as she stood there with her sorrowful expression and her hands clasped in front of her robes, Saria couldn't help but feel a little sorry for her many losses of those close to her.

"I suppose I do love him."

Saria nodded slowly. "Then I suppose it would be best to take leave."

She turned on her heels and headed back to chamber where she knew her mother was waiting for her. She was finally ready to take the throne.

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Saria waited as the large doors opened in front of her. Her arms nervously squirmed as she locked onto her father's arm on her left and the serious elf prince Peronin, on her right. He annoyed her with his stiff, formal demeanor. She wanted him to relax sometime and just laugh, act crazy, do something--anything--out of the ordinary.

They stepped out into the beginning of the long hall and began their walk.

The wedding hall was spacious and airy. The ceiling reached high above the crowd of onlookers along the aisles. Saria could see Mellinia standing at the front of the throne while Jacina stood near the holy man arranging the vows. She didn't want to go through with this, but she knew she had no choice. Especially if it meant the union would bring peace between the two groups.

They lead her to the front and both helped her kneel to the floor. Her father unlocked his arm from hers and offered her hand to Peronin before taking his side next to her mother. She tried to read their actions as they stood next to each other. Hoping for some kind of recognition of their love and devotion to one another. But there was none.

Peronin kneeled down in front of Saria and held her hands in his own hands. She found herself looking into those deep rivers within his eyes once again. He was a handsome young man with smooth and light brown

skin and eyes as hazel as the brownest stone. Gold strands of hair fell around his face. She thought back to her sick bed on the Allorian moon and remembered his hand upon hers. He had seemed so open and intimate toward her in what seemed so long ago. Perhaps he felt cold because of the feelings his mother carried for her father.

Saria could see Peronin's expression change as he looked at her. She almost forgot he knew exactly what she was thinking.

"My dear friends," the celebrant said. "We are gathered today to witness the union of two kingdoms. Alloria and Orland. Saria Bravewind and Peronin Salestar..."

Just as she thought these words, a figure cloaked in white entered at the back of the hall as the doors busted open. Murmurs and gasps filled the onlookers. Her father stood with one hand holding her mother behind him and the other on his sword.

"Who goes there?" he yelled toward the front of the hall.

A large hooded figure emerged from the doorway and made its way to Mellinia standing near Peronin.

"I've not come to harm a soul," the creature said. The voice was deep and raspy. Although it was low, the voice spread throughout the whole kingdom.

"That voice," Saria could hear her father murmur near her. "How did you get past the guards?"

The figure's arms spread. "It is not that difficult to destroy weaklings with only one thing on their mind." It chuckled.

Paol stepped forward. "You are not wanted in these parts, Sir."

"I wouldn't if I were you," the figure said to Saron. "The wrong union is taking place here. You hold the blood that will unify the Elves and the Aurans once again and make no mistake about it, the reunification will take place."

Paol suddenly fell to his knees, clutching his head. Saron drew his sword and approached the figure.

"Not another step," the figure said as he raised his hand higher. His hand, was strangely human over all. Long translucent fingernails stood out at the end and small scales lined almost every part of his skin. "I could kill his mind with thought alone if you come any closer."

Saria's father froze, still holding the sword in his hand.

"Your alliance will fall if it continues on this path. Mark my words." The figure turned and exited the halls. Paol's tense body relaxed and he fell into Mellinia's arms as she went behind him.

Paol was quickly taken back to the Orland castle to rest and the ceremony continued as planned, but the atmosphere held high tension in the air. Afterwards, Mellinia met with the Bravewinds in a separate chamber while Saria and Peronin sat in the hallway. Peronin slowly approached the door and leaned in to listen.

"What are you doing?" Saria asked.

"We are the future rulers of Alloria," he said in a stern whisper. "We should be in there."

"If they told us to stay out here, it must be for a reason," she said. She folded her hands in front of her white dress. "Perhaps for our protection."

Peronin continued to listen. "They won't always be around to protect us."

She sighed heavily. "I won't stay here for such talk." She took her leave while Peronin continued listening. She nearly rounded the corner before she heard the door open and her mother's voice calling her back to the room. Walking back, she saw Peronin following his mother down the hall.

"Your father would like to speak with you," Jacina said. Her mother bent down and gave her a kiss on her cheek. There was something sad about her mother, even as she smiled.

Saria entered the room and saw her father's strong face staring at the ground. She had so many questions for him. Not only for this situation concerning Mellinia, but for herself as well. For her future. Once she entered, he looked up and immediately smiled. She told herself to remember that smile of his and burn it in her conscious no matter what happened in the coming days.

"Barely nineteen years of age and now married," he said. "It is as it should be."

"As it should be a political marriage," she responded. "Besides, the medicine advanced my aging."

"Yes, Saria. It was a marriage to ensure both of our people," he corrected her. "I grow old, Saria. My days...My days of reign have been well. Your mother and I have raised a fine daughter. And now you must continue the reign."

"You speak as though you are already dead, father."

"I will not hold false beliefs of myself and neither should you. There will be a grand battle to come in the next days. Orland and Alloria have officially become one."

She slowly paced the room. "There's something that's been on my mind for a while."

"What's that?"

"Why they wish to possess this vial."

His gaze fell to the floor. "It holds a great power for the two races. One day you'll learn the whole history."

"It's been irritating my mind since they arrived here."

He stood and placed his hand on her shoulders. "You must not bog yourself with 'what ifs' Saria. You shall soon find the answers. For now, it is time to rest." He leaned in and kissed her forehead and she couldn't help but wonder if he knew exactly what was going through her mind.

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That night, Saria stepped into the stone walled bedroom in the Elven castle and proceeded to blow out the candles before she took a seat in the gold and silk chair. She grabbed her brush and began to brush her hair as she peered at her reflection in her dresser mirror. The Alloria castle was nothing like her home back in Orland. The stone walls were an encasing of the prison she felt and she would do anything to escape it.

She thought back to the many hours she spent in bed during her sickness and tried not to let it bring her down.

She felt Peronin maneuver on the bed behind her. The silk covers sat up to his smooth,

bare chest and he held a book in his lap. In the mirror, she snuck looks at him and was startled when their eyes met in that moment. Under any other circumstance, she would be attracted to the elf prince. His eyes held curiosity and something she couldn't quite pin down deep inside of him. His pale skin was soft and almost inviting. His hands, surprisingly held a mix of softness, strength and sensitivity within them. She wondered what those hands felt like against her own skin, caressing her and holding her body close to his...

'Wait a minute,' she stopped. 'What are you thinking, girl?'

"What is it that occupies your thoughts?" Peronin asked, bringing her out of her thoughts.

Saria peered at him through the mirror, trying not to let her eyes fall to his chest. "What?"

"You were looking at me," he said smoothly. "And I can sense the rise in your body temperature. What is on your mind?"

She set the golden brush down and stood. She noticed he looked upon her with wonder and his breath escaped him in that moment. Her long, wavy black hair fell down her bronze back partly revealed by her white silk gown lined with gold trimming. She closed her robe once she caught sight of Peronin's lingering eyes.

He quickly turned away. "I am sorry," he said.

She proceeded to blow out the candles on by one. In the darkness, she removed her robe and climbed into bed. A few moments passed before she felt Peronin moving next to her.

"Perhaps you would enjoy another chamber," she mumbled softly.

"If you so wish." He slipped out of bed and grabbed his robe. "What are your feelings toward me?" he asked.

"This is a political marriage, Peronin," she said. "I know nothing of you except the fact that you wish to take over the throne as quickly as possible."

"I know where my duties lie, Saria. I know what my responsibilities in my position are. If only I could say the same for you." He headed for the door.

"I know my duties." She stood. "How dare you imply otherwise."

"Your mother and father have watched your every move from when you became sick and until now. You never left their sight. You won't know what to do when they are gone. That is why I want you to trust me."

"You do not know me as much as you think you do."

"Perhaps not. But I am willing to learn." With that, he left.

Hot anger rose inside of her. He had plenty of gall to tell her how she should or should not act. She lay back down on the bed and cursed the marriage. Her parents disciplined her well and yet she didn't feel the need to follow the strict orders of another, especially one who shared her age.

She looked at the door where Peronin had left and sighed. It was going to be long night.

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The black sky soon gave way to a sapphire blue and the color of fire as the sun started rising over the golden, orange horizon. Saria couldn't bring herself to sleep that night. She retreated to the grasslands in front of the castle. Her mind was full of sword fighting techniques her father had begun to teach her the previous day. She lost herself in the swift moves and jabs, forgetting her position in the kingdom, her father and mother's situation and especially that alien queen and her son she was tied to.

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Not too long ago, she was a child suffering from a condition of the heart. A condition that would have handed her over to death's dwelling if it had gone any further.

Now she was to be Queen of a new kingdom.

She returned to the castle with her hand on her sword. She was deep in thought as she reentered the castle past the elf guards when she heard a voice.

"Your father is in his chamber if you are looking for him."

She turned and faced Peronin who was approaching her in the hall. His long, dark blue robe caressed the floor as he walked. "How did you know?"

"I felt slight nervousness within you. I couldn't help but-"

"Read my thoughts."

His gaze fell to the floor. "Saria..."

"I obey you because I am your wife. And that is only because I am bound to you by the duties of my land. You do not have permission to read my thoughts nor invade my privacy." She continued past him toward the back chamber. She dismissed the feeling of guilt she felt for treating Peronin as she had. Yet any sign or thought of apologizing disappeared once she entered her parent's chambers.

Saron darted around the room taking items and placing them in a leather skin sack on his back.

"Father..."

Jacina wrapped her arms around her waist and gazed outside the window at the lands below.

'Was he leaving? Had her mother pushed him completely out of the castle?'

Saria's eyes darted from her mother to her father. "What is it?"

"I've received word from the lookouts that the Auran army is on their way here. We haven't much time." He continued gathering items and weapons. "I suggest you tell Peronin to prepare for battle."

"Peronin? What about me?"

"Saria, you've only been practicing for a few weeks. You aren't ready."

"I am. I know I can fight alongside you."

He shook his head. "I can't let you risk your life. I'm not about to lose you again."

"Let her go." Jacina's soft voice silenced them both. She never turned to them, even as she spoke her next

words. "Saron let her fight. She is a ruler now and she is responsible for Alloria and Orland equally, if not more."

Saron sighed heavily and looked at Saria. She was familiar with that look. Her father always wore it on his face when he was about to give in to something he didn't wish to.

"I suggest you both prepare yourselves."

He gathered the rest of his items and headed for the door.

"Saron..."

He turned to Jacina who slightly turned her head to face his direction. "I..."

Saria watched her mother try to form a coherent word. Her eyes were sorrowful. When she finally looked up at Saron, she had tears in her eyes and the restraint she had held onto was beginning to fade. "Please be careful."

He walked to her and turned her to face him. Saria watched her mother and father in front of the window. The sun fell over them and made them into silhouettes as they embraced each other. Something told her to never forget that moment. Perhaps now they had a chance to rebuild what was beginning to fade in those past weeks. Her father gently caressed her mother's cheek and then took his leave.

"Saria."

She turned to her mother and walked to her. The first sight she saw was her mother's brown eyes reddened from tears.

"Use your instinct. That will always lead you in the right direction." Jacina placed her soft, hand on Saria's face. "Return home shortly."

She placed her hand over her mother's. "We will return home safely, Mother. Nothing can happen to Father. I won't let it."

Jacina's gaze fell to the floor at that moment and Saria wondered if her mother had lost hope. She hugged her mother tightly and immediately left the room.

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The grasslands leading away from Alloria were lined with a wall of Men and Elves. Each wore their own plates of armor. The men, with 'Orland' engraved on their chests, while the Elves wore 'Alloria' in the alien Elvish language on theirs. They slowly crossed the lands. Some on foot, some on horses and otherworldly beasts. All holding their heads high. Saria and Peronin stood on each side of Saron's horse in their steel armor and royal blue robes. Elven war ships loomed in the distance against the blue sky.

Saria kept her attention on the lands ahead as she held one hand on her sword next to her. Her heart was pounding fast and it was only then that the realization set in that she was on her way to war. She had only practiced for a few weeks, as her father had said, but she felt as if she had been practicing since birth.

Peronin climbed off his horse and placed his ear to the ground.

Across the large plateau, pale-skinned Aurans with long fair hair covered the lands marching in unison toward

Alloria. Crude, sharp Auran ships trailed overhead. The figure from the wedding, still covered in a large robe with a hood that covered his face, stopped his men only a few feet away from Saria and the army. Her father held his hand up to hold his men back.

"The vial still sits in your possession," the Auran said. His voice was low and raspy yet stretched across the wide-open space. His glowing eyes stared at Saron.

"Yes," Saron said. "In its resting place where it should be. If you wish to have it," he drew his sword, "you will have to fight through us to obtain it."

A low, rough laugh escaped the Auran. He raised his hands and after a few moments gave the command and the Aurans attacked with their

clubs and axes held high. The sky filled with fire as the ships sent small rounds of blaster fire across the way.

Saria watched stunned for a moment as her father thrust his arm forward and a sea of arrows filled the air. Swords swung toward the Aurans, slicing here and there. Finally, she reacted and swung at every Auran in her way. Swing, swing, jab and a kick then sending her sword through their thick scaly skin.

Peronin was not too far away fighting his own battles. Blood was spilled upon the grounds from both sides. Horses retreated in the midst of the battle. Metal clashed against metal and against skin. Ships fell toward the ground both on the Elven and Auran sides.

Saria tried to keep an eye on the figure who was easily making his way through the line of Elves. She turned to arch her head to his direction, to see where he was going.

"Saria!" she heard Peronin in the distance.

She then heard the sound of the Auran growling behind her as he raised his axe. Before she could turn, Peronin gracefully glided past her and sent his sword into the Auran's chest. He helped her to her feet and for the first time, she was glad she went through with the ceremony.

"Can you walk?" he asked.

She nodded. She turned her head toward the figure's last direction and saw no sight of him. Just as she began walking, she saw her father as he leaned forward from the force of the figure's sword entering his chest.

"Father!"

At the same time, another axe nearly cut her back, causing her to fall to the ground. Her wings splayed out into the air, causing the Auran to step back with horror. Saria was frozen with fear. She turned to her father, but he was already lying on the ground. She tried to scream, but the sound caught in her throat. At that moment it was only her and the Auran raising his axe over her. With all of her might, she pushed herself off the ground and blocked the Auran with her sword. She kicked him away and they began a heated battle fueled with anger. She fell to her knees and pushed herself away from the sharp axe. All she could see in her mind was the dead Auran. She swung left and right and soon defeated him.

She approached the figure, knocking any Auran out of her way. She watched the road ahead as he made his way toward the Allorian palace.

"There's one leader left to conquer," she called behind him. "If you want the throne so bad, come fight for it!"

He turned around to face her, his yellow eyes glowing with anger from within the darkened hood.

"I will tell you the same thing I told your father before I ended his life," the figure said. With one scaly hand, he swiftly pulled back the hood to reveal a half human, half Auran creature. In his eyes she could see Alin so clear with so much hate and anger. "You should have listened to me while you had the chance."

He lifted his sword and walked toward her. Saria wondered at the size of Alin now almost fully an Auran himself. She held her sword high.

"This sword will soon be stained and rotting with your blood," she said sternly. "The same fate you bestowed upon my father is the very same that haunts you this minute."

"Oh, we shall see," he growled.

He drew his sword and they battled. Her anger seeped into every movement of her sword. She was knocked to the ground, but stood to her feet each time. He wore her tired, but she pushed on until she jabbed him in the arm. As she leaned over, she twirled the sword in his arm until the blade was angled toward his body. Their eyes met and in that moment, she launched the sword straight into his heart. His large body fell to the ground and the earth shook beneath her feet.

She smiled at her victory and looked upon her sword stained with the crimson blood of the Auran Prince that had once been the man who she and her father entrusted with their lives. The same man who had taught her many battle techniques from how to hold a sword to how to block attacks. Now, a hybrid creature, he lay dead upon the grasslands of Orland. But it was short lived as thoughts of her father returned to her.

She rushed to her father's side and fell to her knees next to him. Slowly, she scooped up his head in her arms, her other hand gently covered the gushing wound.

"Father..." was all could she whisper.

His dark eyes looked up at her. A thin stream of blood formed at the side of his thin lips. The past flashed back in her mind. Visions came to her of riding to Alloria on her father's ship. Resting in bed while her mother protested to her father leaving. Feeling her father's eyes on her as she played in the fields. Learning how to read and write from both

her father and mother who supplied her with books as though she fed off them for survival.

"Tell your mother," he said weakly, "I love her. I have always been in love with her and no other. I did what I had to do to save you and your future. The ship is now yours, Saria. Carry on the love and honor you had for us into your new family and kingdom. I love you, my daughter."

She opened her mouth to speak, but his body had already fallen limp and his eyes lost sight and were no longer looking into her own eyes.

She slowly stood from his body, looking down at him as all feeling inside of her fell frozen. A remaining crowd of Elves circled them, including Peronin. He bent down to Saron's body and urged his men to do the same. They bent down, lifted Saron over their shoulders, and headed back to Alloria.

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Jacina watched the crowd carrying Saron from the castle windows. She had a sinking feeling inside of her and she knew something was wrong. Tears grew in her eyes as she turned from the balcony and flew down the

stairs.

Everyone in the town turned to watch the small group of elves and human soldiers carrying Saron into Alloria. His arms were crossed in front of him, holding his sword to his chest.

Her eyes met her daughter's. Saria's face was soiled with dirt and stained with tears. Jacina broke out in tears as she approached Saron. She barely noticed Peronin placing a hand on Saria's shoulder to which she covered with her own as her head bowed down to the ground.

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Later that evening, Saron lay in a gold coffin aligned with jewels. Each for blessings that he would take with him in the next life. Red for prosperity, blue for peace and yellow for life.

Saria stood, a Queen in a long, dark blue robe covering her deep purple dress of velvet tied with a thin gold belt hanging off her waist. She bent down and placed a single rose on her father's coffin. She remained there for awhile, looking down at the coffin until she was the only soul that remained in the ceremony hall. She never cried. She never made a sound, even as she watched her father's serene face as he lay within his eternal resting place.

Several minutes passed. Slow footsteps approached her. She didn't have to turn around to know who it was.

"He will be transferred to Orland within the hour."

She looked at her mother. "How is Orland?"

"As best as can be expected in times such as this."

Saria sighed. "I worry for the people."

"They have been informed of what happened and what will be. Some have taken refuge away from the city."

"And father's ship?"

"Still sitting beside the Orland castle. I've sent word to transport it here as soon as possible."

Saria shook her head. "I failed, mother. I gave my word not to let anything happen to him."

"You did what you could," her mother said walking to her and placing her hand on her shoulder. "Your father was more than prepared to meet his fate, much to all of our resistance. He felt ready to save you no matter what."

"But there were so many things I wanted to speak with him about. So many questions."

"It usually happens this way concerning death."

Saria admired her mother's strength and will to hold herself together, but she couldn't see her denying the fact this isn't the way things were supposed to go.

"It wasn't supposed to be this way," she finally said aloud. "The population of man is near extinction and it's even worse now." Her eyes remained on the gold casket. "You and father were the only ones willing to step forward to try and rebuild it."

"It was as it should be," Jacina said sternly. "No matter what happened."

Saria turned to her mother. "How could you say that? Father meant everything to you. It was Mellinia who had a hold on him, I heard them talking in the hall."

She noticed her mother's back straighten at the mention. "When was this?"

"Shortly before the wedding I overheard them in the hall. She said..." Saria stopped as she studied the expression in her mother's eyes. She could tell the woman was trying her best to keep her composure.

"Go on, Saria."

Saria licked her lips. She needed to get this out in the open. Holding this within her was now killing her, even if she wanted to protect her mother. "She said she felt close to father after the death of her husband and brother. That he reminded him of her. And to an extent, she felt close to you as well."

Her mother nodded.

"There is something else. On the battlefield as father died, he wanted me to tell you that he loved you, Mother. He loved you alone and no one else. I'm not sure what happened between you and father, but I know he meant it. I can tell in his eyes."

Jacina sighed and Saria could only wonder what she was about to say. "I never told you this before, Saria. I couldn't have children, Saria. Your father and I wanted children, not only as an heir to the throne but for us. He could have brought in a second wife to bear his children, but he believed in us. He believed in me. It caused me much stress and sleepless nights. His ship was destined to be his only baby."

She paused, Saria could still see the pain still stung within her heart. "I left the palace one night and fled into the grasslands. I wasn't sure where I was going or how far I ran when I encountered a being. It was beautiful as if it was made of pure blinding light. It formed in the shape of a figure."

Saria stared at her mother. "A figure," she said softly.

"This being knew our problems and of how we wished for a child. He told me he would provide us with one if we taught you well and loved you. And if we stopped an oncoming threat destroying the lands and our people. Now I know this beast to be what Alin has become. Somehow I saw that in his eyes when I banished him that night. And then you came to us."

"Why are you telling me this now?"

"I just want you to understand the power of our love and what we went through. And why this threat to our marriage was not a minor one." Her mother walked to her and took her small hands in hers. "Marriage is sacred, Saria. I know you did not enter yours under the veil of love, but of politics. Even still, it is a bond that should not be broken so easily. Trust is difficult to come by and even more difficult to fix when it is broken. You have learned this from your ancestors and now from us."

"Do you forgive father?"

Her mother smiled down at her. Her hand caressed the side of her face and the warmth she had come to love about both of her parents returned to her one last time. "I've always loved your father, Saria. Even when we were apart, I never stopped thinking of him."

With a soft kiss on her forehead, her mother turned and walked her to the door. "It's time for me to take my leave. I'm retreating Elmsburrow to restart my studies. Alin's has crippled us for sometime and the hospital is need of some help for the wounded soldiers. Keep alert, Saria. The retreating Aurans will try again to take over. Your husband has agreed to teach of their history and you will know the cause of all this. I'll send word to you when I arrive."

Jacina hugged Saria and headed for the doorway.

"Mother."

Jacina turned.

"What will become of Mellinia?" she asked.

"I have not seen her since the wedding."

With that, her mother took her leave. Saria remained wondering where the elf queen had gone and wanted to question Peronin of her whereabouts. But even as the day passed and the sun fell over Alloria that evening, she couldn't bring herself to touch upon the subject.

She went around the room and blew out the candles in her usual ritual with the events of the day still on her mind. She slipped into the bed next to Peronin, careful not to touch his back which faced her. As she slid across the silk covers, feeling the soft, slinkiness of the fabric against her bare skin, she felt his body move to face hers. She didn't move away or say a word, even as he slipped his arm over her waist and pulled her body close to his. It was then she finally began to cry.

THE END

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#### About the Author

Rae Lori is a fan of David Lynch and Alfred Hitchcock's visual styles and stories. She has a love for film, vampires and visual storytelling which she couples with the art of the written word to tell her stories. While penning her works, she loves to create artwork that explores her strong female characters and the men in their lives.

As an avid reader and viewer of science fiction, romance and fantasy since she was young, Rae enjoys merging the genres to create an adventurous reading experience in her own work. Throughout her writing career, she has garnered credits writing movie reviews, fiction and articles on the comic book and film industry.

Rae makes her home in Phoenix, Arizona where she pens her stories and works as a graphic designer.

Learn more about her work at: <http://www.raelori.com>

She loves to hear from her readers so feel free to drop her a message! [Rachel@raelori.com](mailto:Rachel@raelori.com)

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