This was supposed to be an easy job. Titus Abrasax placed a contract through the Legion for
an assassination. The Legion assign it to Caine Wise because he is the best hunter in the Gyre, everyone knows that. Caine Wise, legendary Skyjacker, never failed to complete a contract, that is, until he smelled her true scent… Never could he have dream his life would change in so many ways.

Notes

This is the first story I wrote since high school, over 20 years ago, and the first story I ever wrote in English. French being my primary language.
Set in an alternate timeline when Caine never killed an Entitled and him and Stinger are still Skyjackers.
Caine had tracked the tersie female for a week on her planet. He did not like his orders this time. His contract said that the female had to be awake and that he must tell her he was hired to kill her. So, when he tracked her to her final destination, a shabby clinic in a shabby part of the city, he had to start by rescuing her from a team of assassins. “So, Titus must not be the only one who wants her dead.” He thinks. “It always gets messy when there is more then one contract for an assassination.” Since she is past out from the drugs the assassins gave her, he has to make a new plan. He can not wait at the clinic, more assassins might be on the way, so he dresses her up and gets her out of there and to his hideout, an industrial space in the tallest building in the city. Most assassins can’t fly, and it’s a long way up the tower, so he feels safe there to wait for the female to wake up.

Listening to her breathing and smelling the drugs on her he evaluates she will be out for 10 to 12 hours. Since the contract said he has to talk to her, but chances are she won’t understand what he says, he injects her with a translation implant. That leaves him time to check out who she is. Jupiter Jones. No Commonwealth ID, only an Earth ID. “Why would Titus want a tersie dead? It’s not like she can leave her planet.” He mutters aloud. “A civilian, a tersie civilian.” To be sure he has the right female, he gets the simulated gene-print card out and compares it to her scent. It is a match, but there is something nagging at him about the smell. He shrugs “A contract is a contract.” He tries to convince himself. He never had to kill a tersie civilian before.

He has been up for the last 48 hours, and since the girl is out, he decides to take a short nap himself. “Might as well recharge myself while she is out. ‘cuz this will be hard to do.” So, Caine settles by the door and shuts his eyes. He falls asleep easily and when he wakes up, he feels strange. He has never felt this good. His neural implant indicates that he slept for 8 hours… 8 hours! He never slept more then 2 hours straight. “What is going on?” he thinks. Then he realizes he did not have a single nightmare while he slept. Usually when he sleeps, he only dreams of blood, his old kills and war, it is never entirely restful, at least not for his brain, but this time he dreamt of soft rain, hot beverages and sunsets on the beach. What strange dreams.

A shrug later he checks on the female, she is still asleep, but now it is true sleep, not induced by the drugs. And somehow her scent is different too, it’s like she has two different scents.

“That is so confusing” he says out loud.

The female stirs a little, she will wake up soon, and Caine is confused about what to do. A contract is a contract, but she does not smell entirely like the target anymore. And he does not like the thought of killing a small civilian female. What he needs is information because he does not want to kill the wrong target. That would be bad. He decides to place his mauler near her head and wait for her to wake up. He does not wait long. 15 ticks and she opens her eyes, stretches and an acrid sent of confusion ebbs from her. She clings her eyes and grabs his gun.

– I thought it would make you feel better when you woke up. He says.
– What?
– The gun. It works better if you flip the switch by your thumb.

She flips the switch, and he raises his hands and faces her.

– Careful, you have been asleep for almost 12 hours. He says.
– Where am I? She asks.
– Still in Chicago. He answers.
– Good. She looks around. My clothes?
– You were still in the paper clinic gown…
– Erg, can’t really think about that right now. She cuts him off and shakes her head.
– Look, Jupiter, is that your name? he asks, while handing her, her wallet.
– Yes.
– I need to know what they did to you in that clinic. His voice is serious.
– Well they made me take a sterilizing shower with some stuff that smelled like old fish and garbage. And then put on the gown. Next thing I remember is you shooting them while I tried not to suffocate.

Realization dawns on him. Did they drench her in the gene-print smell so he would kill her? If so, this is bad, very bad. Killing a falsified target is grant for a court-martial and failing to follow orders too. He is so screwed.

– Did it smell like this? He pulls out the gene-print card and hands it to her.
– Eww… yes. Same sewer smell. She says after sniffing it.
– Dang, that is not good. He says.

He turns around to check his FTL comm on the desk and hears her gasping.

– Are you Michael or Gabriel? She asks.

He looks at her, his turn to be confused.

– What?
– What is your name?
– Oh, Caine Wise.
– What kind of an angel name is that?

Caine looks at her startled. He does not know what an angel is.

– What is an angel? He asks.

She fumbles with her electronic device and hands it to him. He scans the data in his sheave and reads it. “Winged benevolent celestial beings who act as intermediaries between God or Heaven and Humanity”. That is so not him.

– Not an angel.
– What then?
– Ok, there is a protocol the Legion gives us for this… It can be hard for people from underdeveloped world to hear that they are not the only inhabited planet in the ‘verse.
– I must be dreaming, must be the anesthesia…
– Legion protocol actually says that people will say that it is a dream.
– Because a dream is the only thing that explains it.
– Compare to what, the idea that your planet is the only inhabited planet in a ‘verse so full of planet that you don’t even have a number for it?
– You’re an alien?
– A genomgineered human. In my case, my DNA was spliced with something like a wolf, I am a Lycantant. Bred for the military.
– Lycan what? Wolves don’t have wings.
– Lycantant. The wings are military implants, I’m a Skyjacker.

All this time Jupiter still has his gun pointed at him.
– And what do you want with me? She asks.

Here it is, the question he does not want to answer, not with his gun pointed at him anyway.

– If I swear not to hurt you, can I have my gun back before I answer?

She nods, flips the switch back, and hands him his gun. He places it back in his thigh holster and sits on a crate.

– Ok, where to start… my orders… no… So, I’m a soldier. I receive my orders from the Legion. I have never failed a contract before, but I have decided to disregard my orders, because something does not make any sense. You can read my orders here. He hands her a sheave. Turn the middle button to switch language.

**CONTRACT # 452187965321**
**ISSUED BY: TITUS ABRASAX**
**TO: LEGION**
**SOLDIER: CAINE WISE**
**TYPE: TRACK AND ELIMINATE**
**TARGET: GENE-PRINT CARD**
**PLANET: EARTH**
**CITY: CHICAGO**
**STIPULATIONS: 1) TARGET MUST BE AWAKE WHEN KILLED 2) TARGET MUST BE TOLD BY SOLDIER THAT DEATH WAS SANCTIONNED BY ENTITLED**

After reading the contract, Jupiter’s blood has drained from her face. He was hired to kill her, but he said he won’t. And she feels like she can believe him, there is something honest in his eyes.

– Why am I still alive? She asks him finally.
– Because the order stinks. Usually when I get that kind of order, it’s bad people, criminals, escaped convicts, etc. Not small women from a tersie planet, who poses no threat to anyone. Also, the fake smell is gone, so you are not the valid target and if I’d killed a faked target, I’d end up in a court-martial.

Caine observes Jupiter closely. He can smell her calming herself. He hears her deep breath and sees emotions flickering on her face. He is rather impressed by this small tersie female, so far, no panic attack. And she smells really good. Once she is calm, she speaks again.

– What now? Do you have a plan? I’m guessing I can’t go home.
– The only option I can think of right now is to go see Kiza.
– Who’s Kiza?
– She is my CO’s daughter. She is a Marshal for the Aegis. She lives about an hour outside Chicago.
– Aegis?
– They are like cops.
– Space cops… sure why not. How do we get there?
– Well I have a small ship on top of the building, but that would make our position known. I would suggest using a motor vehicle.
– Your mean a car?
– Yes.

While he gathers his equipment, Jupiter observes him. Pointed ears, wolf fangs, blond hair, goatee and huge wings. A least a foot taller then her, well muscled, large shoulders. Not bad she thinks. She can feel herself blushing and as she does, Caine looks at her with question marks in his eyes. She shakes her head to re-center her thoughts. Now is not the time.
When he is ready Caine shows his boots to Jupiter. She seems impressed. She is even smiling. How can she do that, smile at him after she learned that he was sent to kill her? But there is no time to waste now, so he pushes the idea away and asks:

– Ready?
– Ready to fly off a 100th story window with you, your flying boots and your wings?
– This might make it easier, he says, and he grabs her in his arms and passes through a window.

She yelps and hangs on to him hard and when she realises they are not falling, she squirms a little, gasps and looks in awe at the view. Then he turns around to remove the iriser from the window, before slowly flying down to street level. The wind catches in her hair and they whip in his face a little. Some stands end up in his mouth and he can not prevent it. The taste reminds him of his strange dreams: soft rain, hot beverages and sunsets on the beach. Did he sleep 8 hours because she was there? Could her scent be affecting him? He can’t think about that right now! But he likes her smell and her taste.

When on the ground, he put her on her feet and immediately he feels like there is a hole in his chest, but when he looks down there is nothing to see. This tersie is bringing all sorts of weird feelings and sensations in him, and he does not know what they mean. He shrugs, mantles his wings and puts his jacket on, as to not attract too much attention.

– So, I’m guessing we need an untraceable car, she says.
– That would be best, yes.
– Okay so we have to look for an older car, new ones all have GPS.
– What is GPS? He asks.
– Global Positioning System, they track stuff with satellites. She explains.
– Yeah that would be almost as bad as using my ship.

They end up in a nondescript blue car and when they are out of the city on their way to God knows where she gets her electronic device out, he hears her leaving a message to someone named Vladie, about a problem at the clinic and that she would be away for a few days. Then she opens the case and pulls out the battery. At his inquiring glance she simply says.

– This has GPS too.

He nods and she looks out the window.

A few ticks later he can hear her mumbling something, he catches a few words, some curses, but he gets that the words are not all in the same language. Glancing at her again, he takes an exploratory sniff and he acknowledges that she is having a delayed panic attack. Well if this is how she panics, it’s a lot easier than high pitch screaming. And she waited to be somewhat secure before having it.

“Impressive” he thinks.

Her panic attack does not last long, after a few more ticks he hears her taking deep breaths.

– Sorry about that. She says. Bottling everything up always has a way of exploding at the worse time possible for me, so I let it out when I can.
– I understand, he says, because he really does.

Then he gets a whiff of curiosity from her scent, but also awkwardness?

– So, erm, what are they going to do to you for not killing me? She asks. And the question explains her scent.
– Court-martial, he replies sternly.
– So, wait, let me get this straight, you get court-martial if you kill me because I’m the wrong target, but you get court-martial for not killing me, because you disobeyed orders? That is messed up.
– Yes.
– Sounds like someone wants me dead and you out of the way…

He nods.

– Well at least I can thank you for not killing me and being honest. And also, for saving me at the clinic. So, thank you.

Caine is taken aback by her gratitude, and it must show on his face, because next she says:

– What? People don’t say thank you in space?
– Well, they do, but it’s the first time my target has ever thanked me. He replies awkwardly.

She turns her head and mutters something his implant does not translate.
Silence is stretching, not a comfortable one.
From the corner of her eye Jupiter notices that Caine seems uncomfortable in the driver seat.

– What is wrong? she asks.

He looks at her, is she really concern for him?

– Not enough room for the wings.
– Oh… I can help with that. Take your right hand off the wheel a moment.

He does not know what she wants to do, but he wants to obey her. That is a new thing too. He puts his right hand down and she leans over him, reach out on the side of his seat and the backrest recedes.

– Here you go. Is that better? She asks when she sits back.
– Yes, thank you.

The silence returns, but it is not stretched. She simply seems to be thinking and she blushing from time to time. Is she thinking about him? Is she blushing because of him? Maybe, she keeps looking at him out of the corner of her eye.

***Kiza’s place***

When they get to Kiza’s house, it is difficult to miss it. A shabby white house, missing siding and covered in beehives.

– We have arrived. He tells her.
– Good, the sooner we figure this out the better.

They get out of the car and a blond woman exclaims:

– Caine! What are you doing here?
– I need your help Kiza, he says.
– I gathered this was not a social visit. Who is that? And what did you do now?
– Jupiter Jones, Kiza Apini. He says, gesturing from one to the other. And I did nothing.
– So why are you here then?
– False scent. He replies.
At these words, Kiza turns white and exclaims:

– Beeswax!

Caine simply nods.

While they were talking, the bees had come out around Jupiter and started forming a big cloud. Jupiter had never been afraid of bees, there were always a few turning around her, but this was impressive. Of course, she never went out of the city before, and in the city, there are fewer bees. She puts her arms up and starts twirling. The bees have always danced with her in the city, here there are simply a few thousand more.

- Hi guys, nice of you to say hello, she says.

Caine and Kiza are amazed by what they see and Kiza, being in tune with her bees, hears them say “Queen! Queen!” and she feels it too in the part of her that is bee.

Kiza kneels on her front yard.

– Your Majesty!

Caine’s mouth hangs open. He has never met a royal that did not smell like something rotten. But this one still smells of soft rain, hot beverages and sunset on the beach. Still he opens his wings at the proper angle and clench his fist on his chest, in the proper Skyjacker salute, because bees never lie.

– What? Jupiter asks. And after a few seconds she adds, Stand up Kiza.

Kiza stands and Caine says:

– That would explain the contract and the false scent.
– Could someone explain what is going on? Jupiter asks.
– Yes, Your Majesty, but we better get inside for that, says Kiza.
– Ok, she tells Kiza. And then talking to the bees she adds, “You have to stay outside.”

Kiza opens the door then stands aside to let Jupiter in. The bees do not follow. Kiza and Caine do and they settle at the kitchen table.

– I am feeling very thirsty; do you have something I could drink maybe? Jupiter asks.
– Of course, Your Majesty. Kiza answers. She gets up to go to the kitchen.

While Kiza is gone, Jupiter raises one finger in the air, folds her other arm on the table and then proceeds to place her head on her elbow and repeats a sequence of words Caine’s implant refuses to translate. He does not need the translation anyway when the smells that emanates from her is a mix of confusion and anger. It lasts only the time that it takes Kiza to come back with a glass of honey flavored iced tea. And when she raises her head she seems calmer.

– Sorry about that, again. She says to Caine.

Caine simply nods. A royal apologizing to a splice is so backwards…but of course she does not know that yet.

– Thank you Kiza, she says picking up the glass.

After a first taste, she proceeds to emptying the glass like her life depends on it. Wow, she was really
thirsty, well it’s not surprising considering everything she has been through.

Kiza had gone out again, and she comes back with some sort of gun shape tool.

– Your Majesty, could I sample your gene-print for verification? The Aegis will not take bees testimony for identification.
– Only if you promise to explain what is going on after that. She replies.

Kiza nods and place the tool on her neck. The probing tool turns green. A green so pure it almost hurt the eyes.

– Wow, I have never seen a gene-print so pure before. Kiza says.
– No wonder they drenched her in that awful smell, mutters Caine.

Then a small display on the tool returns details on the gene-print. Seraphi Abrasax! That is almost impossible to believe.

– I will ping dad with the emergency and Aegis code Caine, if that is okay with you.

Caine nods. Stinger and the Aegis would know what to do.

Kiza goes to her communication device and sends a coded message to her dad: “Hi dad, your baby-bee here. There is too much honey right now, I could use your help with collecting it, please bring your dark and gorgeous friend to help too.”

– Explanation, please, says Jupiter.
– All right. I just asked my dad, who is Caine’s commanding officer, to get here as fast as possible and to bring the Aegis with him. Caine could not contact him himself or the people after you would have picked up the message and know where you are. That is why you came here in the first place, right Caine?

Caine nods.

– Can you explain the bees first please? I have never known why I can talk to them, and why they like to follow me and dance with me.
– I suppose you know nothing about the ways of the ‘verse?

Jupiter nods.

– I can’t start with the bees, it would be too confusing, you need understanding of the ‘verse. First there are 4 castes of living sentient being in the ‘verse.
– Castes?
– Yes castes, there is no equality in the ‘verse, Your Majesty. The Entitled are the highest ones. They rule the ‘verse. Royals are the highest of the Entitled. Then there are the pure humans, who are simply citizen of the ‘verse, then the Tersies, which are humans from this planet and others like it, who don’t know about the ‘verse, and finally the splices, like Caine, my dad and me. There are also the androids, but those are not living exactly.
– Wait, what? You mean splices are lower then Tersies? Jupiter interjects.
– Splices are tools, Your Majesty, we belong to our splicer and then to whomever buys us. Some owners are better then others... Being bought by the Aegis or the Legion grants us more rights then with any other owner. But we are still considered like intelligent animals, not people.
– That is slavery! Let me tell you, slavery is wrong. You are people. “Life is life, whether it’s wrapped in skin, scales or feathers.” Never thought I would have to quote Dr. Franklin.
– Oh, we know we are people, but that is not what the laws say. Dr. Franklin?
– Yeah, from the sci-fi show Babylon 5. Please continue with what you were saying.
– The caste we belong too, depends on our genes. Genes are almost like a religion in the ‘verse. Sometimes a gene-print reappears in the same pattern as before, Earth people would call that reincarnation, in the ‘verse it is known as a recurrence. The gene-print test I did on you tells us that you, Jupiter Jones, are the recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax, the most powerful queen that ever lived, and as her recurrence, you are Entitled to all that was hers. And it would appear that someone has found out about you and wants to prevent you from claiming your title and inheritance. As for the bees, they are not from Earth, they have been created by Seraphi Abrasax herself as a mean to recognise royalty, and that is why they escort you and understand you.

Jupiter then proceeds to placing her head in her elbow again and muttering some more. From Kiza’s reaction, she seems to have the proper translation package in her implant. Kiza looks at Caine and says:

– No Russian translation in your mission package, I see.

Caine nods.

– We’ll fix that later, she tells him. She turns back to Jupiter, when she raises her head up, and asks:
– Your Majesty, are you okay?
– Not by a long shot… but I can’t spare the time for a panic attack right now.

Caine smirks. She is one strong tersie… Queen!

Jupiter turns to him:

– Abrasax, wasn’t that the name on your contract, Caine?

Caine nods.

– Titus Abrasax. He says.
– And who is he?
– And the assassins I, erm, eliminated, back at the clinic, wore Balem Abrasax’s colors.

Jupiter blushes at the memory and that is an incredible smell on her. She shakes her head, probably to focus on the present, and asks:

– And who is he?
– Her first child. Says Caine.
– Ok, let me see if I got all this, I am the reincarnation of a dead space-queen, bees are aliens, slavery is still happening in the ‘verse and two of my gene-kids want me dead.

Caine nods.

– Anymore of these gene-kids I should know about?
– Lady Kalique Abrasax, the second child, she would never plot something openly against you. She will most likely want to manipulate you, but not kill you. Kiza says.

Suddenly Caine raises his head.

– A ship is coming! Your Majesty, please come with me, he says. We have to be sure they are the Aegis.

He guides her to a safe-room, places her thumb on the panel, then his.
– Only you or I will be able to open the door now, he tells her.

Jupiter nods, enters the room, and closes the door.

It was not the Aegis… at first.

After what seems like an eternity, there is a knock on the door.

– Your Majesty, this is Captain Stinger Apini. Please open the door, it is safe now.
– Where are Kiza and Caine? She asks.

“This one is not stupid” thinks Stinger.

– Commander Wise and Marshal Apini have been injured while defending you. They are in the hands of the medical team at the moment. Please open the door, we do not have much time. More bounty hunters are on the way.
– How can I know you really are who you say you are?
– What would satisfy Your Majesty? Stinger asks.
– Is there a camera on this thing?
– Yes, let me turn it on.

A display appears in the safe-room and she can see a man with striped hair and huge wings. Well he looks like a bee-splice Skyjacker at least.

– Ok, I see you. Also tell me how did Kiza asked for your help?
– My baby-bee asked for my help collecting her honey and told me to bring my dark and gorgeous friend.
– That sounds about right. She says.

The door opens and Stingers bee-instincts tells him that it is really true, she is a Queen. The Queen!

– Majesty, he says, kneeling like Kiza, but with his fist on his chest and wings flared above his head like Caine.
– Stand up, no time for that, get me out of here before more people come for me.

When they get to the entrance, she gasps at the destruction and sheer number of dead people.

– Caine did all that?
– Majesty, Singer points to the door.
– Right!

Once outside, he guides her to the grav-beam that gets them both inside the Aegis cruiser.
Aegis cruiser

– Welcome on board, Your Majesty. I am Captain Diomika Tsing of the Aegis. If we could verify your gene-print once more? Marshal Apini’s data has been somewhat destroyed.

Jupiter chuckles at the understatement. She also understands the code for Aegis being “dark and gorgeous friend” That is what the Captain is, dark skinned and totally gorgeous.

– Of course, Captain.

A doctor uses the same probe-gun tool on her neck again, and everyone gasps at the pure green light emitted by the tool.

– Yeah, Kiza and Caine had the same reaction. What does that mean? Asks Jupiter.
– It means that your incarnation is of the purest essence, Your Majesty, says the doctor.
– Right! She says. Ok, erm, not to sound like I am stupid, but what is the next step to this whole thing?
– The next step if for you to claim your title and inheritance, Your Majesty. Says Captain Tsing. For that we need to portal to Orous, so you can go to the Hall of Titles.
– Ok, and that will take how much time, Captain?
– To get there, about 30 of your minutes, Your majesty. You might want to swallow these to prevent the nausea induced by portalling. She points to an officer by her side who has 2 tablets and a glass of water in his hands.

Jupiter grabs the tablets and the glass and swallow them.

– If there is anything else we can do to make your journey easier, please let us know. The Captain adds.
– Actually, I would like to check up on Kiza and Caine, if that would be all right?
– Of course, Your Majesty. Officer Percadium and Captain Apini, will escort you to the med-bay.

When they arrive at the med-bay Stinger ask for a report on his daughter first.

– Mostly bumps and bruises for Marshal Apini. Nothing serious. We healed her wounds and the bruises treatment is being applied as we speak.
– I am afraid that Commander Wise situation is more severe. He seems to have suffered a lot of trauma, but we can not perform the proper procedures because of the twitches. His medical files indicate that only stasis calms them, but we can not perform these procedures while he is in stasis. Stinger was worried for Caine, he looked at his file, and never as he been hurt this badly. Jupiter must have seen his face change color, because she places a hand on his arm and asks:
– What does this mean, Stinger?

Her use of his first name, calms him enough to explain.

– Caine is… complicated. He’s a Lycantant without a pack. Had the bad luck to be born half-albino, runt of the litter. The splicer that bred him, sold him to the Legion at a loss. But a Lycantant needs a pack, it’s their center of gravity. Alone, usually they waste away and die. Unless they become like him, fearless, relentless, perfect hunting machine. Caine is the best soldier I ever went into battle with, the best in the Legion, a true Legend. But without a pack, his body is never calm, always
twitching. Which makes healing him harder.
– Caine twitching? That can’t be! I have never seen someone more stable then him. Heck, even when I had his gun pointed at him, he was like a rock.

Stinger is baffled for a moment. Could it be? The only thing that can calm an Omega Lycantant is a proper Alpha. He has to ask. Caine is like a son to him and according to his file if they don’t treat him soon, he will die.

– Majesty, in 14 years, I have never seen him not twitching or shaking! His twitches have shakes. Would you mind entering his room and see if your presence would calm him? Unless the view of blood disturbs you?
– Stinger, I clean toilets for a living! I have seen it all. Caine saved my life, the least I can do is test this theory of yours.

So, in his med-room they went. Officer Percadium stayed outside. Doctors and nurses were trying to steady him. When Jupiter saw in what state he was, she was amazed he was still alive at all. “Wow, he is made of sturdy stuff.” She thinks. It took only a few seconds, probably the time for her scent to get to his nose and Caine’s twitches suddenly faded, but not completely. Stinger was amazed. But that was not enough for the doctors to be able to repair all the damage.

– Majesty, there are a lot of smells in here at the moment. They might interfere with your scent. Stinger tells her. Scent is what Lycantant reacts to.
– So, what do I do? She asks him.
– I am not sure, Your Majesty, I am not a Lycantant. But maybe being closer would help?
– Sure, why not. She says raising her hands, palms up.

So, Stinger watched with his jaw hanging as this new Queen with the purest of gene-print ever, went up to the head of the bed of the fiercest soldier ever, placed a wrist near his nose, her other hand on his head and started petting his hair. That was quite the scene. But it worked. Caine had no more tremors, no more twitches, steady and calm as a rock.

– Well, this is going to take some time, I guess, so could I get a chair, please? Asked Jupiter.

Someone brought her a chair and the doctors went to work.

– Stinger, close your mouth before a bee flies in. Jupiter teases. Seems your theory is true. Do you mind explaining to me what this all means?

Stinger finally closed his mouth, took a deep breath and started.

– As I said, I am no Lycantant, so I don’t know everything. Splices keep that kind of stuff to their kind usually. But I think this means that somehow, you are now his alpha, as if you have a connection deeper then genes and splicers could manufacture.
– Maybe that is why I trusted him so fast, she says, and maybe why he could not kill me.

Stinger rubs his neck.

– What else? She prods.
– I don’t know, Your Majesty. Betas who loses their alpha go into severance shock, and often die from it. But I don’t know for an Omega like him what it would do, if you left him alone. Or if that makes him a beta now. And I have never heard of a non-Lycantant alpha before. This is uncharted. At least for me. He might know, if you can get him to talk about it…
– Your Majesty, interjects the doctor.
– Yes?
– We have to turn him to work on his back.
– Oh, go ahead. She says and removes her hands.

His back is in better shape and the doctors don’t have much to do now. She places her hand back on his head and her wrist close to his nose.

– In the mean time, what should I do?
– Keep him close, Majesty. Maybe ask him to be your personal guard. At least until we know what is going on.
– I can do that?
– Well for now it would be unofficial, but once you have claimed your title and inheritance, you will be entitled to whom ever you want as personal guards and more.

Also, taking him as your personal guard would prevent his court-martial for not completing his assignment.

– Oh! Right, he told me about that. We would not want that to happen.
– We are done, Your Majesty. Says the doctor. We should turn him back on his back. Also, we can wake him anytime you want.

Jupiter looks to Stinger, nods and tell the doctor:

– Now would be perfect, thank you.
– Very well, Your Majesty.

The doctor proceeds to turn Caine to his back and then gave him a stimulant to counter the sedation they had given him and right on cue Caine open his eyes and jerks up to a sitting position.

– Easy there, pup, you are safe. Stinger says.
– It’s ok Caine, says Jupiter at the same time.
– Stinger! Your Majesty!

Caine looks around, Med-bay on an Aegis cruiser. They made it. Wait, where’s Kiza?

– Where’s Kiza? He asks.
– Safe pup, in the next room, resting. Only had bumps and bruises thanks to you! You are the one that gave us quite a scare. Without Her Majesty, the doctors could not have treated you.
– What do you mean Stinger?
– We are done here, says the doctor. If there is any discomfort, please let us know.
– Stinger?
– The doctor could not treat you because of your dang twitches, pup. You were critical.
– Anyone else would have been dead already. Adds Jupiter.

Caine flinches. He did not think he was that hurt.

– Pup, I have never seen is so bad.
– What do you mean the doctors could not have treated me without Her Majesty? Caine asks.
– Well pup… you had too many twitches. They could not even scan you. That is until Her Majesty walked in. Look at you pup, not a single twitch or shake. Her presence calms you like nothing I have ever seen or heard of. She spent the whole time the doctor worked on you by your side, she had a hand on your head and her wrist on your nose.

Stinger looks at Caine with his eyes yellow and Caine nods in understanding.

– Now I’ll let you two talk and go check on my baby-bee.
As the door opens for Stinger, Officer Percadium pokes his head in and says:

– Your Majesty, we are ready to portal. Would you like to head to the bridge for the full experience?
– One moment officer. She says. Caine, would you like to accompany me to the bridge? We can talk later, when we both have had time to think.

Caine nods.

– I just need a minute to clean up.
– Of course, she says, I’ll wait with Officer Percadium.
– No! It comes out too fast, too loud. And he blushes… Please, don’t...

Jupiter looks at him with her big green eyes, filled with concern. Words are stuck in his throat. What would a royal think of the needs of a splice?

– Caine, Stinger explained some things to me. As best he could anyway. What is it?

There is no judgement in her eyes. So, he takes a deep breath and just says it.

– The bonding process as gone too far already, I can feel it, if you leave the room I would go into severance shock.
– Oh! Okay. I’ll just turn around and let you get ready then. I would not want you to go into shock. Sounded pretty unpleasant from what Stinger said. Like death unpleasant. And we just got you back.

And on that she closes the door, turns around and says:

– Let me know when you are ready.

At the moment Caine is a little bit stunned by what he has just learned and the changes he can feel inside him. It changes so many things for now and his future. Non-lycantant Alpha are rare, and bonding with one is permanent. What would she do and think with that information. He pushes the thought away, he has to get ready. He goes into the ‘fresher unit to clean, careful to leave the door open as to not go into shock. The cleaning cubicle works fast and in 30 ticks he is totally clean. Next, he goes to the uniform distributor, input his serial ID and a fresh Skyjacker uniform pops out. He grabs his boots which are by the door puts them on and:

– I am ready, Your majesty.

Jupiter turns around and smiles. Her smile is bright as a star, it lights up her eyes and he feel his inside churning.

– Ah, much better! She says.

She opens the door and steps out with Caine at her back, smiles at Officer Percadium, and says:

– To the bridge!

On the bridge she is welcomed by Captain Tsing and the bridge crew. She sees the Earth through the window – or is it a view screen? What a sight!
– Are you ready, Your Majesty? Asks the Captain.
– Make it so! She replies with a huge grin.

And behind her a female voice replies: “Aye, aye, Captain”

She turns her head to see Kiza with the same huge grin, and suddenly both girls are laughing really hard.

– This is no Star Trek, Your Majesty, wheeze Kiza.
– You know Star Trek, Kiza?

Kiza nods and Jupiter sobers up.

– All right, ready now Captain. she says.

And suddenly there is a white blooming sphere outside the ship and then they are elsewhere. This is totally alien. Another planet so full of buildings that they stretch out into space. There are 2 huge rings surrounding the planet, artificial rings, made of buildings! This is incredible.

– Welcome, Your Majesty, to the overpopulated, oozing cesspool we humbly call home. Officer Percadium says.

A few minutes later an android with an annoying smile gets on the bridge.

– I did three tours in Abukesh, a battle that cost the lives of two million soldiers, and I'd rather be back there than have to deal with these bureaucrats. Captain Tsing tells Jupiter.
– Greetings, Your Majesty. I am Intergalactic advocate Bob, here to assist you through the ascension process.
– First, I require security, there are still people after me. Turning around to face Caine, she winks at him, then faces Stinger and nods. Erm... Caine and Stinger, would you come with me? I believe two Skyjackers would be a good thing.

Caine and Stinger flare their wings above their heads and place their fist on their chest in salute.

– Majesty! They say.
– Oh, and Kiza, you are welcome to tag along. I am sure your dad would be glad to have you close by for a while.
– All right. Let’s do this, Advocate Bob, lead the way.
Inside the Commonwealth Ministry’s Hall of Titles, they get into a first line.

– This is the authentic recurrence of her Ladyship the Abrasax Sovereign. And we have come to claim her title. Says Advocate Bob.
– You need to file an inheritance petition, if the title is held, you need a transfer of title, says the clerk.
– Thank you, says advocate Bob.

In the next line, Jupiter gets bored, well everyone is bored in the Orous lines.

– Tell me Kiza, what do Marshals do on Tersie planets?

And for that line, Kiza explains that the Tersies planets are seeded by powerful families, that the actual birth place of the human race is Orous, that her previous incarnation seeded the Earth, and that the Marshals monitor the population, sending reports to the planets owner, on the level of development and illegal incursion by other families, rogues and criminals. When Jupiter asks why these families seeds planets, that leads in an explanation about RegeneX, regeneration, harvest, and that Tersie humans are merely cattle to these people. Jupiter wants to throw up. That is messed up.

Jupiter raises her hand and Kiza stops talking.

– I have to digest all that for a while, she says.

All this time Caine tries to stay at the proper distance for a personal guard, but the touch-hunger he feels is getting pretty overwhelming. He smelled all the emotions Jupiter had gone trough learning about Marshals, Earth and Regenex. From curiosity to disbelief to anger. Now she smelled resolute, as if she had come up with a plan, and that smell was so enticing to him. They have been trough a few lines now, it’s been five hours, and his hands are starting to get the shakes. He just wants to touch her.

Stinger notices immediately when Caine starts to twitch again. He does not know how the bonding process works, but he knows that Lycantant needs smell and touch, and in here smell is diluted and Caine has not had physical contact with Her Majesty since Med-Bay. When they start a new line and Caine seems incapable to maintain distance and gets twitchier, he asks Bob.

– Will Her Majesty be needed to do a gene-scan for this tax filing we are waiting for?
– No, returns Advocate Bob.
– Ok, because she seems to need a break. We will be over there, and he points to a seating arrangement along the wall. Come finds us after you are done here.

When Jupiter turns to look at him, she has question marks in her eyes and he simply turns his head slightly in Caine’s direction. Her question marks turn to worry when she sees Caine’s twitching. Oh, he probably can’t smell her much in here, so many people. She nods at Stinger and heads for the little oasis of rest. She chooses the couch and sits.
– Mr. Wise, sit with me, she says. Mr. Apini, you keep watch. Kiza, at ease.

Stinger nods. Kiza sits on a chair and Caine sit beside her and visibly stops twitching.

– Caine, what is going on? She murmurs. We did not have time to talk before, and I did not think it would take that much time in here.
– It’s the touch-hunger, Your Majesty.
– Jupiter, she interrupts. This is not queen stuff.
– Jupiter, he exhales.– Why does her name make him feel so good? – I did not think it would come on so fast, or so strong. Usually Lycantant bonding happens when we are young and we bundle up together until the touch-hunger passes.
– You mean like a litter of puppies?
– That would be a good comparison.
– Well, we obviously can not do that here. Is sitting beside me helping?
– Yes, at least for now.
– Ok. I need time to think of a valid excuse for you to continue touching me once we go back out there. She says, pointing to the lines. We’ll stay put for now since it does feel good to be off my feet.

While they sit, Jupiter thinks about what she will have to do next, Kiza had said that she was entitled to all that belonged to Seraphi. That must be a lot of stuff. Maybe she should get a head start on that. Oh, and while she does that, she could pretend to be distracted and require a “helping hand” not to bump in people and stuff. It’s a little bit cheesy, but it could work. Not like there are a lot of options, and this way she can get two birds with one stone.

After Advocate Bob returns, she asks him to provide her with blank sheaves, and paperwork she will have to complete once she as claimed her title, and also information on the Legion, the Aegis and the Entitled, “so she can get a head start”. No use in wasting time. Bob seems impressed. She tells Caine “I will be too busy to look where I am going, so you will have to guide me.” Which Caine takes as the “valid excuse” to touch her and nods with relief in his eyes.

They spend the next 5 hours in more lines, with Caine guiding her so she does not get bumped. Kiza and Advocate Bob help her from time to time to understand the paperwork. Stinger explains the difference between personal guards and royal guards. The royal guards are in charge of defending her alcazars, or space-palace, and other properties and personal guards are for her personal protection or anyone else she wants to protect. First off, she writes an edict that prevents harvesting of any Tersie planet she owns without her personal authorization. She completes the forms for money and property transfer in her name instead of Seraphi’s. Fill another form to have Kiza’s house repaired. And then turns her attention to the matter of guards.

– Hey Stinger, how many personal guards would you recommend for a newbie Queen like me?
– Usually about a dozen, some on patrol, some for close proximity. You want enough so they can have enough down time. If they are stretch too thin, they won’t be as efficient.
– Right.

She pulls out the sheave on the Legion and skims it. Legion units come in team of 25. Royal guards are selected from these. Skyjackers are elite Legion, usually in teams of 12 combatant with 1 commanding officer. “Apparently the number 13 does not mean bad luck in space.” She thinks. Continuing to read on the Skyjackers she is impressed, but also learns that removing part of a unit, means dismantling it because it is hard to integrate new members in a unit and harder to change the commanding officer. She realizes that when Stinger suggested she request Caine be her personal guard, he was willing to make a huge sacrifice for Caine. Probably ending his career in the Legion, maybe being sold to someone else. And the same for the rest of the unit. She can not let that happen but can not let Caine get court-martial or die from severance shock either.
Like always, when face with a complicated situation, she reverts to her Russian.

– *I can’t let that happen.* She mutters.

Stinger, Advocate Bob and Caine don’t react, but Kiza does.

– What, Your Majesty?
– Oh, you understand Russian Kiza? Can you speak it too?
– Yes, Majesty. She says in Russian.
– Ok, let me tell you my idea. And you can tell me if that makes sense. I guess your dad told you about the bonding, me being an Alpha and all that.

Kiza nods.

– Letting him return to his unit would mean his court-martial and going into severance chock and possibly dying. I can not let that happen. But I was reading that taking him away from his unit would also mean the dismantling of the unit and possibly the members of the unit that are splices to be sold off. I can not let that happen either. I was thinking of requesting that your dad’s unit be my personal guards. What do you think? Would they want to work for me? You said that the Legion gives splices more rights, so I don’t know.
– Majesty! That would be the best idea ever! Forget the Legion’s rights, you see splices as people! You talk to us and not to give us orders! They would be willing to lose limbs to work for someone like you!
– Okay, do I request the unit, or do I have to buy them all? Buying people is so wrong to me. How do I do this?
– If you buy them, they would have to have their wings removed, that is Legion tech. Requesting the unit would be a better idea and they would still be Legion, so still have more rights in the rest of the ‘verse.
– Okay, I can do this, if you help me with the details for the form.

So, Jupiter and Kiza filled the form for her personal guards. Requesting that the 53rd Skyjacker unit, the Skybreakers, be the personal guards for Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, signified recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax.

By the time they were done, Advocate Bob was so flustered that he resorted to bribing a clerk.

– Place your thumb in the depression, says the clerk.
This is exactly what she does.

– Seals and signets are un Sub 33 says the clerk. Handing Bob a small sheave.

Advocate Bob in turn gives it to Jupiter with a “Your Majesty”.

Heading to Sub 33, advocate Bob tells them that his job is now complete and heads off to a new client. At Seals and Signets, a strange man takes her small sheave, makes a few steampunk looking machines work and tells her to place her wrist in a machine. He makes the machine works, and a glowing blue “tattoo” appears on her wrist. Then he hands her a few more sheaves: “Code and Conduct Guide”, “Royal ways and means commission” and a sheave to file with a Legion Administrator for her Royal Guards Appointment. He ends with a creepy “Congratulations, Your Majesty, and my deepest condolences.”

– Thank You, she says dubiously.

While they are heading out:
She takes out completed sheaves and seal them.

– Here we go, this is so cool.

She seals her orders and edicts and then the one for the repair of Kiza’s house.

– Ok, Kiza, this one is for you, so you can have your house fixed, it was pretty smashed up after you guys saved me. You can have all the upgrades you want.

Kiza is stunned by her Queen’s thoughtfulness. No Entitled care about splices, not like she does.

– Thank you, Your Majesty, this is too kind.
– It’s not kindness Kiza, it’s the least I can do. I’d be dead without you guys. If there is anything else I can do for you, you let me know.

All three splices have their jaws hanging.

– Close your mouth guys, this – she points to her sigil – doesn’t make me a different person. It doesn’t change things that matters to me or who I care about. I am still the same me.

She faces Stinger.

– Captain Apini, about that little matter we spoke about when Commander Wise was being treated, I believe this way would be the best. Look it over, if it is satisfactory, I’ll seal it.

Stinger looks at Jupiter, the formal phrasing denoting that this is a serious matter and takes the sheave she is handing him. It is the form for her personal guards. He can’t believe it. Is she really requesting the whole unit? With him as Chief of Security? He would never have allowed himself to ask for such, such what? He does not even know what to call this. It is more then generosity, more then fairness. Is this how equality feels? When he looks at Jupiter, his eyes are yellow.

– On behalf of the Skybrakers, 53rd Skyjacker unit, I accept. It will be an honor to serve and protect such a fair Queen.

Jupiter seals the sheave with a big smile. Than she nods at Stinger and Caine.

– Captain, Commander.

And both Stinger and Caine salute her with a fist on their chest and their wings above their heads.

***Trouble***

Suddenly, Caine goes rigid, like back at Kiza’s bee farm.

– I hear trouble Stinger.
– Which way?

Caine listens, smells, open his mouth for more details.

– Surrounded, will be here soon.
They all look up. There is a passage way for maintenance bots.

– It seems narrow but it could work. It might get pretty dirty though. Says Stinger.
– Better dirty then dead, plus it can’t be much worse then the janitor’s closet in high school.

Jupiter grabs the pack of sheaves so Kiza can use her gun if necessary. Caine and Stinger turn on their boots, Caine grabs Jupiter and Stinger grabs Kiza and they head to the ceiling, about 3 story high. The passage way is too narrow for two people but years of avoiding the cops for fear of deportation as left Jupiter with a lot of tricks in her bag.

– Hold me in there, I’ll put my feet on your shoulders and you can push me up.

Stinger and Kiza keep a lookout, but they see what Jupiter and Caine do. It works, Jupiter is in, and Caine pushes her up. Then Kiza and Stinger do the same. They go up for about three level and then the conduit splits into three branches. They crawl in the one that is horizontal, roomier enough to be able to be on all four, to listen for pursuers. There is only silence.

And in that silence Jupiter’s murmur startles Caine. She is curled up in a ball and she seem to be repeating the same sequence, over and over, again. Odin, dva, tri, chetyre, pyat’, shest’, sem’, vosem’, devyat’, desyat’. “What ever it is, it’s working for her”, he thinks. He can hear her heart beat slowing down, and the smell of adrenaline is fading. He does not want to disturb her, so he asks Kiza:

– Kiza, what is she saying?
– Erm… counting to 10 over and over again. You really need that translation package.

After counting to ten, ten times in a row, Jupiter has calmed down.

– Sorry, force of habit. She says. Which way to the ship?

Caine wonders how his new Queen and …Alpha?... got the habit of counting to ten over and over again, while in dark and dusty places. He has much to learn about her it seams.

He takes a deep breath, mouth open to find in which direction they should be going.

– This conduit leads to the maintenance bot storage and the other one goes to the refuse disintegrator. Or we can continue up.
– But if we continue up, we might have to make an exit surrounded by people, and that would be awkward. Queen of the ‘verse crawling out of a maintenance conduit. I can see the news titles already, says Kiza.
– Well, maintenance bot storage it is then, but I can’t see where I am going in here. Space must have the equivalent of a glow stick or a flashlight, right? Jupiter says.
– They are not Starfleet issue, but yes, Your Majesty, we call them cold light, says Kiza.

Jupiter snickers.

– I don’t suppose you guys have one on you right?

They all respond by the negative. And it is too dark in the conduit even for Caine’s eyes. And then Jupiter has a flash, she still has her smartphone! They probably have no way to track her Earth phone in space.

– Hey, do you think I can use my phone without being tracked here? I guess there is no Earth GPS, on Orous right?
– I don’t even think the energy output would be registered, says Kiza, but a call will not reach Earth from here.
– I don’t want to make a call, it’s a smartphone, she retorts.

Jupiter fumbles with her phone in the dark, opening the case and putting in the battery. Then she turns it on, input her password and warns “You might want to shield your eyes, this is going to be bright.” Then she turns the flashlight on. When her eyes have caught up with the light, she looks back to see if everyone is okay. Dusty, dirty, but all in one piece, but Caine is having the shakes again. He had stop touching her while in the conduit.

– Caine! You are shaking again. Why did you not say anything? Can you move?

He is laying on the conduit floor and barely seems conscious. Jupiter manages to turn around in the conduit and crawls to Caine.

– Stinger, I need your help here. He is getting unresponsive. We have to flip him on his back.

Stinger and Kiza manage to change position and Stinger helps Jupiter to flip Caine. Touch-hunger and bundle up like a litter of puppies he had said. Ok, she can do that. She lays down on the floor and places her head on his shoulder, turns his head so he faces her neck and starts petting his hair. The shakes have stopped, but he is still unresponsive and his heart beat is erratic. She starts to talk too, she murmurs soothing words in his ear. Like her mama used to do when she was sick. ‘I’m here. It’s okay. I am not going anywhere. You’ll be fine. I’m new at this, but I want to do it right. If you can, tell me what you need.”

After a few minutes, Caine finally open his eyes, he feels the changes in him, he never thought the touch-hunger would be this powerful. He smells the worry from his friends and his Alpha-Queen, but he can’t move. He catches her last words “If you can, tell me what you need.” He tries to focus, what does he need… contact, skin contact…

– Skin. He manages to breath out.

Jupiter sees when Caine opens his eyes and that is a relief. He seems to be semi-conscious, which was better then unconscious. And when she hears him say skin she immediately lifts her head, pull at his shirt to open it – she had seen the doctor do it in the med-bay – and replaces her head back on his naked shoulder, her left arm goes along his arm and she continues petting his hair with her other hand. This is so intimate, he smells like jungle and spices, his skin is warm and soft and his muscle are firm as iron. She barely knows him, yet she feels like this could be the great love her aunt predicted. She watches as his eyes get clearer, hears his heart beat becoming steady, and after that he stirs. His free hand goes to her petting hand, he presses it hard and say:

– Jupiter, thank you.
– It’s okay Caine. Take your time. You gave us quite the scare, never let it get this bad again. Her voice and smell are sincere… and affectionate? Then she murmurs in his ear, for him only: When you need touch simply tell me “kozha” it’s Russian for skin, I will understand, and no-one else will.

Caine nods. The code word works for him. He is very private.

Stinger and Kiza are visibly relieved, but they do not say a word. This is Lycantant business, and splices try to keep to their own kind for that sort of things. They stay bundled up for a minute or two and after that Caine feels strong enough to continue.

– I think I’m good now, he says.
– Okay, she says, lifting her head, but tell me if it changes.

They get settled, Caine closes his shirt, Jupiter turns back around and they press on to the
as they crawl, she can feel Caine’s hand brush up against her ankles and calves every few steps so she picks up the pace. They get out of the conduit and they stand up. There is light in the room, so Jupiter turns off her flashlight. They are all so grimy, but happy and relieved too. They all hug each other and after that Jupiter keeps an arm around Caine’s waist.

Stinger spots a terminal and looks at the Ministry’s maintenance schematic. There is a maintenance elevator, two doors down and it goes to every level. Getting to the elevator is easy, no door is locked and there is no one alive around the maintenance area. The elevator looks like something steampunk, which at this point does not surprises Jupiter anymore. The floor indicator says that they are on level sub 25, and the ship is on level 25. Stinger flips a lever until it is on 25, then cranks another one and the elevator starts to move. Sub 25 to 25, that is a long way up and about half way Caine murmurs “kozha” at Jupiter. She hugs him, hard all the rest of the way. When they reach level 25, he says “This might make it easier”, like back in Chicago, and grabs her in his arms.

The doors open and they get to the ship without any problem.

To say that Captain Tsing is relieved to see them well, especially with how dirty they are, is an understatement. She immediately starts giving orders.

– Her Majesty and escort are on board. Close the hatch, retract the ramp and decouple.

Captain Tsing turns to Jupiter.

– Your Majesty, are you, all right? She asks. What happened?
– I’m fine, Captain, she says. Nothing a shower, a meal and sleep won’t fix. We were ambushed in sub 33, but Mr. Wise detected their approach and we escaped through the maintenance bot conduit.
– That explains a lot, says Captain Tsing. Your Majesty, would you like a meal sent to your cabin?
– Yes, please, and for Mr. Wise too.
– Actually, yes. Erm. Mr. Wise, could you put me down a moment, but help me stand.

Caine put Jupiter down on her feet but keeps an arm around her to “help her stand”.

– I have these sheaves to file, she looks through her pack of sheaves for the right ones. Do you have someone on board who could do that for me?
– Yes, my communication’s officer, Gemma Chatterjee. She points to an android woman.

Jupiter hands her the sheaves and thanks her. She gets the sheave for her royal guard appointment out and asks:

– And, where do I go to find a Legion administrator?
– Your Majesty, as your Chief of Security, I can do that for you, says Stinger.
– Ok, great, thanks Stinger. But do get cleaned up and rest first.

She hugs him then Kiza.

– Thanks for all your help Kiza.
– Your Majesty.
– And now, if you’ll excuse me, I will retire to my cabin. Mr. Wise?

Caine picks her back up in his arms.
– You Majesty, where do we go now? Asks Captain Tsing.
– Where ever Mr. Apini wants to go to file that Royal Guard sheave.
– Legion outpost # 632 in the Outer Arm. No one would think of looking there for Her Majesty, it is out of the way and I have a friend there, says Stinger.
Private time

Chapter Summary

Revelations and universe turned upside down. Jupiter and Caine get to know each other.

On that, Caine walks out with Jupiter in his arms. They get to her cabin at the same time as the ordered meal. The officer sets it up on the cabin’s small table and gets out on a “Your Majesty”.

– All right, Caine, how do you want to do that? Are you good enough to get cleaned up first?
– I am not sure, Your Majesty. I have never been through this before.
– It’s only Jupiter now. She says. Let’s try for you to put me down first.

Caine put her down, and the hole in the chest feeling he had back in Chicago returns, but it is not unbearable.

– How do you feel? Asks Jupiter. Steady enough to go clean up real fast?
– Well, maybe if you stay close? He says uncertain.
– Okay, how close is close?
– I am not sure.
– Ok, well, we’ll test it out. Let’s get what we need ready and go clean up.
– As you wish.

That sounded so “Princess Bride” to Jupiter and it made her belly flutter and her cheeks blush. Caine smells a burst of something red and gives her an inquiring look.

– What? He asks.

She shakes her head. Now was not the time to indulge in such thoughts. Besides he must not know the movie.

– Sorry, that is a quote from a movie and it means something else. Had to remind myself you do not know Earth movies.
– You will have to introduce me to it, then.
– Sure. She says, blushing again.

They gather each a change of clothes and head to the ‘fresher room.

“You go first” she tells Caine. “At least if he passes out while it is my turn, he will be clothed.” She thinks. It turns out that the most distance he tolerated between them was about 6 feet. Which was right in the door frame. She stood there, her back turned, trying not to imagine him naked, it was hard, so she started to count to ten in Russian, over and over again, to keep her heart beat steady. She had the time to count to ten, ten times.

– Jupiter?
– Yes?
– I’m done. Your turn.

Jupiter turns around. Caine is clean and has only his uniform pants on. She blushes, he is really hot. She has to clear her throat before speaking.
– Oh, okay. Are you good?
– Not for much longer, please hurry.
– Okay.

Caine turns around and gets away from her as much as he can, it is less than before, he has to be inside the ‘fresher room. It hurts inside not to touch her. He wants to crawl inside her skin. He feels so good when he touches her, like he is not some misbred error. When she looks at him with her big green eyes, he feels accepted just as he is. And the way that she blushed on a regular basis makes him think that maybe, just maybe, she will accept that the bonding is permanent and not send him away. He thinks back to when he regained consciousness in the conduit, the closeness of her, her wonderful scent it was so perfect and… intimate?

Jupiter is done getting cleaned and dressed in two minutes. She put on some Aegis uniform, without the jacket, it really flatters her figure. She brushes her hair quickly and redo her ponytail. She sees that Caine is getting twitchy again so she walks over and places her hand on his shoulder.

– Caine?
– “Kozha” he whispers.
– Yeah, I figured. Come here. She says opening her arms.

He turns around and she closes her arms around him. He breathes a sigh of relief and closes his arms around her. This is even better than in the conduit and normally he should not even be allowed to touch an Entitled, even less a Queen, and she is here hugging him. Him! This is so upside down and yet it feels perfect.

– It’s okay, Caine. We’ll figure this out. She says.

They stay like this a few minutes, breathing, touching and listening to each other’s heartbeat, until there is a chime at the door. They let go of each other reluctantly and get out of the ‘fresher room.

– Come in, says Jupiter.

It’s officer Percadium with portalling pills.

– We will be ready to portal in 20 minutes, Your Majesty. And he hands her the pills with a glass of water.
– Thank you.

Officer Percadium bows and leaves the room. Jupiter swallows the pills and Caine takes the glass and pill container from her to place them in the recycling.

– Are you hungry? She asks. Because I am famished.
– Starving. He replies.
– Let’s bring the table to the window seat, so we can sit together and not have you pass out or something. I don’t want to re-live that. That was scary.

Caine nods. He does not want to re-live that either.

They sit together and eat in silence, arms brushing against each other. After they are done eating, Jupiter sits back with her legs stretch out and tries to organize all the questions she has for him.

– Before we start talking, are you okay right now, or do you need more “kozha”? 

He looks at her with eyes like a puppy to whom you’ve offered a surprise treat and he lets out a little
whimper. Jupiter smiles, looks him in the eyes and murmurs “Go ahead”. That sends a shiver down Caine’s back, he closes his eyes, takes a deep breath and let instinct take over. He ends ups on his knees at her side, breathing in her scent behind her ear. After another whimper, he curls up along her legs, with his head on her laps and his arms around her legs.

The lights dim and her stomach twist, they have portalled to the Legion outpost.

Jupiter places one hand on his shoulder and feels the deep trembling in his muscles. He must have waited too long again. He seems to be holding on to her for dear life. She starts petting his hair with her other hand and repeat the same soothing words she used in the maintenance conduit: “I’m here. It’s okay. I am not going anywhere. You’ll be fine. I’m new at this, but I want to do it right. If you can, tell me what you need.”

Caine was not unconscious, merely following his instinct. Holding on to her felt so good, felt right. The pain in his chest had gone, the torment in his head vanished and her scent was so relaxing. He felt like he belonged, like he was finally home after searching for it all of his life. Pack! She is pack! Then he heard her soothing words, he did not want her to worry. She has a human nose, she can’t smell is contentment, his relief, his peace. He has to speak.

– Jupiter, I’m okay. I just need some time, then I’ll explain.
– Okay, my big “shchenok”. Take your time.

She continues petting his hair and rubs his shoulder with her other hand. After 15 minutes, his grip loosens on her legs.

– Better? She asks.
– Yes. I can think clearly enough to talk now.
– What just happened?
– An un-bonded Lycantant has an un-balance body and brain chemistry. It’s what provoke the twitching and shaking. The bonding process fixes that, but the body needs time to adjust. It will get worse before it gets better.
– Okay, I guess, this is a good time to get to know each other a little better then. I have a few questions for you and I am sure you would like to know to whom you are bonding.
– I am very curious about the counting to ten in Russian, actually.
– Oh, that is an acquired habit. When I was a small child, my mother and I have had to hide from the authorities a few times. It was always in small, cramped and dark places. She would count to ten in Russian in my ear to keep me quiet and calm. As I grew up, I started to do the counting myself and as a teen when I have had to hide by myself, I kept counting. Now I do it without even realizing it, when I have to keep calm.
– Why would you have to hide from the authorities? He asks.
– Because we are illegal aliens. She replies without thinking.
– You are not from Earth? I thought you had no knowledge of the ‘verse…
– What? Why would you think I am not from Earth?
– You said “alien”.

She huffs a laugh.

– Oh, no, that is what they call illegal immigrants in the United States. Not alien “from another planet”, alien “from another country”.
– That is confusing. But it could be the translation.
– Maybe I should have started with the story of my life.
– That sounds interesting, he says.
– Okay, let’s see. My parents met in Russia, that is a country. My father was an English astronomer
named Maximillian Jones. My mother, Aleksa Bolotnikov, is Russian and she taught Mathematics at the University in St. Petersburg. They fell in love and got married. Russia was plagued with a lot of civil unrest at the time. When my mother was pregnant with me, people broke into their house, robbed them and murdered my father.

– I am sorry about your father. He says, not knowing what else to say.
– Thank you. He would have been amazed by all this. He loved the stars. The last thing he had told my mother was that he wanted to name me Jupiter, after the biggest and his favorite planet in our solar system.
– Is Jupiter not a common name then?
– No, I’ve never heard of anyone else named Jupiter, except the original one. The planet was actually named after the roman mythological god of the sky and thunder and king of the gods. All our planets were named after roman deities.
– King of the gods and Queen of the ‘verse. Powerful name. For an amazing and powerful woman, he thinks.
– After that, my mother did not feel safe in Russia, she and her sister Nino immigrated illegally to the United States, so I could have a better life. They stowed away on a cargo ship, and it’s there that I was born, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, in a cargo container, not belonging to any country. For almost 23 years we have been living with my cousin, as illegals. Sleeping in the dusty basement in the same cramped space as my mother and aunt and earning my keep since I was old enough to manage a bucket and clean a toilet. That is actually what I do for a living, cleaning toilets for rich people. Anyway, being illegals means to always be careful not to attract attention of the authorities. My mother and aunt would get deported back to Russia, as for me, I do not know, they would probably deport me to Russia too, but since I was not born there, I do not belong there either, it would end up being a messy paperwork situation if not a jail situation.
– I understand now. That explains your quick thinking at the Hall of Titles.
– Before this – she puts her sigil in front his eyes – I only had fake identification papers, fake identification cards. I did not belong anywhere on Earth, and now the freakin’ whole planet belongs to me. It’s hard to wrap my head around.
– Maybe it just means that Her Majesty’s future is different then the one that was planned for her.

She bites her bottom lip, suppressing a shiver at her title. When he says it, it gives her butterflies, that is crazy, she has known him for two days.

– Yesterday, she continues, I was a broke illegal housemaid from a backwater world, today I am Queen of I don’t even know how much… but I am still the same me, what I am, does not change who I am.
– If Your Majesty says so.

She can not manage to suppress the shiver this time and Caine squeezes her legs lightly, but neither of them says anything. The emotional situation is too confused right now. She takes a deep breath and counts to ten in Russian in her head… three time, because she needs to be calm and the next part will be harder to discuss and takes the plunge.

– Speaking of what I am, there is this new part of me, that I have not a clue what it means or what to do with it, except that so far you need me as a cuddle buddy to live. I know you did not ask for this and from what Stinger told me, it seems to be pretty rare and I did not understand the meaning of everything he told me when you were dying… So now is your time to talk.
– I don’t know where to start, I don’t know what Stinger told you…
– Forget that Stinger told me anything. It’s all a jumble for me, remember I have the knowledge of a tersie. I don’t even know what a Lycantant is except for pointed ears and fangs and what you told me back in Chicago. I’ll let you get your thoughts in order, speak when you are ready.

Caine starts to think. He can not spring the permanent thing first, neither how messed up he really is.
Maybe explaining how it is supposed to be…

– Lycanthant are genomgineered soldiers, bred for the Legion. We have enhanced sense of smell, taste, hearing and night vision. Lycan are an animal wolf-like from a planet in another galaxy. Like other splices, we are bred in artificial womb, called gestators. Gestators for Lycanthant are huge because we are bred in litters of 30 pups. After we are separated from the gestator, companions take care of us.
  – How mature are you when that happens? Must not be tiny babies?
  – If I have to compare to human development, I’d say about 4 years old.
  – Oh, she murmurs.
  – In the first 3 growth cycle – 60 days each – they let us sort ourselves out between alpha and betas and bond together as a pack. Then the splicer culls the weakest five from the pack and we are sent to pre-military training. Well, that is what is supposed to happen.
  – How much do you grow up in the growth cycle?
  – In human term about 2 years per cycle.

Sent to military school when you are physically 10, but actually less that a year old… how sad. No childhood. She thinks.

– What happens to the culled ones? And why five?
– The culled pups are place in isolation room and if they survive the severance shock, they are sold to the legion as single unit, like other kinds of splices, instead of a full unit of 25.

She can imagine it, a bunch of 10 years old alone in small room, going into shock and dying. That made her sick to her stomach. Maybe they should have talked before they ate.

– Unit of 25, like the royal guards Stinger is going to file for me…
  – Yes.
  – But why not breed you in litter of 25, why so much death?
  – Because they need backup. The Legion won’t buy a unit of 24, if a litter of 25 happened to have an anomaly or a pup dies, etc. they would have to put them all through severance shock and sell the survivors below market value. Solo lycantants are worth a lot less then what it cost to create them.

Sold at a loss, Stinger had said, now she understood, and it made her angry. Without realising it, she was counting again. “Odin, dva, tri, chetyre, pyat’, shest’, sem’, vosem’, devyat’, desyat”.

Caine recognized the sequence and his nose told him that she was furious, the soft rain smell had thunder in it, the hot beverage was boiling and the sunset was blazing. She still smelled good, but also powerful, like the mythological god of thunder she spoke about. He counted ten sequence, like in the conduit, and by the end, the power he felt from her had rolled back to a simmer.

– Sorry about that, she says. The disregard for life is not something I am used too, and not something I ever want to get used too. Can you send a message to Stinger for me?
  – Yes, Your Majesty.
  – Tell him that I want a unit made of solo splices, humans and androids or what ever, please. If he asks why, tell him I can not condone the way pack-bond units are made.

Caine nods and taps his comm implant and send a coded notification to Stinger. Stinger connects immediately.

[You okay pup?]
  – Yes, Stinger. Relaying a message for Her Majesty.
[What is it?]
  – Her Majesty request that her royal guards be a mixed unit.
– Why is that?
– Her Majesty can not condone the way pack-bond units are made.
– Learned about that from you, did she.
– Yes.
– Well, tell Her Majesty, it will be done has she requested.
– Thanks, Stinger. He cuts the communication by tapping his implant. It is done, Your Majesty.
– Thanks Caine. Now back to where we were. What happened with you and your litter?
– We were 31 in my litter.
– 31? How come?
– I am a runt. It is very rare. While in the gestator, the genetic material of the pups can mix, and if it is early enough in the process, while there are still undifferentiated cells, the cells mix and create a new pup. Since my genetic coding was not processed like the others they say I have defective engineering. For starters, real Lycantant are much taller and darker then me. I was culled from my pack at the first growth cycle, because they rejected me. Put in an isolation room, alone. I thought I would die, especially when the twitches started. But I did not, and when I was the same size as the others, I was sold to the Legion as a solo. They say I am an Omega, because I did not bond with my pack. I am simply an engineering error, a miscalculation of the gestator.

Jupiter has a very logical, mathematical mind, thanks to her mother, and she can see through all the lies he has been told. The lifetime of conditioning. “The whole is greater then the sum of it’s parts.” circles in her head. His parts came from 30 other pups, and in that 30, there was an alpha. If he got alpha parts, he is no omega – non-bonded beta –, he is an Alpha, or rather Alpha-Beta hybrid. He could not bond with his pack, because of that, and the Betas could not bond with him, because he is part Beta. An Alpha without a pack, no one to lead, no one to care for, no one to protect, no one to defend. And a Beta with no one to lead him, protect him, care for him. No one until her.

The second par of her, the one that loves the stars like her father, remembers the prediction her aunt Nino had made at her birth. Jupiter in ascension, she was meant for great things and a great love. Advocate Bob had said, “ascension process”. This was so freaky. The idea blooming in her mind gave her shivers and made her gasp. Could Caine be the great love predicted? She felt connected and secure with him right from the start. Love takes two, like binary stars who orbit each other. And the brightest star in the night was Sirius, the Dog Star, a binary star. That was way too much signs and coincidences.

He might not be ready for this bomb of information but she will have to share it.
– I’d rather think of it as a miracle, she murmurs with emotion.

He is taken aback by her words, he never thought about it that way. All his life he has been told he was not good enough, an error or defective. She sees him as a miracle? And what was that smell she ebbed from time to time? Not permanent yet, but part of her.
– Or maybe even destiny.
– Destiny?
– Mmm… Are you ok to sit? She asks.
– Yes, if I can still touch you.
– Yeah that’s ok.

Caine slowly let’s go of Jupiter’s legs, and gets to his knees. Jupiter sigh a little – he is heavy –, shakes her legs and then sits cross-legged. When she is comfortable, Caine sit half cross-legged, with his left leg in front of her knees.

She pulls out her smartphone and ask him. How old are you, to the day?
– I do not know by your calendar. I am 20 standard years old and, erm, 20 days.
– And how long is a standard year?
– A standard year is an Orous orbit, of 400 days, of 25 of your hours.

Jupiter starts calculating stuff on her phone. It’s her birthday in 10 days, so that makes her about 201,240 hours old. And that makes Caine about 200,500 hours old. He is about 740 hours younger then her, so about a month in Earth calendar.

– And how long are you in the gestators for?
– A gestator growth cycle is 30 standard days.
– That sounds like about a month. She mumbles.

30 x 25: 750 hours. Destiny! Nino was right! He even has her name branded on his neck.

– Ok, I don’t think you are ready for this, it might be confusing, it goes against what you have been told, but it is the only logical way to see it. They told you, you are an Omega, but I don’t believe it is true. Like a human child, you were created with randomized characteristics, but rather then have the genes from 2 parents, you have the DNA of the 30 family members from your litter in you. One of these family members was coded to be an Alpha and the rest to be Betas. Are you following?
– I am not sure…
– You could not bond with the Alpha in your litter, because you are an Alpha, and the Betas could not bond with you, because you are also a Beta. You are an Alpha-Beta hybrid. No one ever considered this, because it does not exist in the wild. But it is the only logical explanation since you were made from Alpha and Beta DNA.

While she explained, Caine changed position, back to his kneeling, with his forehead on her left knee.

– How can Your Majesty be so sure, if I’m bonding with you?

He sits back half cross-legged as he was before.

– That is actually the miraculous destiny of it all. And even for me it is so miraculous I can scarcely believe it, but I do. There are too many coincidences for it all to be a coincidence. We were always meant to meet and bond, Caine.

She pauses. He looks at her patiently.

– Do you know what this means? She asks while touching the brand on his neck.

When she places her finger on his brand, it sends a shiver like an electric shock through his entire body. The skin was always sensitive there, but this was like nothing he ever felt. His instinct was telling him to grab on and never let her go.

– It’s, hum… something the splicer had to put together in a rush, because she could not use the same one as the rest of my litter.
– Hum… First coincidence for you, there is my name in it.
– You mean I am branded with your name?

His heart is pounding in his chest and he struggles to keep his breath even.

– Not just my name, but your destiny if you are willing to believe it. The first half is the symbol for Jupiter and since the second half is the Jupiter symbol mirrored, it means it’s equal and opposite. And the rectangle around means together. From my perspective, it means “Jupiter and the one who is her
equal and opposite, together.” And since it is on you, it means that you are my equal and opposite, like two hands are both equal and opposite.

How could he be the equal of a Queen? Even if it felt right, it does not mean that it is right.

– But I’m a splice…he tries to evade the idea.
– And I’m an illegal housemaid who cleans toilets. She interrupts.

Caine ducks his head.

– I did not tell you this part of my story earlier, so listen closely. After I was born, my Aunt Nino took me under the stars to read my future. In the sky that night Jupiter – the planet – was in ascension, which told her that there were great things for me in my future and also a great man. I never believed this prophecy until this Jupiter – she places a hand on her chest – had to go through the ascension process. And I believe that you are that great man predicted by the stars.
– But I am not a man…

He tries to evade again. It is all too much.
She puts a finger on his lips.
Oh, the taste of her… *Control yourself, pup.* His commander’s voice says in his head.

– Laws might say otherwise, but laws are not always right. You are a man, she tells him. That extra DNA you possess does not make you less, it makes you more, you are a super man.

She pauses for a moment at the unintended pun. Superman, and he can fly. When did this turn in a super hero movie? Of course, Caine does not react, no knowledge of Earth movie.

– Do you know what else happened on the day of my birth?
– No? That sounded like a question.
– Second coincidence, the day of my birth, the day the stars told my aunt that there was a great man in my future, according to my calculations, is the day you were created in the gestator.

He is baffled. He wants to bolt out and crash into her at the same time. He settles on staying put but closing his eyes.
Jupiter closes her eyes too and speaks softly as though she is telling an immense secret.

– My favorite star in the Earth sky is Sirius, it is the brightest star in the night, and it is commonly named the Dog Star, because it is located in what we call the Canis Major or Great Dog constellation. Canis is also the scientific term for wolves and other canine mammals. To the naked eye it looks like one star, but when looked at closer, it is a binary star system. Two stars orbiting one another.

He wonders why she is speaking about stars suddenly but does not interrupt.

– I believe we are meant to be like Sirius, binary, both part of the same system, both equal and opposite, strong where the other one is weak, meant the be the brightest star in the darkness, meant for greatness together, or failure apart.

Jupiter opens her eyes and shuffles to her knees. The movement made Caine open his eyes too. She takes his hands in hers, looks him in the eyes and says with all the conviction in her heart, and the beginning of love:

– Caine, you never were an error, you are not defective, you are special, the universe made you for me, to be exactly what I need. And that is why you were always meant to bond with me. As you lead me and protect me in this new universe where I discover *what* I am and what I can do, as
promised by the stars, I am here to lead you and protect you while you discover who you are, all the worth and greatness you possess that this same universe has crushed and wants to rip from you.

Caine’s eyes are wide open and Jupiter is almost certain she sees tears forming in them when he closes them. Yeah, he was not ready for such a bomb of information to drop on him like that. At least she managed to keep the part about love to herself.

Caine is not sure he believes everything she said, but there is relief mixed in there too, because if she believes everything she just said, she will not send him away if he tells her the bonding is permanent. Before he manages to find the words to tell her, she speaks again.

– Listen, I know this must feel like a bomb exploded and ripped you to pieces. It is not easy to have your world, or universe, turned upside down and inside out. I know you probably want to bolt out of here to go clear your mind and maybe punch or shoot something to do it but that you can’t leave me right now. So, I will just lie down and rest and let you process all of this.

Jupiter unties her hair and lays down on her back on the window seat, head in the middle where she was seated and closes her eyes to give him as much privacy as she can, considering the situation. There is no more contact between them and Caine feels it sharply. He wants to bundle up with her so badly. The memory of the maintenance conduit surfaces and he lies on his back, his head beside Jupiter’s, and his feet in the opposite direction.

Jupiter felt him move and when he murmured “kozha” she opened her eyes. Seeing how he is installed, she smiles. She turns on her side, places her head on his shoulder, left arm alongside his torso and right hand in his hair.

– Jupiter, he says.
– Mmm? She is half-asleep.
– There is one more thing I have to tell you.
– What is that?
– Because you are not a Lycantant, you do not have the ability to sever the bond like a Lycantant Alpha.
– So, this is permanent? Like for life?
– Yes. He says with apprehension.
– Good, she mumbles while squeezing him as much as she can in this position, then snuggles in his shoulder like a pillow, and falls asleep.

He is happily surprised by her answer. She will not send him away. He breathes her in: soft rain, hot beverage, sunset on the beach and that new smell... something red and... spicy. He does not know what it is but he likes it. He likes, he likes... her. It dawns on him that it is not only the bonding process that makes him want to be close to her, touch her, smell her, but also the fact that he genuinely likes her and he finds her attractive. A Queen and a Splice, how would that even work. Control yourself, pup. Stinger’s voice in his head says again. I should get some rest too, he thinks. So, he falls asleep and, in his dreams, he wraps his Queen in his wings on a beach at sunset.
They both wake up two hours later when an alarm sounds in the ship. In 20 seconds Caine is up, with his boots on and putting on a shirt. Skyjackers shirts open to the side and the shoulders and have slits in the back for the wings. He passes one wing through, then the second one and wraps the shirt in front of him.

– What is going on? She asks.
– No idea. But an alarm rarely means good things.
– Right, she mumbles.

She gets up and fasten her hair in her ponytail and put some Aegis boots on. Realizing they are not touching and further away from each other then they have been in a while, she asks:

– Are you okay?
– Yes, I should be fine for a few hours, Jupiter.
– Ok, let’s go find out what is going on then.

Caine opens the door and they end up face to face with Stinger.

– Stinger! You’re back! Says Jupiter. Then she hugs him.
– Yes, Your Majesty. I was, erm, coming to report.
– Oh, okay, well report captain.

Caine smirks. Stinger enters the cabin, salutes with a fist to his chest, then places his hands behind his back.

– Your majesty, your mixed royal guard’s unit has been requested. Delivery time is 7 standard days, I have directed them to Earth, because you have not chosen a main living location yet. The rest of your personal guards, will be joining us here by tomorrow. Finally, Titus Abrasax’s royal clipper has just portalled in the system and should be in range in 45 minutes. They have signaled their intention. His lordship is requesting an audience with Your Majesty.
– Thank you, captain. Why the alarm?
– We do not know how they got our location, and if they did, others might have also. It is best to be prepared.
– Yellow alert, she whispers.

Caine wonders what a yellow alert is, and file it under Earth culture.

– It would be safer if you were to remains in your cabin, Your Majesty. Adds Stinger.
– All right, you’re dismissed.
– Majesty? Say Stinger and Caine.
– Another thing to put on the list… Kiza and I will have to introduce you guys to Star Trek. “You’re dismissed” is lingo for “You can go back to your duties”.

At the relief she can read on their faces she adds:

– Don’t worry, I am not about to fire or sell you or anything of the sort. I need you guys. She smiles at them. And don’t be afraid to ask questions or tell me if I am doing something wrong for this universe. Remember, two days ago I was cleaning toilets in Chicago.
– Aye, says Stinger.
– And now I will go brush up on my Code of conducts and my royal ways. Before the showdown
with my gene-son who probably still wishes I was dead.

Stinger bows and leaves the cabin.

Jupiter picks up her sheaves and sits down on the window seat.
– Caine?
– Yes, Your Majesty?
– You should enjoy your momentary freedom, while you can.
– Protocol dictates that a personal guard must stay with you at all times, unless you are in your private quarters, Your Majesty, says Caine.
– Forget protocol for a moment, is there anything you would like to go do? Have a talk with Stinger maybe? No wait, with Kiza!
– How can you tell?
– Second opinion from family member always helps, she says. And you two acts like my cousins Mikka and Moltka. Stinger and Kiza may not be pack or blood family, but they are family of your heart.

Caine ducks his head.
– Do I have permission to talk about everything? He asks.
– If you trust her not to repeat it, yes.
– Okay, I will go, if Stinger stays with you.
– Fine, check if Stinger is out there – she points at the door, if not call him for me.

Caine opens the door and Stinger right there guarding her door.
– Stinger, come back in. I’m sending Caine out for moment. He needs the break.
– Aye, Majesty.

Stingers enters the cabin and Caine bows and leaves. The door closes and Stinger assumes guard position by the door.
– You can sit Stinger.
– Majesty?
– Okay, first rule, in here, it’s Jupiter. Now relax and sit. I don’t like getting pain in my neck when I talk to people.
– Aye.

Stinger sits on a bench that looks like a square box.
– So, anything you want to ask me? Jupiter asks.

Stinger rubs his neck and his brand. A nervous tic.
– Why did you request the Skybreakers for your personal guards?
– Because while I am his pack, you are his family. And you protect family. He is like a son to you, and a brother to Kiza, right?
– Aye.
– I could see it back at Kiza’s house. And in Med-Bay you were worried for him, more then a commanding officer would be. I don’t think he would let anyone else call him pup… And you told me to ask for him as my personal guard, because you wanted him to live and to be protected.
– He has had so little his whole life, at least I have Kiza.
– Back in the Commonwealth, I skimmed the Legion information sheave, and I understood the
sacrifice you were willing to make for him to live. I could not allow the closest thing he has to a father to give up his career and risk being sold, not knowing to whom and if you could even still see your daughter with a new owner. And I could have asked for you personally too, but that would still leave the rest of your team in the same situation, and that was also unacceptable to me. Kiza also explained to me that if I bought you all – even if buying people makes me sick to my stomach – you would have to give up your wings…

She can see Stinger is about to interject that Splice are tools and raises her hand in a stop sign.

– And before you tell me Splices are not people, let me tell you, to me you are all people, and will always be people, with as much rights as I can legally offer you all. I may not be able to give you freedom, even if I want too, but I will not treat you like tools or property. As I said to Caine, the extra DNA you possess does not make you less, it makes you more. I may not be able to change things for every Splice, at least not right away, but I can damn well make a difference for my pack’s family, friends and team. And for all those I am sure I inherited from Seraphi.

Stingers has his jaw hanging, again, this Queen is so unEntitled. It shakes everything he knows. Fairness, equality, respect, humanity, these are all fantasies for a splice, and yet she offers them willingly, with generosity, expecting nothing in return. It must show in his face or body language, because she adds:

– Well, looks like I have turned your world upside down too. I’ll let you think about it, I have to study these things. She shows the sheaves and starts studying.

Stinger closes his mouth and lets her study. And he thinks.

A few doors down the corridor, Caine rings at Kiza’s door.

– Caine! Looks like Her Majesty as put some life back into you! Exclaims Kiza.
– Yes and no. It’s complicated. She sent me to talk with you, to have your opinion.
– She is smart, I’ll give her that. Come on in, sit down. So, what did she say?

Caine slowly sits on a bench.

– She thinks I am an Alpha-Beta hybrid because I was made from the genes of my litter mates.
– Alpha-Beta hybrid? I’ve never heard of that, but I am not a splicer or gene-specialist. I wonder what the gene-probe would show though. Want me to test you?
– Please, I have to know.

Kiza grabs her gene-probe and test Caine, and the color indicator goes crazy, it goes from white to red, to blue, flashes black and settles on purple. Kiza has never seen purple.

– It’s purple, Caine.
– What does that mean?
– I have no idea. I’ve never seen purple.

She taps the indicator to have more information.

“The color coding is as follow:

Green – Royalty
Yellow – Entitled
White – Pure human
Black – Error
Other colors are for splices; Red – Alpha
Blue – Beta
Orange – Omega
Colors can mix for hybrids
Orange-red – Alpha-Omega hybrid
Brown – Beta-Omega hybrid
Purple – Alpha-Beta hybrid”

– Erm, Caine, she was right, purple is Alpha-Beta hybrid, look.

Caine looks at the information relayed on the gene-probe screen. He feels dizzy, he closes his eyes, if she was right about this, is she right about it all?

– What else did she say?
– I’ll resume everything, just listen. She said I was meant for her. She did calculations and according to her I started to exist in the gestator the day she was born. At her birth, her aunt read her future in the stars and it said that there would be great things and a great man in it. She thinks I am that man. My brand means “Jupiter and the one who is her equal and opposite, together.” She thinks the universe or destiny made me for her. That we are a binary system, like Sirius her favorite star in the Earth sky. She thinks of me as her equal… She said…she said… I’m a… m-miracle…

His last words we barely more then a whisper.

– She must be right, Kiza whispers.

Caine looks at Kiza like he can’t believe that she believes everything he just said.

– What?
– It’s too many signs and coincidences, nothing this perfect is a random occurrence. To quote a famous detective in Earth literature “Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.”
– But how can a Splice be the equal to a Queen?
– Haven’t you heard what she said? Or maybe you heard but did not understand… To Earthlings equality is basic. Everyone is equal. If it was a regular Entitled I would not believe them, but Her Majesty is an Earthling. She sees us as people, Caine, not tools or property, people. She talks with us as people! That is why she requested the Skybreakers for her personal guards.
– What?
– She did not want dad and the rest of them to be sold off if she requested you for her personal guard, as dad had told her to do. She was actually appalled by the idea of them being sold. Dad was willing to sacrifice himself and the team for you to live and be protected, and she could not allow that. She wanted to protect all of you. She cares for us as people. That is what we were talking about in Russian back in the lines.

Caine has his jaw hanging. Slowly all he has learned is melting something inside him. He feels a warmth in his chest that was not there before.

– Do you like her?
– “Like” is not strong enough, she is “home” to me, it’s like I have been missing part of myself all my life and I found it in her. I don’t even think “pack” is strong enough…

He pauses.

– Kiza, I have dreamt about her…
Kiza knows about Caine’s dreams, dreams of blood, battle and death. He never told anyone else but her. Blood, battle and death was all his life, but now he dreamt about Jupiter. She wonders.

– Did she tell you any information about the positions of the stars at her birth?
– Only that the planet Jupiter was in ascension.

Kiza’s jaw is now hanging. Then she places a hand on her mouth. As Earth Marshall, she has studied a lot of it’s culture, and astrology is amongst what she studied. Jupiter in ascension, great man, yes, but mostly great love. Could she love Caine? Her binary stars analogy could be interpreted like that…

– That means more then simply a great future and a great man…
– What does it mean?
– I don’t think you are ready for that… and if she did not tell you, she must feel the same. It is not my place to tell you, but it is nothing bad, quite the opposite. Did you tell her about the bond being permanent?
– Yes.
– And what did she say?
– “Good” and then hugged me.

Kiza has a huge grin on her face, she gets up and bolts to the door.

– I have to go talk to her!

Caine follows Kiza back to Jupiter’s cabin.

When she rings the door, Stinger answers.

– Hey dad, does Her Majesty have time for me? Asks Kiza.
– Could we talk in private, Your Majesty? Says Kiza.
– Sure. Stinger, what is the protocol here? You can guard me from outside the door, right?
– Protocol says we must be at least two guards for that, Jupiter. With Caine here, we can do that.
– All right then, “you’re dismissed” she says with a wink and a smile.

Kiza snorts a laugh.

Stinger salutes and leaves the cabin.

---Outside the cabin---

Stinger looks at Caine closely.

– You okay, pup?
– Getting there. I have learned a few things that, how did she put it, turned my world upside down and inside out.
– Aye, Her Majesty did that a little to me too. She is so unEntitled… What did you learn?
– Let’s see, I am not an Omega, I am an Alpha-Beta hybrid. Her Majesty deduced it, and Kiza confirmed it with a gene-probe. It was purple…
– Never heard of that before!
– Neither did Kiza or I.
– So, you can’t bond with an Alpha because you are one and Betas can’t bond to you because you
are one too. How can you bond with Her Majesty?
– Because the universe created me for her… That is what she said. I was created in the gestator the
day of her birth, when the stars predicted that there would be great things and a great man in her
future. She thinks I am that great man. Also, my brand means “Jupiter and the one who is her equal
and opposite, together.” She says we are like a binary star system, meant for greatness together. I
don’t comprehend it all. She is pack, that I know in my body, but it feels like more then that, I don’t
know how or why, but she feels like “home”, Stinger.

Stinger knows what “home” feels like, he had that once, long ago, with his queen-bee, Kiza’s
mother. That must be what Kiza wanted to talk about with Jupiter.

– And she knows the bond is permanent?
– Yes, she said “good” then hugged me.
– That’s good, pup. She is one good Queen, she will do right by you.
– And Kiza told me what you were willing to do to save me. Thanks, Sting.
– Don’t mention it.

---Inside the cabin---

Kiza shuts the door and sits on a bench, facing Jupiter.
– What did you want to talk about Kiza? Asks Jupiter.
– Your Majesty…
– Stop! First rule, in here, it’s Jupiter.
– Ok, Jupiter.
Kiza switches to Russian.
– Please use Russian, Jupiter, Caine can hear through the door.
– Enhance hearing, right.
– He came to talk to me about…
– Yeah, I know, I sent him to you, I turned his world upside down and inside out, and he looked like
he needed family support to cope.
– That is to put it mildly. I did a gene-probe on him, we are not really supposed to do that… but you
were right, the probe turned to purple, I’ve never seen purple before… but the probe confirmed the
Alpha-Beta hybrid theory you had.
– That is great. But I don’t think that this is why you are here? So, what’s up?

She pauses.

– He told me about Jupiter being in ascension… I know what that means, I have studied Earth
astrology.
– Oh… Did you tell him?
– No, it is not my place. Do you believe he is your predicted great love?
– I think he could be. I felt connected and secure with him from the beginning, and he is very
attractive but it is too soon to tell if it really is love.
– Well, I wanted to tell you, that erm… Caine, erm…
– Just say it Kiza.
– Well, he… He has never loved or been loved, not in that fashion anyway. The only love he has ever
received was from me and my dad. I don’t think he knows what love is supposed to be or feel like.
From what he told me, I think he feels as you do, but he does not know what to name his feelings.
Just thought you should know. Just don’t give up on him.
– Thank you Kiza, you are a good sister to him. I will keep it in mind, I sure don’t want to hurt him.
Switching back to English.
– I should get back to these, says Jupiter showing her sheaves.
– Right.
– Aye, aye, captain, retorts Kiza.

Both of them giggle a little, Kiza stands up to leave and Jupiter stands and hugs her.

– Thank you again, Kiza.
– You’re welcome, Jupiter.

Kiza opens the door, both Stinger and Caine turn around. Right before she leaves, Jupiter stops her.

– Marshall Apini, wait a moment, please.
– Your Majesty?
– Do you have what you need to give the Russian translation package to Caine and Stinger before I meet with Titus?
– Yes, Your Majesty. I can do it right here.
– Make it so.
– Yes, Majesty.

Kiza pulls out a pair of what looked like LED diode and hands one to Caine. They both place them on their comm implant and Kiza performs a data transfer. It takes about 10 seconds. Then Caine removes his diode and hands it to Stinger. The same process happens, and then Kiza stores away the diodes.

– It is done, Your Majesty.
– Great, thank you.

Kiza walks away. The door is still open.

– Stinger, Caine, come in, guys.

They get in the cabin and stand there.

– Sit you guys.

They each sit on a box bench and face her.

– Ok, listen I have crammed as much as I can for now. What I need is intel on Titus. What is he like? What does he like?
– Majesty, talking about Entitled is not permitted for splices… says Stinger.
– Stinger, it’s Jupiter. And I told you, to me you are people, with as much rights as anyone else. Which includes to fill me in on any gossip or intel you have on this scumbag who put a hit on me.

Stinger and Caine both have their mouth open, stunned by her choice of words…

– Close your mouths guys, before a bee flies in. I told you before, I will not let what I am change who I am. And I am Jupiter Jones, daughter of Aleksa Bolotnikov and Maximillian Jones, illegal Russian immigrant, born in a cargo container on a cargo ship in the middle of the ocean, and toilet cleaning housemaid. I love my family, the stars, sci-fi shows, dogs, tulips and American pop music. And as Seraphi Abrasax recurrence I say that anyone who put a hit on that girl is a scumbag whatever they might be.

Jupiter pauses to take a deep breath and Caine and Stinger close their mouth. Stinger swallows there was a lot of new information on his Queen in that speech.
– Sorry about that, it’s my Russian temper.
– It is quite all right, Y-Jupiter. Says Stinger.
– I would say this was more passion than fury. Nothing compared to the blazing fury you controlled when you learned about pack-bond legion unit. Says Caine.
– How did you know I was furious?
– Enhance olfactory senses. I smell body chemicals.
– Oh, when we have time, you’ll have to explain to me how that works… Anyway, back to topic. What do you guys know about Titus Abrasax?
– It is said that he has a harem of pleasure splice and human girls and that he really likes his own appearance. Says Caine.
– And that he squanders his inheritance… he might want money… with your recurrence, he probably lost a few assets and he might be in financial trouble. Adds Stinger.
– Rich playboy, who needs mommy’s help to get him out of a jam… I get the picture. How much time until he gets here?
– Let me get an update, says Stinger.

He taps his comm implant. And connect with Captain Tsing.

[Captain Apini, what can I do for you?]
– Her Majesty would like an update on the ETA for His Lordship’s clipper.
[Ten minutes]
– Thank you, captain.

He taps his comm implant.

– He will be here in ten minutes, Jupiter.
– I don’t want to meet him on his turf to start with. I’ve read in the Royal ways that I am above him, in the Entitled world, so I can make him come to me. I suppose there is a conference room on this ship that would be acceptable for this? Or I could make him meet me in here, she snorts, that would be funny.
– The conference room would be a better idea, says Stinger, you need to project that you are a strong Queen.
– I know, but I would enjoy the laugh. Okay, Stinger, you’re dismissed, go see to that. I’ll freshen up and Caine can escort me there.

Stinger stands and salutes with his fist to his chest.

– Oh, yeah, I wanted to mention that. You don’t have to salute all the time in private guys. Unless it makes you uncomfortable not to do it. I am not too much for formality.
– It is protocol, but also a reflex, Jupiter, says Caine. As you say, force of habit.
– All right. You can do it, just don’t feel obligated to do it in private. Okay, go Stinger, time is ticking.

Stinger nods and leaves the cabin.

– Caine? How are you feeling?
– Physically, fine. In other aspects, not quite sure yet, but a little better.
– They say it takes three days for the world to makes sense again after it’s been turned upside down. Hang in there. It gets better. I know, I’m on day two of my world being turned upside down and blown out of proportions.

Caine ducks his head and has a shy smile. Which makes Jupiter blush a little. “That is freakin’ charming.” She thinks.
– All right, be right back, she says and head for the ‘fresher room.

She is out in two minutes, after cleaning her face and fixing her ponytail. She grabs an Aegis jacket and put it on.

– Ok, I’m ready, let’s go.
**Pre-diner with Titus**

***Meeting Titus***

In the conference room she is greeted by Stinger, Captain Tsing, Phylo Percadium, Gemma Chatterjee and Kiza Apini.

– Your Majesty, we have His Lordship’s Majordomo on the line for you. If you will sit, we can put her call through. Says Captain Tsing.
– His Majordomo? That counts as an insult I believe.
– Yes, Your Majesty answers Gemma Chatterjee.
– Her name?
– Famulus, answers Phylo Percadium.

Jupiter sits at the head of the conference table, Stinger and Caine place themselves at her shoulders and place their wings as high and wide as they can in the conference room.

– All right, “showtime”. Put her through and I’ll act insulted.

The hologram of a woman, most definitely a splice of some sort with long droopy ears, appears on the table.

– Your Majesty, I am Famulus and I was tasked to…

Jupiter raises her hand in a stop motion.

– Miss Famulus, you can tell his Lordship that if he wishes to speak to Her Majesty Jupiter Jones, Queen and First Prime of House Abrasax, signified recurrence of her Majesty Seraphi Abrasax, he can do so by joining me here in person. He has 10 minutes to do so, otherwise I am leaving.

Then she makes a cutting gesture with her hand and the communication is cut off.

– How was that? Insulted enough? Asks Jupiter.
– Actually, that was amazing, says Kiza.
– Very appropriate, adds Captain Tsing.

Caine makes a pleased sound and Stinger a sort of buzz.
Jupiter switches to Russian, so only Kiza, Caine and Stinger can understand her.

– While we wait, Kiza, I was meaning to ask, do you like your Marshal job? She asks.
– It is one of the few jobs available to born splices, Your Majesty.
– Why is that?
– Because we are not engineered for a specific task. So, no one wants us.
– That is so messed up. I was reading the royal ways, and it sounded a lot like medieval time to me. With household, retinue, majordomo and all. And I was thinking, would you want the job? I want someone who knows Earth culture enough to understand what I want and how I want it done, and who would appreciate being treated like a close friend rather then a broken pair of heels, and who might enjoy watching Star Trek with me.

Behind her, Stinger is buzzing a lot.

– Dad, relax! Majesty, that kind of opportunity is never offered to born splices. It is unheard of…
– Does that mean yes? Because I don’t care what anyone says about how it is supposed to be. What
is important is what you want.
– It would be an honor, Your Majesty.
Gemma Chatterjee signals that His Lordship is grav-“beaming” over.
– Great, we’ll hash out the details after his Lordship has left.

– Okay, people, “showtime”.
When Titus Abrasax enters the conference room, Jupiter has to stop herself from laughing. He looks
like an older Moltka and parades around like some of the slimy bastards her cousin Vladie used to set
her up with. She knows how to deal with that kind.
Performing a way too dramatic bow he says:
– Your Majesty, I am Titus Abrasax, third primary of the house of Abrasax, and it is my profound
honor, to meet you.
And he kisses her hand for a second too long. Yeah, slimy type.
– You are aware that since my location was not public knowledge, your arrival here is in violation of
statute 47C-5.
– Your Highness is a quick study of the Entitled code I see.
– I also know that I can file a tax grievance against you unless you tell me how exactly you have
found out about my location.
– I’d be delighted to tell you everything you’d like. Famulus, how did we find Her Majesty’s
location?
– Your brother has had a tracking device placed in Her Majesty back on Earth.
Jupiter hears Caine’s growl and Stinger’s buzz behind her.
– For this information and, since you’ve invoked code and conduct I trust you would do me the
honor of dining with me this evening.
– Very well. Shall we say in four hours?
– Very well, Your Majesty.
He bows again and leave with Famulus.

Once he has left, she says:
– Med-bay, now.
Officer Percadium lead the way and Caine and Stinger follow her. They seem worried and… guilty?
It shows in the way their shoulder and their wings are tight as if they were about to receive a beating.
Okay, she has to address that right away. Officer Percadium leaves them at the door to Med-bay.

– Doctor, Her Majesty needs a scan, we have received information that she is carrying a tracking
device. Says Stinger to Dr. Holojem, a pink haired android.
– If you could lay down on the bed, Your Majesty, says the doctor.

Jupiter gets on the bed and lets the doctor perform scans with tools she does not understand. Stinger
and Caine’s demeanor has worsened with the walk to med-bay and through the scans. And when Dr.
Holojem left her room she was about to say something, but the doctor came back too quickly.

– It is a small tracking device, Your Majesty. About 1 millimeter. It should be flushed out on its own
in time. We can of course disable it.
– How does that work?
– A small pulse with this device will do it.
– Like an EM pulse?
– Yes.
– Okay, one moment.
She takes off her jacket and hands it to Caine.
– Proceed.
Dr. Holojem turns on the device, there is a quick flash and she announces: “It is done.”
– Great, thank you doctor. Caine, Stinger, back to my cabin, we need to talk. And have Kiza meet us there.

***Madam Apini and Majordomo***

In her cabin, she sits on the window seat cross-legged and watches as the three people she now thought of as family sit nervously on square box benches.

– Would you guys relax? Why are you acting like I am about to beat the crap out of you?
– We screwed up, Your- Jupiter. Says Stinger.
– How so? I don’t see how you should have known about something that happened before we even met. Is that an Entitled-Splice thing? Getting blamed for everything that goes wrong?
Kiza snorts a laugh.

– Actually, yes. And some splices have been sold or executed for less. Says Caine.
– That is so messed up. I am not and never will be like that. Caine is pack, and you two are his family, that makes you two family to me too. And you protect family. You don’t beat the crap out of them, sell them or have them executed. You three are valuable to me, and not as property.

She stands and gesture for them to stand too.

She hugs Stinger saying “You are family” and proceed to shock him by grabbing his head giving him the two traditional Russian welcome kisses, one on each cheek. Then she hugs Kiza and says it in Russian “Vy sem'ya.” And gives her the kisses too. When it is Caine’s turn she hugs him and murmurs “You are more then family” and give him the kisses too.

She looks at the three of them standing there shocked. Kiza recovers first.

– Jupiter that is an honor, she says. Dad, Caine, that is the official traditional “welcome to the family” Russian greeting.

Stinger and Caine faces light up with understanding and they place their fist to their chest in salute and bow their heads.

– You are now Bolotnikovs and nothing is more important than family to a Russian, says Jupiter.

She sits backs on the window seat and gesture for them to sit back down.

– Now what I wanted to talk about is Kiza’s job. Who do I have to negotiate with to get her? The Aegis? Do born splices have owners too?
– Born Splices usually belong to the owner of the mother… But if you want to buy me, you can negotiate with dad, he owns me. Says Kiza.
– Is that why you were so tense, Stinger? What are you afraid of?
– If you buy her, Jupiter, and change your mind later on, I would never be able to afford to buy her back. She would go on the market… I could not protect her from… It cost me everything to buy her the first time… I had to sacrifice… a lot.

At that Jupiter can see tears in Kiza and Stinger’s eyes.

– Mom… says Kiza.
– What, you had to sacrifice that much? What is the story here?

Stinger is in too much pain, so Kiza tells the story.

– Before the Legion dad was owned by a pleasure house, along with mom. They like bee-splices in those places. When mom got pregnant, the owner allowed the pregnancy to continue, thinking he would get another splice for his… work. Mom and dad did not want that life for me and when another splice in the house found out that the Legion was buying bee-splices for a special unit, dad took the opportunity to get out of there. With Legion money and his savings, he had enough to buy one of us. Like any mother, she sacrificed herself and made him choose me. It was the only valid choice but it was really hard on dad. You see the bond between a drone and his queen-bee can only be broken by death and we know she is alive because even after 18 years he is drawn to her, all his instincts call on him to find her. He has to fight to stay away. Every. Single. Day.

Caine smells it before she starts counting. The fury is even stronger this time. The rain is a full-on tornado, the hot beverage is boiling so much the cup breaks, the sand on the beach is burnt black and that new red and spicy smell is melting. She counts to ten, ten, no twenty times!

When she is calmer, she asks Stinger:

– What is her name?
– Honey-Bee Apini, his voice is breaking.

After a long pause, Jupiter speaks again.

– Stinger, what if you loan Kiza to me? Does that exist in this messed up system? She asks.
– You would be willing to have a Majordomo on loan? Stinger asks back.
– Of course. I really don’t want to own anyone Stinger. I want to employ people. If I could, I would give you all the ability to own yourselves but I have not found the way to do that, yet.

There is so much implied in that sentence that Stinger has to close his eyes and take a deep breath.

– It would be an honor to loan you my daughter, Your Majesty.

Jupiter places her hand on Stinger’s arm as support for a moment.

– All right, Kiza, let’s see…

She takes a sheave and brings out a Majordomo contract she had been working on. She fills out a few missing info and hands it to her. Kiza reads the sheave and has her jaw hanging. She passes the sheave to her dad, who has the same reaction.

– Jupiter, Your Majesty, not even a pure human would get paid that much, says Stinger.
– And I told you, you would not be treated like property. So, I guess I can seal this contract?
– Yes! Kiza and Stinger say.
Very well. She says and places her wrist on the sheave to seal it. Welcome to my court. You are the only one in it so far.

Kiza snorts. Jupiter grabs a blank sheave and starts writing an order on it, then seals it.

– Kiza, I have a first task for you. Listen to me carefully. I am sure this will turn your world upside down but bring you much joy. I need you to acquire a very specific someone for me. All my assets are at your disposal for this task.

She hands her the sheave she has sealed. Kiza reads the contract:

CONTRACT # 001
ISSUED BY: JUPITER JONES, recurrence of SERAPHI ABRASAX
TO: MAJORDOMO KIZA APINI
TYPE: TRACK AND ACQUIRE
TARGET: HONEY-BEE APINI
KNOWN ASSOCIATES: STINGER APINI (husband), KIZA APINI (daughter)
STIPULATIONS: 1) PRICE IS INCONSEQUENTIAL 2) ALL HER MAJESTY’S ASSETS ARE AVAILABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THIS TASK

And starts to weep. She holds the sheave on her heart like it is the most wonderful treasure ever. And to a girl who barely knew her mother, it must be. Jupiter would give anything to have the ability to know her father, she can not bring back her father from the dead, but she can give Kiza back her mother and Stinger his wife. Kiza and Stinger’s eyes have turned yellow. And after a short moment, Stinger is shedding tears in an old soldier kind of way. Kiza share the sheave with her dad, he probably need tangible proof of what they communicated with their eyes.

Jupiter gesture to Caine to come sit with her. She is drained and his presence somehow comforts her. When they are seated side by side, he murmurs.

– You just ordered her to go buy her mom for you, right?
– Yes, at what ever the price. She murmurs back. And what I did not write is that when I own her, I am going to give her to Stinger, so they can never be parted again.
– Your Majesty is one unEntitled Queen.

She bites her bottom lip.

– Thanks, Caine.

Kiza and Stinger have stopped weeping, they are both standing facing her and slowly, they kneel in front of her. Jupiter let them do it, because she feels they need to do it. After a moment she stands and make them stand with her and Caine. She makes them huddle in a circle with arms interlock at the shoulders.

– This is what family is for. She says. You protect family. You take care of family. These are things I can and will do. You have to let me know about stuff like that.
– I do not know what to say, says Stinger. This is beyond anything I have experienced in my life. I simply giving you the opportunity to have what my mother and I can only dream of having. I know this pain too well… her voice breaks. I have felt it and I have seen it everyday of my life. I know how it hardens one’s spirit.

Caine squeezes closer to her in support. He can smell her emotional control slipping away.
– Now please Stinger and Kiza, go be together, do what you need to do. Rest, cry some more, feel, prepare. Enjoy your world changing.
– Thank you, Jupiter, says Kiza and then hugs her.
– Thank you. Stinger’s voice is filled with emotions and his eyes turn yellow for Jupiter.

When Stinger and Kiza have left her cabin, holding each other at the waist and shoulders, Jupiter sits back down and she lets her emotions free. Caine is not sure what to do, but he sits with her and let her cling to him. She cries, weep, growl and make raw noises only a breaking heart can produce. Caine smells that her emotions are all over the place and that somehow, he is her anchor in this emotional storm, so he stays put, and holds her some more. He hurts inside to see her distressed like that, but at the same time he is happy that he is the one she trusts enough to have a breakdown with.

After 30 minutes, she calms down enough to go to the ‘fresher room and when she comes back she has a shaky smile for Caine.

– Okay, I needed that, thank you for being here with me, Caine. It’s been a hard two days.
– You are welcome.
– I’m so drained right now… I need to sleep otherwise I won’t be able to face Titus for dinner.

Saying so, she removes her jacket, lies down and grabs a cushion from the window seat as a pillow.

– Can you set a wake-up alarm for in two hours, please? And you can lie down with me if you need “kozha”, she says. Then right before falling asleep she murmurs “or want”.

The word “want” is singing in his head. Yes, it is more then biological need that make him crave her contact, it is want. He wants to touch, smell, feel, taste everything about her. She is “home” and he wants to know everything there is to know about her. He sets the alarm as she requested and lies on his side behind her. He is just laying there wishing to place his arm around her when in her sleep she shifts and snuggles against him. He enjoys that very much and when he falls asleep, he is cradling his queen in his arms.

***“Kozha” and yoga***

When Jupiter wakes up, she is wrapped up in a cocoon of arms and feathers. She is so comfortable right now and she thinks she would like to wake up wrapped up like that again. She is close enough to smell the jungle and spice sent from Caine and it gives her butterflies. She does not want to get up yet. This feels perfect. Could this really be love? It would be great if it was. She can not imagine how she would explain the situation to a boyfriend. “Yeah so I have this space werewolf angel who needs to cuddle with me from time to time”. But having the said space werewolf angel as her boyfriend, that would be so great. She really hopes Kiza is right and that he feels the same, even if he does not know what to call it. She tries to move, but Caine’s hold on her is too strong.

– Erm, Caine? She says.

There is no answer. Then she realizes that there is that trembling in his muscles again.

– Are you awake? If you can’t speak, squeeze once for yes and twice for no.

She feels a squeeze.

– Are you okay?

A single squeeze.

– You just need time again?
Another single squeeze.

– Okay, she says and snuggles as much as she can against him.

After 10 minutes, his grip loosens and he mantles his wings. Jupiter stretched herself and turns on her back so she can see him.

– Better? She asks.
– Yes.
– How long have you been holding onto me like that this time?
– Maybe an hour.
– And how long will you be good for this time?

She turns again so she faces him.

– Probably a day or two.
– Good.

She hugs him, and for a moment their mouths were so close they were sharing breaths. She had the intense desire to kiss him and would have done so if the wake-up alarm had not gone off.

– Saved by the bell, she mutters.
– What is that?
– Just a saying. Are you good? Can I get up?
– Yes, he says, and open his arms.

She gets up and stretches out.

– Do they have coffee in space? She asks.
– Coffee?
– Erm, a hot beverage with caffeine in it. It’s brown and bitter. Maybe Kiza would know what is the closest I can get out here. Can you check with her? And ask how they are doing, please? And I am starved, could you order us a meal please? And get a report on what is going on out there?
– Of course, but is Her Majesty not eating with His Lordship in an hour?
– A very wise Earth King once said “Don’t eat a stingy person’s bread, and don’t desire his choice food”. I am going to diner, but I will not be eating.

Caine nods with an almost full smile and she heads to the ‘fresher room.

When she comes out the meal is set on the table and there is a cup of steaming hot beverage that smells similar to coffee. She sits down and gesture for Caine to join her. He sits on a bench in front of her. She grabs the space coffee, inhale above the cup and makes a sigh of pleasure.

– What is this called? She asks.
– Grula, Kiza said it’s the closest to coffee in taste, but the caffeine content is higher.

Jupiter takes a sip.

– Oh wow, that is good. More caffeine, heh, I guess I will drink only one cup instead of two.

She takes a real sip now and makes pleasurable hum at the back of her throat and Caine realizes that the hot beverage part of her scent is exactly that, pleasure and contentment. Without realizing it, he is thinking about how much her scent would be intense with other kinds of pleasure. He was so lost in these thoughts that he did not hear her question.
– Caine?
– Yes?
– You did not hear a word I said, did you? You seemed lost in thoughts for a moment. I was asking how are Stinger and Kiza?
– Oh, they are as good as can be after having their world turned upside down and their impossible dream within reach.
– I can imagine how I would feel if I could have my father back…

She shakes her head.

– Let’s change topic, I don’t want to start crying again. Have to stay focused. Any movement out there?
– No everything is status quo. I don’t think bounty hunters would risk something with such prominent witnesses. Legion, Aegis and Royalty in the same area, makes a kidnapping or an assassination attempt highly unlikely. Unless it is at diner.
– No, with code and conduct invoked there would be hell to pay if anything happened to me. He most likely will try to charm me into some kind of a deal. He sounds like some of Vladie’s shady friends.

She drinks some grula.

– I will be fine, beside you will be there too. I’m not going over there without my guards, my Majordomo and an Aegis witness.

They finish eating and Jupiter studies her sheaves some more, there is a lot to learn. After a while she can’t take it anymore. She gets up, removes her jacket and her boots, moves the benches cube out of the way and start doing a yoga routine. After a few poses, she is in a warrior pose when Caine asks what she is doing.

– Yoga. It helps with focus, endurance and inner strength. It’s harder then it looks.

She moves to a supported handstand. Caine is rather impressed by how long she stays in the position. She does a few more poses when the door chimes. Caine goes to open the door. It’s Stinger and Kiza.

– Your- Stinger stops his greeting when he sees Jupiter in a full headstand.

Caine gesture them in.

– What is that? Asks Stinger.
– She called it yoga. Said it is harder then it looks. Says Caine.
– Yoga is an ancient practice dating 3 to 4 thousand Earth years. I skimmed the subject since there is a yoga studio near the grocery store. Yoga masters can stay in each position for hours at a time, says Kiza.

Jupiter gets back down on her hand and knees, stand and finish with a tree pose.

– What’s up? Jupiter asks.
– We are here to accompany you to Lord Titus’s clipper.
– Great, let me freshen up really quick.
Upon getting on Titus’s clipper with Caine, Stinger, Kiza and Phylo Percadium, she is greeted by an honor guard of android guards, Titus himself and Famulus.

– Your Highness, it is my honor to welcome you to my humble ship. Says Titus.

He bows and kisses her hand again.

– I am overjoyed that you have accepted to dine with me. But such an occasion requires far more elegant attire. I have had a suitable dress and servitant made ready for you.
– Very well.

They walk to a suite where 3 androids are waiting for her with a monstrosity of a black dress. Once Caine has checked up the room for security, him, Stinger and Phylo wait outside while Kiza is permitted entrance with her Queen.

The androids dress her up in the black dress and do her hair and make-up. She looks like a drama queen mixed with Cruella de Vil without the fur.

– This is really erm… Kiza does not wish to insult her Queen.
– …"uzhasnyy", complete Jupiter.

They both laugh.

When she gets out of the room Stinger and Caine salute her – with fist and wings.

– Your Majesty.
– Showtime, she claims.

One of Lord’s Titus servitant shows her the way to the dining room. Upon entering Lord Titus great her again.

– Your Highness looks ravishing.
– Thanks, I’ve never had my hair done by robots, and this dress is really uzhasnyy. She says with a joyful tone.

At the lack of reaction, she gathers that Titus does not have the Russian translation package.

– I know you do not trust me right now, but I promise you I am not your enemy. I must congratulate you on your ascension and all that you have accomplished in such short period of time. But I assure you that your guards are not necessary here.

He offers her his hand and she takes it.

– You may want to put this on paranoia but surviving no less then 5 attempts of kidnapping and or murder in two days leaves oneself not willing to trust on the security team of another.
– Very well.
– This is Miss Kiza Apini, she gestures to Kiza, my newly appointed majordomo.

They sit down at the table. Caine, Stinger and Officer Percadium take guard position around the room and Kiza stays at her back.

– I confess I feel like I have you at somewhat of a disadvantage. From the moment I saw your gene-
print I knew so many things about you because I was very close to my mother. Says Titus.

“And you remind me of half the guys I was setup with by my cousin.” She thinks.

– Is that why you have a Legion contract out for my/her elimination? She asks with an uncaring tone.
– That was an unfortunate tactical error. He waves with a hand as if it was nothing major.
– Then you would not mind retracting the contract immediately to amend the situation.
– Of course not. Famulus, please do the necessary.
– Yes, My Lord. Acknowledges Famulus.
– If you would not mind telling me, how did you survive?
– Fortunately for me, Mr. Wise is even better then his legendary Legion status say. You see the gene-print card you provided does not match with my true gene-print. I suppose you provided him with the gene-print of my predecessor. But although our gene-print are identical on a mathematical level, they do not match in purity of essence. Mr. Wise can smell the difference.
– I see…
– I feel I somehow should thank you for that contract though. If not for it, Mr. Wise would not have saved me from your brother’s assassins. And I would not have the legendary Skybreakers for my personal guards. I must say that having the best unit of Skyjackers for personal guards, makes me feel quite… secure, and Captain Apini was so very glad to accept the position of Chief of security. In this short amount of time I have obtained the loyalty of the best soldiers in all of the Gyre.
Titus seems nervous. He empties his glass, stands and holds his hand out.
– I would like to show you something.

Affecting curiosity, Jupiter takes it briefly to stand. Titus guides Jupiter to the RegeneX cold room. Caine, Stinger, Kiza and Officer Percadium follow in proper position.

– Only Entitled are allowed in this room. Titus says.
– One moment, she tells Titus.

She speaks in Russian to Caine.

– Will you be able to hear through that door?
– Yes, it is not sound proof.
– Good.

She turns back to Titus and say:

– Very well.

In the storage room, piles and piles of blue containers are stacked side by side. Titus takes one and hands it to Jupiter.

– This goes by many names, ReCell, RegeneX, Nectar, there are different quality of it, but this is the purest version of it. You see, RegeneX is made from people, one container is made from approximately 100 people.

Jupiter already knows what RegeneX is and holding a container of it makes her ill. She places it back on its stack.

– I already have learned about RegeneX and the farm planets. The first thing I did once my ascension was complete is seal an edict preventing all harvesting on my assets without my personal authorization. Why did you want to show me this?
– You see Jupiter, my mother went through a profound change at the end of her life. She felt exactly as you do now. When she tried to do something to stop this business, she was murdered. I believe the
same thing is about to happen to me because I’ve begun to carry out the work she started.
– And what do you want from me?
– When I heard of your recurrence, I could not take the chance that you would be as she was before her change and want to continue the RegeneX trade. But now that I have met you I believe I can trust you. I can not allow my brother and sister to end up with control over my part of the Abrasax inheritance. I want to know that when I die, you will be my heir.

Jupiter looks at Titus with suspicion. This sounds like a scam, like one of the pyramid schemes her cousin is always involved in.

– Which brings us to one question.

Titus take a box from his pocket and opens it. There is a huge dramatic diamond ring in it.

– Jupiter Jones, will you marry me?

Marriage? What kind of a sick bastard is he?

– Fortunately for me, Titus, my destiny has been foretold by the universe itself, written in the stars at my birth. You see, the universe took away from me the one who loved the stars but it sent me the one to guide me through the stars. I can not turn my back on him or my destiny. So, I will have to say no to that proposition. If you want me to be your heir, do so with a will.
– Jupiter, says Titus, and he grabs her by the arm.

Jupiter has an instant reaction and knee-jerks him in the groin. Titus falls to the floor in pain.

– My mother and my cousin have taught me how to deal with jerks who can’t take no for an answer. She says with thunder in her voice. Don’t get up, I can show myself out. I expect you to leave the system within the hour. If you do not do so I will file a tax grievance for threatening the prime and Queen of the house of Abrasax.

Jupiter turns around and leave the RegeneX room.

– We are leaving, she says. Kiza, go with Officer Percadium and pick up my stuff from the suite, please.
– Yes, Your Majesty.
– Stinger, please arrange for our departure.
– Yes, Your Majesty.
– Caine?
– Yes, Majesty?
– Lend me your arm, please?
– Of course.

Caine holds out his left arm for her to get support, and they headed to the grav-beam room. Kiza must have run half of the way, because she is waiting for them there with all of Jupiter’s stuff in a bundle.

Caine had a lot to think about during the visit to Lord Titus’s ship. Lord Titus had attempted to take control of the situation by dressing Jupiter in an over revealing and creepy black dress. She looked royal, but not herself royal. When he heard her call the dress appalling in Russian, he had to smirk. This was quite impressive. With one word she was able to asses that Titus and his people did not understand Russian and let them know that she was still herself and acting her way into this. When
she spoke about him, she sounded proud of him, of his talents, abilities and senses, it made his ears pinked. He smelled a lot of that red spicy sent, stronger then before when she spoke about him. Maybe that sent was related to him? But the real tour de force was her thanking Titus for the elimination contract. That had really put a dent in Lord Titus control. The rotten smells he got from him were almost close to panic. Oh, he tried to regain control by bringing her to the RegeneX storage room and talking about his mother, but she was on to him. He heard it in her voice through the door. And when Titus proposed to her, she said no and spoke about her destiny. There seemed to be more in her destiny then what she had told him and even Kiza had told him that.

He had tried to stop her and she had defended herself in an unusual way for an Entitled, but very appropriate for a toilet cleaning housemaid. The smell of pain and humiliation he got from Titus when she came out the door were clear enough. She smelled triumphant and disgusted.

Finally, when she asked for his arm, he smelled and felt that her own control was growing thin after putting on the persona of the Queen for too long a period. 

His final assessment of the event, was that he has been more then impressed by her.
Jupiter did not speak all the way from the RegeneX storage room on Titus’s ships to her cabin on the Aegis cruiser. At the door she finally spoke.

– All of you come in please.

They all went into the cabin.

– You three, pointing to Caine, Stinger and Phylo Percadium, please sit. Kiza, come help me get out of this monstrosity.

They went into the ‘fresher room and Kiza helps her to remove the dress.

– Go sit with the guys, Kiza, I will be fine.

They waited in the cabin while she took the time to have a small breakdown, go through the cleaning cubicle and put on a freshly cleaned Aegis uniform. She comes out looking fresh, but tired. She sits down on the window seat cross-legged with her back against the wall and closes her eyes for a minute or two. She takes a deep breath and speaks quietly.

– Post-visit breakdown. What is your opinion guys?
– Your Majesty, starts Phylo…
She stops him with a hand gesture.
– Right, first rule, in here it’s Jupiter.

Phylo nods.

– Jupiter, Aegis personnel as supposed to be impartial.
– Well you can at least tell me what you thought of me?
– I thought you projected confidence and royalty, he says.
– Thank you Phylo. Anyone else wants to say something?
– That dress was horrible, chirps Kiza.
– No kidding, retorts Jupiter. It looked liked something a dominatrix Cruella de Vil would wear.
– Who? she asks.
– Never mind, that is another one for the list.

She pulls her phone out and writes a note: Star Trek, Babylon 5, Princess Bride, Superman, 101 Dalmatians. She sighs.

– What did you think Stinger?
– Even in that ridiculous dress, you were in control of the situation, says Stinger. It was quite impressive.
– Thanks Stinger.
– And you did manage to have the Legion contract on you terminated.
– Yeah, we will have to check the status on that. I need a list of things to do… Kiza can you do that for now?
– Yes Jupiter.
– And you Caine? With that nose of yours you must have gotten more info then anyone else. What did you get from him?
– Well, everything he did, from the dress to bringing you to the RegeneX room was all planned to make you say yes when he proposed. – Stinger, Kiza and Phylo gasped – But you kept ahead of his
moves every time. The use of Russian was a nice move. When you thanked him for the contract that sent me after you, he was close to panic. And the smells I got from him when you left the RegeneX room spoke of pain and humiliation.

– Well, the universe over and the jerks are the same everywhere, they can’t take no for an answer. I have had my fill of encounter with jerks thanks to my cousin Vladie… A knee to the groin works every time.

The three men wince at that statement.

– Thank you all. Phylo you can return to your duties.

Phylo got up, bowed and left the cabin.

– Stinger, I gave one hour to Titus to leave the area, otherwise I would file tax grievances against him. Can you advise Captain Tsing about that and ask to be notified when he leaves? And also check the ETA on the rest of your team?

– Okay.

He taps his comm implant.

[Yes, Captain Apini]

– Captain Tsing, following a less than agreeable rebuttal from Her Majesty – Caine smirks –, Lord Titus has received an ultimatum of one hour to leave the system. That was, he checks the time, 27 minutes ago. Her Majesty requests that I be advise as soon as he leaves.

[Understood]

– Thank you, Captain.

He taps his comm implant twice.

[Yes, Sir?]

– Lieutenant Buzz, Her Majesty requires a report and ETA on her personal guards.

[Let me check. --- Three Skybreakers have already reported in at Legion Outpost #450, the remaining eight have signaled in. They should arrive at the outpost within 9 hours. Adding time for briefing about their new assignment and getting on a Legion transport, I estimate about 12 hours, Sir.]

– Keep me updated Lieutenant.

[Yes, Sir.]

He taps his comm implant.

– The Skybreakers should be here in about 12 hours, Jupiter.

– Thanks Stinger. Who is Lieutenant Buzz?

– Hiven Buzz… he was the one who found out about the Legion buying bee-splices back… then.

– What is he doing out here? Asks Caine.

– Paperwork. He was not really cut out for the Legion, they keep him at a desk job. He files reports.

– That sounds pretty boring. Says Jupiter. Does he like his job?

– Better then the previous one, says Stinger with a dark tone.

Kiza has clued in to the line of thought Jupiter is having.

– That is a great idea Jupiter, she says.

– Arrange for an interview Kiza, unless my chief of security does not approve.


– She needs a secretary, dad. Says Kiza.

– And you would take in Buzz?
– Why not? If he can do the job, has your security approval and wants to do it, yes.
– Oh, for security that is not a problem. Bees don’t lie and he would be a most loyal servant.
– Then what is it? Asks Jupiter.
– He has a queen-bee and two baby-bee.
– What is the problem with that?
– He does not own them, they would be left behind.

The reality of the situation dawns on Jupiter. Space society is so messed up.

– Kiza, make it a double interview. I’m sure I can find a place for her too. And check on their kids’ status. I will not have a family split up on my watch.

All three splices have their jaw hanging for a moment, but they soon recover.

– Talking about family, any update on that first task I gave you, Kiza?
– Dad gave me the location and name to his old owner. I’ve sent a request for the list of his current “property” and was awaiting a reply before we left for Titus’s ship.
– Please, go check on that and come back.

Kiza leaves. Jupiter closes her eyes and tries to relax. While Kiza is gone, Stinger receives notification that Titus’s clipper has portalled away. When Kiza is not back after 15 minutes, Jupiter starts to worry. She was about to send Caine to check on her when she returns. When she enters the cabin, they can all see that she wept, her eyes are red and puffy. Stinger goes stiff, preparing for whatever news she brings. She walks to Jupiter, kneels and with a “Your Majesty” she hands her a sheave.

Kiza’s demeanor has clue Jupiter in that this is something serious. She takes the sheave and reads it, it is Honey-Bee Apini’s file.

**SPLICE FILE #4586153**
**SPLICE TYPE: BRED BEE**
**GENDER: FEMALE**
**AGE: 43 STANDARD YEARS**
**ASSIGN NAME: HONEY-BEE MELLIFERA**
**NAME CHANGE: HONEY-BEE APINI**
**HUSBAND: STINGER APINI**
**CHILDREN: KIZA APINI, SEIZA APINI**
**STATUS: LIVING, HEALTHY**
**PURCHASE AVAILABILITY: YES**

Kiza has highlighted the reason why she is so distraught. Seiza Apini… She opens the file.

**SPLICE FILE #35412876**
**SPLICE TYPE: BORN BEE**
**GENDER: FEMALE**
**AGE: 17 STANDARD YEARS**
**ASSIGN NAME: SEIZA APINI**
**PARENTS: HONEY-BEE APINI, STINGER APINI**
**SIBLING: KIZA APINI**
**STATUS: LIVING, UNHEALTHY – TYPE 2 BUG**
**PURCHASE AVAILABILITY: YES**

Kiza has a sister she did not know about… Stinger left with Kiza 18 years ago and Seiza is 17, he must not know either that he has a second daughter… And she is sick. Kiza has highlighted that too.
She opens the file on Type 2 Bug.

**TYPE 2 BUG**

*GENE-CODE ERROR HAPPENING IN BORN SPLICES, CAUSING THE DETERIORATION OF LUNG TISSUES. CONDITION IS FATAL WITHOUT A MEDICAL GENE-RECODE DONE BY A SPLICER.*

An unknown dying sister...

– I see… Kiza, I need two blank sheaves.

Kiza stands up, heads over to a cabinet and brings back two blank sheaves. Jupiter takes them and starts to write down on the first one. Kiza sits on a bench.

**CONTRACT # 002**

*ISSUED BY: JUPITER JONES, recurrence of SERAPHI ABRASAX TO: MAJOROMO KIZA APINI TYPE: TRACK AND ACQUIRE TARGET: SEIZA APINI KNOWN ASSOCIATES: HONEY-BEE APINI (mother), STINGER APINI (father), KIZA APINI (sister) STIPULATIONS: 1) PRICE IS INCONSEQUENTIAL 2) ALL HER MAJESTY’S ASSETS ARE AVAILABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THIS TASK*

She seals it and hands it over to Kiza.

– This is the first step, Kiza.
– Thank you, Jupiter. She says, taking the sheave. She still has tears in her eyes.
– Stinger, do you know who is the best Bee splicer? Jupiter asks.
– I do, Marcellian Cahun, she was my splicer. He says showing his brand. May I ask why?
– I think it is better if Kiza tells you herself, once I am done with this.

Jupiter writes down on the second sheave.

**CONTRACT # 003**

*ISSUED BY: JUPITER JONES, recurrence of SERAPHI ABRASAX TO: SPLICER MARCELLIAN CAHUN TYPE: MEDICAL GENE-RECODE PURPOSE: CURE FOR TYPE 2 BUG TARGET: SEIZA APINI STIPULATIONS: 1) THIS TAKES PRIORITY 2) HER MAJESTY WILL LOOK KINDLY ON WORK WELL DONE*

Jupiter seals it and hands it over to Kiza too.

– Keep this safe, it will be for her, Jupiter says.
– Thank you, she says.
– And now that I have done my part, I think your father really needs to know about this.

Kiza nods and sits to face her dad. Jupiter place a hand on Stinger’s arm and says:

– Stinger, this will hurt, probably break your heart and shatter your world, but remember that we are family now and that I take care of family.
Stinger is stiff and turns to face Kiza.

– Dad… when we left mom… she was… pregnant… her words come out slowly.
– Beeswax! No! he says.

Blood drains from his face.

– I would have known… a drone knows, unless, oh, Honey-Bee, that last night… I was not careful… that last night, I gave all of myself to her…

He stops talking, tears in his eyes, rubbing his neck and his brand, his shoulders are low. He can imagine it, his Queen-Bee alone, pregnant with a baby-bee, not able to tell him. Raising a baby-bee alone in that place… he had left so Kiza would not grow up in that place, and now this baby-bee had. What had he done. He should have been careful, not give all of himself, that last night, but he could not, not give all of himself, knowing he would never see her again.

– Dad, it’s ok. Look at me. They lock gaze, eyes turned yellow. Her name is Seiza. Seiza Apini, my sister, your baby-bee. And soon she will be with us. She hands him the contract Jupiter had sealed.

He holds the contract to his breaking heart.

– But growing up in that place… the state will she be in…
– No dad! Listen to me! She will be in a good state when we get her. She was probably put on cleanup… because she is not healthy… yet. She shows him the sheave for the medical recode.

Stinger looks at the second sheave, medical recode, type 2 bug. That is why Her Majesty wanted the name of the best bee splicer. She takes care of family, she said. She did not want just any splicer, but the best one. He closes his eyes. This is the worst and the best news at the same time. They don’t use unhealthy splice as pleasure splice. Having learn about Seiza a few days ago it would have torn a hole in his heart, but Her Majesty changes everything. He does not know how to feel. Everything is a jumble. The only thing he knows is that he has to thank Jupiter and that he wants to hug Kiza.

He opens his eyes, gets up and makes Kiza get up and then he hugs her and she hugs him back with all their emotions in a jumble. It is an impressive father-daughter hug. Then he turns to Jupiter, kneels and say:

– Your Majesty, I do not know how to thank you enough for all that this represents for me. It is as if you have put a beating heart back in my chest.

Jupiter gets to her knees, and hugs Stinger. Then she looks him straight in the eyes and say:

– It is the least I could do for family.

Then she hugs him one more time, and stand holding out her hand to make him stand too.

– Now it’s been a hard couple of days for all of us. I think what we all need now is some R&R.
– What is R&R? asks Caine.
– Rest and relaxation. You know, fun stuff, to take your mind off things.

Caine nods.

– Kiza, any idea?
– I do have a few Star Trek episodes in my implant, that I can project through a sheave.
– Oh yeah? Which ones? I don’t suppose space has popcorn?
– Let’s see, I was going through the Voyager series, I have Season 5 episodes 10, 11 and 12.
Counterpoint, Latent image and Bride of Chaotica. And no, no popcorn in space.
– Let’s go with Counterpoint and Bride of Chaotica.

Kiza does something to her implant that transfers the data to a sheave, and then something to the sheave the projects the videos in the air. They all sit on the window seat, Caine chose a spot beside Jupiter, and watch Star Trek. The girls answer a few questions about the show too.

After all that Jupiter declares:
– All right, that was fun, but now I need to sleep. Kiza, are there pillows on this boat?

Kiza snorts and taps open a panel on the wall to reveal a stack of sheets and pillows.
– Great, thanks. I can take it from here, good night.
– Good night, Jupiter.

Kiza picks up the precious sheaves and leaves the cabin. Jupiter grabs sheets and a pillow and make a bed out of the window seat.
– So, who is guarding me while I sleep? I can’t have you both staying awake outside the door all night long. It will be another long day tomorrow.
– Well, Jupiter, it’s either that or one of us has to stay in here while you sleep. Says Stinger.
– What I’d like is for you both to sleep. The logical course of action – and now I sound like a Vulcan – is for Stinger to go to bed and my pack to sleep here. But what do I know, maybe you guys need less sleep then I do. Go discuss it while I get ready, just let me know what it will be.

Jupiter heads to the ‘fresher room.
– You want to sleep here, don’t you, pup?
– Well, or course.
– All right, enjoy it.

Stinger leaves the cabin. Not sure how he feels, but excited for what tomorrow will bring. Jupiter comes out of the ‘fresher room, sees Caine and her heart swells. Now simply seeing him standing like that gives her butterflies. He must smell what she feels, there is no way he can’t notice how often she blushes and her spikes of desire. Like how right now she really wants to cross the room, put her arms around his neck and kiss him. Maybe that will be what needs to be done, with all the social conditioning he lives with, but she does not want to rush him, yet. But she can test the waters, can’t she?
– It’s pack time I see.

Caine has a shy smile. Jupiter walks into his personal space.
– Do you need “kozha” right now? She asks softly.
– No.

And it’s true, he does not need it, but he wants it. She smells disappointed, so he adds:
– Well, maybe…

Oh, the red spicy scent he gets is almost overwhelming. Yeah, that part of her scent is related to him. Is it how she feels about him? She looks at him with her big green eyes and a smile.
– Go ahead…she murmurs.
Caine wants nothing more than to wrap her in his arms and his wings, hold her tight until they are one. He feels, he feels... he does not know what he feels, but it is something good. She feels like “home”. But he is a splice, and she is a Queen, his bonding instinct is not strong enough at the moment to overcome his rational taught. So, he takes a step back and points to the bed.

– Your Majesty said she needed sleep.

Oh, the hurt he just caused her. He can smell it coming off her in waves. As if he punched her in the gut. Her shoulders are stiff and he can smell the tears forming in her eyes. Her red spicy scent is cracking and it dawns on him that, that is her heart. Was she offering _him_ her heart? Does she feel the same way he does? And he just crushed her offer, her so accepting and caring. He feels the hole in his chest again, and he realizes that what hurts her, hurts him. That by hurting her, he hurts himself, because... because he belongs to her, his heart belongs to her. He is frozen in place. Before he can say anything else, she says: “Right.” And heads over to the window seat, takes off her jacket and boots and gets under the blanket and says “Lights dim”.

That was painful, having her heart crushed like that. After she gets in the “bed” she just wants to cry her heart’s out or yell at the universe about it, but Caine is still in the room. So instead she yells in her head, because of course she can’t even do it in Russian now, he would understand. After the initial pain, rational taught returns, she is a Queen, he is a Splice, social conditioning and everything. In this society, she is inaccessible to him. Even if she is his pack. When he touched her, that was the bonding instinct, not rational. But she saw it in his eyes, the want, the feeling. He denied himself what he wanted, because of conditioning. And now she was sad for him, sad he would deny himself what she was offering.

She opens her eyes to look at him, he has not moved an inch. He must have smelled how hurt she felt, and he must know she is calmer now. It’s not his fault this society is messed up. She told him she was here to guide him while he found out who he is. That will take time. She can not let him drag himself down over this. Kiza had said, “don’t give up on him”. She will not!

Caine did not move, he wanted to apologize and flee at the same time. He could not leave his post and she sure would not want to cry on his shoulder after he hurt her. He did not know what to do, so he stayed where he was and waited. He smelled her hurt dissipating and her calm returning. Still he did not move.

– Caine?

Her voice in the near darkness was filled with emotion, he smelled that red spicy scent mixed with a touch of sadness.

– Majesty?
– It’s just Jupiter, Caine.

He moves, turns to face her direction.

– What is it, Jupiter?
– Stop blaming yourself.

How did she know?

– I know you can smell emotions, just don’t blame yourself for mine, okay. I am way too tired to be stable emotionally right now. My life is a feakin’ roller-coaster.
– I do not know what that is…
Jupiter is so tired, she starts to laugh uncontrollably. Caine is a little baffled.

– Up, down, up down, like a freakin’ roller-coaster. She continues to laugh.

After a minute or two, she regains composure.

– Ah! Caine! You need more Earth culture, I’ll have to show you what a roller-coaster is when we go back to Earth.

She sits up and grab her phone in her jacket and adds Roller-Coaster to her list. Then turn it off to save some battery and lie back down.

– Now, I really do need to sleep. You can lie down with me or sit here. She pads the spot of window seat left at her head. But please don’t stay up all night looming over me.

Caine walks to the wall panel and grabs a second pillow. Then walks to the window seat and settles on his side on the spot she padded, his head behind Jupiter’s head and his legs in the opposite direction.

– Good night, she says. And falls asleep.
When she wakes up in the morning, Caine is already up and coming out of the ‘fresher room.

– Good morning, he says.
– Hi, did you sleep well?

She gets up and stretches the sleep out of her muscles.

– Yes. I sleep very well since Chicago.
– Oh? Because of me?
– Yes, it’s the bonding. He sits down on a bench. I’ve never told anyone but Kiza…

She pushes a bench beside his and sits.

– Tell me if you want too.

He takes a deep breath.

– Before you, I never slept more then two hours, even as a pup. It was actually the first sign I had of the bonding. Back in Chicago, when you were sleeping the drugs off… I slept for 8 hours.
– Oh…

She puts her arm around his back, and her head on his shoulder in support.

– Every moment of sleep was filled with war, death and blood. I used to dread going to sleep.
– And now?
– Now, now I dream of you and your scent.
– My scent? I’ve had people dream of me before, mostly my aunt Nino, but my scent, how does that work? What do I smell like?
– All people have a basic scent, I can not explain it but you smell like soft rain, hot beverage, sunset on a beach and you regularly have spikes of something red and spicy that can melt of crack.
– Wait you mean I smell like… like my favorite things?
– Your favorite things?
– Yeah, the sound of rain always made me de-stress, hot coffee comforts and energize me, sunsets on a beach is so beautiful and relaxing, and cinnamon hearts are my favorite candy. Wait you said spikes of cinnamon hearts, it’s not always there?
– It was not at first, but now yes. I first noticed it when you said I quoted an Earth movie.
– Oh…

Could that be what love smells like to him? She wonders.

– Can I test something?

He nods. She turns his head with her hand so she can look him in the eyes.

– Tell me if my cinnamon hearts scent spikes.

She starts to think solely of him, his strong arms, his nice eyes, how she felt when he grabbed her in Chicago and in Orous, she thinks about kissing him, of waking up wrapped in his wings, of his jungle spice smell. She thinks of how strong and gentle he is at the same time and that his skin is really soft and ho boy is he hot when he his shirtless.
– Do I smell more like cinnamon hearts right now? She asks softly.

Caine has to clear his throat before answering. That smell is so alluring.

– Yes, a lot more.
– Good. Now I know what part of me that is.

And then… the door chimes.

They both bolt up. And turn to the door. Caine goes to answer. It was Kiza.

– Good morning, Jupiter, Caine.
– Hi Kiza, give me two minutes and I’m all yours. Says Jupiter, pointing to the ‘fresher room.

When she gets back, she puts her boots and jacket on, saying “So, what’s up?”

– Jupiter, I have your schedule and paperwork for today.
– Arg, I hope there is breakfast and space coffee in that schedule.
– Yes, would you like to eat here or go to the mess hall?
– Oh, mess hall, please, I want to see different walls.
– All right. Would you start by sealing these – she shows Jupiter two sheaves – they are the purchase contract for… you know.

Jupiter nods, grabs the sheaves, contract #004 and #005 for purchase of Honey-Bee and Seiza Apini. She does not even look at the prices and seals them. She hands the sheaves back to Kiza.

– Okay, rest of the schedule. Your personal guards will arrive in two hours, you have the interviews with Hiven and Comb Buzz in three hours and then we have to portal to Pleasure hub #189 to pick up… my mother and my sister.

Jupiter places a hand on Kiza’s arm.

– Okay, and have you checked that the Legion contract on me was terminated?
– Yes, on that Titus did not lie.
– Okay, and what about the Buzz family? Have you checked on their status?
– Of course. Hiven Buzz does report filing as you already know, he is healthy, and available. Comb is a doctor. Their baby-bees are Crystal, 8 and Pupa, 10 years old and are doing their primary classes. They are all healthy.
– That’s good, thank you. On to breakfast then.

In the mess hall, Stinger joins them for breakfast. Jupiter eats some sort of blue oatmeal and drinks a large cup of grula, or space coffee. Kiza reports some gossips she read on a news sheave and Stinger and Caine talk about the Skybreakers.

– Stinger, is there a formal greeting I should know about, or something that Queen should say to their new personal guards?
– Oh yes. I will have the proper sheave brought to you after breakfast. You can of course adapt or change it.
– I would also like to have their personal files to familiarize myself with them before hand.
– Or course.
Back in her cabin with Kiza and Caine, Jupiter gets ready for meeting her personal guards… while doing yoga. Kiza just read her the traditional pledge for personal guards and…

– That is so not me! Sorry but I can’t use that… It’s… barbaric… and, and… entitled!
– You are allowed to make your own pledge.
– Good, because I don’t want underlings who fear my wrath, I want honorable people. Plus, there is nothing in there about what I pledge to do. They should know what I pledge to them before they pledge themselves to me. They don’t even know me.
– But dad already accepted for them. Says Kiza.
– Yeah, but I want them to know that I am a different kind of Queen… Can you take notes for me please?
– Of course.
– Okay, erm: 2 parts, Queen… freedom… sentience… justice… fair… family… honor… Oath… Skyjackers… Serve… protect… fear… brave… loyal… truth… End note. Leave the sheave on the bench, I will use that to write my own pledge.

After a tree pose, Jupiter is done with her routine.

– Be right back.

She goes clean up and comes back.

– All right Kiza. I can continue on my own for now. You can go and prepare the purchase contracts for the Buzz family, I can seal them if they accept to work for me. And when you come back, bring me a stack of blank sheaves.

*I have some transfers of ownership to prepare.* She thinks.

She lies down on her stomach on the window seat with the sheave for her pledge. As a Queen she wants to rip the social construct of this society apart, bring equality, freedom for all and she wants her guards to be respected and respectful, true and loyal. The more she thinks about it, the more it sounds like a modern twist on medieval chivalry. It inspires her. She writes for a while and when she is done…

– Caine, can you read this and give me your opinion? Tell me if you would swear to that? And will they?

Caine takes the sheave and reads. The first part is so surprising, no Entitled would swear to something, even less something like that. And the second part… there is no wrath, threat or superiority anywhere. It’s so… Jupiter!

– Jupiter, that is… I have no words… Even if you were not pack, I would swear to that and more to serve you. And the rest of them will be floored… It’s amazing!
– Good. She says with a smile (and, now that she knows about it, a burst of cinnamon hearts smell)

Next, she studies the *Skybreakers* personal files, they are almost all splices. She is so glad she requested them, she could not bear the thought of so many people being sold because Caine bonded to her. She could not have let that happen.

Commanding officer/Lead pilot, Captain Stinger Apini, Bee-splice
Executive/First officer/Tracker, Commander Caine Wise, Lycan-splice
Second Officer, Lieutenant-commander Aves Red-Tail, Hawk-splice
Tactical Officer, Lieutenant-commander Leo Felis, Lionide-splice
Artillery specialist, Lieutenant Veelvraat “Veel” Gulo, Mustel-splice
Weapons specialist, Lieutenant Tristan Laing, Human
Engineer, Lieutenant Castor Albert, Beaver-splice
Scout, Lieutenant Junior Grade Falco Harpa, Falcon-splice
Mechanic, Lieutenant Junior Grade Menura Bower, Bowerbird-splice
Communication officer, Lieutenant Junior Grade Ezin Lidal, android
Second communication officer, Ensign Pavonia Saturn, Moth-splice
Field Medic, Ensign Kaliepen “Kalie” Ketakeran, android
Second Pilot, Ensign Vespa Polaire Wasp-splice

– Hey Caine, is your team representative of all teams of skyjackers? Because there seems to be a lot more splices then humans.
– Well, yes. Few pure humans have the physical strength or the brain capacity to be a skyjacker.
– Wow, and space society still considers you guys as less… that is so messed up.

There is a chime at the door. Kiza is back, with Stinger.

– Jupiter, I brought your blank sheaves as requested and the Skybreakers are here.
– Great, drop the sheaves on the table. Where did you set up the official greeting?
– We cleared the conference room. It was the only space big enough beside the cargo hold or the mess hall. It seemed more appropriate.
– Okay, then, let’s get started. I want you to say this before I speak.

She hands her a sheave. She puts on her royal demeanor and heads out with Kiza at her side and Caine and Stinger at her back. At the conference room door, she pauses and Kiza enters first to announce her.

– Her Majesty, Queen Jupiter Jones, first prime of House Abrasax.

Jupiter takes a deep breath and enters the room. The table and chairs have been deactivated and placed against a wall. Her skyjackers are standing in line at attention, with their wings out, and Stinger and Caine join them when they enter at her suite. When she stops in the middle of the room and faces them, they all drop to one knee with a fist to their chest, head slightly bowed and wings above their heads.

– Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, commands you to listen, hear and understand this new pledge of allegiance. Kiza proclaims.

Then, with a grand voice for special occasion, Jupiter speaks.

– I, Jupiter Jones of Earth, daughter of Maximillian Jones and Aleksa Bolotnikov, Queen and First Prime of House Abrasax, signified recurrence of her Majesty Seraphi Abrasax, swear that:
  I will show leadership by doing the right thing without being asked, even when no one is looking,
  I will listen to you, your ideas and your feelings and make your concerns my own,
  I will defend freedom for all sentient beings, I will sacrifice so that others may live free,
  I will uphold justice by being fair to all, I will defend my family and my friends and I will live with honor.
I love peace but I am a fierce enemy; I was born to be a different kind of Queen.
That is my Oath.

She pauses.

Do you, in turn, members of the 53rd Skyjacker unit, known as the Skybreakers, swear to:
Serve your Queen to the best of your abilities, protect her and her family,
Be without fear in the face of your enemies, be brave and honorable, be loyal in friendship,
Speak the truth at all times, and forever keep your word, respect and honor all sentient beings,
Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong?
That is your Oath.

While she spoke a few gasps were heard, a few feathers ruffled, but no one moved. She was impressed with their discipline.

– We swear. They said.
– Arise and be welcome. She replied.

They stand and mantle their wings carefully not to hit each other. Jupiter walks to Stinger.

– Well, now that that’s done, Stinger, if you could do the presentations.
– Of course, Majesty. You already know my XO, Commander Wise.

She raises a hand in a stop gesture.

– No, Stinger, that will take way too much time, I’ve read their files… Just consider us private space, will you?
– Okay, Jupiter.

There were a few gasps by the *Skybreakers* at hearing their CO calling their Queen by her given name. Caine smirked, she was changing things already.

– Okay, listen guys, I guess I should tell you all my 1st rule. For my family, my friends and my personal guards, in private, I’m Jupiter. I am okay with formality for formal/important stuff, but otherwise it takes just so much time. I am not one who needs flowering language, I prefer when people get to the point and say what they mean.

That statement was received by a few more gasps and a few nods.

– Okay, let’s start over. Your already know Caine. Says Stinger.
– He is hard to forget, grins Jupiter.

Did Caine’s ears pink a little? Maybe…

– So, this is Aves, Leo, Veelvraat who goes by “Veel”, Tristan, Castor, Falco, Menura, Ezin, Pavonia, Kaliepen who goes by “Kalie” and Vespa.
– I am glad to meet you all. She tells them. Now, I would like everyone to grab a chair and sit, please.

Switching to Russian:

– *Stinger, Kiza, Caine, I am about to turn the world upside down on them, they might need support.*
– *There is no time like the present, she retorts.*
– *One of you grab me a chair, and I want Kiza on one side of me and you two on the other side.*

Caine grabs a chair for Jupiter and install it in the middle on the room. The *Skybreakers* place themselves in a semi-circle, Kiza on her left side and Caine and Stinger on her right. Once everyone is settled, Jupiter raises a hand to get their attention.

– While I am sure you’ve all been briefed for your assignment as personal guards, there is more
information that you have to know. What I have to tell you might turn your world upside down and maybe inside out. Stinger, Kiza and Caine can attest that I have done that a lot these last two day.

She pauses. They nod.

– Now listen and hear me, all of you. You are all here because two days ago Caine could not kill me, even if this is what his contract said. I will not share the details of the how and why, because they are not all mine to share, he can share them with you if he wishes to do so. What I can say is that him sparing me was the will of the universe itself. It put him at risk and I decided to take care of the situation. You should also know that Stinger, Kiza and Caine are now family to me. This does not give them more authority then their rank or position accords them, but it gives them more protection. When I swore to protect my family, it included them. I do not know all of this society’s rules yet, but I have learned a few things. I have learned about how splices are considered in this society, and what happens to a Skyjacker team when a member or commander is removed. I could not let that happen. I requested you all, to protect you all. They are family and you are their team.

She pauses again.

– And this is where I turn the world on it’s head. I meant every word I said in my Oath, but it is hard to do the right thing when you lack information. I can not know your concerns if you do not voice them. So, I want you all to think about the people who are dear to your hearts, if there is anyone, and I mean anyone, that your heart wants here with you, I want you to let me know. I know what pain and suffering of the heart is and I can not have my people suffering in silence, not if I can fix it.

Stinger has never seen his team in such a state. Jaw hanging, tearing eyes, disbelieving looks. An Entitled caring for Splices, they were going through what he had gone through the previous day.

– Jupiter, can I add something? Says Stinger.
– Of course, Stinger.
– I know you do not put much trust in words, the word of an Entitled to a Splice means nothing. But hear this, in about two hours we will be jumping to pleasure hub #189 to pick up my Queen-Bee, that I have not seen in 18 years, and a baby-bee I did not even know I had. Jupiter already sealed the purchase contracts, and she even has sealed a contract to cure my baby-bee from her type 2 bug. Her word is true. I know it is hard to believe, but for her we are people.
– What was that quote you used back at my house, Jupiter? Asks Kiza.
– “Life is life, whether it’s wrapped in skin, scales or feathers.” Quotes Jupiter.
– Yeah, it resumes what you believe so well.
– And if I can add something more? Jupiter has such a high regard for life that she requested a mixed royal guard unit because she can not condone the way pack-bond units are made. She was actually furious when she learned about it. Adds Caine.

Jupiter stands.

– I will leave you all to think about all that you have heard. Stinger, stay with them, they need you. Kiza, will you please stay and take note of every name and details for me? And set up the room for my interviews afterward?
– Of course.
– Caine?

Caine stands and offer his arm to Jupiter. Jupiter takes it and they leave the room.

– To your cabin, Your Majesty? Asks Caine.
– No, I want to talk to Captain Tsing. Can you contact her see if she has time for me?
Caine smirks, the captain would make time for her even if she did not have any. He taps his implant.

[Commander Wise, what can I do for you?]
– Her Majesty requests a moment of your time.
[Very well. You can come to my ready room]
– Thank you, captain.
He taps his implant.
– She will see you now in her ready room.

---In the captain’s ready room---

– Your Majesty, what can I do for you.
– Captain, I wanted to check-in with you because of all the people that are getting on board. I do not know what your duties are, but I am sure they are not to serve as my personal ship. I want to make sure that we are not overtaxing the ship capabilities.
– Our duty is to assist you until you are settled in your position. This ship can accommodate up to 25 additional people.
– Okay, good. Have you been informed of our next destination and its purpose?
– Yes, Miss Apini informed me.
– Good, when we get there, I would like Mr. Apini and his family to have a private room, this will be very emotional and they deserve some privacy.
– Understood.

Jupiter stands.
– Thank you, Captain.

Jupiter leaves the captain’s ready room.

– Now we can go to my cabin, she tells Caine.

---In her cabin---

Jupiter takes the blank sheaves Kiza had brought and sits on the window seat. She starts writing transfers of “property” contracts for Honey-Bee and Seiza, transferring them to Stinger.

– What did they think of me? She asks Caine.
– At first, they were surprised and baffled. You were not what they expected. Some were suspicious. As Stinger said, usually the word of an Entitled means nothing to a Splice. Your Oath was so different though, it made them listen closely. They were all sincere when they swore their Oath… well I can not tell for Ezin and Kalie, no body chemicals.
– What about my second speech?
– Leo probably guessed that we are pack. He has a good nose. But he won’t say anything unless I say he can. They were all surprised that I failed a contract.
– Maybe you should tell them why… I am sure they would understand.
– It’s just so personal…
– You don’t need to tell them about the pack thing. From Kiza’s reaction when you told her “false scent” just telling them about that would be enough. Heck you were screwed over from the start. We changed a lose-lose situation into a win.
– How can you be so…
The door chimes. It’s Kiza.

– Jupiter, it’s time for the interview.
– Great. Grab 3 blank sheaves, please.
---Back in the conference room---

The table and chairs have been put back in their proper places. Jupiter sits at the head of the table. Caine takes his proper position behind her and Kiza lets Hiven Buzz and Dr. Comb Buzz in.

Their splice is more evident than Stinger’s. Their eyes are yellow and they have small antennas on the top of their head. When they are close enough to Jupiter to smell her, their eyes go wide and they kneel.

– Mr. Buzz, Dr. Buzz. Please stand back up and sit. Says Jupiter.

They sit two chairs down from Jupiter.

– Now, Mr. Buzz, I do understand from Mr. Apini that you like paperwork, but that your current position is rather stifling and that the Legion as not much need for your talents.

Buzz nods.

– Well, as a new Queen, I have a lot of paperwork to sort through and organize. Would that interest you? She asks.
– I do not understand, Your Majesty. You are asking? Buzz asks in return.
– Yes, Mr. Buzz. I am asking. I want people who want to work for me, not people who have to work for me. If you are happy with your current position, I will not purchase you. You should also be aware that although I would have to own you legally, I will not treat you like property. I am a different kind of Queen who believes that all sentient beings are people, regardless of DNA.
– Stinger said you would surprise me… Buzz stops, not sure what to add.
– Dr. Buzz, this is valid for you too. If either of you do not want to leave your current position, I will not purchase either of you. I will not split up a family.
– I go by Dr. Comb, she says. Is it true that you would take our baby-bees too?
– Yes, Dr. Comb. I get all of you or none of you. Take some time to discuss this between the two of you.

She turns around to look at Caine and say in Russian:

– What do you think?
– They smell trustworthy.
– Thanks, that nose of your is so handy!

Was that a blush she saw? He seems to blush when she appreciates his many skills. She turns back to the Buzz couple.

– Have you made a decision? She asks.
– Your Majesty, it would be an honor to work for you.
– Great! Kiza, to you have those contracts? And I need the blank sheaves too.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

Kiza hands her the purchase contracts for Buzz, Comb, Crystal and Pupa and Jupiter seals them and hands them back to Kiza. Then she takes the blank sheaves and writes down transfers of property contracts for Comb, Crystal and Pupa. She hands them to Buzz.

– If these are satisfactory, I will seal them. She tells him.
Buzz is completely baffled by what he reads. That Queen is even more special then he felt. She wants to give him his Queen-Bee and his baby-bees for free! He shows the sheaves to Dr. Comb and she tears up. Buzz has to clear his throat before he can speak.

– This is more then satisfactory.

He hands her back the sheaves.

– But may I ask why you would do such a thing.

Jupiter seals the sheaves.

– Because, I understand about family, and pain and hurt. This way you can never be parted.

She hands the sheaves to Kiza.

– Now, I have a few tasks for you already. First you need to write down a work contract for yourself and a loan contract for Dr. Comb so she can be Chief Medical Officer. Kiza can help you with what I consider fair pay. I also need a breakdown of my Skybreakers payroll. Then Kiza should have a list of people to track down and acquire, I need contracts for that too. When they are ready, Kiza can show you to my cabin. And after that, you need to go through my assets and find me a ship big enough for all my people and the ones I am sure I will have to add, be sure to check with Stinger for the Security check on any personnel left from my predecessor.

– Dr. Comb, go back to the outpost and gather your children and your belongings. If you need help, ask Stinger to lend you some Skybreakers. If he grumbles, tell him the faster you are on board, the faster we can be at our next destination, he will understand.

– Kiza, for their work contract, check what is normal pay for a pure human for each job and double it. In Russian.

– Now if you would all excuse me.

Jupiter stands and heads for the door with Caine on her heel.

---Back at her cabin---

Stinger has already organized her personal guards. Two are waiting at the door. Aves the hawk-splice and Veel the Mustel-splice, who reminds her of a wolverine. Jupiter salutes them and enters her cabin with Caine.

She throws herself on her back on the window seat and starts venting.

– Arg! Buying people is so wrong to me! How can anyone think that it is okay to own another person. I am nice about it, I ask first, but it still makes me sick to my stomach. And I don’t want them to think they have to say yes… If I could I would set you all free in a heart beat.

Caine smells her turmoil and crosses the room to kneel at her head.

– Jupiter, Your Majesty. You do not even see how amazing you are. No one would bother asking a Splice what he wants. It is not done by a pure human, even less an Entitled or a Queen! And giving a Splice his family for free is stupendous. Splices will be begging you to buy them, you are so generous and caring. Being owned by you is the closest they can get to freedom.

– Well, I may have to own them legally, but I sure as hell won’t own them morally.

She takes a deep breath and sits back up.
– Come and sit with me.

She pats the spot beside her. He stands and sit by her side.

– Right now, I need the Alpha part of you to tell me what to expect and what to do on pleasure hub #189.
– I do not know this particular one, but it would be best if you had at least the four personal guards required by protocol, I would go with six for security and regal entrance.
– I want Stinger and Kiza to wait on the ship. I want to make sure their reunion is a private one. So, I’ll take Buzz for the paperwork. Who would you suggest I take with me besides you?
– Aves, Leo, Tristan, Kalie and Pavonia. That should cover any possibilities.
– Great, anything else?
– You should also look more royal then an Aegis uniform and act superior. They will believe you are buying pleasure splices for your personal enjoyment. You should look the part in that place.
– Arg, does that mean putting on the black monstrosity I got from Titus again?
– I am afraid so.
– Well, I will not have to deal with Titus at least. Any idea of what I should do after that?
– You should probably find out what contracts are out there for your capture or elimination and arrange to have them terminated, like you did with Titus.
– You mean contacting Kalique and Balem?
– I would start with Lady Kalique.
– Because she does not want me dead?

Caine nods.

– All right, I’ll see to it with Kiza.

She closes her eyes for a moment and relaxes.

– Can you order me a cup of grula and a snack? And then you can take a break or something. I could use some alone time.
– Okay. I should report in with Stinger anyway.
– Right.

Caine stands and goes to the door, opens it and salutes her with a “Your Majesty”.

– You’re dismissed, she murmurs, knowing he would hear her.

She decides to do the corpse and relax while she can.
Five minutes later the door chimes. She sits and says “Come in”. Aves enters with her snack and cup of grula.

– Oh, thanks Aves.

She gets up and take the cup and the plate from his hands. Aves seems surprised that she thanked him and got up for her food. He says a “Your Majesty” and leaves the cabin. A few minutes later, while she is eating her snack and enjoying her space coffee, the door chimes again. It’s Buzz and Kiza.

– Come in.

When the door is closed behind them she says.
– What have you got for me?
– First, these, says Kiza, handing her portal pills and a glass of water.

Jupiter swallows them.

– Your Majesty, these are the work contract for myself and Dr. Comb.

Jupiter takes the sheaves and give them a quick read. Everything is in order, she seals them and hands them back to Buzz.

– This is your personal guards’ payroll.

Jupiter puts the sheave beside her.

– And these are the contracts for the list of people Miss Apini gathered. Some sheaves hold more then one contract.

She takes the sheaves and look at the names:

Plume Red-Tail, hawk-splice, Aves’s wife, and 2 nestling Harlan and Sky;
Lowe Felis, Leo’s twin and Leona, Lowe’s wife, both Lionide-splice;
Erminea Gulo, Mustel-splice, Veel’s sister;
Feliz Silver, cat-splice, Tristan’s friend;
Webe Albert, Castor’s mate and their 5 kits Mani, Sasko, Wakhe, Tawa and Kateri, all beaver-splices;
Prey Harpa, falcon-splice, Falco’s wife;
Golden Bower, bowerbird-splice, Menura’s husband;
Dophia Jewel, android, Ezin’s friend;
Hind Saturn, moth-splice, Pavonia’s husband;
Song Jade, android, Kalie’s factory sister;
Tergum Polaire, wasp-splice, Vespa’s drone.

Jupiter has to count once to keep from tearing up at all the pain this long list represents.


Buzz seems confused, but Kiza understands now that her Queen’s heart suffers with her people’s suffering.

– This will fix it, says Kiza.

Jupiter gives her a quick smile and seals the sheaves.

– If you find anyone more, any surprises, you do not hesitate to let me know. She tells them.

Kiza nods. At Buzz’s confusion she says.

– When I looked into buying my mother for Jupiter, I found out I have a sister. She bought her too. And she sealed a contract for a medical re-code because she has a bug.

Buzz has his jaw hanging. Jupiter smiles at him.

– I take care of my people, Buzz. And Splices are people to me, whatever the laws say. Says Jupiter.

After a brief pause, she asks.
– Now, is your family and belongings on board, Buzz?
– Yes, they got on 10 minutes ago.
– All right.

Jupiter takes the two transfer of property contracts for Honey-Bee and Seiza and hands them to Buzz.

– Hold on to these, I can not seal them yet, but I will need them when we get back on board with them.

Buzz takes the sheaves and looks at them. He nods in understanding when he sees the content.

– Kiza, I want you to give the purchase contracts for your mother and sister to Buzz. You will stay on board with your father for this one. I want your reunion to be private, not in public in that place.

Kiza’s eyes turn yellow and she nods.

– How long until we portal?

Kiza taps her implant.

[Yes, Miss Apini, says Phylo Percadium]
– Her Majesty wants to know how long to portal.
[10 minutes]
– Thank you, Phylo.

She taps her implant.

– 10 minutes to portal.
– Oh, wow, I have to get ready. Buzz, I will see you later.

Buzz leaves with a “Your Majesty”.

– Kiza, can you help me put that black monstrosity on? Caine said I would play the part better with it.
– From the memories I have from that place, he is right. Let’s get started.

10 minutes later, the lights blink and her stomach twist, they have portalled. 10 minutes after that there is a chime at the door.

– Come in.

Caine is back. He has to take a moment to look her from head to toes, she looks Entitled, but still smell like her.

– Hey Caine, how do I look? Kiza helped me.
– Very Entitled…
– Good. Now Kiza, bring those contracts to Buzz, and then, go join your father.

She leaves on a “Majesty”.

– Everything good for my visit?
– Stinger grumbled a little at not going down with you, but when I told him it would be best if “Her Majesty’s Chief of Security was not seen crying in public.” He agreed.
– Okay, then let’s go.

The guards at the door are surprised by her appearance. She just smiles at them.

– Aves, you are coming down with us. Says Caine.
– Sir, he replies. And take proper position behind Jupiter.
In the grav-beam room the other members of her “Away team” are also a little shocked by the transformation.

– It is still me, guys. This is public space, even I, have to play the part.

When the grav-beam activates she says:

– Okay, showtime.

Buzz is the first one to beam down, then they go down in formation, wings in regal position, above their heads. Kalie and Pavonia are first in the beam, then Aves, Jupiter and Caine and after them it’s Leo and Tristan. At the last moment Leo and Tristan fly out of the beam to touch down at the same moment as her. The effect is impressive.

A small crowd of people was looking at them. Not everyday that a Queen came down in full regalia in a pleasure hub, and most personal guards were not winged skyjackers. The sight was quite impressive. A small man came out of the crowd to stop in front of Buzz.

– Her Majesty, Queen Jupiter Jones, first prime of house Abrasax. Buzz proclaims.

Kalie and Pavonia split to reveal Jupiter.

– Your Majesty, I am administrator Jayce Reyna. He says bowing. Is Her Majesty here for pleasure or business?
– Business, she says with an affected hand gesture toward Buzz.

Buzz hands the two purchase contracts to Mr. Reyna. He reads the contracts.

– Her Majesty is aware that these two are not in prime condition? If she wishes we have far better-quality merchandise.

Jupiter internally winces.

– These two have been highly recommended for the purpose I have in mind. Have them brought to me with their belongings immediately. Says Jupiter with a tone that invites no more questioning of her intention.

– Would Her Majesty like to be shown to a better waiting facility?

She makes a small forwarding gesture and they all walk to a waiting room. No surprises there, it feels like a sex dungeon. After a security check, Jupiter sits on the most royal chair in the room and her guards places themselves in a semi-circle around her. Buzz is at her left hand.

10 minutes later two female bee-splices are shown into the room. One seems old enough to be Honey-Bee and the second one is younger than Kiza and she coughed a lot. They look alike and like Kiza. They are dressed in clothing covering a little more than a bikini would. When they smell Jupiter, they kneel.

– Name? Ask Jupiter, pointing at the first one.
– Honey-Bee, says the first one.
– No, full name. Jupiter says.
– Honey-Bee Melifera Apini. She says, and the “Apini” seems to hurt to say.
– And you are? Pointing to the younger one.
– Seiza Apini, she claims.

Pretending to look at her nails she says in Russian.

– Is it them?
– Yes, replies Caine.

Jupiter turns her head to Mr. Reyna.

– They will do, but not these clothes. If they have nothing appropriate, you will provide them with some. The person I intend them for prefers his property fully clothed.

Caine has to smirk at the phrasing. Honey-Bee and Seiza seems confused.

– Right away, says Mr. Reyna and leaves the room.
– Your Majesty, we do not understand, says Honey-Bee.

Jupiter smiles at her and speaking with her normal voice:

– I am turning your world upside down, and it is a very good thing. Seems to be what I do best. I can’t tell you more for now.

Mr. Reyna comes back with some ordinary clothes for the both of them, pants and shirts and flat shoes.

– Are these satisfactory, Your Majesty?
– They will do. She says with an uncaring tone.

Mr. Reyna hands the piles of clothes to them. Jupiter stands.

– We are done here. Follow Mr. Buzz, she says to the Apini women.

They head back to the ship. Buzz goes up first, then the Apinis and Jupiter and her guards per protocol.

---Back on the ship---

Jupiter acts like herself.

– Okay, that was a show alright. Hate putting on that persona.

Caine smirks. The Apinis eyes go wide.

– Aves, Leo, Pavonia and Tristan, you’re dismissed.

At the faces they make, Jupiter realizes they have not been informed of what that means.

– Guys, relax, it means “Go back to your duties” nothing more. She says with a smile. Let the others know, would you?

She turns to Buzz.
- I will take those sheaves now Buzz.

He hands them to her with a smile.

– You're dismissed.

He leaves on a “Majesty.”

She hears Seiza cough again. She turns to the mother-daughter duo.

– I know you are confused right now, but, let's head to med-bay first. I want to make sure you are both okay.

Caine leads them to med-bay with Kalie bringing the rear.

---In Med-bay---

– Dr. Holojem, nice to see you again. Says Jupiter.
– Your majesty, she salutes.
– I want Madam Apini and Miss Seiza to have a full medical check-up. Give them any treatment they require and I particularly want a report on the state of Miss Seiza’s bug.
– Yes, Majesty.
– And after your check-ups, please dress up in your new clothes. She says to the Apinis with kindness.

Dr. Holojem leads the women into med-rooms. Jupiter sits on a chair and hold the transfer of property sheaves to her heart.

– Caine, check with the Captain where they are would you?

Caine nods and taps his implant.

[Commander Wise, what can we do for you?]
– Captain Tsing, Her Majesty wants to know which room was set aside for the reunion.
[ Cabin 3b, to the front and the left of her cabin]
– Thank you, Captain.

He taps his implant again.

– Cabin 3b, front left of your cabin, Majesty, says Caine.
– Thanks Caine.

Dr. Holojem is done with the check-ups and comes to Jupiter.

– Your Majesty, both women are in good health. They both have some vitamins and minerals deficiency, but we gave them a supplement injection and with better nourishment, they will be in perfect health in a few days. As for Miss Seiza’s bug, it is in the early stage of development, it will not be life threatening for at least 2 years.
– Thank you, doctor. I would like that report in writing, please.
Dr. Holojem nods and hands her the report sheave. The Apinis come out of their rooms in the basic clothing provided by Mr. Reyna. She looks at both of them and smiles.

– Much better.

She stands and say:

– If you will come with me.

---At Cabin 3b’s door---

Jupiter seals the transfer of property sheaves.

– Now this is where I make the universe turns on it’s head to offer you something you never dreamed you could have or have again. Here is where I ease years or pain from your hearts and give you joy and happiness.

She hands each woman their sheave and hugs them.

– Give these to him, you are family now.

She signals Caine to open the cabin door.

Then time stands still for a moment, with on one side of the door Honey-Bee and Seiza and on the other side Stinger and Kiza. Then Honey-Bee and Seiza step through the door and Jupiter sees the start of what she can only describe as a bee-dance with the four of them with their eyes turned golden. She does not miss the tears in their eyes, then she smiles and signals Caine to shut the door on them.

– They deserve privacy, she murmurs.

She turns and heads to her own cabin.

---In the Apini’s cabin---

After performing the bonding-dance, Stinger kneels in front of Honey-Bee.

– My Queen-Bee, my Honey-Bee, he murmurs.
– My love, my heart. She says, opening her arms.

Stinger stands and holds his Queen-Bee in his arms. All that had hardened in his heart melts. With tears in his eyes and a rough voice he murmurs in her ear.

– I have never stopped dreaming of you. You are my home, being away from you was worse then torture. My heart remains yours for now and forever. I just want to say how much I need you. Now that we are together again, I will never let you go. All I ask of you is that we could grow old together.

Honey-Bee is crying. She speaks in between kisses.
– Stinger… You’ve always been… in my heart… I will stay forever… All of my dreams… have come true.

Kiza and Seiza hugs each other. They have both seen how much their parents have suffered apart from one another.

– I never thought I would get to meet you, Seiza says to Kiza.
– I never allowed myself to dream I could have a sister, even if I always wanted to have one, replies Kiza.

Then Seiza starts to cough.

– Baby-bee are you okay, says Honey-Bee.
– I’m fine mom.

Honey-Bee takes one of Seiza’s hand and one of Stinger’s and join them together.

– Stinger, meet Seiza, your baby-bee. She says.

Stinger eyes are yellow.

– Seiza, when I found out about your existence, it tore a hole in my heart. I dreaded what that place would do to you. And now having you here I feel my heart overflowing with happiness. My baby-bee…

He hugs her and holds her tight.

– I want to know everything about you, Seiza Apini, my baby-bee.
– Dad, mom talked about you all the time. My greatest dream was to meet you and Kiza. I only have one faded holopicture of you and now you are here and I’m here. I don’t know how this is possible. You put your arms around me and I am home.
– Oh, baby-bee, if I had known I would have tried so hard to…

Stinger can not talk more, he just hugs Seiza with all the love he already has for her. All his genetics tells him that she is his.

Kiza walks to her mother and take her hand.

– Mom… I’ve missed you so much.
– Kiza, baby-bee, I never forgot you, she says taking her Kiza in her arms. Seeing you so grown up and healthy makes all the sacrifices worth it.

Kiza is crying on her mother’s shoulder.

Then they have a family hug and for a long time they don’t move and don’t say a word. They only bask in each other’s presence.

Finally, another coughing fit from Seiza breaks the moment. Some worry shows on Honey-Bee’s face.

– I have something for you Seiza, says Kiza.

She goes get the Medical-recode contract sheave and gives it to her sister. When Seiza sees the priority recode in her name, issued by that strange queen, she tears up and hands it to her mother, who starts to cry again. That is just too much. Her baby-bee is going to live. She realizes she still have the other sheave in her hand.
– Her Majesty asked us to give you these, she says handing over the sheave, and Seiza does the same.

Stinger takes the sheaves and reading them he has to sit. He rubs his neck and brand.

– I should have known she would do something like that… She swore to do the right thing even when no one is looking… he whispers.
– What’s that dad? asks Kiza.
– She gave them to me…
– Oh! I suspected she would do it, she did it for Buzz’s family too.

Stinger looks at Kiza with his jaw hanging.

– How can all this be true? Honey-Bee asks.
– Come sit, we will tell you all about the Queen of Earth, says Kiza.

Kiza and Stinger spends the next hour explaining how the recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax, born on Earth, believes in equality, that no one should be allowed to own another being, that Splices are people and considers them family. How family is the most important thing for a Russian and that she was absolutely furious at the system when she learned about the sacrifice they had to do to get Kiza away from being a pleasure-splice. How she did not hesitate to purchase Seiza and sign the medical recode when she learned about her and her condition. And that she gave them to Stinger so that they could never be parted again.

They barely notice when the ship portals.
---In Jupiter’s cabin---

Jupiter wants to remove that dress so badly. But she can’t very well ask Kiza to help her. She does not feel comfortable asking for one of female guards to help her…The hooking system is complicated and, on her back, she can not undo it herself.

Caine smells her frustration.

– What is it, Jupiter?
– I can’t unfasten this monstrosity on my own… and I can’t very well call Kiza to help me.
– Would you like my help? He asks.

Jupiter blushes, and probably releases a huge spike of cinnamon hearts smell, at the thought of Caine’s hands on her. She is silent for a moment too long, contemplating the possibilities.

– Oh sorry, I was elsewhere for a moment. Yes, if you could unhook the back I can go change out of this thing.

She turns around. Caine smirks, he smelled the spike in her scent. It is really enticing and that she smells like this about him was beyond imagining. When he places his hands on her back, he feels the shiver that goes through it that she tries to contain. If she could smell him right now, she would know that he is thinking about other ways he could touch her. He tries to concentrate on unfastening the dress but his fingers linger for a second – releasing another spike of cinnamon hearts – before telling her he is done.

Jupiter is holding the dress in front of her and heads to change with a “Thanks” she does not dare turn her head, she must be tomato red from all that blushing, and she is sure he knows what was going through her head. She changes in the Aegis uniform and freshen her face with cold water. When she comes back out, she is herself again.

– I’ve decided our next stop, she says, putting her jacket on.
– Where is that?
– Where ever Marcellian Cahun works. We are going for Seiza’s recode. Could you arrange that please? I know it’s not your job, but I don’t have one of those comm implant.
– My job is what ever you wish it to be, he replies.

Jupiter gives him a “are you kidding me” look but does not say anything. She sits and picks up the Skybreakers payroll sheaves she got earlier and starts reading it while Caine talks to the Captain. The details of the payroll make her angry again at the system. Tristan, the only human on the team, is paid more then Stinger who is the highest ranked and the two androids together receive even less then Vespa Polaire who is the lowest ranked.
– Tell me, she says to Caine, how can I change how much you guys get paid?
– You would have to talk with the Legion, and that would be complicated. It would be better to give us bonus.
– I’ll have to talk to Buzz, because these numbers are totally unacceptable to me, she says dropping the sheave.

Jupiter looks up and notices that Caine’s hands are twitching.

– “Kozha” time? she asks, pointing at his hands.
– Almost, he says.

Jupiter sits length wise on the window seat to be able to look out the window and invites Caine to join her.

– Do not fight your instinct, she says tending him her hand.

Caine closes his eyes on a whimper. She knows him so well already. He gets to the window seat and he sits beside her, still hesitating.

– Go ahead, she whispers, looking him in the eyes.

This time he can not resist his instinct and after smelling her hair and neck he ends up rolled around her legs and she rubs her hands in his hair and on his shoulder. She feels the muscle-trembling once again; his body is adjusting. She looks at the stars out the window and let the wonder her father had for the stars fill her. She dreams of exploration, and all she has to learn about the universe. Maybe she could go see Sirius binary star in person. It could inspire her on what to do and how to do it. She was looking out the window when she felt and saw the portal happen. She sees a brown planet through the window. This must be where Marcellian Cahun works, it’s probably Stinger’s home planet in a way. She is lost in thought when Caine stirs, she does not know how much time has passed. she only knows they have portalled to a planet and that she is hungry.

Her grumbling stomach makes Caine smirks against her legs. She is so caring that she endures hunger for his sake. He checks the time, it’s been two hours! He loosens his grip around her legs. He feels steadier. When there is a chime at the door, he lets go of her and sits and she turns to face the door.

– Come in, says Jupiter.

It is the Apinis, the four of them. Caine stands and move to the side of the room. Jupiter stands to welcome them in, but before she can say anything, the four of them kneel in front of her. Their eyes are yellow and there are tears in them.

– Stand, all of you.

When they are standing, she proceeds to shock Honey-Bee and Seiza while Caine, Stinger and Kiza have grins on their faces. She kisses Honey-Bee on both cheeks saying “You are family” and repeat the greeting with Seiza. Then Stinger and Kiza shock them both by saying “Thank you, Jupiter” and hugging her. Jupiter sees their shock, and smiles.

– In private, for family, friends and my personal guards, I am only Jupiter. I have officially greeted you with the Russian traditional “welcome to the family greeting”, you are now Bolotnikovs. You are family, you may call me Jupiter in private. She tells them.
– Why would you do so much for us? Asks Honey-Bee.
Jupiter smiles and then her eyes sadder.

– Because I understand pain of the heart and sacrifice. I have felt it and I have seen it everyday of my life. Please sit, she invites them. I will tell you some of my story and you might understand more.

They sit.

– Only Caine knows my whole story... When my mother was pregnant with me, my parents lived in Russia, it’s a country on Earth. At the time, the country was plagued with unrest and one night, their house was broken into and my father was murdered in front of her eyes. I never knew him, but I have lived everyday with the pain and the broken heart of my mother and I would give up anything to be able to know my father and soothe my mother’s broken heart. My mother was so scared for my future in Russia that she illegally immigrated to the United States, another country on Earth, sacrificing all that she knew to try to give me a better future. I was born in a cargo container, on a cargo ship in the middle of the ocean, not belonging to any country on Earth. For almost 23 Earth years I have lived as an illegal, sleeping in my cousin’s dusty basement with my mother and my aunt Nino. And ever since I was old enough to manage a bucket and able to clean a toilet, it is what I have done to earn my keep. Not having any choice for my future.

She pauses. Whipping tears from her eyes.

– Then out of the blue, three days ago, by a quirk of DNA, I found out that I am this powerful space-Queen. But this, she shows her sigil, does not change who and what I care about. It may change what I am, but not who I am. I am, Jupiter Jones, daughter of Aleksa Bolotnikov and Maximillien Jones, toilet cleaning housemaid, illegal immigrant from a tereon planet meant for harvest. And what I believe in is family, equality for all sentient beings and freedom.
– You do understand, Jupiter, says Honey-Bee. And she squeezes Jupiter’s hand.

Jupiter takes a deep breath and declares.

– I will not have my people suffer in silence, even less people I consider family. You protect family. You take care of family.

Then a smile comes to Jupiter’s lips.

– Speaking of taking care of family… Stinger, take a look outside.

Stinger stands and looks out the window.

– Beeswax, Jupiter, already?
– There is no time like the present.
– What is it? Asks Honey-Bee.
– Jeymia… Marcellian Cahun splicing facility, for Seiza’s recode.

Seiza is so excited by the information that she jumps up and down and ends up coughing.

– Now, Stinger, will your splicer welcome your return? Do you want to go there by yourselves or do we go down in full regalia?
– I do not know how she will react. Splicer rarely welcome back their creation.
– All right, full regalia it is then, minus the dress. Put a team together Stinger, 10 minutes sharp.

Stinger’s fist goes to his chest in salute.

– Honey-Bee, Seiza, take some time to think about what you want to do, if you want to work for me, I have plenty of positions to fill. It’s your choice.
They both look at her stunned, again, but nod.

– Kiza, when we come back, I need you to arrange a meeting with Kalique. The sooner the better.
– Very well.
– See you all in 10.

---On Jeymia---

Beaming down on Jeymia, Jupiter calls “showtime” and put on her queen demeanor.

Kiza and Buzz touch down first, then Honey-Bee and Seiza. After that it’s the turn of Aves and Kalie, then Caine, Jupiter and Stinger, and finally Leo and Castor who touch down at the same time as Jupiter, per protocol.

The arrival of a queen in full regalia is always a sight and in Marcellian Cahun facility it’s almost a panic situation. Everyone is straitening their desk, station, uniform, etc. Everything to make a good impression. In the reception, they are greeted by Miss Cahun herself.

Kiza, Seiza and Kalie split on one side while Buzz, Honey-Bee and Aves split on the other Caine places himself on Kiza’s side and Stinger on the other and they form a “U” shape honor guard with Leo and Castor closing the rear.

Before Miss Cahun can say a word, a loud buzzing sound is heard and a few thousand bees come to form a huge cloud above Jupiter. She raises her hands and makes them dance and follow her arms movement. Jupiter’s murmur can not be heard above the buzzing of the bees, but Caine can see Jupiter’s lips moving. The cloud of bees then split and small clouds goes circle around Kiza, Seiza, Honey-Bee, Buzz and Stinger, welcoming them.

– Leave us now, Jupiter says aloud. And the bees leave as fast as they arrived.

Jupiter sees Marcellian Cahun jaw’s hanging open.

– Her Majesty, Queen Jupiter Jones, first prime of house Abrasax. Proclaims Kiza.

Jupiter walks between her people until she faces Marcellian Cahun.

– Your Majesty, I am Marcellian Cahun, and this is my facility. What may we do for you?
– Miss Cahun, I have been told that you are the best bee-splicer in the ‘verse, says Jupiter, with a smile. I have had the opportunity recently to admire your work, you may remember Mr. Stinger Apini, my Chief of security. I have to say I was quite impressed by his abilities.
– Why yes, he was one of my subtler work, one of my best drones. Do you have problem with it?
– Not at all, Miss Cahun. His work is quite exemplary. I must congratulate you on a job well done.
– Thank you, Your Majesty.
– Now the task I have for you should not be complicated for a splicer of your caliber. You see I like to acquire my splices’ dependents and offspring, but this one, she points to Seiza, has a bug and I need it fixed. Right away.

Seiza hands the sheave to Miss Cahun.

– Why yes, she says looking at the contract. We can do this in 10 minutes, we only need the time to prepare the facility and the procedure takes about 30 minutes.
– Very well. Direct us to a proper waiting area.
– Of course.

Marcellian Cahun guides them herself to a waiting room and Jupiter has the ironic pleasure of seeing
her get more and more unsettled every time a bee-splice kneels when they smell her.

– I am sorry my presence is disturbing your facility Miss Cahun. You were, of course, aware that bees have been created by my predecessor as a way to recognize royalty and that they are particularly attuned to my specific gene-code. Bee-splices make the most loyal of splices for me. I must say I feel quite honored that you have specialized in bee-splices.
– Majesty, says Marcellian, nodding.
– Now, I expect your work to be perfect, so off you go.
– An assistant will come for the splice when we are ready.
– Very well.

Marcellian Cahun leaves and Jupiter is alone with her people.

Jupiter speaks in Russian.

– Kiza, Russian package for your mother and sister.
– Right. She says taking her LED diode thingy out.

She does the data transfer for the both of them.

– Now we can talk without anyone else understanding. This is Russian. Says Jupiter.

Honey-Bee and Seiza nods.

– What is your opinion guys, can we trust her to do a good job? Ask Jupiter.
– Jupiter, the little show with the bees would have been enough but complimenting her work with Stinger and how you feel honored by her work put it over the top. She would be ready to do anything for you. Says Caine.
– You are so good at this, it is almost scary. Adds Stinger.
– We have an expression on Earth. “Fake it ‘till you make it.” I have had a lot of practice with Katharine Dunlevy’s friends. But if I ever start to believe myself when I talk like that, send me back home to clean a few toilets, please!

Kiza snorts a laugh.

– So, everyone is good with Seiza having the procedure done here?

They all nods.

– Good.

The assistant comes and Seiza leaves with her.

Switching back to English.

– Mr. Buzz. How are you on that last task I gave you? Asks Jupiter.
– I have gathered the data on all the ships you have inherited, Majesty. We would have to look over them to see which ones covers all of your needs.
– We might as well do this now. Let’s see. I’m thinking something like Voyager in size to start with. What do you think Kiza?
– I would say bigger, you want to have bigger ships then shuttles on board and Voyager did not have to deal with that many children, you need facilities for them.
– Okay then something that can dock a ship big like this one and a few smaller ones? And children
facilities. A med-bay, cargo space, kitchen and mess hall. Stinger? Caine? Any input?
– A training facility and an exercise room, says Caine.
– Good defenses capabilities, and some offensive ones if possible, mentions Stinger.
– Guys, you can add input too, she says to her guards.

That is what they were waiting for apparently.

– Android maintenance and update facilities, chirps Kalie.
– Family quarters, adds, Castor.
– Rec rooms and offices, inputs Leo.
– Private quarters for you, and the required royal facilities like a reception hall and grand dining
  room, says Honey-Bee.
– Visitor’s quarters for up to a royal guest. Aves adds.

– Okay, Mr. Buzz, is there something in the list that covers these requirements?
– Let’s see…

He sorts the list and removes anything that is too small.

– There are 3 royal clippers that would fit the criteria’s. When we are back on board I will ask for
  status update on them and crew complement. You would not want a broken-down ship.
– Right. And I’ll need more people too probably. Starting with people to take care of the children
  and to feed us all.

Before the conversations could continue on, Miss Cahun returns with Seiza.

– Your Majesty, your splice has been fixed. The bug was common and the procedure was
  completely successful. We can provide Your Majesty with a full report if She wishes so. And there is
  also the matter of payment.
– Yes, I require a full report. And give your payment request to Mr. Buzz.

Miss Cahun hands over two sheaves to Buzz. He looks them over and hands the payment request to
Jupiter. She looks it over really quick, seals it and hands it back to Buzz. Buzz hands it back to Miss
Cahun, who smiles.

– Thank you, Your Majesty, it is a pleasure doing business with Your majesty. She says bowing.

Jupiter stands.

– It is time for us to leave. Continue your good work Miss Cahun.

They leave in the same order they came in, with bee-splices still kneeling as they walk to the exit.
A lot of talking in this chapter, but Jupiter has a lot to learn and to do. And Caine figures some things out.

***Family***

---In the grav-beam room---

When they are back on the ship, Jupiter dismisses the guards and Buzz. Only her new family is left.

– Okay, I don’t know for you, but I feel like a family celebration is in order. What do space people do for party?
– Entitled parties are comparable to Earth balls and galas, says Kiza.
– Eww, no way, I was thinking more in the “hot wings and a bottle of beer” or “shashlik and vodka” kind of party. You know, stuff your face with food and drink too much alcohol?
– That sounds like a last meal before leave in the legion, says Caine.
– Great, can we have one of those? I just want to be normal for a while, and I am starved.
– There is not much party food or alcohol on an Aegis cruiser, says Stinger.
– Damn, okay, we’ll have a real party when we get back to Earth. Put it on the list Kiza. Let’s simply go eat in the mess hall for now.

Jupiter grabs Seiza by the arm and tugs her along the way to the mess hall saying:

– I am so happy I could do this for you Seiza. Now tell me, is there any dream you had while growing up that I can help you with?
– You have already fulfilled my biggest dreams, Jupiter. Meeting my dad and my sister and being healthy. What more can I wish for?
– I don’t know. I know I always wanted to study astronomy and have nice clothes. Just think about it.

---In the mess hall---

When they enter the mess hall, people stop talking and look at Jupiter.

Arg, I’m just here to eat. I don’t want to be queen right now. She thinks.

When people keep staring at her, waiting for her to say something, she shrugs and mentally kick herself in the butt. Being queen is not something you can quit the same way you walk through a door.

– As you were people. I am simply here to eat.

The Aegis crew are stunned a little when they see the Queen get her own food and sit at a table with five splices but they soon return to what they were doing.

After everyone is seated with a plate of food and a drink, Jupiter takes her glass and says:
– A toast!

Kiza smiles and takes her glass, but the remaining four pair of eyes look at her with confusion. Jupiter shakes her head and explains.

– A toast is an Earth custom where you wish good health or goodwill for someone. Everyone takes their glass, someone says the toast, we all raise our clink our glasses together and everyone takes a sip in approbation.

She stands with her glass in hand and gesture them all to stand.

– A toast. To Seiza’s good health and happy future.

They clink their glasses, take a sip and sit back. Honey-Bee and Seiza have a semi-stunned look on their faces. They have had less time to adjust to the reality that a Queen considers them people and even family. A Queen wishing good health and happy future to a splice, that was astounding.

They eat for a while, exchanging stories about their lives. Jupiter does not miss the emotions on the Apini’s faces when one shares something one half missed, like when Seiza broke her arm and when Kiza got the cripa. She also sees that Stinger and Honey-Bee just want to be alone together somewhere and do what any long-separated couple wants to do. When we are done eating I will order him off-duty, thinks Jupiter.

When everyone seems full, Kiza stands with her glass and they all stand with her.

– To you Jupiter, the Queen who turns the universe upside down. May your heart never change and all of your destiny becomes true. Kiza says with a wink.

Jupiter blushes and lowers her eye lids for a second. Her destiny… Her destiny is standing right here looking at her with wonder in his eyes. She wants to hide behind her chair and throw herself in Caine’s arms at the same time. But she stays put and says:

– Thank you, Kiza. And winks back at her.

They clink their glasses and Jupiter looks into Caine’s eyes when she takes her sip. Trying to pass on the message that he is her destiny in more ways then the pack bonding.

They sit back.

– All right, Kiza you have that meeting to organize. Seiza, think about that future you now have and what you want to do with it. I’m sure Kiza can help you think about possibilities.

She stands and walks to Kiza to murmur in her ear.

– Keep your sister with you for a while, your parents need alone time, a lot of it.

Caine heard every word and he smirks.

Kiza nods, grabs her sister by the hand and tugs her away with her exiting the mess hall on a “Majesty”.

Jupiter takes her queen voice and addresses Stinger.

– Captain Apini, I assume that everything is in order with my guards’ schedule and everything?

Stinger strengthen up in his chair.
– Yes, Your Majesty. He replies formally.
– Good. Captain Apini, you are now ordered off-duty.

Then using her normal voice:

– Your first queen needs you.

Stinger catches the teasing glitter in Jupiter’s eyes and his eyes turn yellow. He stands and salutes.

– Your Majesty, he says.

He heads for the door and then makes a strange buzzing noise that has Honey-Bee blushing and rushing to her feet to follow him. Jupiter looks at them leaving with a fond smile on her face. Then she sees the amazed expression on Caine’s face.

– What?
– Your Majesty is so evil at being good, he teases.

Jupiter snorts a laugh to cover her blush and heads for the door, with Caine on her heel.

– Did I spook him?
– Not as such, but it is unsettling how you can change between both sides of you in the middle of one sentence.
– Except for you, you can tell with that nose of yours.

Caine ducks his head with a smirk.

– Does that disturb Your Majesty?
– No, but it makes it a challenge to surprise you.
– All of Your Majesty is a surprise.

Jupiter’s mouth forms a silent “oh” and an electric shock passes through her entire body. It makes her steps falter and she braces herself with a hand on the wall. For goodness sake, how can he make me feel this way, it’s not even been three days. She feels giddy like schoolgirl and her heart is beating faster. There is a fire in her belly and wants to throw herself at him again. She turns to look at him and he looks as out of it has she is. His eyes are open wide, his ears are pink, his nostrils flared and his mouth slightly open and she can see he is breathing heavy.

The spike of her cinnamon hearts smell is so sudden and stronger then anything Caine has previously smelled that it goes up straight to his brain and makes him dizzy and he feels like he has taken a hit in the gut. He has trouble breathing and his hands are shaking. His instinct yells “mine” and then she turns around and the look in her eyes! Oh! I will be dreaming about that look! She looks at him, at him, like he saw Honey-Bee look at Stinger. She is a Queen in that moment, but not just a Queen, his Queen, his home, his everything.

She takes a step toward him her eyes open wide.

– Jupiter, he breathes out, stepping towards her too.

They are inches apart, for a second and…

***Talks***

– Your Majesty!
Buzz’s voice startles them both. Caine steps back and Jupiter turns around to face her secretary.

– Yes, Mr. Buzz?
– I have the reports on your royal clippers and purchase contracts for the list of people you wanted to acquire for you to go through.
– Very well, Mr. Buzz. Let’s go to my cabin. I also have new tasks for you.

---At her cabin door---

– Hi guys, Jupiter says to Falco, the falcon-splice and Menura the bowerbird-splice.
Falco opens the door for her.

– Your Majesty, if you’ll permit, I have to assume Stinger’s duties since you ordered him off-duty.
Jupiter can see that he needs time alone. There is a “lost” look in his eyes.
– Of course. You’re dismissed commander. She says.

Caine salutes and leaves.

He did not really have to leave. There were not many duties to be done on an Aegis cruiser, but he needed time away from her to think. It was the first time he had been alone since he rescued Jupiter back in Chicago. The hole in the chest feeling was back, he felt like he left his heart with her, as if it did not belong to him anymore. He was heading to his cabin when he was stopped by Leo.

– Sir, may I have a word?
– It is not like you to be so formal Leo.
– This is of a private nature.
Caine nods. He can guess what Leo wants to talk about.

– Let’s go to my cabin, he says.

---In Caine’s cabin---

When he enters his cabin, Caine realizes he had not even step foot in it before. He had spent all his time with Jupiter, or almost. It has been a long few days.
He gestures to Leo to sit and does so himself.

– What is it Leo?
– Sir, you know my nose is not as good as yours, but you know it is better then the rest of the team.
Caine nods.

– You do realize that you smell like her?
Caine smirks and ducks his head. Smell bonding is one of the last steps in the bonding process.

– Leo… I had guessed you would smell it. I do not understand it all myself, I have learned many things in the last two days, my universe was turned upside down and inside out has she calls it, but I do know in every part of me that she is pack.
– Is that why you failed a contract?
– Yes and no. It is part of why I could not kill her, her death would have been my death, even if I did not realize it at the time, but the simple truth is: I could not kill her before I knew she was pack, because her scent was… faked.
Leo’s face goes pale. He knows what that means.

– You mean…?
– Yes. I was screwed over from the start. When I got to her in Chicago, a team of assassins from Balem had drugged her to test her gene-print. I had to rescue her from them to fulfill my own contract. The contract stipulated that she had to be awake and that I had to tell her why I had to kill her. I had to wait for her to wake up from the drugs and by the time she woke up, she did not smell like the gene-print card anymore. So, I talked with her to find out what they had done to her. She had been drenched in the fake gene-print smell. Killing her would mean a court-martial, and not killing her too… I chose not to kill her and took her to Kiza… and then we found out who she was because of Kiza’s bees.
– And in return she saved all of us…
– She saved us all… because we are people to her. When I started to go into severance shock, she could have let me die… but no. Have you ever seen a Queen crawl in a maintenance conduit to bundle up with a Splice in severance shock? She did that. She genuinely cares for us.

Leo is stunned. He stays silent for a moment.

– Can I tell the others about this? They are all a little unsettled that our commander failed a contract.
– Her Majesty said I should tell you all about it. I just did not have the time to do it. You can tell them about the faked scent, just not the part about pack. We are still trying to figure out that part.

Leo stands, says “Sir” and leaves Caine’s cabin.

Caine receives a communication from Kiza.

– Hi Kiza
[Hey Caine, the meeting with Kalique is in 3 hours at her alcazaar on Cerise.]
– We will be ready.
[Okay, bye.]

He taps his implant to connect to multiple people, after 5 “Sir” he says:

– Aves, Leo, Veel, Menura, Ezin escort duty in three hours. Her Majesty has a meeting on Cerise with Lady Kalique.

They respond affirmatively and Caine taps his implant.

He closes his eyes and remembers what just happened in the corridor with Jupiter. Remembering the look in her eyes makes him shiver. Oh, he wants to see that look again. And her scent, it was powerful enough to shutdown his brain preventing the “She is a Queen and you a lowly Splice” from even coming to mind. A few seconds more and he would have taken her in his arms and wrapped her in his wings. She called him her destiny, a miracle. Her equal and opposite, like a binary star system. “Jupiter and the one who is her equal and opposite, together” says his brand. Together. Equal and together. The idea brings out other desires and he realizes that he wants her to be his, as much as he wants to be hers. And that smell, that smell that spoke of heart and feelings, it spoke of desire too. He was sure about it now that he had time to think. This is much more then pack bonding. Is this mate bonding? Cinnamon hearts she called her smell, I would search the universe over to smell her again.

---In Jupiter’s Cabin---

Jupiter enters her cabin and Buzz follows. She settles on the window seat and gesture to Buzz to sit down.
– Let’s start with the purchase contracts Buzz. Any surprises?
– Your Majesty…
– Jupiter. It’s my first rule. In here I am only Jupiter.

Buzz is a little bit shaken, but he nods. He hands her the pile of purchase sheaves and she starts sealing them.

– Okay, Jupiter. There were no big surprises. Leona Felis and Prey Harpa’s purchase prices are higher than expected, but understandable since the former is expecting a litter of lionide cubs and the latter is nesting twins.
– Oh, so many babies and children. We will have to find people to take care of the babies and toddlers and also a teacher for the older children.

She hands him back the sheaves.

– I did start to look into that actually, since you mentioned it down on the planet. Song Jade is a pediatric nurse and Madam Apini has been taking care of the children of the other pleasure splices for the last 3 years, since her usefulness has a pleasure splice was expired.
– Thank you for the information, but it has to be their choice Buzz.
– Or course.
– Wait until I have a ship before filing the purchases, there is not enough room on this ship for all these people.
– Understood.
– Next, I want you make sure that my personal guards are not available for purchase and the same for you. I don’t want anyone to be able to swoop in and buy you away without your consent. And also prepare transfer of property contracts, so that families can not be split. Like I did for captain Apini and you. And make sure that the transfer of property renders the splices unavailable for purchase too. When one member of the family is a skyjacker, make him or her the owner. This procedure is valid for any subsequent acquisition, of course.
– You mean to give them their families too? Asks Buzz stunned.
– Yes Buzz, if I could I would make you all your own owner, but I can not do that legally. This way is the closest I can get to give you freedom and self-determination. This is the only way I can protect them and you from the system. Do you understand?
– Yes, Jupiter. He says with emotion.

She smiles.

– Good, my next item is the Skybreaker’s payroll. These numbers are unacceptable to me.

She takes the sheave on the seat and hands it to him.

– I was informed that changing their pay with the legion is not doable. But I can pay them bonus myself. I want you to check what is the normal pay for a pure human according to the ranks and specialities and fix it so that they receive a bonus doubling what a pure human would get, even for the androids. That is of course valid for Tristan too. And that is also my standard procedure for any further employees, double pure human pay for the same position whether they are human, splice or android. If no pure human does that job, make an educated guess on what it would be, and double it.

Buzz nods with a stunned look on his face.

– Good. Last point is the ship. What have you got for me?
– Of the 3 royal clippers, only two are worth looking at. The third one is so old and damaged that it is not worth repairing. They both have crew for the ships to function properly. You would only need your personal staff.
Okay, I don’t know anything about real spaceships, I only have experience with those in science-fiction shows.

She stands and gesture to Buzz to stay put. She goes to the door and opens it.

– Anything we can do for you, Your Majesty, says Falco.
– Actually, yes. You can start by calling me Jupiter. She smiles at him.

He nods.

– Can you tell me who is the best of you with ships specs?
– That would be Castor Albert, our engineer, Your- Jupiter.
– Great, can you tell him that I request his presence, please?
– Of course.
– Thanks.

She closes the door and goes back to her seat.

– We’ll wait for him. How is your family doing?
– They are fine, Jupiter. The children are a bit unsettled, there is not much to do for them on this ship.
– Yeah, that is why I need the ship. Space and facilities for my people. It should not be for more then a few days, I hope.

The door chimes.

– Come in. She says, expecting Castor, but it’s Kiza.
– What’s up Kiza?
– The meeting with Lady Kalique actually.
– Oh, when and where is it?
– In three hours at her alcazaar on Cerise. She is expecting you for a memorial for her mother, your predecessor.
– Very well, coordinate with captain Tsing and Caine please.

The door chimes again.
Kiza opens the door.

– Ah! Castor, come in, we were waiting for you. Kiza, stay with us, we are discussing the ship. Please sit both of you.
Kiza sit with a gesture saying she is on a call.

[Miss Apini, what can we do for you]
– Captain Tsing, Her Majesty has to be to Cerise for a meeting with Lady Kalique in three hours.
[Understood]
– Thank you for your cooperation captain.

Kiza taps her implant twice.

[Hi Kiza]
– Hey Caine, the meeting with Kalique is in 3 hours at her alcazaar on Cerise.
[We will be ready.]
– Okay, bye.

Kiza taps her implant and signals Jupiter that she is done.

– Castor, Buzz here has reports on my three royal clippers. We are trying to decide with which one
to go. He feels that one is a no-go, too old and damaged. Falco said you were the best Skybreaker for this task. I would like your opinion as an engineer.

Buzz hands over the three sheaves to Castor.

– Your Majesty, right away I have to agree with Mr. Buzz that one is too old and damaged. It would not even do a single portal jump.
– Castor, this is private space, just call me Jupiter.
– Very well, Jupiter.
– What about the other two ships?
– They are quite comparable specs wise. The first one is the previous version of the second one.
– Thank you, Castor. Kiza any opinion?

Kiza takes the sheaves from Castor and looks at details on the facilities.

– I would go with the first one, even if it is a little bit older, the facilities seem better maintained and it was returned to you from Lady Kaliq’s inheritance. The second one… came from Lord Balem’s inheritance. I do not think you would like Lord Balem’s style…
– What style is that?
– I think the closest Earth comparison would be dark gothic.
– Oh yeah, not my style at all. Buzz, have Stinger vet the crew of the first clipper when he is back on duty. You may not disturb him before he comes out of his cabin.
– Understood.
– Oh, I almost forgot, do you have the report on Seiza’s treatment? I would like to read it.
– It is in my cabin, I will go get it for you.
– Very well, you and Castor are both dismissed.

They leave.

– How is your sister, Kiza? Has she decided anything?
– She is very exited that she has a future. She would like to have a work contract that allows her enough time to study clothing design.
– Clothing you say, how about Lady’s Maid?
– I am not familiar with that term.
– A Lady’s Maid is the one to coordinate clothing, make-up, hair, shoes, jewellery, etc. and brings breakfast in the morning and tea and coffee during the day.
– Oh, that sounds quite perfect for Seiza.
– Can you go get her for me, I would like to discuss it with her.
– Right away Jupiter.

Kiza stands and bolts to the door with a little bounce in her steps. At the same time the door chimes. It’s Buzz bringing the report on Seiza’s treatment. Kiza takes it, gives it to Jupiter and leaves to go get her sister.

Jupiter turns on the sheave and reads:

MEDICAL GENE-RECODE REPORT
SPLICE: SEIZA APINI
SPLICE TYPE: BORN SPLICE
ORDER ISSUED BY: JUPITER JONES recurrence of SERAPHI ABRAXAS
REASON: TYPE 2 BUG
PROCEDURE: Genetic structure of splice was changed by gene-resequencer and 3 doses of medium grade ReCell.
SUCCESS RATE: 100% No further recode necessary.
Jupiter was angry with herself for not looking into what a medical gene-recode entailed, ReCell... another name for RegeneX... people juice... what else do they use it for? Was that what was used to heal Caine two days ago? She thought it was nanobots or something, but this is not Star Trek... It could have been this stuff. If it is so, it is a really powerful substance that was not going to be easy to remove from society. She was feeling confused on how to deal with that stuff. It cured Seiza and thinking about it, probably Caine too... was it less evil if used to cure people, family? Where to draw the line? If she had known, would she have sign the contract for the recode anyway? Those people were beyond help and she protected her own planets from Harvest. But what of all the other planets seeded for Harvest? She has a lot to think about.

When the door chimes, she counts to ten once before answering.

– Come in!

Kiza and Seiza come in her cabin.

– Sit please.

Kiza can see that Jupiter is upset about something, but she sits anyway and Seiza follows.

– Seiza, your sister tells me you would like a work contract that allows you to study clothes design?
– Yes. I used to help the other dress for their... work. I like the fabrics and matching colors and textures.
– What I had in mind was Lady’s Maid. You would be responsible for coordinating clothes, shoes, hair, make-up, jewellery, etc. to make me look good, and also bring me breakfast in the morning and tea and coffee during the day. It would leave you time to study, and your studies would be sure to help me look good at the same time. Would that be something you would like to do?
– Jupiter, that would be an amazing opportunity.
– Great!

Jupiter stands and takes Seiza’s hands in hers and make her stand to hug her.

– Now go see Buzz to write a loan work contract and come back with it so I can seal it. He knows my pay scale.

Seiza leaves.

– You want to talk about what has upset you while I went to get Seiza?
– That! She says giving the report to Kiza.

Kiza reads the report from her sister’s treatment but does not see anything out of the ordinary.

– What is upsetting you in this report?

Jupiter finds the lack of recognition from Kiza a good proof that people juice is everywhere in the society.

– The ReCell! I did not know they would use that to cure Seiza. Is that stuff used to heal everything? And what is it used for beside healing and fountain of Youth?
– Oh... that is a complex subject...
– Well I have 2 hours before I have to prepare for Kalique, might as well learn something important. Because as the product I find it really disturbing and upsetting that everyone seems to use this stuff without remorse as if it was not made from sentient beings.

Kiza visibly swallows and Jupiter remembers to herself that none of it is Kiza’s fault. She tries to
– Kiza, don’t be scared, I am not mad at you. I just want to know the whole truth.
– I can tell you what I know. But I can not give you specifics.

Jupiter nods.

– As I told you back on Orous, RegeneX is produced from Harvested humans from tersie planets. I do not know how they do it, but I know that the Abrasax are the leading family in it’s production. As the first prime and queen of the House of Abraxas, it means that you are the leading producer of RegeneX…
– I already forbid Harvesting for all the planets I own without my personal approbation.
– If you want to know how RegeneX is made, you may want to contact one of your refineries.

Jupiter winces.

– For what RegeneX is used for, there is as you know, to rejuvenate the body. Only Entitled are rich enough to have access to that and only royalty amongst the entitled have the luxury of millennia, other Entitled only have centuries, unless the become royalty. Royalty may choose to rejuvenate some of their staff, if they are fond of them, many will rejuvenate their top staff once or twice before discarding them…
– How much does it take to rejuvenate someone? And how long does it last?
– They use the purest form for this and it takes five full containers. After rejuvenation, the body ages normally, so it last until natural or accidental death or the next rejuvenation.
– Titus said that a container was made from 100 people… If they rejuvenate to their prime, that means late teens, early twenties…that is about a year of life for 5 people’s death… but I don’t suppose they wait to be old and grey before they rejuvenate.
– It depends on their wealth, the richer you are the more you have access to it…

Jupiter raises a hand in a stop motion. Kiza let’s her Queen process the information. Jupiter is counting in her head.

The door chimes. Seiza is back with her loan work contract.

– Jupiter, are you certain about that pay? It’s more then a human would get… Seiza says walking to Jupiter.

Jupiter smiles and gesture to Seiza to give her the contract. She looks at the number and seals the sheave.

– Yes Seiza, that is my normal pay. Welcome to my court, you are now to be referred to as Miss Seiza. I will see you later when we go down to Cerise.

Seiza nods and leaves.

Jupiter turns her attention back to Kiza.

– Next use?
– The second use for RegeneX is in the medical field. I do not now all of it’s uses but I know it can be use in a spray form, a liquid form, a gas form and ingested to treat different kinds of illnesses and trauma. The more rich or valuable you are to society the more access you have to it for healing. By default, all Entitled are healed using it. The Legion uses it to make the Skyjackers… the wing implant could not be done without it or it would take years to heal everything. And they use it to heal them when injured because they are very valuable. The Aegis also use it, but only if other treatments are not an option. The 3 grades of RegeneX can be used for healing. Entitled are healed with the
pure form. Pure humans and skyjackers are healed with the medium grade and Aegis and Legionnaire receive the low grade. Splices don’t have access to it as a general rule. If you want to know specifics about the medical uses, you may want to talk with a doctor.
– But there are other options to RegeneX for healing?
– For current health problems and trauma yes. Unless you are Entitled, belong to an Entitled or close to death RegeneX is not used as a first option. It’s too expensive.
– I… see…

So, Caine was healed with that stuff, in front of her. A Skyjacker and close to death and saved a Queen. She said nothing… he must have received RegeneX treatment more then once… Stinger and the rest too… not counting their wings implant… This is even more complex then she thought.
– Anything else?
– The third use on RegeneX are us, Splices. You need RegeneX to make a splice, otherwise the splice would not take. For the splicing, the pure form of RegeneX must be used, but I do not know the specifics on how much RegeneX is used to make one Splice. Maybe Miss Cahun would agree to give you that information. She was quite impressed by you.

Jupiter nods. My space family would not even exist without RegeneX… I can not be mad at them for using it and seeing it as a miracle. They owe it their very existence. She thinks.
– The last use of RegeneX that I know about if for androids. Without RegeneX, they would not be sentient, but I don’t know how they use it or how much.
– Thank you, Kiza. I have a lot to think about. Please see with Miss Cahun for information about the use of RegeneX in splicing before we leave for Cerise. Dismissed.

Kiza leaves and Jupiter does not think about RegeneX. Instead she thinks about Caine and what happened in the corridor. She saw “want” and desire in his eyes and he stepped toward her when she stepped toward him, instead of back. Oh, and the way he breathed out her name put a fire in her belly. She never felt feelings this strong before… Maybe it’s my scent when I get aroused, it might be enough to short-circuit his thought process and let him follow his instinct. That gives her hope, she is sure about it, Nino was right and Caine is her great love.

She decides to take a nap to be fresh for her meeting with Kalique. She grabs a pillow and falls asleep thinking and dreaming about Caine.

An hour later, when Kiza rings her door and there is no answer, she gets worried. Jupiter’s heart was hurt by the truth about RegeneX. She hopes she is not having a breakdown. She calls in Caine as backup.
– Kiza? What is going on? Asks Caine when he gets there.
– Jupiter is not answering… and she was upset when I left her.
– About what?
– RegeneX. She asked me for information about what it was used for and by whom… I fear she might be having a breakdown.

Caine listens through the door.

– She is fine, she is only sleeping. You should bring her a cup of grula.
– That is Seiza’s job now. She is her Lady’s Maid.

At Caine’s face, Kiza raises a finger, then taps her implant.
[Yes, Kiza?]
– Miss Seiza, please bring a cup of grula for Her Majesty.
[Right away]
– Thank you.

– Seiza wanted work that would allow her to study clothes design. A Lady’s Maid takes care of coordinating clothes, shoes, jewelleries, make-up, etc. to make her look good, and also brings her breakfast in the morning and tea and coffee during the day. She was very happy about it.
– Good.

While they wait for Seiza.

– I was wondering Kiza, have you heard of cinnamon heart candies on Earth? Asks Caine.
– Of course, you can’t miss hearing about those, especially around Valentine’s Day. They are everywhere for that celebration, that and heart shape chocolate boxes and heart shape everything. I’ve never heard of a day like that anywhere else.
– What do they celebrate?
– Love! It’s a whole day to celebrate love. Couples go to romantic dinners, watch love story movies, give each other presents. Why do you ask?
– Oh, she mentioned it was one of her favorite things. He replies.

Love. Is that what this is called? Does he smell love from her?

When Seiza arrives with the grula Caine use his security clearance to open the door. When he enters her cabin what he smells is very strong, almost as strong as what he smelled in the corridor after lunch. Is she dreaming about me? He steps carefully to the window seat and places a hand on her shoulder.

– Jupiter, Your Majesty, he says softly.

Jupiter stirs and opens her eyes.

– Caine, she says equally softly and with a smile. I was dreaming about when we went down the tower in Chicago.

Caine smirks and ducks his head. She was dreaming about me.

– Jupiter, says Kiza, I was bringing you portal pills and I was worried when you did not answer the door, so I called Caine.

Jupiter sits and blinks the fog of her nap away. Kiza hands her the portal pills and Seiza steps forward with the cup of grula.

– Seiza, that is exactly what I needed, thank you.

She takes the cup and swallow the portal pills with a large gulp and sigh with pleasure.

– Kiza asked me to bring it, says Seiza.
– It was actually Caine’s idea, retorts Kiza.
– Thank you to the three of you then. You are taking such good care of me.

She drinks another large gulp.

– What is the time to portal?
Kiza check the time.

– 10 minutes Jupiter.

And who is coming down with me beside the three of you?

– Aves, Leo, Veel, Menura and Ezin, replies Caine.
– Alright, go get ready girls, I’ll see you at beam-down.

The sisters leave and Jupiter is alone with Caine.

– Jupiter, Caine breathes out.

Jupiter heart beats faster. He has the same look on his face then earlier. But if they start something now, she will never be ready for Kalique. She puts down her grula cup and stands to face him. She takes his hands in hers and looks him in the eyes.

– Look into my eyes, you will see, I know Caine. I’ve known since Chicago. I had to leave you time to figure this for yourself. But I can’t get into this right now, or I will be in no shape to face Kalique.

Caine is silent, in her eyes he sees, he sees this is love. He can not find words to express all that he feels. He simply wraps his arms around her and brings her to him in a tight hug, then he deploys his wings and wraps her in them. Jupiter places her head on his chest and her arms around his back, under his wings, and holds him tight. They do not need words.

When the lights blink and she feel her stomach twist they reluctantly let go of each other.

– Your Majesty has to get ready, he murmurs.

She smiles and caress his cheek with one hand then takes a step back, turns around and head to the ‘fresher room. Caine mantles his wings and closes his eyes. He takes deep breaths. This is so incredible and perfect.

When she comes out of the fresher room, she smiles at him, then at the cabin door, she takes a deep breath, hold it in and let it out slowly. He opens the door for her and when she steps through, she is the Queen.
A short chapter for the meeting with Kalique.

In the grav-beam room, Aves, Leo, Veel, Menura and Ezin joins them with Kiza and Seiza.

– Showtime, she says.

And they beam down. Kiza and Seiza first. And then per protocol, Aves and Leo, Caine, Jupiter and Veel, and Menura and Ezin, touching down at the same time she does.

An honor guard of androids welcome her, like with Titus, and a slightly older women takes a step forward.

– Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of House Abrasax, proclaims Kiza.

Then the group split to let Jupiter walk forward.

– Your Majesty, I am Lady Kalique, second primary of House Abrasax, says the woman. Welcome to Cerise.
– Lady Kalique, it is a pleasure to meet you, says Jupiter.

Kalique takes Jupiter’s hand as if to kiss it but does not lays a kiss on it. Then she seems frozen.

– I’m sorry for staring, but it’s really quite astonishing.
– What is?
– It will be easier to show you, but first we must dress you properly.
– Of course, I have not had time to acquire proper clothing yet. You understand.
– Of course. I do have a few articles of clothing that now belong to you my dear.

Kalique guides Jupiter through her alcazaar to a suite for her to change.

– I can make servitant at your service if you wish it so, says Kalique.
– I will be fine, Miss Seiza and Miss Kiza can see to my needs.
– Very well. All the clothing in this room belongs to you, this was my mother’s room when she visited. When you are ready, Maledictes can show you the way.
– Very well.

When Caine signals that the room is secure, Jupiter, Kiza and Seiza enter with Menura and Ezin, the male guards wait outside the room.

Jupiter, Seiza and Kiza head to the dressing room, while the guards stay by the door.

– Wow, there is too many choices in here. Even Katherine does not have that many dresses.
– What type of occasion is it? Ask Seiza.
– A memorial for her mother. Maybe go with something simple? Says Kiza.

After a few minutes they settle on a lilac silk lace dress with flowers in the design and crystals and matching high heels.

Jupiter changes and Seiza closes the back of the dress.
– Now hair and make-up.

Seiza unties Jupiter’s hair and style them with crystals to match the dress and put some lilac eye shadow on her eyelids.

– Now you look ready.

Jupiter looks at her reflection, this is way better then the looks Titus had fit her in. This looks more like her.

– I am ready.

When she gets out of the dressing room, her guards strengthen up and salute her. Kiza and Seiza takes their places behind Jupiter and they head for the door. Ezin open the door and Jupiter murmurs “showtime”.

Even as he salutes her with her other guards, Caine’s ears pink when he sees Jupiter dressed as her rank requires.

– I am still me, she says in Russian.

Caine nods.

– Maledictes, could you arrange for my belongings to be sent to the Aegis Cruiser in orbit?

Maledictes bows.

– Of course, Your Majesty, if Your Majesty would follow me, we can join Lady Kalique.

And he guides them through corridors and grav-beam to a sort of boudoir where Kalique lay on a chaise. She stands looking at Jupiter with an appreciative look.

– Jupiter, you chose very well.
– Thank you, Kalique.
– Only Her Majesty may enter beyond this point says Kalique. This shrine is sacred.

Kalique opens a door with her sigil and guides Jupiter into a shrine filled with lit candles. At the end of the aisle in middle of the candles a huge statue, that look like Jupiter, stands.

– Could this get any weirder, says Jupiter.
– Imagine it for me, meeting your mother long after she’s past away.
– But I’m not your mother.
– Your planet is just now entering its genetic age. You understand very little about something which is a vital part of our reality.

Kalique lights a candle.

– In our world, gene have an almost spiritual significance. They are the seeds of our immortality. When the exact same genes reappear in the exact same order, it is for us what you would call reincarnation.
– Yes, I have heard about this. Your brother told me your mother was murdered.
– Yes, they never found who did it. She was approaching her 91st millennia when she passed.

Jupiter winces internally at the amount of RegeneX she must have used.

– I am very young in comparison, only 14004 to be precise. You’ll be amazed how quickly it passes.
My mother and I did not always get along, but I have a hope that this recurrence might mean a second chance for both of us.

She wants me to be her mother?

They leave the shrine to lay on chaise in the boudoir.

– I have taken to the habit of my mother of waiting for a longer period of time before rejuvenating, I have learned that with each rejuvenation our essence looses of it’s purity. But at my age, it is not possible to stop, we become dependent on it. Your essence at the moment is as pure as it can be, but once you close your eyes and take your first rejuvenating bath, everything changes.

Caine hears what Kalique says, and it dawns on him that the reason Entitled smell like sewer and rotten fish is that they are filled with the remnant of dead people, rotten bodies, corpses. And now he dreads the day Jupiter might start to smell like that. He hopes that she will stay true to herself and refuse rejuvenation.

– I wish for you the life you’ve always dreamed of Jupiter. Kalique says softly.
– It is hard to live when there are people trying to kidnap or kill you. I have already survived no less then 5 of these.
– I would never do such a thing to you, my dear but I fear I must warn you about my brother Balem.
– What about him?
– You see he is quite insane and furious and must have more then one contract on you. Before your recurrence Balem owned the Earth. Now that you have claimed your title, the Earth belongs to you. Earth is the ripest and most abundant Harvest in over 2 millennia. Your recurrence has robbed him of his most prized possession. I fear he may resort to unsanctioned actions against you.
– Like what?
– I do not know, but Balem is so old that no one can really predict his actions anymore.
– Thank you for your warning Lady Kalique. It has been a long day, and I am quite fatigue. If you would excuse me, I will retire to the ship.

Jupiter stand and Kalique follows. She takes Jupiter’s hand in the weird space-handshake.

– Oh, please do, and visit me again, new family is such a rare event.
– I will, Kalique.
This chapter is mostly a retelling of the Chicago-Jupiter refinery part of the movie, because it made sense to keep it almost as is.

***Aegis Cruiser***

On the way to the ship grav-beam area, Jupiter speaks in Russian.

– Caine, I want the ship prep to portal. I want to jump to Earth as soon as possible.

Caine nods. He can smell her worry and fear.

– Contact Stinger, I will need him and you. I also want a team of Aegis ready to beam down to Earth with us. And a full team of Skybreakers.

They make good time to the ship, Caine is so efficient that they are met by Stinger and Captain Tsing in the grav-beam room. Her worry is painted on her face.

– I fear Balem might have gone after my family on Earth. We jump there and we go down. I told Caine what I want, organize it.

Stinger nods. The Queen knows how to give orders when necessary.

– I'll go change in something more appropriate, we meet back here in 10 sharps.
– Yes, Your Majesty, Stinger says.
– Seiza, I need your help, Kiza, see to the rest of my people.

She heads for her cabin, escorted by Menura and Ezin.

In her cabin a huge pile of clothes awaits her, but she changes in an Aegis uniform with Seiza’s help removing the dress, then dismisses her. While she cleans up her face and ties her hair in a ponytail the ship portals. She leaves her cabin and Menura and Ezin escort her back to the grav-beam room. There her full team of Skybreakers awaits.

– We will be in place in two minutes, Your Majesty, says Captain Tsing. I will be going down with you as well as Phylo Percadium and Gemma Chatterjee.
– What time is it in Chicago?
– 2h36 AM by your time notation, replies Gemma Chatterjee.
– Good, less chance of being seen in the middle of the night.

***Chicago***

The grav-beam activates and they go down. They touch ground a block away from her house in an alley. They walk to her house, the Skybreakers surround it and Jupiter opens the door. The house is a wreck.
Mom? Oh, God, no! Nino!

A rat-splice is sitting where the table is supposed to be.

Good evening Your Majesty, I am Chicanery Night, he says.

Caine draws his weapon and aims it at Mr. Night.
A huge Sargorn points his gun at Caine.
Stinger and Gemma pull their weapons out too.

Easy, it says.
Where is my family? Asks Jupiter.
We can all only hope that they remain unharmed. Says Mr. Night.

Jupiter walks toward him and slaps him hard across the face.

I see you have the standard issue Abrasax temper. He says.
Bolotnikov actually, she retorts.
The transfer of title has already been processed. You and your Lord are trespassing in this precinct.
Says Captain Tsing.
We are aware of all current legalities, he says. I have been instructed to offer Your Grace a proposal.
You are to come with me to meet my Lord. There you will abdicate your title and in return my Lord guaranties that he will do everything in his power to see that no harm comes to you or your family.
You can’t do it Your Majesty, you can not trust these people. If you abdicate you will have nothing to protect yourself. Warns Captain Tsing.

Mr. Night snickers.

You’re going to kill them if I don’t come with you, says Jupiter.
Your Majesty, I could not even consider such an abhorrent crime.
He’s lying, says Caine.
You wound me Mr. Wise, he replies.
If I were trying to wound you, Mr. Night, you wouldn’t be breathing. Says Caine, containing his desire to rip the splice limb from limb.
If it makes everyone feels warm and cozy, the Aegis is welcome to follow us, interject the Sargorn.
No, she won’t be going anywhere with you, claims Caine.
Very well. I will inform my Lord you have rejected his offer.

Jupiter closes her eyes.

Wait. She says.

She turns to face Caine.

This is my family, she murmurs.
it’s too dangerous, he murmurs back. His eyes filled with his feelings for her.
I know…

Her eyes are warm for a moment and then she is the Queen.

…but it’s not your decision.
Jupiter turns back to follow Mr. Night and Caine looks at her leaving with dread and fury in his eyes. Jupiter has a last thought for Caine, reaching to the deepest of her heart she thinks “I love you, Caine” hoping that her scent will be strong enough to comfort him and stop him from blaming himself. And then she murmurs, so low only him could hear: “I’m counting on you.” Caine smells and hears her, his instinct yell at him not to let her go. But it is her decision. He will simply have to get her back.

***On the Aegis cruiser***

When the grav-hull of Jupiter – the planet – closes on Jupiter – his Queen. Caine feel like the universe is crashing down on him. His Queen, his everything, is out of his reach and in danger. Nothing in his life prepared him for the despair that he feels. He has trouble breathing and he feels as though there is a gaping and bleeding hole in his chest. His brain refuses to think.

When Stinger finds Caine a few minutes later, he is shocked by the way he looks. Caine has tears in his eyes, he never saw that before, but he knows how it feels when the person that is your home is out of reach, and that is what he sees in his eyes. His heart is breaking and he can’t find a solution to fix it.

– I know because of who and what you are unable to say this so I’ll say it for you. You let her go in Chicago because you’re a hunter who’s been searching for one thing his whole life. You survived so long without it, the fact that you may have found it terrifies you but not as much as the fact that she’s down there buried in several tons of hurricane and if you ever want to see her again, you take my advice, you get down there and you start digging.

Caine looks at Stinger and Stinger sees the hunter alive and strong in Caine’s eyes, he will not fail!

A second after Stinger’s speech Caine is out the door, heading for the hangar. He boards a Zero and launches as fast as the ship allows.

– Mr. Wise, as a matter of public record, I must inform you that I strongly advise against this reckless course of action that will almost certainly cost you your life. Captain Tsing informs him, in the comm system.
– Understood, he replies.
– Off the record, I will tell you that you are a man of rare courage, and I pray your aim is true. She says.

He bows his head for half a second.

– Thank you. He answers.

And then he launches himself into the eye of Jupiter. He uses all his pilot and hunter skills. His target is on the other side and he will get to her, or die trying. In the end the best he can do is crash as best he can and he is surprised himself that he survived.

***On Jupiter***

---In the throne room---

Jupiter walks toward Balem who is sitting on a floating throne. She takes a breath and when she reaches him she asks:

– Where is my family.

When he replies “You should have stayed dead” she knows Kalique was right and that he is insane.
– I am not you mother, she claims.
– No, my mother never cleaned a toilet in her life.
– Maybe that was her problem.

When Jupiter accuses him of killing people, Balem starts a whispery speech on profit with his creepy voice that make the Ferengi seem like Miss Congeniality.

– I’m not surprise you hated your mother, she says.
– I loved my mother.
– And yet you are trying to kill me.
– My mother taught me that all human society are a pyramid and that some lives will always matter more then others.

He touches her face and she closes her eyes, creeped out.

– It’s better to accept this then to pretend it isn’t true.

Balem takes a step away.

– Is that why you killed her, she accuses him.

He turns and slaps her hard but does not deny it.

Balem goes to his throne and retrieves a sheave.
This is a notice of abdication, you will confess your genetic incapacity to rule and return Earth to it’s rightful heir.

– Where’s my family? She asks again.

He gestures and the floor becomes transparent. Jupiter see her family surrounded by sargorns and creepy machines. She tries to negotiate for the release of her family, but Balem simply threatens her mother. She has to beg, she hates that.

– Stop, stop, stop, stop! I will do anything, you win, I beg, please stop. Please!

He signals to stop the machines and hands her the abdication sheave. Jupiter takes the sheave, trying to figure out ways to delay the abdication to give Caine more time to come to her rescue.

She reads the abdication, pausing more often then necessary. Then before sealing it, she asks:

– Once I seal this, how long until you harvest the Earth?
– I can promise that you will not see it.

That is not very reassuring, she thinks.

– But how long?
– You knew nothing about harvesting before why should it matter now?

*Because I am not a creep like you*, she thinks.

– Remember why you’re here, he murmurs.

She looks at her family through the floor.
– I came here to try and protect my family she murmurs back.
– Seal that sheave and you and your family will return home safely.

His voice is so creepy, she does not believe a word he says. She looks at the sheave.

– If I don’t seal this, you can’t touch the Earth even if you kill me. Is this right.
– That planet belongs to me. It is my right.

She removes her arm from the sheave and takes a breath.

– Not anymore.

Balem starts to threaten her when Mr. Night walks into the room.

– Mr. Night!
– It is an emergency, the grav-hull has ruptured, the gas is reacting to the stockworks.

Then there is an explosion in the room below and Jupiter sees Caine rescuing her family. After locking eyes with him, she shatters the abdication sheave. Balem tries to choke her but she knee-jerks him in the groin and he falls to the floor yelling “Kill HER!” to the android guards.

But before they can do so she falls through the floor, into Caine’s arms.

---On the refinery---

In the air, Caine smells the scent of people that reminds him of Jupiter. There is one in particular, the mother! He heads for that scent, if he saves her family, she will not need to abdicate to save them.

When he blows through a wall to where he smells Jupiter’s family, he is attacked by sargorns. He kills them and sees Jupiter through the ceiling. He jumps on a sargorn and places his iriser on the ceiling underneath Jupiter, looking directly in her eyes. Then he kills the sargorn and a few more.

The ceiling goes opaque, he has no time to waste, he turns on the iriser and catches Jupiter in his arms when she falls through. He places her on the floor and protects her with his shield and fires at the enemies. When the room is clear, he hands her his gun.

– Here take this, get your family out.
– Wait, she says, placing the gun on the floor.

He stops, he has too, even if there is a battle to be fought, she asked. She places a hand on his cheek. Then she kisses him, twice. And that is the most amazing feeling in the universe. His heart explodes in his chest.

– In case I don’t get the chance again, she says.

Caine smiles and kisses her back quickly. He wants to taste and feel her again, in case she is right.

– Go, he says.

And he goes back to fight the sargorns while she takes her family out of the room.
Balem had fallen through the floor at the same time as Jupiter and he attacks her with a sharp tool. She pulls Caine’s gun on him.

– You’re just like her, you won’t pull that trigger he says.

Jupiter lowers the guns and shoot him in the leg as a reply.

There is an explosion in the refinery and Balem and Jupiter fall through a hole in the floor.

– Jupiter! Caine cries out.

He tries to go after her but he is stopped by Greeghan, Balem’s lead sargorn.

After being strangled in the air, bitten in the shoulder and smashed into the floor, Caine manages to get the upper hand in a smart move and slams Greeghan through the hole in the floor made by his iriser and shuts it down at the last moment, killing him.

The Aegis contact him and he asks for extraction for Jupiter’s family. Once the last member of her family is on board, Captain Tsing warns him that they can not wait much longer.

– Give me every second you can, he says, grabbing two emergency suits pods and jumping out of the ship to find Jupiter.

Jupiter is actually fighting with Balem, who attacked her again, after surviving the collapse of countless parts of the refinery.

Balem hits her with a pipe.

– Is this familiar mother? He asks. Does some part of you remember this like I do?

After being hit a few times and smashed into the floor, Jupiter manages to put her thumb in Balem’s gun shot wound. The pain makes him fall and she kicks him in the face. She stands up and grabs the pipe and hits him twice.

His insanity is so intense that he tells her “You begged me to do it”, as if she really is his mother.

Jupiter throws the pipe away saying: “I am not you damn mother.” She was about to walk away when the platform they were fighting on collapses and they fall into the refinery core, where Caine catches Jupiter. He flies to a platform where he presses an emergency suit pod to her chest and she is enveloped in a space suit.

– Jupiter, he breathes out.

She hugs him hard.

– Just breathe, he tells her while holding her, just breathe.

She looks at him.

– My family? She asks.

– There safe, he tells her.

Their gazes are locked but the portal drive activating send an adrenaline rush into Caine’s body.

– Oh, no! He says.

He hoists Jupiter on his back and gravity surfs as fast has he can toward the ship. He protects her as
much as he can from the explosions using his shield and Jupiter holds on with an iron grip around his chest.

He has to get to the portal, he has too. He wants Jupiter to live.

They make it, when the ship portals back to Earth, they portal with it and they are orbiting in space above the Earth. Caine squeezes Jupiter’s hand and smile at her.

---Inside the ship---

– Everyone all right? asks Captain Tsing
  – Aye Captain, replies her crew.
  – Captain, I don’t understand, but I’m pinging Mr. Wise again. Claims Gemma Chatterjee.
  – What? She says.

She flips something in her holo-console and Caine’s voice comes through he comm system.

  – Hello, in there.
  – Wise, where are you? Captain Tsing asks.
  – Why don’t you take a look out your window? He says. You may want to open the door for us or something…

The crew is overjoyed and Stinger and Captain Tsing are relived in learning they are both alive.
Stinger rushes to the airlock and opens if for them. Caine activates his boots and directs them towards it.

Once they are inside and out of the emergency suits, Stinger calls for a medical emergency, they are both in bad shape. The medical team brings them to the Med-Bay and Jupiter is in and out of consciousness. Caine refuses to leave her side before he knows she will be okay. Stinger also stays with them. When doctor Holojem brings in a container of RegeneX for Jupiter, Caine stops her.

– No, she does not want RegeneX used on her.

The doctor looks at Stinger for confirmation.

– Use alternative treatments, doctor, Stinger says.

Doctor Holojem obeys.

– How is she, doctor, asks Caine.
– She will be fine Commander, only superficial damage, not even a broken bone.

Caine breathes better.

– You should go get treatment yourself Commander, she says.

The doctor uses a sealing tool on the cut on her arm and Stinger forces Caine to leave her side to get treatment.

– She’ll be fine, pup, he tells him. You saved her.

Caine goes to his Med-room and let Dr. Comb treat him.

– Use alternative treatment if possible, he tells her.

She scans him and say,

I can use alternative treatments for everything except that shoulder, you would lose mobility and precision with alternative treatments.

He nods. Alternative treatments take more time, but, for Jupiter, he is willing to use the least amount of RegeneX as possible. Loosing mobility in his shoulder would put him out of the Skyjackers, Jupiter would understand.

Stinger is joined in the Med-Bay waiting area by Honey-Bee, Kiza and Seiza.

– They will both be fine he tells them.
– Did anyone tell them not to use RegeneX on Jupiter? Asks Kiza
– Caine did, he says.
– Whew, glad he thought about it. She would never forgive herself if it was used on her, especially if
there was other treatment possible.

Stinger nods. He does not fully understand, but he respects the Queen’s choice. They sit together and wait for the doctors to come inform them of their condition.

Dr. Holojem comes out first.

– Her Majesty is resting now, we gave her something to let her sleep. She had bumps and bruises and a cut on one arm. From the scans it would appear someone tried to choke her and that she was hit with a long and heavy object. The bruises on her back were especially deep. It is a miracle that her spine was not affected.

– Beeswax! says Stinger.

Kiza and Seiza gasp. Honey-Bee places a hand on Stinger’s arm.

– She is safe now, Love. She says.

– Thank you, doctor. He says.

Then comes Dr. Comb.

– Commander Wise will make a full recovery. We used alternative treatments for his injuries has he requested except for the damage to his shoulder. RegeneX was necessary to prevent loss of mobility and precision.

– Thank you, doctor.

– We should go back to our duties, says Kiza. It’s the best way to help her remain safe. I know Buzz has a ship’s crew for you to vet dad. Seiza, you should organize her new belongings. And I will check on the rest of her people, has she requested. Mom, I could use your help if you want. Honey-Bee nods. They all leave the Med-Bay.

30 minutes later a fully healed Caine steps into Jupiter’s Med-room and sits on a chair at the head of her bed. He weaves his fingers in her hair, closes his eyes and dreams of her.

An hour later, Jupiter wakes up half panicked and her head jerk pulls on Caine’s hand and wakes him up.

– Jupiter, you’re safe, he says. We are in Med-Bay. Your family is safe. Everyone is safe.

She turns her head to look at him, and then rushes to her feet to throw herself at him. He barely has time to stand and she is in his arms, hugging him hard. He closes his arms around her and presses tight against her.

– Caine, she breathes out on his chest.

He strokes down her hair and then lift her chin up to look in her eyes. In her eyes he sees pack, home, love, everything. She rocks on her toes and kisses him. This kiss is different from the one on the refinery, that one was quick and desperate, this one is slow and tender. She takes her time and explore every corner of his taste. Caine kisses her back, dazed and amazed by her taste and her smell. It goes up to his brain and down to his gut, it fills him with joy, laughter, relief and hope.

When their mouths separate, she makes a sigh and he lets out a whimper. She hugs him again then tenses. Med-Bay, she does not feel that cut on her arm anymore. What did they do to me? Caine smells the change in her and when she takes a step back he worries it was all a stress induced reaction. But he sees her looking and touching her arm, where the cut was and he understands that she worries about the treatment she received. He takes her hand in his and lift her chin up with the other.
– They used alternative treatments, no RegeneX was used on you. I made sure of it. He says softly.

He smells her relief.

– Thank you, she murmurs.

And she places her head over his heart and squeeze him hard.

– I could not let them use it, I would die inside the day you start to smell like they do. He confesses, placing a hand behind her head.

Kalique’s words resonated in her head. “Your essence at the moment is as pure as it can be, but once you close your eyes and take your first rejuvenating bath, everything changes.” Mixed with the fact that Caine could smell the difference between her gene-print and Seraphi’s while they are the same makes her understand that statement.

– That will never happen, she murmurs.

And he holds her tight again.

– What about you? Are you all patched up?

He worries a little at her reaction.

– Yes, all patched up. I asked for alternative treatment too. But they had to use RegeneX for my shoulder. Greeghan bit me, it was badly damaged. Dr. Comb said I would lose mobility and precision with alternative treatment and…

He stops. He does not know how to interpret the look on her face.

– You asked for alternative treatment because of me? She asks, incredulous.

He nods and ducks his head.

– Caine, that’s… that’s… I would never have asked you to… You’re amazing!

It is her turn to hold him tight. Caine breathes deeply, gobsmacked.

After a moment, she stifles a yawn.

– You need sleep, Your Majesty. He says and he smells a puff of cinnamon heart smell at her title.

She nods.

– But not here. Take me to my cabin. Please?

Caine smiles and grabs her in his arms saying:

– This might make it easier.

She smiles, places her arms around his neck and her head on his shoulder. She is asleep before they exit Med-Bay.

***Her cabin***
At the Med-Bay door, Vespa and Pavonia are on guard.

– Her Majesty asked to go back to her cabin. He tells them.

They accompany them to her cabin, Vespa opens the door and closes it back behind them.

Caine puts Jupiter down gently on the window seat. He brings her a pillow so she will be comfortable, but she wakes up and grabs his hand and tugs him unto the seat with her. She snuggles on her side with his bicep and shoulder as a pillow. Caine has his chest to her back and his back to the door. When he delicately puts his other arm around her, she sighs of contentment and he smiles against her hair. He breaths deeply to fill his senses with her scent. He feels like this is all just a dream, it is too perfect. They share the pillow and when she seems cold, Caine unfurls his wings and wraps her in one.

When Jupiter wakes up wrapped in Caine’s wing she smiles and snuggles against him.

– Are you awake? she murmurs.
– Yes, Your Majesty, he murmurs back.

She smiles and he smells her puff of scent.

– What time is it?
– The time you want it to be, he says.
– And for unEntitled people, what time is it?
– Ship time, it is mid-morning. Local time it’s midday, he pauses checking local info with his implant, 12h25pm in Chicago to be precise.
– Thanks.

She turns around to face him. He has a soft look on his face.

– Do you want me to call in Seiza with breakfast? He asks her.
– Not yet, if we open the door I won’t have a moment free. And we need to talk.

He nods. He mantles his wings and slowly they sit.

She takes a deep breath and goes for it.

– This, what is happening between us, is it only the pack bonding to you?
– No. I don’t know how to say what it is, lycantant are not engineered for feelings, but it is more than that.
– You mean normal lycantant are feeling-less soldiers?

He nods.

– But you are different, aren’t you? You are more... more human.
– Yes, but I always had to hide away that part of me, I never learned what feelings are. I can describe the sensations, the physical reactions, but I do not know what to call them.
– Why don’t you describe to me how you feel about me? I can help you put words on what you feel.
– One sensation I have is when I am away from you, there is this hole in my chest, as if I had left my heart behind and you were the one who holds it, like it did not belong to me anymore. When the grav-hull closed on Jupiter and I was stuck on the other side, it felt like huge gaping and bleeding
hole, as if I had been shot. It hurt so much… more then anything in my life.

Jupiter never had so many butterflies in her belly. *He may not know what love is or how to say “I love you” but his description is almost poetry. He gave me his heart! That is so romantic.*

– And when I am with you, you feel like “home”. Like it is where I belong. When we were in the corridor… my instinct was shouting that you were mine, my Queen, my home, my everything. I wanted to hold you tight and wrap you in my wings. And when you put your arms around me later, I was home. And when you kissed me on Jupiter, my heart exploded in my chest. When you are in my arms, I feel complete.

Jupiter smiles. Her eyes are big and bright. Caine smells her cinnamon heart scent rising, stronger and stronger while he describes his feelings. When he is done talking her scent is even stronger then in the corridor.

– And what do you want? She asks.

That he knows.

– I want you to belong to me and me to belong to you.

Jupiter straddles his laps and murmurs in his ear:

– I want that too.

And the kiss she gives him is not quick and desperate or slow and tender, it is hot and passionate.

Oh, wow, Caine is dizzy. Jupiter’s smell is a burning forest fire that sets him up on fire too. It’s never been this strong. Her mouth on his is setting explosions all over his body and his hunter instinct yells “mine”, “mate”, “take”. He’s never had the instinct to mate before and this suppressed side of him is awakening with sensations that frightens him. He has no idea what to do.

– Jupiter, he breathes out. This is so new to me… I… I don’t know what it is… or what to do.
– It’s okay Caine. Take your time. I’ll show you, when you are ready, and it does not have to be now. Just feel and hear me, okay.
– Okay, he manages to say.
– In your eyes I see all the love that you described, that is what you feel, love. And that is what I feel for you too. That is what you smell, that red and spicy scent. You gave me your heart, and my heart belongs to you. You are forever mine and I am yours for now, until forever.

The whimper Caine lets out comes from somewhere so deep and sincere inside of him, that Jupiter’s heart swells. She hugs him tight then places a hand in his hair at the back of his head and the other one on his shoulder and murmurs her next words in his ear.

– I’ve found you, Caine, *moya sud’ba*. Our love is the part of my destiny I did not tell you about, I wanted to make sure before I told you.

He lets out a slow breath and places his hands on her back holding her firmly, but not tight.

– I never thought you’d be the one to hold my heart, he murmurs. You are everything I never even knew I was looking for. You are my home, there is nowhere, unless you are there.

She places her forehead against his and slowly she brings her hand from his shoulder to his ear and caresses the pointed top of it. With one finger she traces the outer edge and another finger lingers on the soft spot behind it.
It sends a tremor through Caine and he catches her hand. He never felt sensations like that. He places her hand against his heart so she can feel how fast it beats. Jupiter takes his other hand and places it over her own heart.

– There’s nothing I want more. She murmurs.

Then she places her head in the crook of his neck and takes a deep breath, filling her nose with his jungle spicy smell, she shivers and hums in the back of her throat.

– For this, I’m just a woman, and you’re just a man.

She places a finger on his mouth before he can say anything.

– Do not say you’re just some splice, she tells him, because all that I see is perfect.

And with the same finger she caresses his ear again.

– Jupiter… his voice is hoarse.
– Don’t fight it, she murmurs.

Caine can not resist his instinct anymore, he is a hunter and she is what he wants. He put his mouth over hers and kisses her with the strength of his desire. He feels an onslaught of sensations, there is a raging fire in his body and the only thing that can put it off is making her, his. Her arms snakes behind his neck and she kiss him back with the same strength. When his mouth leaves hers, he breathes deeply behind her ear and his mouth goes down along her neck until it is at the junction of neck and shoulders. He opens his mouth and places his teeth on her skin. Then he stops.

Jupiter is all sensation, giving as much as she receives. When she feels his teeth against her skin, she knows what is coming and she feels his hesitation. Biting is not usually a human practice, but she can feel it is a lycan one and that it is part of him. She tilts her head to the opposite side and murmurs: 

– Go ahead.

Caine shivers. She is so amazing. Slowly, he closes his teeth on her skin, careful not to pierce it with his sharper teeth. When he releases his bite, words come out of his mouth without thinking:

– You are mine, Jupiter Jones.

He marked me has his! Jupiter has an instant reaction and she pulls on the shoulder of his shirt to open it. When his skin is exposed she does has he did, smelling behind his ear and trailing down his neck with her mouth, then at the junction of neck and shoulder she places her teeth on his skin. When his head tilt to the side, she bites down enough to leave a mark. She feels the shiver that goes through his body. When she releases her bite, she mirrors his words.

– And you, Caine Wise, are mine.

He stands up, bringing her with him and he hugs her tighter then ever before and wraps her in his wings too. Her heart sings “You may kiss the bride” and she tilts her head up, he has tears in his eyes, she snakes her arms behind his head and bring him down into a kiss.

Then she murmurs against his chest:

– I love you, Caine.
– You have my heart, he says in return.
After a moment of silence, when his instinct is quiet, Caine mantles his wings and Jupiter takes a step back to look at him.

– Erm, was that a Lycantant wedding? She asks beaming. Because it’s what it felt like.
– Is that what it’s called, mate-bonding, like pack-bonding?
– For mammal splices, yes.

Caine’s attitude is telling, Jupiter can see that he feels guilty or ashamed. Probably unworthy of her.

– Caine, she says softly. If it is, and I feel it is, I am happy about it. You’ll be difficult to explain to my mother, but I am truly, truly happy.

Caine straighten up and smiles softly. Jupiter gives him a soft and tender kiss.

– Anyone you trust who could tell us if it’s what we just did?
– Leo probably, he has the nose for it. And he smelled the pack-bonding already, we had a discussion about it.
– Okay, call Seiza for breakfast for the both of us and call Leo to be here in 30 minutes.

She pecks a kiss on the corner of his mouth and heads to the ‘fresher room.

***Breakfast***

When she comes out, fresh and clean, Seiza is placing the breakfast on the table.

– Thanks for breakfast, Seiza, I won’t need to dress up in anything fancy today, so you can return to your studies.

Says Jupiter, sitting at the table.

– I have taken the liberty to organize and inventory your belongings, she says, handing her a sheave.
– Oh, thanks Seiza. Anything interesting?

Seiza goes to get a box.

– These might interest you, they are communication devices.

In the box, Jupiter see what could be describe as plain jeweleries: earrings, bracelets, necklaces, rings and even hair accessories.

– You will be able to contact anyone with these, and I thought they would be easier to conceal from your family then the brain implant.

Jupiter nods and takes a bracelet that looks like a blue stone on a silk rope and places it on her arm.

– This one looks simple enough. Thank you Seiza. You’re dismissed.

Seiza leaves and Jupiter gesture Caine into sitting beside her. In the way he sits, stiff and controlled, Jupiter feels his tension.

– Caine? What is it? She asks.
– You don’t know how it is out there yet. If we really mate-bonded, it will make things difficult. Splices are not even supposed to touch Entitled.
– *Moya sud’ba*, I don’t care what they say or think or how difficult it gets. I would give it all up, I would sacrifice everything, I would lie and fake my way through anything for you.

He turns on the seat to face her.

– Jupiter… he sounds like he wants to argue.

She places a finger on his lips and looks into his eyes.

– Did you not hear me? “You are forever mine and I am yours for now, until forever.” She repeats her earlier words. I love you, Caine, you can’t tell me this is not worth fighting for.

He places his nose behind her ear and nuzzles. Jupiter places her hand in his hair and feels the tension leaving his body. He takes a deep breath and he is not stiff anymore. Her hand slowly moves to his ear without realizing it and she caresses it. When Caine has a very lupine head shake and he catches her hand, she freezes.

Caine never let anyone touch his ears before Jupiter, Lycantant ears are so sensitive. But the way she touches them feels so incredible, it wakes up that mating instinct again. He feels like he is suffocating, it is too intense, the animal part of him that is awaken scares him. His head shakes on its own, and he grabs her hand to soften the sensations.

– Sorry, she says.
– Don’t… he murmurs.

He looks at her and she see the wild fire burning in his eyes.

– Oh… too much, too fast? She asks.

He nods.

– Okay, she murmurs.

She places a quick kiss on his mouth, then smiles and says:

– Let’s eat.

And she reaches over for the cup of grula.

***Post-breakfast***

They have time to finish eating before the door chimes.

– Come in.

It’s Leo Felis, the Lionide-splice, has requested.
When he enters the cabin, he stops, frozen.

– Close the door, would you, and come sit. Says Jupiter.

That shakes him up, he closes the door, takes a step toward them and salutes.

– Your Majesty, Sir.
– Jupiter, she says. Leo, please sit.

Once he sits on a bench, Jupiter tries to find the right words. Caine seems on edge.

– Erm, this is rather personal, and uh, unconventional, but Caine said you could help, that you had the nose for it.

She pauses.

– When you smell us, do you smell something beside the pack-bond?

Leo closes his eyes and takes a few deep breaths. When he opens his eyes, there is surprise and confusion on his face.

– Yes, but this should not be possible, not for Lycantant…

Leo takes another deep breath.

– It smells like the second step of… mate-bonding? But how could it be?
– Caine is, let’s say, special. He was not genetically coded by his splicer, he was “created” in the gestator from cells from his litter mates.

Leo nods.

– But as you’ve said, it should not be possible and we need…
– Information. Completes Caine.
– Right. You said step two mate-bonding… What are the steps?
– Step one is the emotional connection, the feeling of love, when both mates love each-other. Right then, it should not be possible, Lycantant are bred without the capacity for feelings.
– I have feelings, Caine says. But I always controlled them…

Leo’s jaw hangs open for a moment.

– Step two? Asks Jupiter.
– Step two is some sort of instinctual physical marking of each-other. For Lionidons it’s a scratching on the bottom jaw. It usually mimics the animal we are spliced with.

Jupiter touches her neck where Caine bit her.

– Would that be like a wedding in human terms?
– Yes, it would.
– And is it permanent?
– That depends on the splice. For those who are spliced with an animal that mates for life, it is physically permanent and being separated for long period of time is worse then torture.
– Like Stinger… she murmurs.
– Step three is the actual mating…

There is hesitation on Leo’s face.

– What?
– The capacity for that is usually suppressed in Lycantants. He says with an apologetic tone.

Jupiter’s mouth forms a silent “oh”. She has to think about that for a moment.

– Anything else? Asks Caine.
– There is also a fourth step, when the mated pair have offspring’s.

Jupiter has enough information as it is. She needs time to think and she needs to talk to Caine, alone.

– Thank you, Leo. That will be all. Do not discuss any of this with anyone, please.

Leo stands, salutes and leaves.

Caine stands and faces a wall, he is stiff again, closed off. Jupiter stand and walks to him, she places a hand on his shoulder.

– You are worried, aren’t you?

He nods.

– Do you worry I would stop loving you?

He nods again.

– Caine, *moya sud'ba*, love don’t die *that* easy.

He lets out a whimper and turns around to face her. The pain on his face makes her insides twist. She hugs him hard and kisses him even harder, trying to convey to him the strength of her love. When their mouths let go of each other, they are out of breath.

– My love, *moya sud'ba*, she murmurs. We’ll figure it out, together.

– Okay, he murmurs back.

Chapter End Notes

Some of the dialogue was inspired by the songs "(Everything I Do) I Do It For You" from Bryan Adams and "Weapons" from Emily Kinney
Post-Jupiter, part 2

Chapter Notes

I had to change the tags to Mature instead of Teen and up...

I have no clue how American citizenship works, sorry if things are wrong. I'm Canadian.

***Paperwork***

The door chimes.

– A Queen’s job is never done… she murmurs. Then says “Come in.”

Kiza and Honey-Bee enter her cabin.

– Good afternoon Jupiter, Caine, I am glad to see you have both recovered.

Caine nods.

– Hi Kiza, what’s up?

Kiza smiles.

– Let’s see, while you were recuperating, I have arranged for your house to be repaired and mom and I took care of your people. Mom was a great help with the kids. We are getting a little cramped on this ship.
– Yeah, I can imagine.

She presses her comm bracelet.

[Majesty?] [Majesty?]
– Stinger, Buzz, report to my cabin please.
[Aye!] [On my way.]

She presses her bracelet again.

– Have you checked on your own house Kiza?
– Yes, it is all fixed. Thanks for the upgrades.
– And what is in the schedule today?
– The Aegis wants a formal report on what happened on Jupiter and we have to return your family to their home.
– How are they?
– They have had their memory of the events erased and they are in stasis.
– So, they won’t remember being abducted by Sargorns?
– They should not.
– Okay.

The door chimes.
Stinger and Buzz enter.

– Hi guys. Please, sit all of you.

They all sit.

– Let’s clear the official stuff for today.
– Honey-Bee, have you decided what you want to do?
– Yes, I would like to take care of the children.
– Great, nursemaid, governess, or childcare coordinator? We will be getting a lot of babies and children soon.
– I am not familiar with those terms.
– Oh, right. A nursemaid takes cares of babies. A governess takes care of children, including their education. And a childcare coordinator supervises the nursemaid and governess and can replace or help them when necessary.
– If it would not be presumptuous, I would like to be childcare coordinator.
– Very well. Buzz, make it so.
– Next, Stinger, have you received the ship crew list to vet?
– Yes, Jupiter. Everyone has been approved.
– And when do I get my ship?
– It will be here tomorrow, 7:30pm Chicago local time.
– Good, then Buzz you can go ahead and file those purchase contract, making sure everyone has transportation to Earth, arriving after my ship.

Buzz nods. Then hands her the work contract for Honey-Bee.
She seals it and hands it back to Honey-Bee. Who is baffled by her pay scale. Jupiter smiles at her reaction.

– These are the bonus for the *Skybreakers* that you requested.

He hands her a sheave.

– Ah! That is much more acceptable to me.

She seals it and hands it to Stinger.

– Jupiter, that is…
– Great? Awesome? She completes.
– Unheard off!
– Good! I told you, you would not be treated as property.

Stinger grins and hands the sheave to Buzz.

– Is everything else I asked you taken care of Buzz?
– Yes, the transfers of property contracts are all ready, and everyone in your household is set as unavailable for purchase whether they are own by you, own by someone you own or work for you.
– Good. I don’t want anyone to be able to buy anyone without their consent.

Caine and the Apinis are all gobsmacked by that information.

– Now, for my family’s return to their home, let’s make that at 8:00pm local time and I’ll ‘return
home” at 9:00pm. Which reminds me, Buzz, look into what assets I have access to on Earth, I own the freakin’ planet, I must have local money too. I may have to clean toilets with them for a few days while I figure some things out, but I don’t want it to be for a few years.
– Of course.
– Okay, now I want to go see my family, and then I will meet whoever they want for the official report in the conference room.

Jupiter stands.

– Caine and Stinger, you’re with me, the others are dismissed.

Kiza, Honey-Bee and Buzz leave the cabin.
Jupiter leaves for the cargo hold, followed by Caine and Stinger.

***Cargohold***

Caine and Stinger stay at the door when they enter the cargo hold.
Jupiter sees her family, with stasis bracelet keeping them asleep. Tears come to Jupiter’s eyes. She walks around, touching everyone of them and talking to them.

– Vassily, you protect family.
– Irina, you take care of family.
– Vladie, you were right, “Shit rolls downhill. Profits flow up.” And now I am the one who is at the up side.
– Mikka, Molka, vy spasayete sem’yu.
– Lyudmila, vy zabotites’ o sem’ye.
– Zeno, you can have all the cleaning jobs.
– Aunt Nino, you were right all along. I have found moya sud’ba. You’ll like him.

She goes to her mother last, places her head on her shoulder and murmurs to her.

– Mama, ya lyublyu tvoyu mamu. I found a man mama, he is not a boy like the others. He does not fool around. He is strong, powerful and yet gentle and caring. He does not hurt me, he saves me, protects me. I always thought my compass was broken, falling for the wrong guys all the time. He is not wrong mama, he is right. His eyes are like daddy’s, he looks at me like daddy in your wedding picture. I think daddy would have liked him. Me, I love him, mama. I hope you like him, when you get to meet him. He’s just different, good different. You see mama, in this society I am a Queen, and his kind are no better then slaves. And I want to change that. He deserves all the joy and happiness, he is incredible and he does not even see it. Remember, how much I love dogs, I’ve always loved dogs mama? Now I know why. And remember how much I’ve always wanted to fly? He has wings mama, beautiful feathery angel wings. And the stars mama, he took me to the stars. Oh, mama, I really do hope you like him, because I will never let him go.

She places a kiss on her mother’s cheek, wipe her tears and straightens up and head for the door. It’s only when she sees that Caine’s ears are red as tomatoes that she realizes he heard everything. She smiles at him and heads to the conference room.

***Conference room***

When she enters the conference room, Gemma Chatterjee is waiting for her.
– Your Majesty. I am here to record your record of the events that occurred on the Jupiter refinery.

Jupiter sits on a chair, Caine and Stinger at her back, wings deployed. She turns her head and speaks in Russian to Caine and Stinger.

– This might be hard to hear for you two. Do not blame yourselves that you were not there to protect me guys. Caine’s timing was perfect and it all worked out in the end.

When they nod, she turns back to face Gemma.

– I am ready.
– I am now recording the official record of events from Her Majesty Jupiter Jones, signified recurrence of Her Majesty Seraphi Abrasax. You Majesty, in your words, what happened once the grav-hull closed on you?
– The ship docked and I was escorted through the refinery to what I could call Balem’s throne room. He was waiting for me. When I asked him where my family was, he told me I should have stayed dead, as if he thought I was really his mother. After a speech on his mother, I accused him of killing her and he slapped me hard across the face but he did not deny it. I kept trying to save time, hoping my guards could get to me and my family in time.

She pauses.

– The second time I asked where my family was, he made the floor go transparent and I saw them surrounded by Sargorns and machines. I tried to bargain for their release, but he made a Sargorn activate the machines around my mother. I had to beg him for him to stop the machines. He handed me a notice of abdication sheave and I read it slowly, I was about to seal it, for my family, but instead I told him I would not do it, so he could not touch the Earth even if he killed me and my family. That is when Caine made an explosive entrance in the lab below where my family was. I shattered the sheave and Balem tried to choke me. I knee-jerked him in the groin and he ordered his synth guards to kill me.

She pauses again, when she hears Stinger’s buzz and Caine’s growl.

– Then we fell in the lab below through an iriser hole where Caine caught me while killing Sargorns. I moved my family out of the way while Caine continued to fight and Balem attacked me with a sharp tool, cutting my arm. I shot him in the leg with Caine’s gun. After an explosion, Balem and I fell through a hole in the floor into the stockworks. I managed to get out of there and kept trying to go back to my family. Balem found me and attacked me again, with a long metal pipe. He kept asking me if I remembered when he killed me, mistaking me for his mother, again. I managed to put my thumb in his gun shot wound, kicked him in the head and grab hold of the pipe with which I defended myself. When he accused me of begging him to kill me, again thinking I was Seraphi, I threw the pipe away and told him I was not his mother. Then the platform we were on collapsed and we fell into the refinery core. Caine caught me and we managed to reach the portal bubble before the ship portalled and then we were in space above Earth.
– That is more then enough and coupled with the medical report I believe you should receive a large compensation for the murder of your predecessor, the kidnapping of your family, your kidnapping and attempted murder of you and your family.
– Thank you. She says.

Gemma leaves.
She turns to face Caine and Stinger.
– Are the two of you okay?
– You should not have had to be in that position, says Stinger.
– And I should not have gone to the fertility clinic. I should not have dated the jerks Vladie put me up with. I should not have tried to get my license with fake IDs. I should not have gone to that concert back in high school. I should not have lost my dad before I was even born… You need more “should not”? Or you’ll stop blaming yourself for the shit life puts in my path?
Stinger shrugs.
– It’s not your fault Balem was an insane bastard who broke about 20 laws to use my family against me. I am just happy Caine got to me through a hurricane the size of the freakin’ Earth.
– I could not have done it without you Sting. Says Caine.
– What do you mean? Says Jupiter
– I felt like the universe was crashing on me, I could not think. He gave me a speech that helped.

Jupiter stands and hugs Stinger, she looks him in the eyes and say.
– Thank you, Stinger, she looks him in the eyes and say.
He just nods.
– Okay, back to my cabin.

***Jupiter’s cabin***

At her cabin door she dismisses Stinger and tells Veel and Ezin that she does not want to be disturbed under any circumstances unless it’s a life emergency. Once in her cabin Jupiter presses her comm bracelet.

[Majesty?]
– Kiza, I need you to compile a sheave about Lycan, and Lycantant. I want it for 6:00pm local time.
[Oh, I thought there was something different earlier. Is this about Jupiter in ascension? Does he know?]
– Yes, and yes.
[Whoop! Okay, I’ll have it for you.]
– Did you get the info from Miss Cahun?
[Yes.]
– Ok, bring it at the same time, and thanks, Kiza.

She presses her comm bracelet again then looks at Caine.

– Is there a lock on this door? And can the window on it be obscured? She asks him.

Caine smirks and flips a holocontrol on the side of the door, the window goes dark and she hears a clicking sound.
When he turns around, he is nervous, stressed, uncomfortable. He does not know if his body will react normally, what his instinct will make him do. He does not want to disappoint Jupiter. She is standing there, in the middle of the cabin and she smells stressed and nervous too.

– My love, moya sud’ba, come here, she says, opening her arms.

He takes the two steps to her and she enfolds him in her arms, holding him tight.
– I love you Caine, and I know you love me, even if you can’t say it. She says softly. Even if it’s not supposed to be possible.

She opens her arms and pulls on his shirt to open it and expose his shoulder. With one hand she touches the spot he bit and with the other she touches the spot she bit.

– This and this, tells me at least some of your instinct works.

He shivers when her fingers touch her bite mark.
She takes her hand from the bite mark he left on her and touches his brand. It sends an electric shock through his body. His wings unfurl unconsciously.

– This tells me we are meant to be. She says.

And they wrap around her to hold her tight.

– I just have two topics to clear. Erm, I have been taking fertility treatment to boost my eggs production for the egg donation at the fertility clinic and I’d rather not get pregnant right now…

He pats his shoulder.

– Standard Legion health implant, renewed half-year ago, last two years.
– Okay.

She takes a deep breath.

– Do you want to do this? Are you ready?

He searches within himself and finds no valid concerns and lets out a very husky “yes”.
She smiles and looks at him with fire in her eyes. She kisses him with that same fire and murmurs against his lips.

– You have to let me know if you like or don’t like something and if your instinct kicks in, do not fight it. And if you want to stop, we can.
– Okay, his voice barely a whisper.

Jupiter finishes opening his shirt and he furls his wings enough to remove it. There is a large release of her cinnamon heart scent when he is standing shirtless.

– God you’re handsome, she lets out.

She takes off her boots and he sit and starts to remove his equipment. Gloves, shield, mauler, boots. She straddles his laps and lay a passionate kiss on his mouth. Oh! the smell of her. It’s starting to make him dizzy already.

– Do anything that feels right she murmurs in his ear.

And she caresses his ear with her tongue. That sends him over the edge, his instinct kicks in and cries out “mine”, “mate”, “take”. He lets out a sound in between a growl and a howl and Jupiter shivers under his hands. He tugs at her shirt desperate to feel her skin under his hands and against his chest. Her skin is soft under his hands and her sigh of pleasure are like tiny explosions in his brain. He can not stop, this feels incredible, he wants more, he wants to know her taste. He flips her on her back on the window seat and lowers his mouth on her breasts, tasting. He smells and feels her pleasure and it makes him only hungrier for her taste. Her hands are in his hair and they shift to his ears, he wants to howl. There is this spike in her scent that drives him lower, he wants to taste that scent too. He is like
a man dying of thirst and she is an unending flow of water. He can’t get enough. He feels his hardening desire in his pants and that is new to him too, but he knows enough about mating that it just excites him more to know that his body is capable of mating. He still wants to taste her and he unties her pants, she lifts her hips to help him remove them and he gets a new wave of her scent, branding him as hers in his brain. He finds the source of her scent and he has to taste her. She is warm and spicy, hot as a forest fire and he feel and smells her rising pleasure. When he feels her climax approaching he hears her moaning his name.

– Caine! I want… I need… can you? Can you?

He raises his head and rises to her head and murmurs “yes, Your Majesty” in her ear. She shivers. He stands and strips of his pants as fast as he can and when Jupiter looks at his naked body he only sees desire in her eyes. He is back on top of her and her hand goes between his legs to stroke him. He shivers and then she spreads her legs and guides him inside of her. She is tight for his rising desire and he does not want to hurt her.

– Just go slow, she tells him when she sees his hesitation.

But he flips on his back, bringing her with him and relinquishing control. She lowers herself on him, slowly, moaning and sighing, and when their hips touch she rocks on him, he can not believe this much pleasure is possible. His body is on fire, he hungers and thirst for the smell of her. He wants to know every parcel of her skin. He touches her everywhere his hands can reach. She is his everything. She catches one of his hands and guides it between her legs. His touch makes her tremble with pleasure and his brain explodes with elation that he can please her. Her climax is approaching again, he smells and feels it, it is in the sounds she makes. The way she moans his name. When it comes, it surges in her like ocean waves, she clenches around him and falls onto him, her whole body is shaking. Caine is drowning in her scent of pure ecstasy, he breathes in deeply, relishing in it.

– Your turn she murmurs, when her consciousness returns.

She makes him flip back on top of her and with both hands she caresses his chest, shoulder, his neck and goes up to his ears, tracing the contour, and insisting on the tips and the soft spot behind them. Her touch is maddening. It drives him crazy, his body demanding release from this burning fire inside of him. His wings flare out, one hitting the window. He follows his Lycan instinct and when his climax approaches he cries out her name, the last sound turning into a howl as he explodes inside of her. His whole body is shaking, he feels like he was taken apart and put back together. He falls on her still shaking and when he rises back from the fog he was sent into, words he could not say before come out of his mouth:

– I love you.

Jupiter gasps. She knows he loves her, but to hear it, it does something to her. He flips onto his side as not to crush her with his weight.

– Can you say that again?

He smirks.

– You mean… “I love you”. He says with stars in his eyes.
– Yeah… She bites her bottom lip. How come you can say it now?
– I don’t know… something is different… inside me… I feel whole, not broken anymore.
– You mean mate-bonding fixed you?
He nods.
She tears up, tears of joy, and nuzzle against his throat.
Silence stretches for a few minutes.

– Was I… satisfactory? He asks nervously.

She smiles. Satisfactory is such a meager term.

– You were amazing! Truly!

His ears pink and he lets out a breath.

– Were you worried?

He nods.

– Caine, the first time is always awkward and unsure. I can tell you that even if it was your very first
time, you were miles ahead of all the guys I have known. It might be that nose of yours or your
Lycan instinct but wow you were amazing.

She hugs him.

– How did it feel for you?
– It was… I don’t think I have words that would describe how… I’ve never felt anything like this
before…

He rolls on his back, looking at the ceiling.

– Jupiter… I could not even do this before… my body did not work… I don’t even know… how it
does now… or if it will again…
– I have a theory about that…

He lifts and turns his head to look at her. She has a smile and glitter in her eyes, like she knows
something he does not. She stands and offer him her hand.

– Come, let’s go clean up.

Later, when they are clean and dressed and cuddling on the window seat, after Jupiter “innocently”
stroked the outer edge of Caine’s ears in the cleaning cubicle and showed him different ways of
using a shower…

– I think we can safely say that your body works fine now, she says softly.
– I don’t know how it happened, but yeah…
– I’ve confirmed my theory, she says.
– What is it?
– It’s your ears…

He sits up and looks at her.

– My ears? He asks.
– Yeah, I don’t know why, but when I touch them…
She strokes the side of one gently and Caine feels what she means. He catches her hand; his eyes are already dark and fiery.

– I see what you mean.
– I was touching your ear right before you marked me, that was my first clue. And when I touched it again right before breakfast, you had the look I always thought the Big Bad Wolf must have had before eating Red Riding Hood.
– Who, what?
– Oh, it’s an Earth tale about a wolf who eats a little girl… oh, wait I must have Internet access now that we are in orbit…

She grabs her phone, turns it on and does a quick search for the tale.

– There are many versions of the tale, because it’s an old tale, but you can read this one.
– I can not read Earth languages…
– Oh, is there a package for your implant for that?

He nods.

– Okay, I’ll get Kiza on it before we go down. For now, I’ll read it to you.

She reads him the tale.

– Anyway, the tale was not the point, it was the look on your face and in your eyes, when I touched your ear, intense desire. That was my second clue. When I touched your ear with my tongue you went totally bonkers, and you almost ripped my pants off of me when I was caressing both of them at the same time…
– That is when my body started working…

Jupiter grins.

– So, I tested my theory in the cleaning cubicle… and you know what happened there. She says with a suggestive smile.

Caine ducks his head.

– You might catch me starring at them in the future, but I promise to only touch them when we are alone, moya sud’ba.

She gives him a sweet and tender kiss and he nuzzles the spots where he bit her.

– I have to go back out there and be the queen now.
– If Your Majesty says so.

He kisses her fingers then starts to put his equipment back on.

– What is the time in Chicago now?
– 6:12pm
– Oh, Kiza will be waiting out the door… when you are ready, clear the window and unlock the door, please. The holo thingy are still a mystery to me.

When he unlocks and open the door, Kiza walks in with sheaves and Seiza with diner.
Hey, how are my favorite sisters doing? Says Jupiter.
Oh, wow… says Kiza, then pauses.

Seiza is oblivious to her reaction and simply places the diner on the table.

I’m fine, Jupiter, she says. Do you need anything else?
Not right now Seiza, you can go.

Seiza leaves.

What’s wrong Kiza? Asks Jupiter.
I’ve known Caine long enough to… There is something different here… she pauses, are you mate-bonded?

Caine nods then ducks his head with a smirk, Jupiter shrugs and smile.
Kiza steps closer and seems to open her senses, they hear a buzz coming from her chest and her eyes are yellow. After a moment of intense gazing and buzzing, she blinks herself back from what ever she was doing.

There is more… Something has changed in you Caine…

He nods.
The pattern of your brain energies is different…
What are brain energies? Asks Jupiter.
I think you call them brain waves…

She tilts her head and emit that buzzing sound again.

A part of your brain that was dormant has been awaken. Do you feel different?
Yes, I don’t feel broken anymore.

She nods.
You sense brain waves?
Yes, I can recognise people I know from them. It’s like remembering their faces. It’s hard to explain.
That’s so cool!

Kiza smiles.
Anything else you can tell us?

She gets closer to Caine and repeat the buzzing.
The change is not stable yet, I sense variations in it. I can’t tell more, but maybe the data I collected for you will give you clues.

Kiza hands her the sheaves she brought with her. One is on Lycan and Lycantants and the other one is on RegeneX’s uses in splicing.

Thanks, Kiza. Now, back to Queen business.

She presses her comm bracelet and asks Buzz and Stinger to come to her cabin. Kiza takes a sheave to take notes. Jupiter sits back cross-legged and closes her eyes. When the door chimes, she opens her eyes and says “Come in”.


It’s Stinger and Buzz.

– Hi guys, please sit. She says.

They sit and she starts.

– I will have to stay on Earth for at least a few days, until I am sure my family is fine and I can find a valid excuse to leave, so, Kiza, I need everyone who comes down to have the voice and written translation packages for English. Oh, and we will operate on Chicago’s time while here.

Kiza nods.

– Also, I want the Apini and the Buzz family to have the day off tomorrow, maybe you can all go to Kiza’s house, the Buzz children might appreciate the space to move and run around in the corn fields.
– Stinger, organise the guard duties and such so you can be off-duty for the day. And I want the full Skybreakers team there to go up to the ship.
– Aye.
– I’ll join you there around 6:30pm to go up to my new ship when it arrives. I’ll need an outfit for that. Kiza, ask Seiza to take care of it, nothing over the top, and easy to walk in for the tour of the ship. I’ll change at your house.
– Right.
– Buzz, did you figure out if I have Earth money and assets?
– Yes, there are several bank accounts in the name of Abrasax Industries for the maintenance of the planet, when there are incursions from outsiders. The Keepers are in charge of that and use that money to do so.
– Keepers?
– They are like guardians, shepherds. They come from the Diorite system. Says Caine.
– Kiza, compile me a sheave on them, please.

Kiza nods and adds a note to her sheave.

– What else Buzz?
– I’ve taken the liberty of transferring money into a bank account in your name at the Bank of America. Your current funds are 2 billion of the American dollars. Also, I have had to regulate your citizenship situation to open your bank account. You will receive the necessary paperwork and cards by courier tomorrow.

Jupiter’s jaw drops. She is thunderstruck. It’s a lot of money, but the most shocking part is the citizenship. She did not even think they could do that… Well, yeah, she owns the freakin’ planet, she can’t be illegal on her own planet… "mama and aunt Nino?"

– If that is not satisfactory… starts Buzz.

Jupiter blinks, shakes her head and closes her mouth.

– No, that is great, sorry, it’s just a lot to process…

She closes her eyes for a moment.

– How did you fix my citizenship? She asks.
– According to your new paperwork, your mother, your aunt and you were accorded legal status two hours ago. There will be documents for them too, in the package you will receive tomorrow.
– And how do I explain it to them?
– I thought about that. I have left evidence, with what you call a lawyer, of a pro-bono case in your name. That lawyer died naturally two weeks ago and the new lawyer who got the case wanted to be
paid for finishing the paperwork. And that’s why you resorted to the fertility clinic. Where there was a problem and you left angry. You bumped into Caine, who is a security guard for a very important person, you told him your story and he brought you to her, she is a very resourceful woman and she paid the lawyer to finish the paperwork, because she has been in your shoes before.
– That sounds almost like the truth, except that the powerful woman is myself. And how do I explain the money?
– Ah yes, the first lawyer found an inheritance from your great-uncle Paul Smith, your father’s uncle on his mother’s side, he died without an heir and a trust in his name was left to manage the inheritance until an heir could be found.
– Is any of that true?
– Actually, yes, but the inheritance was five million pounds, which translated into about 6.5 million American dollars. That is what will be in the paperwork.
– Okay, okay, I can deal with that…

Vassili will want all the money… I have to be strategic. She thinks.

She pulls out her phone and writes a note.
MAMA AND AUNT NINO: 1 MILLION + house
VASSILI AND IRENA: 750,000 + house
LYUDMILLA: 100,000
ZENO: 100,000
VLADIE, MIKKA & MOLTKA: 50,000 COLLEGE FUNDS EACH, 100,000 when they have a degree.

– Tomorrow is Tuesday, only 2 houses to clean. We get home at about 3:00pm. That is perfect. Caine, will your ship still be on top of the Willis Tower?
– It should be, the stealth shield makes it impossible for Tersies to detect it.
– Good. We can use that to go to Kiza’s place then.

He nods.

– Okay, Buzz and Kiza, see you at beam down at 8:00pm, dismiss.

After they left.

– Was there anything else to discuss, Jupiter? Asks Stinger.
– Well, yes, but this is much more personal and Russian.
– Okay.
– I know you are not really Caine’s father, but you are the father of his heart and my father is dead, I can not ask him for this. It’s a little out of order and there is usually more to it but it is really important to me.

She stands and gesture to Caine and Stinger who stand too. Then she takes Caine’s hand in hers and kneels, making Caine kneel with her.
Caine has no clue what is going on, but when Jupiter says it is important to her, who is he to refuse? She is his pack, his Alpha, his Queen, his mate, his everything. What is important to her is de facto important to him. So, he stands and kneels with her. Her next words make his heart beat faster.

– Would you give us your blessing on our mate-bonding? She asks Stinger.

Stinger’s jaw hangs open, he is surprised by the request, once again Jupiter turns what he knows to be true upside down. A Queen and a Splice mate-bonding is unheard of, and a Queen asking a Splice for it’s blessing is ludicrous. But this is Jupiter, so he closes his mouth before she tells him to and searches for words. What would he say if Kiza asked him a similar request?
He nods and clears his throat.

— Jupiter, Caine, love is a risk, and you are both brave. Love is also a choice, and you made a decision. I have learned that love, true love, knows nothing of time or distance and that it always finds its way home. You have found pack, love, home and destiny in each other, and nothing can change what is meant to be. I pray that your love is true.

They bow their heads for a second and say thank you. Then they raise to their feet and Jupiter gives Stinger an impressive hug. Caine salutes his CO and then places a hand on his shoulder.

— Thank you, Stinger, you have no idea how much this means to me. She says.
— Aye. He pauses. Who else knows about this?
— For now, only Kiza, she sensed it, and Leo, because he can smell it.
— Okay…

He pauses.

— I’ve never heard of a lycantant mate-bonding…
— Because they can’t. Says Caine.

Stinger is shocked. Jupiter feels a stab of pain at the way Caine said “they”, she is not sure if he considers himself not one of them anymore or something else. She squeezes his hand.

— His file might say he was bred, but in reality, he is much more like a born lycantant. Think about it Stinger, he was created from random genetic traits from his litter mates, like Kiza and Seiza were created from random genetic traits of you and Honey-Bee.

Stinger nods.

— Caine has what they should all be allowed to have. It might make them good soldiers but they are not really living only surviving.

Her words echo Stinger’s earlier speech and Caine feels proud of his differences, he is not surviving anymore, he is living.

— Aye. Since this has many unknowns, I’ll schedule Caine in close guarding duty for the next few days.
— Thanks Stinger. You’re dismissed.

Stinger leaves the cabin and Jupiter turns to Caine.

— That went well. She says, beaming.
— I did not think you would tell anyone…
— Why? Because I’m a Queen and you a Splice?

He nods.

— Oh, Caine, moya sud’ba, I’m so happy I’d tell everybody, I’d make it a royal announcement and throw a huge party. But has you’ve said, I don’t know how it is out there, yet, so we will just let them think you are my favorite guard. Queens are allowed to have a favorite guard.

She gives him a teasing smile.

— How would they know that you are no ordinary lycantant anyway?
He smiles back at her and encircles her with his arms. She puts her arms behind his head and brings him down into a kiss.

– Now, go get ready, I’ll see you at beam down.

He gives her a short kiss and leaves the cabin.
I've changed Vassily from uncle to cousin after re-watching the movie, again, since Jupiter calls him cousin.

With this chapter we get to the movie's final scene. After this, everything comes from my own crazy brain.

Jupiter takes the sheaves she got from Kiza and thumbs the first one on. It’s the one on Lycans and Lycantants. She settles on her stomach on the window seat and starts to read. The part on lycantants breaks her heart, they are really bred like living weapons, no feelings, no life, no families. Perfect obedient soldiers. The holopictures make her realize how different Caine is from a typical lycantant. He is shorter and blond while they are at least a foot taller and dark furred. He looks much more human then they do.

When she gets to the section on Lycans, she goes to their mating habits and what she learns makes her smile. First off, she learns that a bonded pair does mate for life which puts butterflies in her belly and although she does not have lycan genes biologically bonding her to Caine for life, she swears to herself that she will do everything in her power to make sure he has no cause for regrets or doubts about her love. Then what she deduced is confirmed, lycans touch each other’s ears as a sign of mating interest. They also bit off a piece of each other’s neck as a sign to other lycans that they are taken. She is glad that their biting did not go as far as that. She also learns that they tend to nuzzle, lick and smell each other a lot, not that much different then other canine’s habits. My love of dogs sure prepared me for him. Maybe I should tell him how good he smells even to my human nose. She thinks.

She was about to change sheave when the door chimes. She sits.

– Come in.

Caine enters, but it is not really Caine, he looks human and a jacket is hiding his wings. She stands and walks to him, looking at him closely.

– God, what have you done?

He smirks. Then turns off something with his glove.

– Standard Legion anonymizer. Thought it would be best if you saw it in private first.

She sighs of relief when the effect is turns off and he looks like himself again.

– Yeah thanks. That was a shock. Will the others all look human?

He nods.

– Well, that is handy, but weird at the same time.
– If Your Majesty says so.
– I have to get dressed too, I can’t go back home in space clothes.

She strips to her underwear right there in front of him as if she has always done that and grabs her jeans, flannel shirt and sneakers then gets dressed. She grabs her phone, keys and her wallet. The only space tech she keeps is the comm bracelet.

– Ok, I’m ready.

They head to the grav-beam room and Leo and Pavonia steps in behind them. Caine did notice Leo taking a sniff and having a smile, and he nodded to him in return. He knows he will keep quiet.

In the grav-beam room, every Skybreakers, beside Stinger and those who arrived with her, is holding a member of her family. She walks to Aves who is holding her mother, looks into his eyes and simply nods. Then she lay a kiss on her mother’s cheek and murmurs.

– Mama, my zabirayem tebya domoy.

The grav-beam activates and they go down, directly to the front door. Caine and Stinger are the first to go down, making sure everything is secure, then Leo, Jupiter and Pavonia. Jupiter opens her front door and enters her house. Everything is back the way it should be, except for an alien with big black eyes kneeling down in front of her, handing her a sheave.

– He is a Keeper, Your Majesty, they work for you, says Stinger.

Jupiter nods and takes the sheave.

– Please stand, she says.

She looks at the sheave, it is a holorecording of her family, right before they were abducted. She has no idea how they have that, but they can just place them back were they were and they should not notice they lost a day.

– Thank you, she says to the Keeper.

It responds with a thrill and vanishes into thin air.

Jupiter makes the recording play and she hears her cousin Vladie admitting to the family that he convinced her to sell her eggs. She sees cousin Vassily and Zeno beating Vladie with a cushion. And she hears Vassily say “You don’t treat your cousin like chicken”. It makes her glad to see her family taking her side.

After the viewing of the recording, she signals to bring them down and the Skybreakers beam down with their precious cargo, precious because they are their queen’s family. They place them in the living room according to the holorecording and those who don’t stay on guard duty go back to the ship.

– How long does it take for them to regain consciousness after the stasis bracelet are removed? She asks.

– About five minutes, Stinger answers.

– Okay, go back to the ship, Stinger and then enjoy your free time, see you tomorrow, around 6:30 pm.

He salutes and goes back to the ship.
The remaining guards are Aves, Falco, Kalie and, of course, Caine.

The grav-beam deactivates. They remove the stasis bracelet and head outside quickly. Her guards activated their anonymizer and they all look human. Weird, she thinks. Jupiter closes the door and stands outside under the living room window and listens as her family recovers from stasis. After a few minutes she hears a thumping sound.

– You don’t treat your cousin like chicken, Vassily says.
– You little shit Vladie, says Aleksa.
– She wanted to do it! Vladie defends himself. She wanted to buy some stupid telescope.
– Telescope, says Aleksa.
– It’s a curse, our family is cursed, says Nino.
– I don’t care what she wanted, you don’t treat your cousin like chicken! Says Vassily, beating Vladie with the cushion.

Jupiter is satisfied that they do not remember the Sargorns and quietly leave the front of the house. She walks down a block and show them a furnished but uninhabited house that has been sitting on the market for about 2 years. No one wants to buy it since it was a crime scene.

– It’s not much, but better then to stand outside all night long and risk being caught by the cops. Just be careful not to be seen coming in or out.

They nod and head inside using an iriser. Caine stays out with her. They walk back to her house.

– Now I have to go back home and deal with the family. I’ll go to bed soon because we get up at 4:45am. Tomorrow we have two houses to clean and then we go back home at about 3:00pm. I think I can manage to get free around 4:30pm after dealing with the crazy stuff. I’ll see you then, but you can call me anytime.

– We’ll rotate on the close guarding duty, but I have the first watch. I’ll be on the roof if you need anything.

She smiles and she kisses him, a deep long kiss. Then she smells him behind the ear and going down to his throat and hugs him with her ear on his heart.

– See you tomorrow, think about what you want to do from 4:30 to 6:30pm, that’s a whole two hours for ourselves, she murmurs.

He takes her hand and kisses her fingers, there is fire in his eyes. She crosses the street, goes up the stairs and opens the door. Caine turns on his boots and lands on her roof.

***Bolotnikov***

– Mom? Nino? She says.

When her voice is heard, the voices of her family quiet down, Aleksa and Nino rush to the front door.

– *Jupiter!*
Jupiter has never been so glad to hear her mom’s voice. Aleksa grabs Jupiter in her arms and hold her tight. Nino comes and hugs with them too.

– *Yupiter*, you tell me you did not sell your eggs like Vladie said. Says Aleksa.

– Mama!

Jupiter tears up and holds her mom and her aunt. *You have no idea how glad I am to hold you like this*, she thinks.

– *Yupiter, dragotsennaya doch’,* what happened? Asks her mom.

Jupiter takes a deep breath.

– Mama, I’m fine now. Come, let’s sit I’ll tell you what I can.

They sit in the living room and the whole family comes to listen.

– Let’s see... I did go to the clinic to sell my eggs, but I changed my mind right before they started the procedure. They were not happy about that, they wanted to continue so I cried out for help. They gave me a large dose of anesthetic and when I woke up, it was 12 hours later. I was in a safe place with a man named Caine, I found out that he heard me cry out for help and he rescued me from the clinic before they could do anything to me.
– Stalin’s balls, says Aleksa in Russian.

Vassily thumps the cushion he was still holding on Vladie’s head.

– I was pretty shaken up when I woke up, you can understand, and I needed time to process what had happened. He wanted me to go to the cops, but I told him I could not. He took me to his sister’s house, and they took care of me. And he escorted me back here when I was ready.
– Oh, my dear, and you are okay, you’re sure?
– Yes mama, I am still a little overwhelmed by what happened, but I am fine. I just need to do normal things now, to shake things back into perspective, and sleep in my own bed.
– We can do that.

They hug each other and head downstairs to their bedroom. Nino follows. Once in their room, Aleksa asks:

– Jupiter, there is more to your story isn’t it?
– Yes mama, I should be able to tell you more tomorrow after work.
– Okay, *Yupiter*.

Jupiter kisses her mom on the cheek and goes to the bathroom. After a hot shower with real water she feels all her muscles beginning to loosen. The space-shower might be quick but a shower with real water is glorious.

– God that felt good. Nothing like a shower with real water.

After brushing her teeth and her hair she speaks to the air.

– Caine, can you wake me up at 4:20, please.

She feels a tingle in her comm bracelet and presses it.

[As you wish, Your Majesty]
Jupiter grins alone in the bathroom.

– I love you too, she murmurs. Try and get some rest.
[Good night]
– Thanks.

She presses her comm bracelet and heads to bed. Under her comforter, she looks at her sigil, proof this was not all just a dream. She remembers every detail of the last three days, waking up in Willis tower, heading to Kiza’s, Orous, Titus, the Apinis, her Skybreakers, the Buzz, Kalique, Balem, but she most clearly remembers Caine, she would redo it all, just to meet Caine.

She falls asleep and dreams of Caine.

On her roof top Caine listens to her telling a somewhat believable story to her family of what happened at the clinic. He did not think she would mention him, but she did, and his heart beats faster when he hears her says his name. Then he hears all the members of the family get ready for bed. There is some hustle and bustle in the house for 15 minutes and then everything is calm beside some running water. He hears Jupiter humming and sighing. He hears her saying something about a shower with water. He might try that someday. “Caine, can you wake me up at 4:20, please.” He hears her say.

He taps his implant and connects to her.

– As you wish, Your Majesty, he tells her.
[I love you too. Try and get some rest.]
– Good night.
[Thanks.]

He listens to the sounds of the night and Jupiter’s heart beat. He knows she has fallen asleep when it becomes slow and steady. He remembers that she asked him to think about what he wants to do tomorrow and he remembers her telling her mother she always wanted to fly. He can’t get her wings, but he might be able to get her boots… he connects to Stinger with his implant.

[Everything okay, pup?]
– Yes Sting.
[Why do you call then?]
– Do you know how I could get ‘jacker boots for Jupiter?
[‘jacker boots heh, that’s kind of a weird mate-bonding gift.]
– Sting!
[Okay, okay, I can make a request with the Legion, when do you want them?]
– Tomorrow at 4:00pm Chicago time.
[What foot size is she?]
– I’m not sure, ask Seiza, she should know.
[Okay, pup, you’ll get them.]
– Thanks Sting.

At 11:00 pm Aves arrives to replace him and he reluctantly heads back to the house Jupiter showed them. Falco is asleep in a bed and Kalie is keeping watch, android do not sleep. He finds a bed in
another room and lies down. He sets an alarm for 4:00am local time and falls asleep and dreams of Jupiter.

***Cleaning day***

At 4:00am he wakes up with his alarm, and he can’t wait to get to Jupiter. His whole body is craving her presence. At 4:10am he leaves the house and goes to her house. He is at the back door. At 4:20 he tries to comm her, but there is no answer. He listens and hears her heart beat, she is still asleep. He uses his iriser to enter her house and quietly he heads downstairs to where she sleeps. Her scent in his nose makes him shiver after the hours apart.

He touches her shoulder and murmurs her name. She stirs, stretches and blinks herself awake.

– Caine!

She pulls him down in a good morning kiss.

– Thanks for the wake up, now go back outside before anyone sees you. She says.

He does as she asked him. With the kiss she gave him still tingling on his lips.

Jupiter gets up, dresses quietly and heads upstairs. She heads to the back door and opens it. When Caine drops from the roof to meet her she smiles.

– Good morning. She says. Did you get any sleep?
– Yes, the bed was comfortable.
– Good. Are you hungry?
– Yes, but I have my ration bars.
– Oh, no, I’ll put some syrniki into you. Come inside.

She heads to the kitchen and starts the pot of coffee. Then she makes a huge batch of syrniki for the whole family and gives a plate to Caine.

– Eat up before anyone wakes up.

She puts some slice of bread in the toaster and she eat a few syrniki herself.

Caine eats the food his Queen prepared, it is tasty. When he is done eating she takes his plate and gives him another kiss.

– Go back outside, mama and Nino will be awake soon.

He does so. Outside he listens to the family waking up.

– *Jupiter, Jupiter*, get up, make the coffee. Says Alekza.

There is a pause, he hears Jupiter go downstairs.

Jupiter brings the breakfast to her mother and aunt Nino.
– Morning Nino.

Nino grabs a cup of coffee.

– Spasibo, she says.
– Pozhaluysta, Jupiter replies.

She puts the breakfast tray on her mother’s bed and takes the remaining cup of coffee to give to her mother.

– Morning, mama.

Her mother takes the cup.

– Zavtrak gotov, she says placing a kiss on her mother’s cheek.

She goes back up to clean the dishes she used to make breakfast while they get ready. She drinks her own cup of coffee with a silent delight in the taste, she missed real coffee. Grula is not coffee, she thinks. I’ll have to get some real coffee when I leave.

When her mother and aunt come upstairs, they gather the cleaning supplies they will need for the day and heads out to their first job. Jupiter can see four larges “birds” in the sky, following her and she smiles, thinking about Caine and her space-life. She works hard at both housed, not even looking into the owner’s closets. She can have all the Earth and space clothing, shoes and jewelleries that she wants now. Her only distraction is her sigil, that she looks at when she is alone cleaning the bathrooms. She lowers her pink cleaning glove’s cuff and smiles. At 3:00pm they are done and are heading back home.

As soon as she enters the house, cousin Irena come to the door with an envelope.

– Jupiter, a man delivered a huge envelope for you today. She says, handing her the envelope.
– Great, I was waiting for that before I could finish the story of what happened.

She hugs the envelope and goes sit at the table and opens the precious gift that it is.

She gets the papers out, there are three Certificate of Naturalization, her inheritance papers and her bank accounts papers and cards. She places the cards in her wallet and she can not stop the tears that come to her eyes.

– What is it Jupiter, asks her mother.

Jupiter smiles through her tears and hands out the certificate to her mother and aunt.

– These are for you, and you, she says, and this one is mine showing them hers.
– Stalin’s balls, exclaims Aleksa, are these real?
– Yes, mama.
– How did you… Aleksa can not finish her sentence.
– Maybe I should finish my story…

Aleksa nods.

– About a year ago, I found a lawyer doing immigration legalization pro-bono. I met with him, and he accepted to take us on. Everything was going well until he died two weeks ago. A new lawyer
contacted me, he wanted $5,000 to complete the paperwork. …that is why I went to the clinic.

She pauses. Aleksa squeezes her hand.

– While at his sister’s house, Caine was curious why I could not go to the police. I told him my story and he took me to see his boss. He is a security guard for a very powerful woman who once was an illegal immigrant like us. She was appalled when she heard to what I was resorting to try to pay for the paperwork’s completion, when all the job was done. She offered to pay the lawyer and I accepted.
– I hope that’s not mob money… says Nino.
– No, it’s all perfectly legal and I will repay her, because, you see, the first lawyer found out that I had an unclaimed inheritance from daddy’s uncle.
– Inheritance?

She hands her mother the inheritance paper, when she sees the numbers she is shocked.

– That can not be true…
– It is mama, 5 million pounds, over 6.5 million dollars.

Jupiter hears the gasps from the family. She sees Vassily is about to say something, but she raises her hand so he does not speak.

– Before you say anything, listen. I have decided to give some of it to the family. It is not done yet, because I needed these papers to do it. Mama and Nino, I give the both of you 1 million dollar, it’s enough to stop working if you want too and have a comfortable life. If you wish to move into a place of your own, I will buy you the one you want. Cousin Vassily and Irena, you will get 750,000$ as a thank you for sheltering us for such a long time and I will pay your mortgage. Lyudmilla and Zeno, you will get 100,000$ each, to do as you please with. Vladie, Mikka and Moltka, you will each have a 50,000$ college funds and you will get 100,000$ once you have a degree. The rest of the money is mine, but I will take care of you if you have real needs. She stares at Vladie. I will not pay for fancy TVs and robot vacuum cleaner.
– Jupiter, I know we don’t always see eye to eye, but that is very generous, more then I expected, says Vassily.
– You are good girl, Jupiter, says her mother.

Aleksa and Nino looks at each other.

– Vassily, we will not work for you anymore. Zeno’s crew can have all the cleaning jobs. And we will be moving out. Says Aleksa.
– Big surprise, he says.

Jupiter gathers her papers.

– Now, if you will excuse me, I have to get ready because I actually have a date. She says.
– What? They say.
– Is he Russian? Asks Lyudmilla.
– Is he rich? Asks Irena.
– Does he have a younger brother? Asks Mikka.
– How is he with a mop? Asks Vassily.
– What’s its name? Asks her mother.
– I don’t know, she says to her aunt’s question. It’s Caine, mama. And he already has a very good job, cousin. He does not have any brothers, Mikka. Even if he was rich, I don’t need his money, I have plenty of my own now. And no, he is not Russian.
Jupiter gets up.

– You’ll be careful with this boy, Jupiter? Asks her mother.
– He is not a boy, mama. He is not like the others and yes, always careful.

***Date***

Jupiter heads downstairs and hides her new papers in a box underneath her bed. Then she gets ready. She takes a quick shower, brushes her hair and put some clean clothes on. She does not want to smell like toilet cleaning products. She checks the time, 4:20, that’s good. She presses her comm bracelet.

[Jupiter?]
– Hi Caine. I’m ready, meet me in front of the house, on the other side of the street.
[Okay]

She smiles and presses her bracelet.

She heads back upstairs; her family is still in shock. At least I did not tell them I am a space-queen. She tells herself.

– Mama, Nino, start looking into where you want to live. And don’t wait for me, I will be late tonight.

She gives her mother a kiss on the cheek and heads out. Caine is waiting for her on the other side of the street. His anonymizer is turned on, so he looks human. She crosses the street, aware that her family is staring out the living room window, and she snakes her arm around his and starts walking. When they are out of sight of her family she tugs him between two buildings.

– Turn it off, she says.

He understands what she means and turns off the anonymizer. She lets out a sigh when he looks like himself.

– I missed you moya sud’ba. She says.

She puts her arms around his neck and lays a very passionate kiss on his lips and Caine kisses her back fiercely. When they let go of each other, they are out of breath.

– I’ve waited all day for this, it was really hard to stay away, he says, his voice husky.
– I thought of you every minute, she says.

She delicately caresses the side of his ear. Caine lets out a growl. He catches her hand, there is fire in his eyes and he his baring his fangs. He blinks, shaking the instinct.

– This is not a very private place, Jupiter. His voice is hoarse.
– Then send the other guards to Kiza’s place and we’ll go somewhere private, she says.

He smiles and taps his implant.

[Sir]
– Her Majesty says you are to join Captain Apini at Kiza’s house.
[Yes, sir.]
He taps his implant again.

– It is done, Your Majesty.

They end up at an hotel near the Willis Tower. It’s not upscale, because even with the anonymizer on, Caine is impressive, tall, dressed in black with a space-leather jacket and it would attract too much attention. Jupiter pays for a room with her new credit card and when the door closes behind them she locks it. She goes to the window and closes the blinds. Caine has followed her to the window and he turns off the anonymizer when no one can see into the room.

– Jupiter, do it again, please, he murmurs.

Jupiter has a blinding smile and with both hands she caresses his ears, starting at the front edge, she goes up to the points, circles them tenderly a few times and slowly goes back down the outer edge.

There is fire in Caine’s eyes and he is baring his teeth again, like he really wants to bite her. Her shirt is in the way so she lowers her arms and removes it. There is a flash in Caine’s eyes and when she tilts her head and murmurs “Go ahead” while looking him in the eyes. He lowers his head and smells and nuzzles from her ear to her shoulder and finishes with a bite at the junction of neck and shoulder.

– I am yours, Caine. She says.

Then she pushes his jacket off his shoulders, he pulls on the sleeves to remove it and lets it drop on the floor. She pulls on his shirt to open it, but he is too tall for her to reach his neck with her mouth. She puts her arms back around his neck and lift herself up enough to encircle his waist with her legs, snaking them under his furled wings. His hands automatically go to support her. This way she can reach up to the point of his ear with her mouth and she licks it. She feels his shiver and his growl resonate in her own chest. She nuzzles behind his ear, smelling deeply and sighing on the exhale.

– You smell so good, she lets out.
– Jupiter, he says trembling and sounding like a howl.

His head tips up and to the side and she smells and nuzzles the length of his neck and shoulder, humming at how good he smells. Then she opens her mouth and let her teeth and her tongue trail the whole length, at the way he shakes, she knows he needs her to bite him. She goes back at the junction of neck and shoulder and lets her teeth sink into his skin, hard.

When Jupiter bites him, Caine drops to his knees. Her bite is powerful, claiming, the fire it lit in Caine is stronger then the first time. His hands are shaking from controlling his instinct, his heart is pounding. The sound that escapes from him comes from deep inside of him and it expresses all that he feels.

– Yours, he howls.

Only then does she release her bite.

– Always, she says, fiercely, in his ear.

He closes his arms around her so tight, any tighter he would be crushing her.

– I love you, Jupiter Jones.
– I love you too, Caine Wise.
Slowly his hands move up her back into her hair and he bring her into a hunter’s kiss. It is possessive and passionate, hot and spicy. When he lets her mouth go, she bites his ear lobe while caressing its pointy tip. She feels his desire in his pants and letting go of his ear she murmurs:

– Take me to bed.

The flash of fire in Caine’s eyes is powerful and Jupiter shivers in anticipation when he stands. He holds her firmly and she lets go of his neck to unclasps and remove her bra. He pulls her up higher and she arcs her back in pleasure when he places his mouth on her breasts. His licking and soft nipping puts a fire in her belly she is like an offering to the ancient gods in his arms, offering every inch of herself to him. When he drops her on the bed he does not let go of her breasts, nuzzling and licking them while he removes his gloves. She pulls on his shirt to open it completely, only then does he let go of her, he straitens up to remove it. Jupiter sits and unclips his holster, while licking and nuzzling his abs. That he lets her disarm him, him the legendary hunter, shows how much he trusts her and it puts gas on the fire burning inside her. She respects it on the bedside table and does not miss the slight thank you nod Caine does.

She taps his boots with a finger and then proceeds to remove her shoes. He deactivates his boots and removes them, still standing in front of her. She unties his pants but he pushes her on her back before she can lower them. He unties her pants and removes them, kneeling on the floor on the side of the bed. He proceeds to kissing, nuzzling, licking and soft nipping the inside of her thighs while caressing her breasts, until her hips are bucking; her core wanting attention. And attention he gives it. Her legs go over his shoulder, snaking under his wings and he tastes and touch her until she climaxes in his mouth. She tastes and smells incredible and it’s burned into his brain. While she recovers, he removes his pants, his body demanding release.

He is still standing on the side of the bed, waiting for a sign that she is ready for more when she sits.

– God, Caine, you’re amazing, she sighs.

Then she strokes his harden desire with her tongue. That sends fireworks in his brain and a shiver down his back. She does it again, and his hands go into her hair and he pull her head back. She looks up at him and the fire burning in his eyes is an inferno.

– Too much? She asks softly.

He shakes his head.

– New, he says, voice trembling.
– Okay.

She caresses him with her tongue again, slowly, letting him adapt. When she gets to the tip his knees flinch and he almost fall to the floor, her name escaping from his mouth. It put the fire back in her belly and she tug him onto the bed, where she shows him all a tongue can do. When she takes him into her mouth he lets out his half-growl, half-howl sound and she hums of satisfaction. She keeps him in her mouth until he stops her, pulling on her hair. When they lock gaze they both have infernos in their eyes. She is so ready for him to get inside her, she wants to feel the hunter’s strength. She rises to his head, licking his torso along the way and taking support on her elbows, she caresses his ears and murmurs “Take me”.

There is a flash of power in Caine’s eyes, he flips her on her back and he kiss her hard, powerful. He his over her, his muscles hard as iron, his wings flared out and he shows her how much power is in his body when he trusts inside of her. Jupiter moans his name and some unarticulated sounds. She is so close and so is he. He touches her with one hand and her climax bring on his. They are both
shaking with pleasure. He drops on her, his wings not supporting him anymore.

He does not realize he is crushing her until she taps him gently and says “Can’t breathe”. He takes support on his forearms, mantles his wings and flips on his side. There is something contrite in his attitude, the way his shoulders narrow and he dips his head.

Jupiter turns on her side and lifts his head up with a gentle hand, but he keeps his eyes down.

– Caine, look at me, she says with tenderness in her voice

He looks up slowly.

– It’s okay, Caine. It’s actually flattering, she says with a huge smile.

His face lights up.
She kisses him gently. Then sits, stands and tugs him along to the bathroom to clean up.
It turns out Caine really likes running water showers, and the feel of Jupiter’s hands in his feathers, helping him to dry them out, after.

– I have something for you, he tells her, while they dress back up.
– Oh, what is it?
– It’s a surprise. He says with a smile.

They head out of the hotel and Caine brings Jupiter in an alley between two buildings and turns on his boots. He takes her in his arms and skates up higher and higher and then he heads for the Willis tower where he put her down gently on the top.

– Just wait here. He says.

She watches as he walks away and disappears inside his invisible ship. He comes out with an Earth gift bag and hands it to her.

– I see Kiza helped you with that, she teases.

He smirks and ducks his head.

– Stinger and Seiza too

She sits down on the higher outer edge, curious, and opens the bag. She gets out some elbow pads, then a pair of fingerless gloves just like his, and then she sees them… boots! Gravity surfing boots!

– No! You didn’t… For me? She says, excited.

He smiles and nods.
She takes the boots out of the bag and hugs them.

– Caine that’s a wonderful gift! Show me how they work!

Caine shows her the activation sequences, explains how to surf the gravity waves and sits on the other edge to remove his own boots to show her how to put them on.

– Tell me about your family, he says while they lock their boots in place.
– I guess you can say that my family is complicated the way that most families are complicated.
– You think you’ll ever tell them? He asks.
– What that I’m a space-queen?
– Yeah.
– Are you kidding me? They’d have me locked up. And I wouldn’t blame them either. Beside I’m still trying to understand what it means myself.
– Maybe it just means that Your Majesty’s future is different then the one that was planned for her.
– Say that again, she says biting her lower lip.
– You mean… Your Majesty. He says lowering his pitch.

She hums an agreement, with her eyes sparkling.

– That really works for me.
– Yeah?
– Yeah.
– All right. He says, standing. Come on.

He removes his jacket and unfurls his wings completely.

– That’s not bad either, she says.

He offers her his hand and she takes it to stand up. She steps onto the platform where he is standing and he places his hands on her waist, pulling her closer. He slowly wraps his wings and his arms around her and she places her hands on his biceps.

– I could get used to this, she says with smiles in her eyes.

Caine smiles and lowers his head to kiss her lovingly. He gently caresses her cheeks and hold her head while he brings his wings back.

– You’re ready? He asks against her lips.
– Watch this! She murmurs.

And she runs and jumps over the edge of the building, whooping with glee.

Caine looks at her with a smile and wonder on his face. Then he crouches bringing his wings up and jumps in the air, bringing them down and he is flying.

Chapter End Notes

I am working very hard on the next chapter.
I'd appreciate your comments on my story so far. Let me know what you think.
Back in space

Chapter Notes

A lot of new people in this chapter, Jupiter starts to organize her court and Caine changes some more.

Let me know what you think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

***Kiza’s place***

They fly through the sky of Chicago and Caine keeps close to Jupiter. He catches her a few times when she loses balance. And each time she kisses him and says “Thanks”. Jupiter is having so much fun, she loses track of time until her comm bracelet buzz.

– Yes? she answers.
[ Jupiter, you said you would be here around 6:30pm, it is 6:40pm.] Kiza’s voice says.
– Oh, shoot, lost track of time, okay, we are on our way.

She hangs up and when she looks at the Willis Tower, she realizes that they have gotten pretty far away.

– Caine, we got to go back fast, I’m late.

He grabs her in his arms and says:

– I’m here to help you.

He brings her back to the Willis tower under two minutes, it turns out Skyjackers can fly pretty fast. Jupiter is impressed and wonders just how fast he can fly. When he puts her down, she turns off her boots and starts to gather her stuff, putting everything in the gift bag.

– That was so much fun! Is that your top speed?
– No, he says, picking up his jacket. We can go much faster then that, but I did not want you to be uncomfortable.
– So, what is your top speed?
– I do not know exactly.
– I guess there are no Space Olympics…

He guides her to the ship’s door.

– Olympics?
– Yeah, it’s an Earth international sports competition that happens every four years. People train hard to compete against each other to find out who is the best.
– There might be some worlds with competitions like that, but in the ‘verse competitions are more about survival. Warrior splices are put in an arena by their owner to face each other until one wins.
– And kill the other? Jupiter asks.

Caine can smell the thunder, boiling coffee and burning sun in her scent, but he can not lie to her.
— Yes. He says with an apologetic tone.

He brings her to the ship’s cabin while they talk and gesture to the co-pilot seat for her to sit. Caine sits in the pilot seat and launches the ship. Jupiter started counting as soon has she sat. After five sequence she says:

— I don’t know why I am still surprised by what I learn. Seems to me everything bad that happened on Earth and that we managed to get rid of or try to get rid of, the ‘verse has a worse version of it. Manufactured slaves, feeling less soldiers, genocide and now space-gladiators. I am sure there will be more along the way.

She pauses.

— Maybe I should start space-Olympics… give people new options.

She takes out her phone and makes a quick search on the Olympics.

— Well that would be fitting…
— What?
— According to what I am reading, the Olympics started with the ancient Greek, to celebrate Zeus. When the Romans conquered the Greeks, they kept the Olympics and took on their gods, but gave them new names. The Roman name for Zeus is… Jupiter.
— As you say, he says.

Jupiter nods.

— How long until we get to Kiza’s?
— Two minutes.
— Okay.

Jupiter closes her eyes and thinks. She can imagine flying races, running races, jumping races, precision shooting and maybe even swimming races for starters. Maybe I should start small… maybe with just my people, see if they like it.

Caine lands the ship near the corn field. Jupiter grabs her bag, she still has her skyjacker’s boots on. Before he opens the door, she gives him a kiss.

— Thank you, I’ve had a wonderful time. She says.
— Your Majesty, he says with his low pitch.

She bites her bottom lip. Then shakes her head.

— Okay, I have to be the Queen now, please don’t say it like that when there are people around. I can’t think straight when you do that.

Caine smirks, then checks in with Stinger before using the holocontrol to open the door.

Jupiter steps out with Caine at her back and is greeted by the Apinis, the Buzz and the Skybreakers. It’s the first time Jupiter sees the Buzz’s children and they offer her a bouquet of wildflowers. She takes it crouching a little.

— Thank you, children, I love them.
— Your Majesty, the children say, with smiles as wide as their faces.

Jupiter smiles at them and stands back up.
– Hi guys, sorry I’m late.

Then Jupiter sees Kiza’s house. The structure seems solid, there is siding everywhere, the roof looks new, the barn has been fixed too and the junk is gone from the yard.

– Wow, Kiza, your place looks much better.
– Thank you for that Jupiter.
– You’re welcome.

She walks toward the house and all her people follow.

– What is the schedule? Anything to report? She asks.

Before anyone can reply, the bees come in a cloud to welcome her. She lifts her arms and makes the cloud move left and right and then tells them to go back to work. The people that did not go down to Jeymia have their jaw hanging.

They enter the house and Jupiter stomach growls at the sent of corn.

– The schedule is corn on the cob right now, then change and go up to the ship. Meet the crew, then your new people will arrive at 8:00pm. To finish there is a tour of the ship. Says Kiza.
– All right.

As she says it, Dr. Comb hands her a plate and gesture toward the table. There is only room for four people at the table, so instead Jupiter head toward the door.

– Let’s eat outside, she says.

Her people come outside one by one and everyone finds someplace to sit. Jupiter eats as quickly as a Queen can eat, she has to change before going to the ship. When she is done, she stands.

– Seiza, Kiza. She says pointing to the house.

They stand and head into the house. Seiza guides her to a room on the first floor, where a knee length white, black and gold dress is waiting for her. Jupiter takes off her skyjacker boots and places them gently on the floor.

While she changes with Seiza’s help, Jupiter discusses her birthday with Kiza.

– Kiza, I am not sure if you are aware of this, but it is my Earth birthday in a week. As majordomo, it is your job to organise my birthday party.
– I was not aware it was your birthday, is there specifics you would like for the occasion?
– Well, a birthday cake of course, lots of food, vodka, shashlik, and a sport competition.
– Sport competition?
– Yeah, have you heard of the Olympics?
– I’ve watched some from last year.
– That was the winter Olympics, there is also the summer Olympics, where people races in many sports. I’d like to see just how good my people are. And I was thinking of slowly introducing the Olympics to the ‘verse, this could be a small-scale test, see if they enjoy it.

After Jupiter is dressed, Seiza moves on to her hair and make-up.

– What kind of race would you like?
– Well, nothing they’d have to learn how to do in such short notice and that we could not judge properly, we can forget the archery, fencing and horseback races and the gymnastics and stuff like
that. Maybe the foot races, precision shooting, and add flying and gravity surfing races for the skyjackers. Oh and no technologies allowed beyond the wings for the flying races and the boot for the gravity surfing ones.

– What else?
– Let’s see, I will need medals to distribute to the winners, and second and third places like for the Olympics. We need appropriate clothing and shoes for everyone and find a proper location for that, a track and field stadium, but not one where everyone will be able to see us. I want all my people to be allowed to participate, except the children, they are not mature enough.
– I am done Jupiter, says Seiza.

Jupiter stands and looks at her reflection in a mirror. She looks like a cross between a Queen and a corporate mogul. She likes it, she looks confident and powerful.

– Great job Seiza. Thank you. Kiza, if you need more information for my birthday, you know how to find me.

When Jupiter comes out of the room, Caine is stunned by her look. She is magnificent. It’s hard for him to believe that she is the same woman that was flying in the Chicago sky with him less then an hour ago and that he took her to bed right before that. But then her scent catches up with his nose, and there is no mistake that she is still herself, there is even the puff of cinnamon heart when she sees him.

– By the look on your face, I’d says Seiza’s choices were successful. She tells him.
– Very successful. He says.
– All right, time to go up.
– Stinger’s arrangement is that we go up to the Aegis cruiser and that they dock inside the Abrasax clipper A-Ω-5. This way you can get a first look at your ship and it will be easier to transfer people and belongings. Tells Caine.
– That sounds practical but is that what my ship is called Abrasax clipper A-Ω-5?
– Yes, he says.
– Well, that won’t do. I’ll have to change that.

When she gets out of the house the Aegis cruiser is hovering above the house and the grav-beam is active, everyone has gone up already, except Stinger. Kiza and Seiza go up together, and then Stinger, Jupiter and Caine. Jupiter heads for the bridge accompanied by Stinger and Caine.

– Your Majesty, says Captain Tsing, welcome to the bridge. We will be heading to the dark side of the moon to reach your clipper, they have deactivated the stealth shield for your inspection and are hiding being the moon to prevent detection.
– Thank you, captain.

When they circle to the back side of the moon, Jupiter’s attention goes out the window. Her ship is spectacular in simplicity. Maybe Seraphi had similar taste as hers, because the ship is made of clean and simple lines. It looks like an inverted blooming tulip. Seven “petals” are blooming around the very large “stem” which is the actual ship, the stem itself looks like a cross between a submarine and the Willis tower.

The Aegis cruiser flies around the ship for her “inspection”, as if she new anything about real spaceships, but Caine and Stinger make approving sounds along the way, so she imagines that it looks good from their perspective too.

– Looks good, she says. Captain Tsing, let’s dock, shall we?
– Of course, Your Majesty.
Jupiter leaves the bridge and heads for the main airlock.

– Stinger, have everyone meet at the airlock, I don’t want to waste anytime.
– Okay.

***Abrasax clipper***

The Aegis cruiser docks inside the clipper.

– What protocol are we using for this Singer?
– The non-military personnel will go out first, then the Skybreakers will go out two by two forming your honor guard then Kiza will precede you, then you, and Caine, Aves and myself behind you.
– All right.

At the airlock, everyone gets into position. When the airlock opens, the Buzz family goes out first, Hiven Buzz is holding a pack of sheaves in one hand and Crystal by the other one, Dr. Comb is holding Pupa’s hand. Then Seiza and Honey-Bee disembark and then the Skybreakers, two by two, according to their ranks: Leo and Vee, Tristan and Castor, Falco and Menura, Ezin and Pavonia and Kalie and Vespa. Then Kiza comes out and stops between Kalie and Vespa. When Jupiter steps out she murmurs her classic “showtime” and goes down the ramp. Caine is on her right and Stinger on her left, Aves right behind her. When she reaches the honor guard, she stops. Kiza walks the length of the honor guard, steps to the side and announces:

– Her Majesty, Queen Jupiter Jones, first prime of House Abrasax.

Jupiter walks down the aisle made by her people with Caine and Stinger following suit. A man and two women are waiting for her and when she stops beside Kiza, they deeply bow.

– Your Majesty, welcome aboard the Abrasax clipper A-Ω-5, I am Colby Marsden, captain of this clipper, says the man. This is Commander Bayleigh Vang my first officer and Lieutenant-commander Ailsa Blankenship my communication’s officer. It is an honor to serve Your Majesty again.
– Thank you, captain Marsden, but I am not Seraphi, and you will find out that I do things differently.
– Of course, says the captain.
– For starters, this ship will now be the JJ-A-Ω-5 – Maximillien Jones. Do the necessary.

All of her people have a discreet smile or nod at the name, they all know it’s the name of her father.

– As you command, Your Majesty, says captain Marsden. You can tell your preferences to Valik, the ship’s presence, and she will route the request to the appropriate department.
– Valik?
– Yes, Your Majesty, says a disembodied voice.
– From now on you will be known as Max and use a male voice.
– Yes, Your Majesty, says a now male voice.
– Pardon the interruption, says Ailsa, a transport is requesting permission to dock.
– Ah, good they have arrived, says Jupiter. Please guide me to the reception hall and allow them to dock. After they have disembarked, bring them to me.
– As you command, Majesty. Says the captain.

He guides them through the corridor while commander Vang stays to guide the people disembarking. Jupiter takes in the decoration scheme as they walk to the reception hall. It resembles mostly old
Greco-Roman architecture, and Jupiter stifle a laugh at how appropriately it goes with her name.

When she enters the reception hall, her jaw hangs for a few seconds as she takes in the room. The room is rectangular with columns lining the four sides. On the left and right sides, between the columns, there are benches, chaise lounge and what could be called sofas, all floating on anti-grav beams. Everything is in soft grey and white. At the far end of the room there is a floating throne upon a dais. The throne is a wonderful work of art, it resembles a mix of fanned out tree leaves, a fire and stained glass, without the glass.

– This will do nicely captain, all that I require now is a detailed schematic of the ship.
– We have already provided your majordomo with that information, Your Majesty.
– Very well. You’re dismissed for now.

At the panic look on the captain’s face Jupiter rolls her eyes.

– Captain Apini, explain to him what it means would you, says Jupiter, walking toward the throne.

Stinger nods and gives explanations to captain Marsden.

– Captain, “You’re dismissed” is only Her Majesty’s way of saying “Go back to your duties”. It comes from Her Majesty’s home planet, explains Stinger. Make sure to let your crew know.

Captain Marsden relaxes and nods. He exits the room on a bow and a “Majesty”.

Jupiter is at the bottom of the dais, looking up to the throne, Caine is beside her and he can smell that she is nervous.

– It is only a chair, Your Majesty, he says, using his low pitch.

He immediately smells the change in her scent. She slightly shakes her head, takes a deep breath and climbs the four steps to her throne. When at the top she sits on her throne and signals to Caine to stand beside her, he does so with a smile.

– Kiza, Buzz, she says.

When they look at her she signals for them to come to her. They climb the dais.

– Buzz, you have all those transfers?
– Yes, Jupiter. He shows her the pack of sheaves.
– Great, thanks.
– Kiza, do you have the schematics with you?
– Yes Jupiter, she says handing her a sheave she just took out of her jacket.

Jupiter thumbs on the sheave. She skips the engineering and ship’s crew quarters and facilities that are all at the back of the ship, beyond the docking bay, and moves to her personal side of the ship. There is a grand deck, three decks high, with a corridor going from the docking bay to her personal quarters at the tip of the ship. On this deck there is the reception hall or throne room, the ball room, the grand dining room and a formal office on one side of the corridor and two royal suites for guests taking the rest of the deck on the other side of the corridor. The tip of the ship consists of her personal quarters, on 4 grand decks. The first room is the guard antechamber, anyone wanting to enter her quarters must pass through there. That leads to a grav-beam “elevator” that she can use to move between her decks. The top deck is mainly a personal garden. The second deck is the one connecting to the guard antechamber, beside this there is a private dining room and a private office and a lounge. The third deck consist of her bedroom and bathing room. There is also a small room to the side, labeled guard room. Finally, the fourth and lower deck consist of recreation facilities.
The remaining space is divided between her military personnel and her non-military personnel. The space above the grand deck is split into three decks, that consists of personal and family quarters. Under the grand deck, there are the facilities for her personnel, kitchen, mess hall, daycare, education facilities, laundry, rec room, offices and the medical bay. Under the facilities, there are the military decks. Three decks split into barracks, offices, armory, rec room and training room.

Kiza already assigned quarters to her current personnel and Jupiter is glad to see that she assigned personal or familial quarters to her Skybreakers in addition to their barrack bunk. She hands the sheave back to Kiza.

– Good job, she tells her.
– Thanks, says Kiza.

Caine hears many footsteps coming toward the room. He signals Stinger and all the Skybreakers place themselves between two pillars all around the room, unfurl their wings and salutes. They stay in that position even as their families enter the room. The sight is impressive and Jupiter gets the definite impression that her new people are quite intimidated. When everyone has arrived, she gestures to the Skybreakers to stand with their families, she can see in the speed they mantle their wings that they are in a hurry, they probably have not seen them in a while, maybe a long while. She hears sighs, laughs, and sniffles and sees tears. It warms her heart that she can help all these people to be together. When the hubbub of the reunion of so many people calms down a little, Jupiter raises a hand and almost immediately everyone quiets down and look at her.

– Welcome everyone. You may be wondering why you are all here today. A lot has happened in the last few days and your family and friends might not have had to opportunity to inform you of these changes. Now, the first thing you should know is who I am. My name is Jupiter Jones, and three days ago I ascended to Queen and first prime of the house of Abrasax, as the signified recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax.

A few of the newcomers start to kneel. Jupiter gestures to them to stand.

– No need to kneel, she says. The next thing you need to know is that starting three days ago and for very important reasons to me, the Skybreakers, are now my personal guards. This decision is permanent and final. I have seen to it that they can not be bought by anyone. Which brings me to my next point. If there is one thing that is of the utmost importance to me is family. I have asked them to give me the names of the people their hearts wanted to have with them, and you are the people they wanted here with them. I have had to buy you all to bring you here, but I have something more they do not know about.

She can see her Skybreakers looking at each other. Stinger has a huge smile on his face and his eyes flash yellow, it seems to calm them down a little. She signals to Buzz and he takes the first sheave, looks at it and hands it to her.

– Aves, Plume, Harlan and Sky Red-Tail, calls Buzz.

Aves and his family step to the dais. Jupiter gestures them to come up. They climb the four steps. When they are up, Jupiter seals the three transfers of property on the sheave and hands the sheave to Aves. Aves takes it and reads it. He falls to his knees.

– Your Majesty, this is… he stops, having no adequate words.
– This is who I am, she completes, and this is what I swore to do.

He nods.

– Thank you.
They go back down and Aves holds his wife close.

Buzz takes the second and third sheave and repeats the process.

– Leo, Lowe and Leona Felis.

They step up the dais and Jupiter seal the transfer for Leona to belong to Lowe and the one for Lowe to belong to Leo, and hands the sheave to Leo and Lowe.

– Your Majesty, says Lowe, with tears in his eyes.
– I protect my people and families, Mr. Felis, says Jupiter.

Next is Veel and his sister Erminea Gulo. Which brings a similar reaction.

– Tristan Laing and Feliz Silver, calls Buzz.

When they come up the steps, Jupiter catches the glitters in their eyes when they look at each other. They are more than friends.

– Miss Silver, do you want to belong to Mr. Laing? She asks the cat-splice.

Feliz Silver blushes intensely.

– More than anything, she murmurs.

Jupiter smirks, seals the sheave and hands it to Tristan. They go back down. Jupiter signals to Buzz to pause.

– Kiza, Jupiter says softly.
– Majesty?

Jupiter signals her to get closer and Jupiter murmurs in her ear. “Place them in the same quarters.” And then winks at her. Kiza understands and winks back.

They continue with the transfers of property and everyone is rather stunned, emotional or grinning. Falco almost faint when he learns his wife is nesting. At the end Buzz calls the androids.

– Dopha Jewel and Song Jade.

Buzz hands over a sheave to Jupiter while the two androids climb the dais’s steps. Jupiter turns on the sheave and reads it. It is an article of law stating that androids can not be owners. A flash of anger goes through her but she calms down quickly.

– Ladies, she addresses the androids, you must both know what I have just learned, that I can not transfer you to Ezin and Kalie since they are androids, but what I can do is offer you your choice of owner. You can choose to stay mine or you may choose anyone in this room as your owner.

The two androids, and everyone else in the room, seems stunned by her offer.

– Your Majesty gives us a… choice? Asks Song Jade, hesitant on the last word.
– Yes, I can see that you never had a choice before, she tells her.

Then she addresses all her people.

– If there is one thing you all need to understand about me is that I believe in freedom for all sentient beings. Which means that although you legally belong to me in some way or another, morally you belong to yourself and while you are mine you will all be treated as equals and you will all have a
choice in what you want to do with your life.

She pauses and addresses Dopha and Song.

– Now ladies, what do you choose?

Dopha bows and says:

– Your Majesty, I would like to remain yours. I could not wish for a better owner then one that gives me a choice.
– Very well, and you Miss Jade?
– I will also remain yours, Your Majesty.
– Very well.

They go back down and Jupiter addresses the group again.

– Now I have another surprise for everyone. I have told you that I have made sure that no one can buy any Skybreaker, but… I also made sure that no one can buy any of you too.

At these words Plume Red-Tail falls to her knees, crying. Jupiter stands and goes down to her. She takes her hands and makes her stands up. She is still crying and sobbing so Jupiter hugs her. Many of the newcomers are stunned to see how the Queen holds a crying splice in her arms. When Plume calms down, Jupiter asks gently:

– Plume, why are you so upset?
– Majesty, I’ve had a new owner every year for the last 15 years and Aves and I have not been allowed to see each other for the past three.

Jupiter has a burst of anger at the society.

– That is so wrong on so many levels to me, she tells her.
She takes her hand in hers, then reach for one of Aves, and places it on Plumes hand and she does the same with Harlan and Sky.

– Understand this, she says to them, love always finds it’s way back. I am only the tool the universe used to bring you all together.

Aves places his free hand around Plume’s shoulders.

– Thank you, Ju– Majesty.
She smiles and nods, then heads back to her throne and addresses all her people.

– Well, that is done. Now, I have many jobs position to fill. I will not order anyone into a job position, but I will offer them to you in the first place. Mr. Buzz, please take notes.

Buzz nods and takes a sheave.

– First of all, I need a household manager. Someone to mange my personnel, make sure I have enough personnel according to my rank and to take care of the needs of my people. So, I don’t have to do it myself, like I am doing now.

Erminea steps to the dais and Jupiter gestures for her to speak.

– Your Majesty, I was trained for management, even if my previous owner did not make use of my
skills.
– And do you want to do this?
– Yes, Your Majesty.
– Good, thank you.
– Now, I need a nursemaid and a governess to work under Madam Apini who is the childcare coordinator. The nursemaid takes care of babies and small children and the governess takes care of and educates older children.

Song Jade, Webe Albert and Feliz Silver step to the dais.

– Webe, Song and then Feliz, says Jupiter.
– Majesty, I would like to be a governess, says Webe. I do not have formal training, but I have been taking care of my own children and educating them myself since we could not afford formal education for them.
– As a pediatric nurse I could be a nursemaid if no one else can of want to do the job, even if I prefer the medical field, says Song.
– Majesty, I do not have any training, but I’ve always liked babies and small children, say Feliz.
– I see, says Jupiter.

She closes her eyes and thinks for a minute.

– All right, Webe will be the governess and Feliz will be the nursemaid in training, Song Jade and Madam Apini will teach you what you need to know and Song will work for Dr. Comb Buzz after that.

They bow and step back.

– The next important job that I need filled is chef and sous-chef. Anyone likes to cook for a large quantity of people?

Tergum steps to the dais and Aves pulls his wife to it.

– Your Majesty, I’ve always wanted to learn how to cook, says Tergum.
– Majesty, Plume is too humble to say it, but she is an amazing cook, says Aves.
– Is this true? Jupiter asks.

Plume looks to the floor.

– Yes, but I do not know how to prepare Entitled meals.
Jupiter has to smirk. She ate Aegis bland food for three days, she can’t do worse then that.
– Good, she says.

Plume raises her head and look at Jupiter with her head cocked in a bird-like fashion.

– I don’t care for Entitled meals. All I want is good food. Anyway no one up here would know how to make my favorites anyway. I’ll have to teach you myself. And I can hire someone to train you for the fancy space-food stuff once I step into that world, but for now you only have us to feed.
– I can do that, she says.
– Good, Chef Plume and sous-chef Tergum.

She nods to them and they step back.

– Next, I need a head of finance. I have inherited a lot of stuff, I need someone who can keep my finances organized.
Dopha Jewel steps to the dais.

- Yes? Jupiter says.
- I am an accountant, Your Majesty. I would just need to upgrade my programming with the Entitled finances module.
- Perfect!

Dopha steps back.

- Last but not least, I need a business manager.

Golden steps forward.

- I would be very interested in that job, Your Majesty, but I would need training.
- Erminea?

Erminea steps forward.

- Yes, Majesty?
- Would you be able to train Golden in business management?
- Yes, I was trained in both personnel and assets management.
- Perfect!

They both step back.

- Ok, great. Those who did not step up for a job, step to the dais, please.

Lowe, Leona, Prey and Hind step to the dais.

- Please tell me, one at the time, what you can or would like to do.
- I am trained in physical training and therapy, says Lowe.
- Okay. Anything you prefer or you would like to do both?
- Both would be amazing, he says.
- Good. Dr. Comb, Mr. Lowe will be part-time on your medical staff. Mr. Lowe, you will be in charge of the physical training and the training facilities.
- Thank you, Majesty.

He steps back.

- Next?

Leona is fidgeting, so Prey speaks.

- I am a seamstress, Majesty.
- Oh, cool, you will be on Miss Seiza’s team, she is my Lady’s Maid and she studies fashion.

She steps back.

Leona takes a deep breath and speaks.

- Majesty, if it would be okay, I would like to be exempt of work when I have my litter.
- Sure, that is understandable, having children is hard work. But is there some work you would like to do?
- I enjoy sorting and organizing, whether it's events, files, documents, objects, etc.
- That sounds like an assistant, let’s see… you will be a sub-assistant, supporting Miss Kiza, Mr. Buzz and Miss Seiza in their duties, that should give you a wide variety of sorting and organizing to
– Thank you, Majesty. She says.
– And what about you, Hind?
– Your Majesty, may I approach?

Jupiter gestures him forward. He climbs the steps and waits looking at Kiza, Buzz and Caine. Jupiter
gestures to Kiza and Buzz to step down and they do. Hind has another look towards Caine. Jupiter
shrugs.

– Mr. Saturn, Mr. Wise can hear anything you want to tell me and anyway he would hear even if he
was standing outside the room. She says with a smile.

Caine’s ears pink a little.

– Very well.

He approaches the throne and murmurs in her ear.

– I see, she says. We will discuss it further in a few moments.

He nods and goes back down the dais.

– Mr. Buzz, please prepare the work contracts for everyone, and bring them to my personal quarters
tomorrow morning at 7:00am. I will take care of the one for Mr. Saturn.
– Of course.
– Now everyone, I know you all had a long day, and it is late. Miss Kiza will show you all to your
quarters for the night. Tomorrow I want everyone to write reports for Madam Erminea and Mr.
Buzz. I want one report per quarters and one per facilities. The quarters reports should include
anything to be fixed, replaced or added to the quarters. I also want everyone to inspect the facilities
set aside for your jobs and I want full reports on their state, what needs to be replaced, fixed or
purchased so you can do your jobs in a secure and efficient environment.

She pauses.

– I also want you all to think about the people that you know that could work for me. Madam
Erminea will have a list soon of personnel that I require and if you know someone that can do the
job, I want you to let her know who they are. And if there are people that your heart wants you to
have with you, you have to let Mr. Buzz know.

She stands.

– Caine, Stinger, Mr. Saturn, with me, she says.

On her way out of the room, she stops by Tristan and Feliz, taking one of his hand and one of hers in
her own hands, she joins them together.

– Nothing is impossible when you follow your heart, she tells them.

She squeezes their joined hands and Tristan nods slightly. She nods back then continues on hey way
and leaves the room.

Once out, she remembers that her personal quarters are at the end of the corridor and she heads that
way. At the door, she sees a sigil lock, like Kalique had used to enter the shrine to her mother, and
she scans her wrist. The door opens and she lets Caine enter first. She enters when he sends the all
clear signal. They are in the guards’ antechamber which she crosses and heads to the office. Caine
opens the door and scans the room, then she enters and sit behind a massive desk that would fit well in a Greek museum.

– Please sit, she says.

When they are all seated, she adds.

– Hind, please repeat for Stinger what you told me.
– I am trained in intelligence gathering and spying networks, he says.
– That could be very useful, especially since we do not know how many contracts are still out there for your kidnapping or murder, says Stinger.

Jupiter nods.

– We agree then? She says.
– Yes, Stinger says.
– Okay, Hind, you will be the head of the intelligence division and you will report directly to Captain Apini. You may choose an office on the military deck.

Jupiter sees that Caine’s hands are shaking slightly. He will need kozha soon, she thinks.

– Stinger, please prepare a work contract for Mr. Saturn, put “military analyst” for the job title and bring it by at 7:00am. And my pay scale is double what a pure human would get paid. She adds in Russian. For my guards tonight, I need only Caine, let everyone else enjoy their reunion. Now you are both dismissed.

They stand, Stinger salutes, and they leave.

Jupiter pulls out her phone, turns it on and calls her mother.
– Hello, says her mother’s voice.
– Mama, it’s me.
– Are you okay Yupiter?
– Yes mama, I just want to tell you that I will be sleeping at Caine’s sister tonight. We came to see her and it’s too late to drive back tonight. I just did not want you to think that something happened to me.
– You are a good girl Yupiter. She says.
– I should be there at about 10:00 am tomorrow, and we will go to the bank, tell Aunt Nino and cousin Vassily and the rest of the family too. Good night mama.
– Good night my Yupiter.
She hangs up and leaves the office.

She presses her comm bracelet.
[Yes Jupiter?]
– Please inform the captain to engage the stealth shield and and that the tour of the ship will be reported to the morning, 8:00am. Also, Captain Tsing can undock when the belonging of all my people have been transferred. Put my belonging in my private office and lounge for now, no one is to enter my bedroom. Tell Seiza that I want breakfast at 6:30am and tell Erminea, Golden and Dopha that I want them to join me in my office at 7:00am.
[Okay.]
She presses her bracelet again. She takes the down grav-beam and opens her bedroom door. Her bedroom looks like a museum once again. She as no trouble imagining an ancient roman goddess in a room like this.

– Max?
– Yes, Your Majesty?
– Can you tell me where the sleeping clothes are? She asks.

He guides her to a dresser inside the giant walk-in closet and she selects something that looks a lot like a long blue t-shirt. When she is back in the bedroom, she asks Caine to open the back of her dress, which he does. His hands linger on her back for a moment and he place a kiss on the bite mark on her shoulder. She turns around and offers him her lips in a soft kiss.

– Investigate the guard bedroom over there, she points to a door, there might be something in there you can put on to sleep that would be more comfortable then your uniform. She tells him.

Then she heads for the bathing room. The bathing room is as museum quality as the bedroom. Columns line the walls and lush fabrics are draped in the archways. Jupiter takes a quick space-shower, which removes her makeup and coiffure at the same time and heads back into the bedroom. Caine is coming out of the guard’s bedroom holding something in his hand.

– Go clean up, she tells him pointing at the bathing room.

While he is cleaning up, Jupiter looks into the guard’s bedroom, the room is so plain, it looks like a bunker. Her bed space at her cousin Vassily’s house is fancier then this. She wonders if that is what is standard accommodation for guards. There is a bed, a dresser and a tiny ‘fresher room.

Caine comes back out of the bathing room in some sort of black space pajama pants and shirtless. Holding his uniform, boots and equipment. Jupiter eyes him for a moment, biting her bottom lip, then she shakes her head. He goes to the guard room and places his things on the dresser.

– Are these standard quarters? She asks him.
– No this is actually luxury for guard quarters. In the barracks we only have a box at the head of our bunk to put all our possessions and we sleep four in that same space and we share the same ‘fresher unit.
– That is so sad…

She tugs him back into her bedroom.

– Max?
– Yes, Your Majesty?
– This is Commander Caine Wise and my personal quarters are also his personal quarters. No privacy restriction applies to him.
– Understood.
– Now Caine, tomorrow I want a report from you too on what you need to make these quarters yours too.
– All that I need is right here, he says, encircling her with his arms.

She smiles and places her head on his chest.

– Well, if not things that you need, things that you want then.
– Okay.

There is a pause then he murmurs “kozha” in her ear.
– I noticed. Why do you think I told my mom I was sleeping at Kiza’s?

Caine smirks and happily follows Jupiter to the bed. After setting an alarm for 6:00am Chicago time, they lie in the bed, Caine hesitates to follow his instinct until Jupiter murmurs “Go ahead”. Things start like pack bonding cuddle time but after half an hour Caine’s hand start to caress her much more like mate-bonding time. When his hand snake under her shirt to reach her breasts, she shivers and sigh.

– Jupiter… his voice is hoarse, I can’t control this… I want you, I need you…
– Caine, my love, moya sud’ba, show me how much, she murmurs in his ear.

Then she thoroughly caresses his ear with her tongue before removing her clothes.

Caine was trying to control his needs but when Jupiter licked his ear and said to show her just how much he wanted her, then stripped naked, he lost all control. His mouth finds hers and tasting her set off the fireworks in his brain. Touching her soft skin sends electric shocks in his body and her scent is burying deep in his nose. Every part of her smell is enticing and the pack-bonding needs mix with the mate-bonding wants. In the midst of all his sensations, he realizes that he wants to mate as an Alpha, with his Alpha, he truly feels like Jupiter’s equal in that moment. He deeply understands her words from two days ago “I’m just a woman and you’re just a man.” He frees her mouth and lowers to her breasts, he caresses her in a mix of give and take and he knows she enjoys it by the way she squirms, how she sighs and how she smells. When her hips start to buck, he kneels and lift her core up to his mouth. She hooks her knees over his shoulders and his caresses on her core are a give and take too. She stops him right before she climaxes and tells him to strip of his clothes. When he is naked he turns her so they are both kneeling and her back is to his chest to caress her easier and she surprises him by guiding him inside her in that position. He is not sure what fires up in his mind, if it is a lycan thing or not, but his caress gets stronger, possessive, faster.

– Oh, God, yes, oh Caine, yes, she lets out.

That galvanizes him and, in a few caress and trusts, she climaxes, falling on all four, shaking. The lycan in him is going crazy and in a few hard trusts he climaxes. His needs and his wants being fulfilled at the same time is dizzying, he shakes from one and trembles from the other, he has to drop on his side on the bed, it’s too much. He brings her with him and wraps his arms around her and hugs her strongly.

– Jupiter, you are… that was… he stops having no words to express what he felt.
– Glorious, she sighs.

For only response, she feels his head in her hair and hears him taking a deep breath then let it out slowly.

When she wants to move after a few moments because his arm under her is getting painful in her ribs, she finds that his grip is hard as iron and that he is in full pack-bonding now.

– Caine? Are you conscious?

She feels a squeeze.

– Okay, it’s just that your arm under me is not comfortable in my ribs. Can you move at all?

Two squeezes.

– Erm, okay, it’s just that it’s getting painful.
– Field on, he manages to say.
Jupiter wonders for a second what that means until a blue field of light lifts them up from the bed. They are floating in mid-air, being held by the field. There is no more pressure on her ribs, but now she feels rather exposed. She hears his wings being opened and when he wraps her in them she sighs. This is heaven. She snuggles against him and sigh again.

– Good night *moya sud’ba*.

He squeezes her. Soon after Caine knows she is asleep by her slow and steady breaths. He is not tired yet and he is thinking so much he could not fall asleep right now anyway. What he just experienced was so fulfilling on so many levels, it was perfect. He really did feel like an Alpha, like her equal. Deep inside of him something is singing as he comprehends that what he is, is not who he is and who he is, is worthy of her. Him, the runt of his litter, the pack-less half-albino lycantant, who was only good at hunting and killing, he is worthy of her love, because that is not who he is, that is what he was. What he is now is Her Majesty’s personal guard, but who he is, is the man that she loves.

An hour after Jupiter fell asleep, Caine can finally move, he is surprised that the pack-bonding did not last longer, but they never pack-bonded while naked, the amount of skin contact probably helps. He decides to deactivate the field so she is not startled when she wakes up, so he brings his wings back and mantles them and removes his arms from around her.

– Field off, he says softly.

When they are down on the bed, he brings the bedding on them and Jupiter snuggles against him in her sleep so he puts his free arm back around her. He closes his eyes and falls asleep.

### Morning

When Jupiter wakes up, on the bed, she is grateful of Caine’s thoughtfulness. Caine is still asleep, on his stomach, his wings wriggle slightly.

– Max, what time is it in Chicago? She asks softly.
– 4:45am, the voice replies, equally softly.

*Of course,* she thinks.

She stirs, gets up and stretches. Then pick up her sleep shirt and head over to the bathing room. She looks at her reflection and sees that yesterday’s bite mark is not showing anymore. *Good, Seiza had a weird look when she saw it yesterday.* She cleans up from last night and fixes her hair in a ponytail, put the blue sleep shirt on and goes from the bathing room to the bedroom and into the closet. She looks at the clothes but can not find what she is looking for. *I’ll have to get some yoga clothes up here.* Finally, she looks through the sleep clothes and chooses a pair of sleep pants and keeps on the blue sleep shirt. She goes back to the bedroom and starts a morning yoga routine.

Caine wakes up and sits to see an upside-down Jupiter.

– Good morning, she tells him.
– Good morning, he replies.

He gets up and comes to stand in front of her. She has to close her eyes to finish her routine, because he is too distracting. After her tree pose he takes her hand and brings her close. He hugs her and then kisses her and Jupiter feels there is something new in him. She pulls back slightly to look at him.
– Something’s different, she says.

He smiles.

– I finally understood what you were telling me, he says.

– What?
– Last night, the mate-bonding mixing with the pack-bonding it was special, it changed me even more here and here he says, pointing to his head and his heart. It’s hard to put into words but… I felt it first… and I understand it now… we are equals.

She hugs him, there are tears of joy in her eyes.

– And…
– There is more?

He nods.

– I understand now that what I am is not who I am.
– And who are you?
– Caine Wise, the man worthy of your love.

They hug and kiss until the 6:00am wake-up alarm chimes.

– Alarm off, she says.
– Your Majesty, you have one pending message, Max’s voice says.
– Let’s hear it.
– “Jupiter, I left today’s outfit outside of your bedroom door. I will be there at 6:30 with your breakfast.” Says Seiza’s voice.
– Thanks Max, you can delete it.

Jupiter goes to her door and opens it. Seiza choose a skirt, a blouse and some heels, in dark blue, very business like. She grabs the outfit, closes back the door and heads to the bathing room.

– You should come get ready too, she tells Caine.

He nods and goes to the guard room to pick up his stuff, he considers the tiny ‘fresher unit but she said come get ready, not go get ready, so he heads to the bathing room too.

They share the facilities and are out in 10 minutes. The outfit was easy to put on and Jupiter twisted her ponytail into a bun.

She goes up to her office and looks at everything, there are columns in every corner, shelves with sheaves line the wall beyond her desk. There are three chairs in front of her desk and two more with two chaise-lounge along the walls. On her desk there is the bouquet of wildflowers from the Buzz children and also some sheaves that were not there last night. She turns one on and it is the sheave on Lycantants and lycans. Ah those must be the sheaves I had on the Aegis cruiser. She hands the sheave to Caine.

– You might find some of this interesting, I know I did, she tells him.

He takes the sheave and turns it on. It is still on the Lycan mating habits. He smirks and starts to read and he does find it quite interesting.

Jupiter takes the next sheave and turns it on, it is the sheave on the Keepers.
At first what she reads seems pretty harmless, they repair the structures and wipes peoples mind when there is an outside incursion. They also defend the planet against illegal harvest and they can build or modify any structure to the liking of the planet’s owner. *That might come in very handy…*

The next section on the sheave is about “crop management” and this part makes her angry. Keepers are responsible to make sure the crop grows as fast as possible by creating chaos, war and natural disaster to stir the population into having more babies. *They can’t do artificial insemination like humans do with cattle so they trick us!* *How many of the Earth’s wars and disasters were caused by the Keepers?*

She puts the sheave down on her desk with a thump and looks up. Caine seems smaller in his chair. She forces herself to calm down, counting to ten a few times and she sees Caine relax as she calms down.

> Sorry about that, I guess anger must smell strong in the morning, but it has nothing to do with you, she says.

> It is… startling… what has angered you?

> I was reading about the Keepers and I just found out that they are probably responsible for a lot of the bad stuff that happens on Earth.

> Oh, I do not know much about the Keepers and what they do except that they take care of tersie planets, but how they do it, I do not know. Kiza would know more about them.

> Yeah, this sheave is from Kiza. I had to calm down before continuing my reading.

He nods in understanding. She takes back the sheave and reads on.

The owner of the planet sets the growth policy for the planet and can change the mission parameters for the Keepers assign to that planet. *Okay, that’s good.*

> Your Majesty, says Max’s voice.

> Yes, Max?

> Miss Seiza wants to enter your personal quarters.

> Let her in and tell her we are in the office.

> Yes, Your Majesty.

Seiza enters the office with her breakfast and places the tray in front of her.

> Good morning, Jupiter, Caine.

> Good morning, they say.

> Were there guards in the antechamber? asks Caine.

> Yes, Ezin and Kalie.

Caine stands.

> I should report in with Stinger, Jupiter.

Jupiter stands and walks to him, going around her desk, and placing her arms around his neck, she brings him down into a kiss.

> Okay. Come back soon.

He gives her a quick kiss and leaves.
---Stinger’s office---

When Caine gets to Stinger’s office, Kiza is there too eating breakfast with her dad. He takes a chair
and join them.

– Good morning Stinger, Kiza, he says.
– Good morning, pup, anything to report?
– Nothing that fits into an official report, he says smirking.

He takes food from the table and starts to eat.

– Oh, beeswax… says Kiza, baffled, you changed again!

Caine nods and Stinger looks at his daughter with a weird look…

– What are you talking about Kiza? He says.
– Dad, you remember my secret right, how I can recognize people without seeing them?
– Yes. What does that have to do with… you are not even supposed to mention that…

She looks at Caine, then at her dad.

– He already knows dad, so does Jupiter. Let me try to explain. I have done research while on Earth
and I found that what I recognized is the brain energies, everyone has a different brain energies
pattern and usually it does not change. The only time I have detected changes before Caine was with
brain damage from accident or diseases.
– But you detected changes in Caine?
– Yes… the first time was two days ago before going down to Earth. It was as if a dormant part of
his brain had been awakened, but the change was not stable. And now…

She emits her buzzing sound and concentrates.

– Wow, there is no variation anymore, everything is stable, even in the new changes. It is as if you
are now who you were always meant to be, as if your brain was damaged and has been repaired.

Caine smiles. Stinger is shocked.

– That is exactly how I feel, Caine says. Two days ago, I was a broken splice only good for hunting
and killing. After Jupiter and I mate-bonded, I did not feel broken anymore, but I still felt like a
splice, maybe what a non-pack-bonded splice feels like. But something else changed last night, I had
another pack-bonding episode, but it mixed with the mate-bonding and it changed me. I understand
now what Jupiter means by “what I am is not who I am” because I feel the same way. What I am
might be a runt Lycantant, but who I am is simply the man who loves her, is her equal and worthy of
her love.

He says his last sentence as if it was a well-known fact like “The sky is blue” or “Space is black”.
Stinger rubs his neck and brand and clears hi throat.

– That is very dangerous to say, pup, he says.
– Did you not hear what Kiza said Sting? I did not get brain damage; my brain was repaired. You
know I would not say such things to people I don’t trust.

He pauses.

– Stinger, I know her secret but I would never put her in danger.
He nods and they finish eating.

---Jupiter’s private office---

Jupiter turns around and sees the startled look on Seiza’s face. *Doh, she was not aware of that.* She shrugs.

– Anything you want to ask? Jupiter says.

When Seiza remains frozen, she walks to her and place a hand on her arm.

– Seiza, are you okay?

Seiza nods.

– I am shocked. You two are… are…
– Pack and mates, completes Jupiter.

Seiza has to sit down.

– You admit it? She says incredulous.
– To you? Yes, you are family Seiza. Kiza and Stinger know too. To the others? No, for the others, he is simply my favorite guard until I figure out how this society works and how far I can bend the rules.
– But what if they find out?
– No pure human would suspect anything since Caine’s file says he is an omega and normally Lycantant can’t mate. Splices might smell it if they have a good enough nose, like Leo, but from what I have learned so far, I don’t think they would say anything, at best they would be really confused.
– Other Entitled have splices too, they would tell their owner.

She has to think for a moment.

– Worse case scenario I guess I can use it to prove I am the ultimate Queen. If the legendary un-bondable hunter from the legion bonded to me, I must be the ultimate leader… It’s not really what happened and who I am, but I can put on a show when I need to. If there is one thing that I learned being an illegal immigrant is how to avoid and get out of sticky situations.

Jupiter sees Seiza physically relax.

– Are you okay now?
– Yeah, just so much “unexpected” happening.
– Give it time, it takes about three days for things to make sense again.

She nods.

– Now, you’re dismissed because I really do have to eat before my 7:00am meeting.

Seiza leaves and Jupiter contacts Kiza and asks her to meet with her at 7:30am. Then she eats her bland breakfast and drinks some grula. Plume probably has nothing to cook with in the kitchen because her food looks like an Aegis mess hall meal. While eating she turns on the third sheave that was on her desk, it’s the one from Marcellian Cahun, on the use of RegeneX in splicing.
She takes a deep breath and reads on.

USE OF REGENEX IN SPLICING
PREVIOUS SPLICING METHOD: Prime cells
SUCCESS RATE: 75% for mammal splicing, no success with bird, reptile and insect splicing
BEGINNING OF REGENEX SPLICING: about a million year ago
SUCCESS RATE: 99.5% for all types of splices
QUALITY OF REGENEX: High quality is needed; other qualities contain too much impurities
QUANTITY OF REGENEX USED: Minimum quantity is used because of the high cost of RegeneX, complicated splices requires more RegeneX.
QUANTITY FOR TYPICAL BEE-SPLICE: 1% of a container per splice, insects are the most complicated of splices.
COST OF REGENEX: 5,000,000 credits per container
METHOD USED: RegeneX is added to the gestator’s fluid to prevent splice rejection.

Jupiter breaths a little better knowing that splicing did not require huge amount of RegeneX per splice, not like a full rejuvenation of an entitled. It’s used like an anti-abortion serum. A container is made from 100 people, at 1% for a complicated splice, that makes a life for a life. It’s still too much death but it’s not 5 containers every 10 years or so like royals do… I wonder how many splices there are and how many are made every day, and I still need more information on RegeneX. And why is Earth considered the ripest and most abundant Harvest in over 2 millennia?

She was so deep in her thoughts when Stinger knocked on the door frame that she jumped in her chair.

– God, Stinger, make noise next time, I don’t have extraordinary abilities!

He smirks.

– Is it 7:00am already?
– No a few more minutes. He says rubbing his neck.

Jupiter has learned that means he wants to ask her something, but he is nervous.

– Come in Stinger.

Stinger walks in and kneels in front of her desk, head bowed and his wings trailing on the floor.

– Your Majesty…

Jupiter quickly stands and going around her desk she takes his hand and makes him to stand and then sit in a chair.

– Stinger, what ever it is, you don’t have to kneel, ever.

He sits and stays there, not saying anything.

– What’s going on Stinger?

He clears his throat.

– Your Majesty, Kiza just told me that you and Caine know about her ability.
– Stinger, it’s just Jupiter! What ability?
He nods and swallows.

– How she can recognize people, he says not looking at her.

Jupiter is clueless about why this would make him so nervous and… scared? Reverting to using her title instead of her name and kneeling.

– You mean the brain pattern stuff? Not all bee-splice can do that?

Stinger breaths better all of a sudden, as he realizes that she does not know the splices laws yet. He looks up and see genuine concern in his queen’s eyes.

– No, I never heard of anyone else able to do that.
– Really, because it’s really cool!
– It is also illegal, he says somber.

_Ah here is why he was so scared_, she thinks

– We kept it a secret ever since we found out about it because any splice with unsanctioned abilities have to be…

He stops, searching for an easier word to say then “killed”.

– Be what?
– Terminated, he says flatly.

Jupiter has a quick flash of anger and her fist slams on the armchair; Stinger freezes.

– Are you friggin’ kidding me? She exclaims.

Stinger shakes his head.


Stinger waits for her to calm down.

Jupiter understands what he feared and she places her hand on his arm.

– Thank you for letting me know, she pats his arm. I don’t have nearly enough knowledge about the ‘verse yet and ignorance can kill. I won’t say anything to anyone about it Stinger, I swear.

His eyes turn yellow. He had come early to maybe beg her not to have Kiza killed and instead Jupiter swears by herself not to tell anyone about what Kiza can do.

– Who else knows about this?
– No one, not even her mother.

She nods and returns to her chair. A thought flashes through her mind as she sits.

– Stinger, would that law apply to Caine’s ability to mate since Lycantant can’t normally do that? She asks.
– I do not know, Jupiter, but I would keep that quiet for now.

She nods.

– You may want to review the laws applicable to splices.
– Right. Where can I get that?
– Probably on one of those sheaves, he says pointing to the shelves behind her.

She looks back, there must be over a hundred sheaves. She sighs.

– But how to find the right one… Hey Max, how are these sheaves sorted? Is there an index or something?
– Her Majesty kept an index sheave in the middle drawer or I can tell you which sheave you are looking for, says Max.

Jupiter opens the drawer, there are a lot of alien looking trinkets and a sheave in the drawer. She takes it out and thumbs it on. It is in a language she does not understand but the sheaves titles all start with the same character, then it changes to a second, then a third, etc. so she deduces it must be in some sort of alien alphabetical order.

– Max, I need the text of law on Splices.
– That would be the third shelf from the top, sheaves 10 through 15.

She stands and takes the first indicated sheave and thumbs it on, switches it to English and reads the first one.

– I’ll need someone to help me understand theses laws…
– Probably an advocate.
– Right, I’ll have Erminea look into that.

– Your Majesty, Mr. Buzz, Madam Erminea, La Dophia and Mr. Bower are requesting entry.
– Let them in, Max and show them the way to my office.

Buzz enters her office with a stack of sheaves and Erminea, Golden and Dophia follow. Buzz places the sheaves on her desk and sits on a chair, Erminea sits on the third, golden take a chair along the wall and brings it closer and Dophia remains standing. Stinger adds Hind Saturn’s sheave on the stack and she seal them all.

– All right, since this is our first official meeting let me state a few rules and facts I have already established and a few new ones.

She takes out a sheave she as been working on.

1) Those who are allowed in this office may call me Jupiter in private.
2) I do not need flowering language in private, it is a waste of time.
3) When I say “Dismiss” it’s Earth lingo for “Go back to your duties.”
4) I will never have a family split on my watch, so when acquiring personnel, I will always acquire the entire family, if they agree. I will never buy unwilling people, whether they are human, splice, android or alien.
5) After acquiring personnel, family members will be transferred to the highest-ranking member of the family, at no cost, like I did with you all.
6) Personnel status will always be set as unavailable for purchase, this ensure that no one can be bought away on a whim.
7) My pay scale for everyone is double basic human pay for the same job.
8) There is to be no harvesting of tersie planets without my express written and sealed approval. And Earth will never be harvested.
9) When one of my people has a new child, they will be granted 5 standard 40-days cycle of paid leave so they can take care of their child and come back to work in good health and with their strength back. If they have more then one child at once, each additional child will grant 20 days of paid leave.
10) All personnel will be vetted by my chief of security or someone he appoints, even if I already own them.

– Are these rules clear?

After a few nods, she continues.

– Buzz, I have new tasks for you. First, I need you to check if I have advocates in the people I inherited from Seraphi. I need a team who can teach me at least the basics laws so I don’t fall on my face when I get out there. I need a team of three to start with. A head advocate and two assistants. Also, I want you and Dopha to review this ship’s crew pay scale, make sure that everything is up to my standard. Finally, I want the sheaves on this wall switch to English and reorganized according to that alphabet.
– That would be a good task for Leona, Buzz says.

Jupiter nods.

– Golden, I would like you to catalog all of my businesses and business assets. Erminea, I need you to do a census of all my personnel and personal assets. And Dopha, I need you to organize and review my finances.
– When do you want theses for? Asks Erminea.
– I know I have inherited a lot of stuff, I give you two weeks for your preliminary reports and two 40-days for a complete report.

– Your Majesty, Miss Kiza request entrance, says Max.
– Let her in Max. You’re all dismiss, except Stinger.

They stand and leave, Buzz grabs the stack of sheaves when he leaves.

Kiza and Caine enter her office while she talks to Stinger.

– Stinger, I have the tour of the ship at 8:00am and I have to be home for 10:00am. I will spend the rest of the day on Earth, do Earth paperwork with my family and maybe be ordinary for a while, as much as I can be anyway.

Caine nods to Jupiter and she smiles at him.

– Hi Jupiter, says Kiza.
– Hey Kiza. Your dad informed me that we have to keep your ability a secret. Don’t worry, your secret is safe with me.
– I knew that, she says smiling. You should know I detected more changes in Caine and they are all stable.
– She said that it feels like I had brain damage before and that my brain was repaired now. And that I am now who I was always meant to be, says Caine.

Jupiter is so happy at these words that she stands and goes to hug Kiza.
– Thank you Kiza, she murmurs in her ear.
She was about to go kiss Caine when her phone rings, so she takes a step back and answers.
– Hello?
– Yupiter?
– Yes mama. What is it?
– Nothing, nothing. I had koshmar last night and wanted to make sure you were okay.
– I am fine mama. What did you dream about?
– A dragon-men saying I was the mother.

Jupiter’s jaw hangs open for a moment, and she is glad her mother can not see her right now. Sargorns!

– Mama, I will be home at 10:00, we will talk more then.
– Okay, Yupiter.
She hangs up. And lets out her mom’s favorite curse “Stalin’s balls”

– You all heard?
They nod.
– God, I did not want to deal with that today. Stinger that means I’ll need Caine all day today.

He nods. She rubs her forehead.
– Okay, I’ll deal with that later.

She takes a deep breath and lets it out.
– Kiza I wanted to see you because following what I read on the sheaves on the Keepers you provided me with. Do you know who is the new Earth Marshal?
– I am still the Marshal until the new one arrives. She says.
– Okay. Well Marshal Apini, I want all action to grow the population of Earth stopped. I want the Keepers to work on stabilizing the population instead and no more provoked natural disasters or war or death of any kind.
Kiza takes a blank sheave and inputs the new parameters for the Keepers on the sheave, her Marshal identification and hands it to Jupiter. She seals it and gives it back to Kiza.
– Done, now tell captain Marsden that I am ready for the tour.

For the tour, she is accompanied by Caine, Stinger and Kiza. It starts on the bridge where she meets the command staff. Beside captain Colby Marsden, commander Bayleigh Vang, the first officer and lieutenant-commander Ailsa Blankenship the communications officer that she met last night, there is lieutenant-commander Enilorac Alil the security chief, lieutenant Ramnath the helmsman, an elephant-splice, lieutenant Cakhinn Felot the chief engineer, a carac-plice (some sort of feline), commander Lagger Gaibin the chief medical officer, an android, and ensign Avita Valens the operation’s officer.

The rest of the tour goes by fast, mess hall, engineering, med-bay, cargo hold, docking bay, personal quarters for the ship’s crew, it’s all very basic but Jupiter notices that the quarters and many facilities are looking a little run-down. And that is what she can notice with her tersie knowledge of space ships.

At the end of the tour, she addresses the captain.
– Captain, I want a full report on the state of the ship and its crew. Anything that needs to be fixed, replaced, upgraded or added. Whether it’s crew, equipment or facilities. Even if it seems trivial.

– Yes, Your Majesty.

– That will be all for now.

She looks at the time and it is 9:35am, she said she would be home at 10:00.

Kiza notices her looking at her phone.

– Thank you for the tour captain. Her Majesty has to leave for an appointment now.

Chapter End Notes

Her throne looks like this: http://vuing.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/luxury-furniture-bench-design-Greek-Romanold-world-times-1.jpg

I have started on the next chapter. Jupiter has to face her mother about the Sargorns...
They make good time to the docking bay and three Skybreakers are awaiting their arrival, Leo, Tristan and Menura. Jupiter notices scratch marks on Tristan’s arm and smiles.

While in transit Jupiter instructs Kiza on real estate she needs to find for her.

– Kiza, I need you to find real estate on Earth for me. First, I need a place to live that is not my cousin’s house. I’m thinking top 2-3 floors of a building downtown. Something with roof access for ships and skyjackers. Room for guards and my retinue when I am in Chicago, with bedrooms and offices. And also, I want an industrial building on the outskirt of Chicago that can serve as a sort of base or spaceport, something more permanent then a garage rooftop.

She says her last sentence has they land on top of a garage two streets away from the Bolotnikov’s house with 10 minutes to spare.

– And finally, I need you to find a secluded plot of land where I can build my Earth Alcazaar, someplace where my people won’t have to use the anonymizer.
– If I may suggest, Jupiter, my neighbors’ land has been for sale for quite a while. They are an elderly couple who can not take care of it anymore and their daughter does not want anything to do with it.
– Get me the details and I will check it out.

Jupiter and Caine leave the ship (shuttle?) and he brings her down to the street level, activates his anonymizer and they walk to the house. Caine smells how nervous she is.

– Are you all right Jupiter?
– Yeah, I just hope that not everyone remembers the Sargorns… People dreaming of the same thing at the same time would be hard to explain, and not everyone could deal with all this, she says pointing to the sky.

When they arrive in front of the house, Mikka comes out running.

– Jupiter! Quick…
She stops in her track at the sight of Caine.

– Caine, my cousin Mikka. Mikka, Caine, my… boyfriend.

It feels weird to call Caine boyfriend, but calling him “mate” would be too strange for her family.

– Hi, she says.
– What is going on Mikka? Jupiter asks.
– Oh right, your mom and your aunt are freaking out in your room, no one knows why.
– It’s okay Mikka, I’ll take care of this, go back inside, she says.

Mikka leaves and Jupiter turns to Caine.

– I guess I won’t have time to be ordinary today.

She gives him a quick kiss.

– Come inside with me, please. I need your presence and support.
– Anything for you, Your Majesty, he murmurs in her ear.

They climb the stairs and enter the house. Everyone crowds them and Jupiter must do the presentations before she can head downstairs to her mother and aunt Nino.

– Caine these are my cousins, Lyudmila, Vassily, Irena, Zeno, Vladie and Moltka and you met Mikka outside. Everyone, this is my boyfriend Caine. Now if you’ll excuse us, mama needs me.

She takes Caine’s hand and pulls him away from her cousins and head to her room. When they enter, she clearly sees on her mother’s face that nothing but the truth and the whole truth will be required.

– Yupiter!

Her mother holds her tight.

– Mama, I’m okay. I’m okay, she says. What is going on?
– Yupiter, you left things out of what happened, did you not?
– Yes mama, I was trying to protect you and everyone else. Like you taught me, “you protect family”, but how did you know?
– Nino had same dream I had, with dragon-men crashing down in the house.

Jupiter walks to her bed and crashes on it, with her elbows on her knees and her head in her hands.

Caine kneels in front of her and takes her hands in his, to comfort her and make sure she is fine. She looks in his eyes and finds the strength in herself to smile at him. She squeezes his hands, takes a deeps breath and stands back up. Aleksa Jones did not miss a single detail of that silent exchange.

– Who is this? She asks.
– Mama, Nino, this is Caine, my boyfriend and security guard. Caine this is my mother Aleksa Jones and my aunt Nino Bolotnikov.

Caine bows to them, in a sign of respect. He can smell that Aleksa is protective of her daughter and that Nino is excited.

– What is your sign? Nino asks.
– Nino, that is a far more interesting question then you might suspect, Jupiter replies. And the answer really long and complicated.
She pauses.

– Anyone else dreamt of the dragon-men? She asks.
– I don’t believe so, says Nino.
– Good. They could not deal with the whole truth… Mama, Nino, there is a lot I have to tell you but here is not private enough, and we don’t have the time right now, we have to go to the bank and fix everything. After, I promise, I will tell you and show you everything.

After they agree, they all head out to the bank of America, except Irena who stays at home with Mikka and Moltka. They walk to the bank which is two blocks away and once the manager glimpses at Jupiter’s bank account, he gets very cooperative with her wishes. Aleksa and Nino use their new green cards to open a joint bank account and Jupiter transfers them one million dollars. Then she pays cousin Vassily’s mortgage and transfers 750,000 dollars to him and Irena’s account. Lyudmilla and Zeno each get 100,000 dollars and she sets up the college funds for Vladie, Mikka and Moltka, 50,000 dollars each with 100,000 dollars upon graduation. If they do not graduate before their 30th birthday, the money will revert back to her. Last but not least she requests another bank card for her account, which she intends to give to Caine and sets the PIN to 9473 for WISE.

After they leave the bank, Vassily, Lyudmilla, Zeno and Vladie head back to the house. Jupiter heads for the garage where they landed in the morning.

***The truth***

– Mama, Nino, we have to make some calls. You may be confused, but do not be scared.

She presses her comm bracelet.

[Yes, Jupiter.]
– Stinger, I need a pickup as fast as you can on top of the garage from this morning and a ride to Kiza’s place. My mother and my aunt will be there.
[I understand, I will be there in five minutes]

She presses her bracelet.

– Caine, can you call in the others please.

He nods and taps his implant.

– Leo, Tristan, Menura, Her Majesty, requires your presence.
[Yes, sir.] They reply.

30 seconds later the three skyjackers land in front of Jupiter in the alley behind the garage. Aleksa and Nino are stunned, jaws hanging by hearing Caine call Jupiter “Her Majesty” and by the fact that these people can fly.
– It’s okay, mama. They are part of my security detail. I will explain everything, but first we have to get up to the roof.

She turns to her guards.

– Leo, take my mother up please, and Tristan, take care of my aunt. Caine?

Caine takes Jupiter in his arms, Leo does the same to Aleksa and Tristan to Nino. Menura covers them and they activate their boots and skate up to the roof. Once on the roof, Aleksa and Nino turn to Jupiter.

– Stalin’s balls, Jupiter, what is going on?

Jupiter shrugs.

– I can give you the short version right now. I am a space-queen.

Aleksa feels dizzy and a strong arm steadies her. She looks over and see the guard that took her up to the roof and gives him a thanking nod. A space-queen?

– How? She asks.
– You see mama, aunt Nino was right. You remember what the stars said at my birth, that I had great things, a great man and a great love in my future? Well it came true. And daddy was right too, the sky is full of miracles, some amazing and some utterly terrifying.
– Jupiter, Your Majesty, we have to step back for Stinger to land, says Caine.

She nods and they all step back to the edge. Aleksa and Nino do not see a thing, but suddenly a man walks out of thin air.
Jupiter walks to him and give him a hug.

– Stinger, looks like my day is nothing I expected.

Aleksa, Nino and her guards followed her and she does the presentation.

– Stinger, my mother Aleksa Jones and my aunt Nino Bolotnikov. Mama, Nino, this is captain Stinger Apini, my Chief of security.

He bows to them and his eyes flash yellow for a second.
– Let’s get going Stinger, says Jupiter.

Stinger lead them into the ship and they fly out to Kiza’s place. While in the ship Jupiter starts her story.

– Mama, Nino, the story I told you was not exactly the truth, the truth is outlandish, amazing and totally crazy and terrifying. It all started with me wanting to buy a telescope like daddy’s. Cousin Vladie came up with the idea of me selling my eggs for the money and I agreed, I really wanted something of daddy’s.
– Oh, Yupiter! Says Aleksa.
– It’s okay, mama, I have something better now, I have found moya sud’ba, she says with a fond look on her face.

She pauses.

– What I told you happened at the clinic was almost the truth. I went in and the doctors set my up,
but what I did not know is that they were not the real doctors. They were alien posing as the doctors. And they were there to kill me.
— Stalin’s balls, says Aleksa.
— What I told you about crying out for help and being rescued by Caine was true, but not entirely.

— We are landing, Jupiter, says Stinger.
— Thank you, Stinger.

When they land, Jupiter speaks in Russian.

— Stinger, send Tristan and Menura on patrol. Leo can stay on close patrol, he won’t learn anything he does not already know.

Stinger nods and gives his orders.
When they exit, Kiza is standing on her porch and waves at them. Before they reach her, the bees come to welcome Jupiter.

— Don’t be scared mama and Nino, they are just saying hello.

She raises her arms and speaks to the bees.

— Hi guys, this is my mother and my aunt.

The bees split and circle around Aleksa and Nino. Suddenly, Stinger and Kiza are kneeling.

— Your Graces, they say.
— What? Say Aleksa and Nino.
— Yeah, I had about the same reaction, when Kiza called me “Your Majesty” the first time, says Jupiter. Kiza, Stinger, stand guys and let’s go inside.

They sit in the living room.

— Kiza, this is my mother, Aleksa Jones and my aunt, Nino Bolotnikov. Mama, Nino, this is Kiza Apini, Stinger’s daughter and my majordomo.
— Kiza, do you still have a gene-probe? Asks Jupiter.
— Yes, she replies.
— Go get it, will you, and test them.

She nods and exit to her office.

Kiza comes back with the gene-probe.

— This is painless, Your Grace, she says to Aleksa.

Aleksa looks at her daughter and Jupiter nods at her.

— Okay.

Kiza take a sample from Aleksa and the light turns to a yellowy-green. Then she goes to Nino and does the same process. The light turns yellowy-green too.

– Green is for Royalty and yellow for Entitled, so something in between. We should get them to Orous and sealed for their protection as soon as possible.
– Only if they want too, Kiza. I’ll finish my story, and then they can decide.

– Now where was I, ah yes, Caine rescuing me at the clinic. When Caine rescued me, I was unconscious. He took me to safety on a floor under renovation in the Willis tower and watched over me while the drugs flushed out of my system. It really did take twelve hours. Now I have to give you some background information before I can continue my story, because I want you to understand all the risks Caine took for me.

She turns to Caine and Leo.

– Caine and Leo, would you turn your anonymizer off please? She asks them.

They nod and flips it off.
Aleksa and Nino gasp.

– Caine is a Lycantant or lycan-splice and Leo is a Lionidon or Lionide-splice. You see in the universe there are many genomengineered humans, created sentient beings made of human’s DNA spliced with animal’s or insect’s DNA. They are called Splice. Also, Stinger and Kiza are bee-splices, you might see their eyes turn yellow sometimes and if you look closely, Stinger’s hair is stripe black and yellow.
– Actually, my hair is striped too but I bleached the black out while stationed on Earth, says Kiza.

Jupiter nods.

– Right. Now an important part of the ‘verse society to know about is that up-there genes decide everything, the purer your genes, the more power and wealth you have. This society is unfair and caste ruled and it is disgusting. At the top, there is the Entitled, and at the top of the Entitled is Royalty. The gene-probe Kiza did on you indicated that you are Entitled mama and Nino and part royalty, and mine indicates that I am Royalty. After the Entitled there are the pure humans, then the tersies, that’s the humans on planets who do not know about the ‘verse, then come the splices and last comes androids. In Earth terms, Splices are basically slaves and androids are property. Both are bought and sold and first-generation splices like Caine, Stinger and Leo are created in labs. I don’t agree with this, of course, but for now, I have to abide by the major rules and bend those I can until I know them all and learn how I can change things for the better.

Aleksa and Nino have turned green. Royalty, entitled, slavery, property… that is a lot to process.
Jupiter gives them time to process the information. When she sees colors returning to her mom’s cheeks, she continues.

– The next thing to know about is law enforcement. The two forces out there are the Legion and the Aegis. The Legion is like the space-army and the Aegis are like space-police. Kiza was Aegis before I gave her a majordomo position. In the Legion, there are elite forces, like in the American army, the elite of the elite are the skyjackers. That is what Stinger, Caine and Leo are but not just any skyjackers, the Skybreakers are the best skyjacker unit in the ‘verse. I have learned that most skyjackers are splices because pure humans don’t have the strength or brain capacities for the wings.
– Yes, wings. If you would demonstrate guys?

Stinger, Caine and Leo stand, they remove their jacket and expand their wings as much as they can in the living room.
– Angely… murmurs Aleksa.
– No mama, they are not angels, I thought so too when I first saw the wings, but they are bio-neural implants. It’s like an upgrade they receive when they are the best of the best. I have thirteen skyjackers to protect me, Stinger is their commanding officer. Now, the ‘verse is a very capitalist society, another thing that I have learned is that when a skyjacker unit loses a member, instead of introducing a new member to the team, the team is dismantled and the members are either forced to retire, demoted or, too often, sold off.
– And I thought our family was cursed… this is much, much worse, says Nino.
– That is only the tip of it aunt Nino. The next thing to talk about are second-generation splices, like Kiza. Second-generation splices are born-splice. They are made like humans makes babies but have even less opportunities then first-generation splices, because they are not engineered for a specific task like bred-splices, nobody wants anything to do with them. The majordomo position is never accorded to a born-splice like Kiza by any regular Entitled or royalty. Before me, Kiza had to work at the lowest of job, she was a Marshal for the Aegis on Earth. This is actually her house, but it looked very different when I got here the first time.

She pauses.

– Now I can continue my story where I left it off. When I woke up in the Willis tower, Caine had left me his gun and he instructed me on how to use it. I learned that Caine has a very unique ability. His splicing gave him the ability to smell someone’s gene-print, or DNA, and that he is the best hunter in the gyre. The legion gave him a contract for my assassination, but he was unable to complete it.

Aleksa jumps to her feet and is about to jump on Caine, but Nino grabs her arm and Jupiter places herself between her and Caine.

Caine automatically shrinks in his chair. Shoulders drawn in, ducking his head, he slumps to the floor kneeling in a proper submissive way before Royalty and Entitled. Kiza and Stinger are frozen in place, Leo can’t seem to decide if he should stay put or defend his Queen from her own mother.

– Your Grace, I must apolo…

The pain that strokes Jupiter’s heart when she hears this amazing man start to apologize to her mother for something he had no control over brings tears to her eyes. Aleksa immediately feels remorse for her quick over reaction. Damn Bolotnikov temper! Jupiter turns around and kneels in front of Caine.

– Caine, moya sud’ba, you don’t have anything to apologize for, Jupiter murmurs to him. Listen to me, she lifts his chin with her hand so he looks her in the eyes, she just reacted, like any parent would. Give her time.

Slowly Caine relaxes under Jupiter’s touch and with her words. He can smell how her heart hurts and he hurts with her. She takes his hands and pulls him up with her. She places her arms around his waist and her head on his chest, he encircles her with his arms too and bending his head he breaths her in deeply. After that he can sit back a little calmer.

Jupiter turns back to her mother, placing her hand on her shoulders, she takes a firm voice and speaks.

– Mama, listen to me. You have to trust me. Do not make any judgement before I am finished. I told you about the slavery and everything, you have to understand. As Entitled, we have to be very careful with our words and actions because we have power of life and death over any Splice. You have that power mama.

Aleksa’s shoulders clench under Jupiter’s hands.
– I know it is not an easy power to have, it is disturbing, but you saw how he submitted to you even if he could kill a human with his bare hands easily. Mama, he is the best soldier in the universe and he killed far more dangerous to protect me. I am alive and safe thanks to him, he did not kill me, he could not kill me, he would never harm me, he saved me and more then once.

Aleska looks at Jupiter, looks into her eyes and there she sees it, the trust and understanding that her daughter needs from her. She nods briefly and sits back.

– I will listen, she says.

There is tension in the room but Jupiter has to move on with her story.

– Now as I said, Caine received a contract from the Legion for my assassination, but he could not complete it. Something was bothering him about the contract in the first place. He told me he usually got assassination orders for criminals, warlords, bad guys, etc. not civilian females from a tersie planet. Things did not add up for him but failing to complete a contract for a legionnaire is case for a court-martial. A court-martial meant he would be removed from his unit and the members of his unit probably sold off. He waited for me to wake up because the contract said I had to be awake when he killed me, but by the time I was awake, my scent had changed. You see when I was at the clinic, they did something to me that made me smell like his target to make sure he killed me, but they gave me too much drugs and he had nothing to wake me up. After twelve hours I smelled like me, not like her.
– Her? Says Aleska, confused.
– Yes, I’m getting to that. Now killing a faked target is also a case for a court-martial. Either way he was screwed, bound to be court-martialed. He probably could still have killed me and make it look like I was the right target to save his unit and Stinger who is like a father to him, but instead he brought me here to Kiza.
– You said you went to his sister, says her mother.
– Yes, Kiza is the sister of his heart, Stinger and Kiza are the closest thing he has to family, and they are family to me too.

Aleska and Nino look from Stinger to Kiza a few times.

– Family, are they… ? Asks Nino.
– Yes, they are actually Bolotnikov now, so are his wife and his second daughter.
– But they are not even Russian, says Nino in Russian.
– Neither was daddy, and you still liked him, and they understand Russian aunt Nino, retorts Jupiter.

Nino shrugs.

– This was all meant to be aunt Nino, you will see, she says switching back to English. Now as I said Caine brought me here where we learned what I am. I am the genetic recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax, the most power Queen in the ‘verse. A recurrence happens when the exact same gene-print, or DNA, reoccurs. Actually, for the ‘verse I am Seraphi Abrasax reincarnated because in the ‘verse genes are almost like a religion. The bees were the first clue, you see bees were created by Seraphi Abrasax as a mean to recognize royalty, they sense it. Being a recurrence granted me everything that was hers before her death, which is a lot since she lived for almost 91,000 years.

Nino and Aleska gasp.

– Yeah, I know. I’ll explain how that is possible a little later. It’s… complicated. It is also why my DNA and hers do not smell the same even if it is mathematically the same.
She pauses and her stomach rumbles.

– Hey Kiza, I’m getting hungry, any corn left from yesterday?
– No, but I can make some more.
– That would be great. Leo, go help her, would you?

Leo mantles his wings and follows Kiza out.

– Now, when we were here, Kiza sent a coddled message to her father for help, but bounty hunters showed up before he got here. Caine took me to a safe room and when I came out – Stinger had to prove to me who he was – there were at least 20 dead bounty hunters in the house and there were big holes in the walls. The place was a total wreck. I paid to have it fixed for Kiza. Caine and Kiza had killed all the bounty hunters and if Caine was not a skyjacker and a splice, he would have died from his injuries, and Kiza would be dead too. I saw the state he was in, it was not pretty. Outside the house was an Aegis cruiser and Stinger got me on board. That is where we first learned that Caine’s biology had begun to bond with mine. That is also another reason Caine could not kill me back in the Willis tower, even if he did not realize it at the time. It’s a Lycantant thing, I’ll explain more later.

Now the Aegis took me to a planet called Orous, where after standing in lines for twelve hours, I was able to claim my title, inheritance and sigil.

She shows her wrist to her mother and aunt.

– It’s like an ID. It proves who I am and I use it to seal paperwork instead of signing with a pen. And the first things I sealed were an edict preventing harvesting of tersie planets, the repair for Kiza’s house, the transfer of property from Seraphi to me and claiming Caine’s unit of skyjackers has my personal guards, so they would not be sold off. After escaping from more bounty hunters, we went to a Legion outpost to file for my royal guards.
– Harvesting?
– Yeah, that is the ugliest truth of them all. You see to live for more then one normal human lifetime, people use something called RegeneX. It is also used in medicine to heal wounds almost instantaneously, to create splices and it gives androids their sentience. Without RegeneX these people would not exist, she says pointing to the splices in the room.
– That is powerful… says Nino.
– Yes, but the thing is RegeneX is made from… people.
– You see mama, tersie planets are farms for the Entitled. Large industries transform them and seed them with human lives and they wait for thousand or hundred of thousand of years and then they come out and harvest the people like cattle and transform them in RegeneX. Don’t ask me how, I have not learned that yet, but I have learned that Earth was seeded by Seraphi Abrasax and that using RegeneX to rejuvenate actually darken’s once essence and that is why our gene-print do not smell alike even if they are the same. Caine can smell the difference. He made me smell her gene-print and even to my nose it smelled like rotten fish and old sewer.

Aleksa is green and Nino is so white she could be a corpse. Aleksa looks like she wants to strangle someone.

– Mama, remember, they did not choose this. And actually, when I inherited Seraphi’s estate, I became the biggest producer of RegeneX in the ‘verse apparently. So, preventing the harvest of my tersie planets is not a small thing.

Aleksa looks at Jupiter, where did her little girl go, this is a strong woman now. She takes a deep breath and tries to comprehend her explanations. Her brain feels like mush, too much information. She closes her eyes and thinks things over.
– You are a good girl, Yupiter. She finally says.
– Thank you, mama. I can not help those who are already dead, but I can help the others. Now what I have learned about it is that a canister of pure RegeneX is made from 100 people and cost 5 million credits and that for a complete rejuvenation you need 5 containers of pure RegeneX. In medicine, Entitled are treated with pure RegeneX, pure humans and Skyjackers are treated with the medium grade and Aegis and legionnaire are treated with the low-grade. Splices don’t have access to it, unless they are in the Legion or Aegis or belong to an Entitled who is particularly fond of them. Ordinary splices are not valuable enough to be treated with it apparently. In splicing, I have learned that they use the pure form and the most complicated splices require about 1% of a canister. I have not learned yet how it is used for androids.
– 50,000 credits per life… murmurs Aleksa.

Jupiter nods, she can see the mathematical brain of Aleksa Jones firing up.

– Back to what happened. After filing for my Royal guards, I met Titus Abrasax, third child of Seraphi Abrasax. He was so slimy and appalling, mama, he made Vladie’s slimy friends look like the catch of the year.
– Wow, it’s hard to get lower then that… chirps in Nino.

Jupiter laughs at her aunt's comment, then shakes her head.

– He is the one that put the order for my assassination with the Legion, which sent Caine after me. I managed to have that cancelled out and I actually thanked him for it. The look on his face was priceless.
Caine chuckles, remembering the events.

– After that, can you imagine he had the nerve to propose to me! Hell, I am basically his mother reincarnated and he proposed to me. I was so disgusted and when he tried to stop me from leaving I knee-jacked him in the groin.
– Good girl! Murmurs, Aleksa.
– The scent of pain and humiliation that came off of him was quite strong, mentions Caine proudly.
– After that I learned that Stinger had not seen his wife, Kiza’s mother, in 18 years because she was owned by what you could call a brothel, which he had managed to escape with Kiza to give her a better life. She had sacrificed her own possibility for a better life to give a chance to Kiza. That reminded me of you mama, how you gave up your life in Russia for me. After some searching, we also learned that Honey-Bee had another daughter after Stinger left with Kiza. So, Stinger did not know about his second daughter, Seiza, and Kiza about her sister. You understand I could not let that stay the way it was, so I put on a show and I bought them both to reunite the family. And after I bought them, I gave them both to Stinger so that if anything was to happen to me, they could never be parted again.
– You bought people? Says her mother on an incredulous tone.
– Mama, it is how things work out there, but being own by me is the closest they can get to freedom for now. One day, I will manage to give them real freedom, but for now it is the best I can do. Remember, I have been Queen for about four days, that’s not much and I bought more people then that already… I bought another bee-splice family, the Buzz. Hiven Buzz is Stinger’s friend and he was the one that helped him escape the life in the brothel. He was stuck in a dead-end job, filling reports. I, of course, asked them first if they wanted to work for me. His wife is my lead doctor and he is my secretary. And after buying them, I gave him his wife and two children for free. Then after meeting my personal guards, I also asked them to think of people they wanted to have with them and I bought them all and then gave them for free to each of them. And I offered them jobs, I did not force anyone to take a job even if legally I could buy anyone I want and force them to do the jobs I want, you raised me right, I know the difference between a legal and a moral right. I also pay them
all twice what a pure human would get paid for a job, because of course this society being so twisted
splices are paid one fourth of what a human is paid and androids are paid half of that. But with me
everyone gets paid twice a pure human’s pays. With me everyone is equal. That part happened last
night actually.
– But still…
– Oh, I know mama, I get sick to my stomach every time I do it, but I can not break every rule at
once, it would be suicide. I already bent the rules a lot by giving family members away for free… I
have to learn what I can break and what I can bend and how fast I can do it. Too much too fast is
dangerous. I may be the most powerful Queen, but if the other royals band together against me, I
would be in a lot of trouble. And changing the mind of people who are thousands of years old takes
time.

– The corn is ready, calls Kiza.
– Great let’s take a break and eat, I’ll continue after lunch, and you’ll have time to process some of
what I told you.

They all eat some corn on the cob at or around the dining table and everyone seems to relax. Jupiter
notices her mom observing Caine closely.

After lunch they all sit back in the living room and Jupiter continues her story.

– So, after buying the Buzz but before meeting my skyjacker’s family, I met Lady Kalique Abrasax,
second child of Seraphi, on her planet called Cerise. She was nice in a weird kind of way. She seems
to want to establish a relationship with me, as if I really am her mother, but it is hard to tell what a
14,004 years old genetic-daughter might think. She did however inform me that her older brother,
Balem, was mad and insane and that he might resort to illegal actions to get the Earth back from me.
You see the Earth belongs to me now…
– The Earth, the whole planet? Aleksa says.
– Yes, and technically, everything and everyone on the planet belongs to me.
– That is crazy, says Nino.
– I know, I don’t even know how many planets I own yet... Anyway, after that piece of information
I rushed back to Earth to find cousin Vassily’s house a wreck, the whole family gone and a Sargorn
and a rat-splice in the dining room.
– You mean the dreams are memory?
– Yes, mama. Sargorn are what you call dragon-men. They are… were Balem Abrasax’s henchmen.
They actually are descendent from dinosaurs… which were exterminated by Seraphi when she
decided to seed the Earth for harvest…
– She killed the dinosaurs… murmurs Aleksa.
– The Sargorns captured you to try to get me to give the Earth back to Balem, so he could harvest it.
Kalique told me that the Earth is the ripest and most abundant harvest in over two millennia. I am not
exactly sure what that all means… Anyway, I had to follow the rat-splice and the Sargorn to meet
Balem Abrasax otherwise he would have killed you right away. I had to at least try and bargain with
him. It turns out he had a RegeneX refinery inside the great hurricane inside the planet Jupiter, where
you all had been taken. Greegan, the Sargorn I was with, maneuvered in a way that locked me inside
the planet with all my people locked on the outside. I met Balem, and he was really crazy, mistaking
me for his mother. Which I learned he killed and he tried to convince me that some lives mattered
more then others. I asked him were you were and he showed me… you were all unconscious,
surrounded by machines that looked like medieval torture machine and by Sargorns. He promised
that if I returned the Earth to him, we could all go back to Earth, and that I would not see the Harvest
in my life-time. I was about to seal the sheave but I could not mama, I had to think about the billions
of people on Earth. I could not let him have the Earth.
Jupiter is crying, telling her mother that she was willing to let her family be killed and herself too to save the Earth was so difficult, but necessary. Aleksa cradles her daughter in her arms, she is still her little girl sometime it seems.

– *Yupiter, moya dragotsennaya doch’.* You are so brave.
– I think Spock would be proud of me if he was real. She says, sniffing.
– “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few” states Nino.

Jupiter nods.

– How did we survive if you did not give the Earth away? Asks Aleksa.
– Caine, Caine saved us all.

Aleksa looks at Caine with a new appreciation.

– You see by that time the bond between Caine and I was not only biological it was deeper, stronger. He risked everything for me and dived in Jupiter’s hurricane, a hurricane the size of the Earth, in a Zero, a single pilot attack ship. You could think of it as an X-wing if this was Star Wars, but in the shape of an angel. By random luck or rather because it was faith, he survived the dive and crashed through the grav-hull surrounding the refinery. It’s like a bubble surrounding it, to protect it from the planet’s gas. He made an explosive entrance in the lab where you were and killed the Sargorns. Which gave me the courage to smash the sheave for Earth I was holding. Balem tried to choke me, and I knee-jerked him too. The universe over and the jerks are the same everywhere, they can’t take no for an answer.

Nino desperately shake her head.

– With space technology Caine made a hole in the floor-ceiling between where I was and the lab and he caught me as I fell. I moved you all to safety before Balem attacked me. I shot him in the leg with Caine’s gun which he had given me again, but we fell through a hole in the floor. Caine fought with Greeegan, the last remaining Sargorn, and managed to kill him. The refinery was collapsing because he had crashed through the grav-hull and Jupiter’s gas was reacting to the stockworks. The people working in the refinery evacuated and it let the Aegis cruiser come down and Caine brought you all up one by one to the ship. During that time, I was attacked again by Balem, he beat me with a pipe. I managed to take the pipe from him and I hit him back. He said some crazy stuff mistaking me for his mother again, saying I begged him to kill me. I told him I was not his mother and then the platform we were on collapsed. We fell into the refinery core, but Caine caught me and activated a spacesuit around me. We managed to get close enough to the cruiser before it jumped to Earth and then we were floating in space above the Earth.

– After that we were sent to med-bay to be treated, we rested for a while, I had cousin Vassily’s house fixed. Your memories were wiped, or so we thought. I gave my report to the Aegis about what happened on Jupiter, Mr. Buzz fixed the paperwork on Earth for our citizenship, found the money and made the paperwork trail for the story I told you about the lawyers. As owner of the Earth, I can have all the paperwork I want. We brought you back home and placed you were you were according to the Keepers and I came back home after that.
– Keepers?
– Oh yeah, they are aliens, from a system called Diorite. I did not know much about them yesterday, but I found out more about them this morning actually. They work for the planet’s owner, fixing things and making sure no one learns about aliens, wiping memories and such. They also defend the planet from illegal harvests. Arg…That makes me so queasy… I also learned that they take care of “crop management” making sure the planet’s population grows as fast as possible for a faster harvest by creating, wars, chaos, natural disasters, to trick us into making babies…
She winces.

– I changed that for Earth this morning, there are to be no more provoked wars, death or natural disasters. From now on, they will only work on stabilizing the planet’s population so we do not exceed the planet capacity to feed us and such.
– I can not believe how much responsibilities are on your shoulders, my Jupiter.
– I am not alone, mama. I have my family, my people, my space-family and Caine.
– Why is Caine so special?
– He is my destiny mama. Aunt Nino, you asked what Caine’s sign was… It is marked on his neck, will you read it?

Nino approaches Caine and looks at the mark. She gasps and her mouth hangs open. She tries to speak, but no sounds come out. She shakes her head and clears her throat.

– “Jupiter and the one who is her equal and opposite, together”, she says.
– You see, Lycantant are bred in litters, 30 of them in the same artificial womb called a gestator. Caine was number 31. Stray cells from his 30 litter mates combined to create him, he was not engineered like the other Lycantant. I did calculations and he simply started to exist at the moment of my birth, when the stars predicted my great love. And through all the craziness of my ascension, that is what they call the claiming of my title and such, we actually fell in love.
– How can this be love? After only a few days.
– And how did you know it was love when you met daddy half-frozen on the river to watch the stars. When he told you the sky was full of miracles? Mama, I knew Caine was my destiny back at the beginning, the first time I looked in his eyes. When he looks at me, there is that same look then in daddy’s eyes in the wedding picture above your bed.

Aleksa looks at Jupiter and then at Caine. She sees in their eyes the spark that was in her Max’s eyes.

– And you should know that the bonds between us are unbreakable. Only death can separate us.
– What do you mean?
– We are pack-bonded, that is a bond that fixes a Lycantant body and brain’s chemistry. Before me, he was like a drug addict in need of his fix, to give you a clear image. Shakes and twitches and all. Lycantant are not meant to be alone. They usually bond in pack, like wolves, but Caine did not bond with his litter mates, they rejected him, because he is different. That is why his splicer gave him another mark then the others too, no one else has this brand. He was told he could not bond ever and yet after rescuing me and simply being in my presence when I was unconscious, his biology started to bond with mine. He was meant for me, meant to bong with me and since I am human and not a Lycantant, I can not break the bond like a Lycantant Alpha could, so the bond is permanent. Separating us would mean his death.

She looks into her mother eyes, then her aunt and continues.

– Mama, Nino, you have to understand all the trust that this bond implies. Legally, I would be in my right to order him tortured and executed for bonding with me. Royalty and Splices do not bond, it’s just not done. For him to tell me about the bond and that it is permanent, he was risking his life. He did not really know who I was and how I would react. He trusted me with his life, the lives of all members of his unit and his sister’s life at the same time.
– Stalin’s balls… murmurs Aleksa.
– You can say that again, says Nino.
– Our second bond is even more dangerous to have, yet it is wonderful. Let me explain. Splices inherit a lot of instincts from the animal or insect they are spliced with and like many animals on Earth, Lycan well, they mate for life. Caine and I are mate-bonded, it is deeper then that, but the closest Earth term would be… married.
– *Yupiter,* what are you saying? Asks Aleksa.

– *Mama, posmotri mne v glaza.*

Aleksa looks into her daughter’s eyes. Jupiter lets down all guard and let her heart show in her eyes.

– *On moya sud’ba.* There is no-one else for me mama. You remember all the guys I went out with? You called them boys, and you were right. Caine is not a boy like them, mama. He is strong and powerful, yet gentle and caring. God, faith, the universe, whatever you want to call it, created him for me. I love him and he loves me. He is mine and I am his, forever and always. I can not do this without him, he is my other half. The sky is full of miracles mama, and he is my miracle.

– *Moya dragotsennaya doch’, ya ponimayu, Gde lyubov’ i sovet, tam i gorya net. Berís’ drúžno, ne búdet grúžno.* (Roughly translate to: My precious daughter, I understand. Where love and advice exist, there is no grief. Take hold of it together, it won't feel heavy.)

Jupiter hugs her mother and Aleksa returns the embrace.

– *Spasibo, mama.* Jupiter murmurs.

Then Aleksa stands and walks to Caine and signals for him to stand.

Caine does not know what to expect from the mother of his mate and Queen. He heard her words to Jupiter, but he did not understand the sense of what she said. She does not smell angry or enraged like she did earlier, but she smells determine. She learned a lot of things in the last few hours and her rises of angers were similar to Jupiter’s when she learned the same things. When she gestures for him to stand he does so after looking at Jupiter, who simply nods at him with a smile on her face. Aleksa looks deep into his eyes and he is taken by surprise when she plants kisses on both his cheek and then she says:

– *Dobro pozhalovat’, moy syn.*

He is so surprised by her acceptance that he has to close his eyes. When he opens them, he has tears in his eyes and Aleksa pats him on the cheek.

– I can see. I can see, what she sees. You are a good man, she tells him.

Then she moves to Kiza and she does the Russian greeting for her and then for Stinger too. Nino also stands and greets Caine, Kiza and Stinger.

When they sit back, Jupiter speaks again.

– *Mama, Nino, we have to keep this a secret for now. The only people who know about it are in this room except for Seiza, Kiza’s sister.*

– *Why is that? Asks Nino.*

– Because this society is twisted Nino and I do not know all the rules and laws yet and Caine is not a standard engineered Lycantant. Something I have learned is that splices with non-approved abilities have to be terminated… like they are malfunctioning tools or equipment.

The women wince at the explanation.

– *Caine’s ability to feel and to mate are not approved abilities for Lycantant.*

– *How can that be? Asks Nino.*

Jupiter places a hand on Caine’s arm.

– *Lycantant are pack-bonded unit bred for the Legion. They are engineered to be the perfect feeling-less soldiers. Being feeling-less prevents the possibility of mate-bonding because for that to happen*
both people must feel love and be loved in return. And the last nail in the coffin of their engineering is that their physical capacity to mate is blocked.
– Then, how can he? Says Aleksa.
– Remember how he came into existence, mama. He was not engineered like the others. He was created from random cells from his litter mates, like babies are created from random genetic traits from their parents. He is in fact what the others should be without the engineering. He is unique, amazing and wonderful.

Caine’s ears have turned a deep shade of crimson at her words and he duck his head with his shy smile.
– Now that you know the truth, you both have a decision to make. Do you want to be part of this new universe or do you want to live normal Earth human lives? If you choose to come up to space with me, we will get you to Orous to get your sigils, register you as Entitled and you can be there to support me. Or you can live normal comfortable lives here on Earth, I gave you both enough Earth money to do so. I would like you to come with me, but it is your decision. I have made mine already. I will give you time to think and discuss it.

She turns to Kiza.
– Kiza are my boots and stuff still here? She asks.
– Yes, we left them where you put them.
– Great. I’ll be right back.

Jupiter goes to put on her Earth clothes and her ‘jacker’s boots and returns to the living room.
– Caine, will you come fly with me? She asks.

He stands.
– Your Majesty does not even have to ask, he replies, eyes crinkling.

She blushed and has an eye-blinding smile.
– Jupiter, says Aleksa.
– Yes mama?
– You are right, he looks at you like Max looked at me.

She smiles again.
– I will be back in an hour or so. Take your time to think and discuss. If you need anything, ask Stinger or Kiza, they will take care of you.

***Couple trouble***

They get out of the house as Tristan is landing on the lawn.
– Hi Tristan, I see you took my advice to heart.
– What?

She points to the scratches to his arm.
Oh, I must apologize Jupiter, I have no idea why Feliz did that, she is always so soft and gentle.

Jupiter facepalms.

You don’t know? Did she not tell you why?
No, she won’t talk to me, she seemed really hurt, but I don’t understand why.
Oh hell…

She raises her hands to the sky and let them down fast, shaking her head. She looks at Caine and tells him:

I guess I have to be a couple’s counselor too.

She takes a deep breath and sits on the ground.

Tristan, sit with me.
It’s not proper protocol, Majesty.
Caine can take over for you. Now sit, Queen’s order.

He nods and sits on the ground beside her.

Listen Tristan, I don’t know what space-humans do, but on Earth humans offer a ring to their partner as a sign of their love and to tell others that they are taken. Space-humans must have something similar?
Yes, it’s an arm-cuff.
Okay, well Feliz is a splice and splices well they have instincts that comes from the animal they are spliced with.
I know that.
But did you know that that includes mating instincts?
You mean?
I don’t know much about it but as far as I know, feline splices, they scratch. You could say that this, she points to his scratch marks, is a cat-splice arm-cuff. If you rejected her after she scratched you, you basically told her you did not love her and did not want her. The proper thing to have done would have been to scratch her back in the corresponding area.

Tristan is taken aback.

Why did she not tell me?
I do not know Tristan. Did she grow up with other cat-splices?
No, she was owned by an elderly woman as a companion and then she was sold to an entertainment house.
Then she might not know herself, Tristan.

He nods.

What can I do? She won’t even talk to me.
You do love her, don’t you?
More then my own life, Jupiter.

She nods and places a hand on his shoulder.

We’ll fix this.

She turns to Caine and sees his shoulders drawn in and he is looking down even has he checks the perimeter for threats. One problem at a time! She thinks.
Jupiter stands and Tristan follows.

– Caine, call Leo for me, please?

Caine calls Leo and he joins them outside.

– What can I do for you, Jupiter.

Jupiter takes Tristan’s arm and shows the scratches to Leo.

– I see, he says.
– It’s a mess Leo, Jupiter sighs. Feliz scratched him, he did not understand why and did not scratch her back. She won’t talk to him and she does not understand herself because she never was instructed in cat-splice ways. I know you are not the same splice, but you are both feline, would you talk to her and explain her things as much as you can?
– Of course.
– Thank you, Leo.

She presses her comm bracelet.

[Yes Jupiter]
– Stinger I need you to switch Tristan and Leo with 2 other guards and send them back to the ship, they have a very important matter to attend to.
[Understood]

She presses her comm bracelet.

– All right, Leo stay with Tristan until your replacement arrives and explain to him the three steps of mate bonding for mammal splices.

She turns to Caine, something is definitely bothering him. She can see it in the way he avoids looking her in the eyes, how his shoulders are drawn in and in the restlessness of his wings, so instead of turning on her boots and flying to the sky she walks into the corn field where he follows her.

Caine follows Jupiter as it is his duty as her security guard, even though he is uneasy and worried. He did not know the thing about the ring. *I got her ‘jacker’s boots… I should have asked Kiza what humans do on Earth. Stinger was right to say it was a weird mate-bonding gift.* He wonders why Jupiter is walking in the corn when she wanted to go flying, but he is on duty as her security guard, it is not his place to question her activities.

After Jupiter is sure no one can see or hear them she faces him and takes his hands in hers, he still does not look at her.

– Caine what is bothering you? She asks.

Caine is taken aback. *How can she tell?*

– How can you tell?
She smirks.

– I may not have your nose, but I know you, she says. When you are worried about something, you look down when you look at me, your shoulders are slightly hunched and your wings are restless as if you want to fly away from the situation.

He lets out a breath and looks up into her eyes. She knows him so well already.

– Now will you let me know what is going on with you?

He looks back down.

– I got you boots…
– And I love them, she says, bringing his hands behind her back.
– I did not know about the ring…

Jupiter’s head and eyes roll back. She closes her eyes and shakes her head. Then her head goes back forward until her forehead is on his chest.

– Oh, Caine, moya sud’ba, she murmurs on his chest.

She takes a step back and looks up into his eyes.

– Caine, stop worrying, my mom would have died of a heart attack if I’d come home after a first date with that kind of ring on my finger.

Caine looks lost.

– This is just culture misunderstanding. All right, sit with me.

She sits cross-legged in the corn field and Caine sits with her.

– Okay, where to start… the exchange of rings on Earth is something very official, that happens during a wedding. It is not done lightly and normally not after only a few days.

Caine’s face gets brighter, so Jupiter continues.

– I’ll tell you how it traditionally happens. When two people who love each other have been together for some time and they realize that there could never be anyone else for them, and they want to pledge their love to each other, one of the two, more often the man, will buy an engagement ring for the other one. Then the one who bought the ring will propose to the other one. A proposal is when you ask the other one to marry you. The way to do it vary from couple to couple but traditionally the one proposing gets down on one knee and offers the ring to the other one. If the answer is yes, the ring is placed on the ring finger on the left hand.

She shows him the proper finger.

– Then the couple will take some time and plan their wedding day and during the wedding ceremony the couple will exchange rings and vows.

While she talks she sees Caine’s shoulders and wings relax and he stops looking down.

– I understand, he says. It sounds like the signifying bonds the royal exchange during their wedding ceremony, except them it is inscribed in their skin, like your sigil.

She nods and then winces realizing that Titus must have done his research before proposing to her,
since he used a ring.

– What is it? He asks.
– Royal wedding… that reminded me of Titus. He used a ring when he proposed to me…
– I really liked your answer to his proposal, he murmurs.

Jupiter smiles and he brings her close for a kiss.

After, when he looks at her, there is something intense in his eyes.

– If I proposed to you, would you…
– Say yes? My heart says in a heartbeat, here on Earth and out there in space, moya sud’ba.

She smiles at him and touches his brand. He closes his eyes and lean into the touch.

– My mind says to check the rules and laws first. I don’t want to risk your life, Caine, and if Titus can find out about our customs, others can too.

She stands back up and he follows. He brings her into his arms and hold her tight.

– I love you, Your Majesty.

She shivers under his hands and holds him tight in return.

– I love you, Caine Wise.

She releases her hold on him.

– That reminds me, I have something for you.

He lets go of her. She takes out her wallet and pulls out the bank card she got for him.

– With this, you can buy stuff on Earth. This way you can buy food and not have to eat rations bars, and if you want to buy me stuff, even if technically I already own everything on the planet, this way you can. I’ll show you how to use it when we are back in Chicago.

Caine takes the card and stores it in one of his pockets.

– Thank you, Jupiter.

She nods.

– Now, let’s go flying before something else comes up, she says.

She turns on her boots and climbs in the sky, whooping with glee, with Caine not far away.

***Return to Kiza’s house***

When they get back to Kiza’s house, they salute Ezin and Vespa who are on patrol, replacing Leo and Tristan, then head inside the house. There are loud noises and mouth watering smells coming from the kitchen.

– Ah, Jupiter, you want a latke? says her mother.
– What is going on here?
– Your mother and your aunt are making us a Russian dinner, says Kiza, to welcome us to the family.
– Oh, mama! I’ll come help. Kiza, are your mom and sister coming down from the ship?
– Yeah, dad has gone to pick them up. Your mom, sent me to the store with a very specific list of ingredients.
– Well it smells good in here.

She walks to the kitchen, removes her control gloves and washes her hands.

– Chto ya mogu sdelat’? She asks.
– You can prepare the shashlik, Jupiter, I’m on the latke, and Aleksa is doing a honey-cake, says Nino.
– Very well.

The sight of a Queen in ‘jacker’s boots and two Entitled preparing foods in an Earth kitchen for a bunch of splices was so out-of-the-’verse for Caine and Kiza and yet so down-to-Earth and ordinary for them. They could not help but chuckle and shake their head.
– You guys can help if you want, says Jupiter.

When Stinger gets back with Honey-Bee and Seiza, Caine is shredding potatoes with a grater, Kiza is slicing cucumbers, Jupiter is sautéing slices of beef, Nino is cooking the shashlik and Aleksa is checking on the honey-cake while preparing blinis. It sounds like a hive in the kitchen and it is a comforting sound for him.
Stinger knocks on the door frame and everyone turns around.
– Hey Stinger! Food is almost ready, claims Jupiter. Where are…?
Honey-Bee and Seiza come into the kitchen.
– Ah! Here you are. Mama, aunt Nino, these are Honey-Bee and Seiza Apini, childcare coordinator and Lady’s maid. Honey-Bee, Seiza, my mother Aleksa Jones and my aunt Nino Bolotnikov.

Honey-Bee and Seiza stand there and Jupiter sees their foot going backward to kneel.
– No kneeling in the kitchen, she claims. Mama, Nino, go, I’ll take care of this.

Aleksa and Nino stop their cooking to greet Honey-Bee and Seiza with the Russian kisses quickly while Jupiter turns back to check on the food. When they return, Jupiter asks Kiza:

– Kiza, do you have a bigger table somewhere?
– Not really.
– Can you find something to extend the table space? It’s not a family meal if we don’t sit together.
– Yes.

Kiza leaves the kitchen and grabs her dad by the arm to take him with her. They come back with two bistro size table and add them to both end of the dining table. She goes back, tugging her mom and
sister with them and they come back with four chairs and place them at the table. Soon the Russian dishes start to fill the table and they all sit for the meal. When they all wait for her to pick up her fork, before serving themselves, she does an imaginary facepalm and thinks *Oh right, no one eats before the Queen.* Everyone eats so much that there is not a single left-over, and then it is time for the dessert. Aleksa brings out the honey-cake and all the Apini’s eyes turn yellow and Caine stares at it. Jupiter smiles, Aleksa smirks, Nino shakes her head.

– I’ll do this, mama, says Jupiter.

Jupiter takes the knife and cuts and serves the cake. When no one but her, her mother and her aunt eat the cake, she gets curious.

– Erm, guys… why are you not eating the cake?

Stinger rubs his neck and brand.

– There is honey in it, he says.
– Of course, it’s a honey-cake.
– Honey is to rare and precious, only Entitled are allowed to eat honey.

Jupiter’s jaw hangs open a moment.

– You mean that in the universe honey is rare? Are there no honey bees elsewhere?
– Bees are placed on seeded planets to maintain a proper ecosystem and bee-splicers are allowed to have a hive or two, but otherwise only Entitled are allowed to have honey bees and consume honey. He explains.
– Then Kiza, why do you have all this honey? She points at the honey jars filling every available space on shelves, door molding, counter, etc.
– I was saving it to buy my mom, she says.
– Stalin’s balls, mutters Aleksa.

Jupiter looks at her mom, then at her space-family.

– Kiza, can you get me a blank sheave?
– Yes, she says and exit the dining room.

Aleksa murmurs in her daughter’s ear.

– This universe is so messed up, Jupe.
– You don’t know how many times I’ve thought and said that in the last few days, mama, she says out loud.

Kiza returns with a sheave and hands it to Jupiter. She takes it and starts to write something, muttering “baby steps”. When she is satisfied with it, she stands and reads it out loud.

– “From this moment on, anyone may eat of any food prepared for them or served to them directly by Her Majesty Jupiter Jones or a member of her Bolotnikov-Jones family. This edict precedes any other laws or edicts regarding food.”

Then she lifts her sleeve and seals it with her sigil. Hands it back to Kiza for filing and sits back down.

– There, now you can eat the cake my mom prepared and that I served you.
They all gratefully took a first hesitant bite and tasted the sweet taste of honey. Stinger and Caine both made a strange face while the Apini women ate the cake in bliss. Stinger and Caine look at each other, then at Jupiter, at the cake and they swallow hard.

– What is going on guys? Jupiter asks.
– What else is in this beside honey? Stinger asks.
– Sugar, eggs, salt, flour, baking soda, butter, vanilla, replies Aleksa.

Stinger places a hand over his jaw and mouth.

– You’re freaking me out guys.
– Majesty, can we talk in private? Asks Stinger.
– Wow, so serious. Okay… If you’ll excuse me she says to the others at the table.

Aleksa nods. Jupiter stands and heads to Kiza’s office. Stinger and Caine follow her and Caine closes the door behind them.

– Okay, what ever it is, just say it guys.
– You should cancel that edict Jupiter, or never give honey to anyone else, says Caine.
– What? That does not make any sense.

She sits.

– Explain.
– Honey taste like… starts Stinger.
– RegeneX, states Caine.

Jupiter looks at them one at a time and the significance of what they just said dawns on her. If honey is used in the production of RegeneX, the Entitled would not want that to be known, otherwise tersie planets would be raided for the honey they produce.

– If it was anyone else telling me this I’d ask if you were sure…

She pulls on her hair.

– That must be the reason for the interdiction and the rarity of honey… but if Seraphi created the bees… what were they using before that? I guess I’ll have to contact one of my refineries.

She winces then takes a deep breath and let it out slowly.

– Okay, okay… let’s see… my edict stays. I’ll talk to my mom and my aunt. It’s not like the others will be preparing or serving food to anyone from out there anytime soon.

She chuckles at the image of Vladie serving food to her household…

– You two, go eat your cake and send me my mom and my aunt.

They nod and leave the office. A few minutes later Aleksa and Nino enters the office.

– What is going on, Jupiter? Asks Aleksa.
– Mama, Nino, please close the door and sit.
After they do, Jupiter tries to find the words to explain the situation to them.

– Okay, so you know that Caine and Stinger are skyjackers, and when injured skyjackers are treated with RegeneX.
– What has that got to do with some cake?
– I’m getting to that. Now they have been treated with that often enough to know what it tastes like, and Caine’s senses are way better then anyone else. They said that honey taste like RegeneX.
– I don’t understand, says Nino.
– My working theory is: Honey is used to produce RegeneX and the interdiction to eat it for anyone but Entitled is because they don’t want anyone else to know about it. With bees being majorly on tersie planets if it was known, it would send raiding parties to all tersie planets, it would create chaos and be risky for the humans on those planets.
– What is to do? Says Aleksa.
– I will have to contact one of my refineries – yeah, I own that – to learn how that stuff is made and with what. In the mean time, just don’t use honey in food preparation.

Aleksa looks at her sister and back at Jupiter.

– We can do that.
– Another thing, can I know what you have decided?
– We want to support you Jupiter, we take care of family. We will go with you, we can’t let you do this all by yourself.
– Oh, I’m so happy, having you with me will be so comforting. Not being the only one finding this universe so messed up.

Saying so, they all stand up and hug together.

– Let’s go eat some more cake now.

When they are back at the table, Jupiter serves more cake and gets on with business.

– Kiza, have you checked on those properties I asked about?
– Yes, I believe I’ve found what you asked. I’ve found a quite large apartment complex downtown that has the top floor for sale and a Storage building in the Fulton River District. There is roof access for both and you could claim more apartment in the complex has needed. As for the land, I think the 532 acres my neighbors have for sale would do nicely.
– Great, give me the details.

Kiza gives her information on the three properties.

– I’ll have to find myself some Earth people too, I can’t really send Buzz to deal with the paperwork for that.
– You need an accountant, says Nino.
– And a lawyer, add Aleksa.
– I’ll start with a lawyer.

She pulls out her phone and does a search for a lawyer, checking referrals and she picks one that work in acquisitions and has great review but is not insanely expensive. She places a call to her office and has an appointment for 8:00am the very next day. Having money seems to make things work faster on Earth.
She checks the time, 6:00pm.

– Do you have a dishwasher Kiza?
– Erm… no. I was almost always alone in here.
– Right, okay, dishes time everyone.

While they wash, dry and store the dishes and cookware:

– Mama and Nino have decided to come to space with me. What department of the Commonwealth Ministry do we have to go to, to have my mom and aunt sealed?
– The Hall of Title, says Kiza almost apologizing.
– Arg, I hope it won’t take twelve hours for them too.
– For new Entitled, it usually takes only a gene-scan. They are not in anyone’s will, so there won’t be any revenue review or transfer of title.
– Right, better request advocate Bob again, he was efficient enough even if too cheerful for my taste and I don’t want to deal with a new one.

She looks at her mom and aunt.

– Tomorrow, we will do some shopping for the two of you. Find you clothes that can pass for space-clothes. Where do you think? Fifth Avenue New York?

They both look at her with jaw hanging.

– You can afford to shop there? Says Nino.
– Nino… It technically all belongs to me already and the money I got from daddy’s uncle, well it’s about a drop in the ocean of money I have. So yeah, I can afford to shop anywhere.

Nino looks at her taken aback.

– I have to go up to my ship, maybe it will help you put things in perspective, do you want to come with me?
– Your ship? Says her mother.
– Well the one I am using right now, I don’t even know how many I own.

They agree and after the dishes are done, Jupiter changes back in the outfit Seiza had picked up for that day and fixes her hair a little.

– Stinger, contact captain Marsden, I want my mom and aunt to see the outside of the ship before we board.
– Yes, Jupiter.

Chapter End Notes

Aleksa defends her daughter to Vassily at the beginning of the movie, when he says she is not married because she is too smart. Which makes me to believe that she trusts
Jupiter's decisions and judgement. 
"Stalin's balls" is actually the curse she uses in the movie.

Nino, just had to ask about his sign. His sign being his splicer brand was a fun way to address that point.

I thought of using honey in RegeneX since honey never spoils they even found honey over 5,000 years old.

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Let me know what you think of this chapter. I appreciate comments and Kudos.

In the next chapter, Jupiter introduces her mother and aunt to the universe.
House Bolotnikov-Jones

Chapter Summary

Aleksa and Nino visit the Maximillien Jones.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this chapter took a little more time, my sister had her twins.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

***Meeting***

They all board the small ship they have been using as a shuttle and head into space.

When they break free of the atmosphere, Aleksa and Nino are holding on to each other, making sure they are not dreaming.

– Now remember, I got this ship yesterday, I don’t know how everything works, she murmurs to her mother and aunt.

They head to the dark side of the moon and the sight of Jupiter’s ship makes them gasp. Stinger, who is piloting the ship, takes them on a close-up tour of the outside of the ship before heading to the docking bay.

Jupiter sees a small grin on Stinger’s face has they prepare to disembark.

– You’ve organized something, haven’t you? She murmurs to him.

He nods.

– Honor guard and meeting in the throne room, he says.

She smirks.

– Good, I go before or after them?

– Behind them, at the same time at first and after the announcement, you go first.

When the door opens, the Apini women exit and go take their position in the honor guard, so do Vespa and Menura.

– It’s our turn mama and Nino, we walk until you are between the guards, and after Kiza speaks, you let me pass and we walk to the end of the honor guard.

They do so, with Stinger and Caine on each side and Ezin at the rear and when they stop, Kiza announces them.
– Their Graces, the Grand Duchess Aleksa Jones, mother of Her Majesty, first primary of House Bolotnikov-Jones and the Duchess Nino Bolotnikov, aunt of Her Majesty, second primary of House Bolotnikov-Jones.

She pauses. Aleksa and Nino straighten up at their title, this is getting official.

– Her Majesty, Queen Jupiter Jones, signified recurrence of Her Majesty Seraphi Abrasax, first prime of House Abrasax and House Bolotnikov-Jones.
– That is quite a mouthful, she mutters, then she murmurs to her mom and aunt, okay, showtime.

They split to let her pass and walk behind her, when she stops, she steps aside a little so her mother and aunt are not behind her. Captain Marsden and Tsing bow to them, with their first and second officers.

– Welcome back, Your Majesty, says captain Marsden. Your Graces, I am captain Colby Marsden, captain of this ship, and these are Bayleigh Vang, my first officer and Ailsa Blankenship, my communication’s officer. Welcome aboard the JJ-A-Ω-5 – Maximillien Jones.

Aleksa has to blink a few times when she hears the name of the ship and Nino squeezes her shoulder in support.

– Thank you, captain, says Jupiter and she gesture to captain Tsing.
– I am captain Diomika Tsing of the Aegis. These are Phylo Percardium my first officer and Gemma Chatterjee my communication’s officer. We will be escorting you to Orous tomorrow as it was our honor to do the same with Her Majesty.
– Thank you, captain. You and your crew have gone above and beyond for me and my family.
– It was our honor, Your Majesty.

Jupiter nods.

– You did risk your life and the lives of your crew on our behalf, I will not forget it. If there is anything I can do for you in return, do not hesitate to let me know.
Captain Tsing nods and there is a flash in Phylo’s eyes.

Jupiter walks out of the docking bay followed by everyone and she goes to the reception hall. At the door she looks at Stinger.

– So, what have you planned now?
– You will see. He replies.

He opens the door and the Skybreakers, except Stinger, go around the room and take position between columns with their wings open, like last night. Honey-Bee and Seiza enter too and join the crowd of her people. Then Kiza enters and placing herself beside the door she repeats the presentations.

– Her Majesty, Queen Jupiter Jones, signified recurrence of Her Majesty Seraphi Abrasax, first prime of House Abrasax and House Bolotnikov-Jones.

Jupiter enters the room and everyone splits to form an aisle toward the dais and her throne. When she steps in, they all kneel for her. She walks down the aisle and steps up the dais to sit on her throne.

She notices the two new chairs on the dais, one on each side of her throne. When she is sited, Kiza claims:

– Her Grace, the Grand Duchess Aleksa Jones, mother of Her Majesty, first primary of House Bolotnikov-Jones.
Aleksa steps into the room and everyone is still kneeling for her, it makes her uncomfortable but she follows on her daughter example and sits on the chair at Jupiter’s right.

– Her Grace, the Duchess Nino Bolotnikov, aunt of Her Majesty, second primary of House Bolotnikov-Jones.

Nino does not seem more comfortable then Aleksa was, but she fixes her glasses on her nose and walks down the aisle with dignity, steps up the dais and sits on the remaining chair.

Stinger enters the room last and opens his wing in the doorway.

– Please everyone, stand, says Jupiter lifting one hand slightly.

They stand and Kiza walks down the aisle and stepping up the dais, she hands a sheave over to Jupiter and steps back down. She turns it on, it is the Oath she has written, but her title has been modified. She gathers that they want to redo the Oath for her new House too. She looks down at Stinger at the end of the room and nods.

Stinger stomps a foot and his wings go up above his head then the twelve other Skybreakers do the same and walks toward Stinger. Stinger steps forward walking toward the dais and the others follow him according to rank. Stinger steps to the dais and the others form a single line behind him, in front of their families. And they kneel with a fist to their chest, looking up to the throne.

Jupiter stands and she repeats her Oath.

– I, Jupiter Jones of Earth, daughter of Maximillian Jones and Aleksa Bolotnikov, signified recurrence of her Majesty Seraphi Abrasax, Queen and First Prime of House Abrasax and House Bolotnikov-Jones, swear that:

I will show leadership by doing the right thing without being asked, even when no one is looking,
I will listen to you, your ideas and your feelings and make your concerns my own,
I will defend freedom for all sentient beings, I will sacrifice so that others may live free,
I will uphold justice by being fair to all, I will defend my family and my friends and I will live with honor.
I love peace but I am a fierce enemy; I was born to be a different kind of Queen.
That is my Oath.

She pauses. Looks at her mother and aunt and sees their approving faces. And turns back to her people.

– Do you, in turn, members of the 53rd Skyjacker unit, known as the Skybreakers, swear to:
Serve your Queen to the best of your abilities, protect her and her family,
Be without fear in the face of your enemies, be brave and honorable, be loyal in friendship,
Speak the truth at all times, and forever keep your word, respect and honor all sentient beings,
Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong?
That is your Oath.

– We swear! They reply.
– Then stand and be welcome.

The Skybreakers stand and mantle their wings.
Jupiter takes a step forward.

– Mama, Nino. She says.

They stand and follow her. They step down the dais and reach Stinger.
Captain Apini, please present your team to my mother and aunt.
– Of course, Your Majesty.

They walk to the first in line, Caine, and he presents him, stating his rank and name, “Commander Caine Wise” and he bow his head. Then they move to the next one, Lieutenant-commander Aves Red-Tail, and he bows his head too, Lieutenant-commander Leo Felis, Lieutenant Veelvraat “Veel” Gulo, Lieutenant Tristan Laing, Lieutenant Castor Albert, Lieutenant Junior Grade Falco Harpa, Lieutenant Junior Grade Menura Bower, Lieutenant Junior Grade Ezin Lidal, Ensign Pavonia Saturn, Ensign Kaliepen “Kalie” Ketakeran, and Ensign Vespa Polaire. They all bow their heads to Aleksa and Nino.

– Thank you, Captain, says Jupiter. Then she murmurs: “Anything else planned?”

Stinger shakes his head.

– Now that the formal presentations are done, please, stand with your families. Jupiter says loud enough to be heard by everyone.

There is a small hubbub while everyone moves and then Jupiter moves to the first family. It’s the Buzz.

– Mama, Nino, these are the Buzz. Hiven, Comb, Pupa and Crystal. Buzz is my secretary and Dr. Comb my lead doctor.
– Your Graces, it is an honor to meet the women who raised Her Majesty, says Buzz.

Aleksa and Nino offer their hand in a handshake and Buzz emits a strange buzzing sound. Jupiter chuckles and shakes her head.

– I don’t think they have handshake in space… she murmurs. Then louder: Time to learn an Earth custom for everyone. When someone from Earth offer you their hand, the proper thing to do is to take it with your hand and shake it once or twice. It’s called a handshake and in a situation like this one it means “It’s nice to meet you”. The firmness of the grab and shake depends on you, just don’t do the bone-crushing grip, that one is always unpleasant.

Aleksa and Nino re-offer their hands to Hiven and Comb and they take them shaking hands. Then she brings her mother and aunt to the Red-Tail.

– Mama, Nino, these are the Red-Tail, Aves, Plume, Harlan and Sky. Plume is my Chef.

Plume kneels for Aleksa.

– Your Grace, she says.
– Please stand, says Aleksa. What is that for?
– You have raised the most amazing Queen, Your Grace. Her goodness is unheard of in the universe.

Jupiter turns to her mother and explains.

– Plume has been sold and resold every year for the last fifteen, mama. And in the last three, they were not allowed to see each other. Now they can never be parted again. I made sure that everyone in this room can not be bought by anyone.

Aleksa has a flash of anger at this universe and at the same time she is proud of her daughter, finding ways to make things better.

They shake hands and then come the Felis, the Gulo and the Harpa. After that, she heads over to
Tristan and Feliz, she spots some scratches on her forearm.

– Mama, Nino, you met Tristan earlier, and this is Feliz Silver, the nursemaid and his…
– Mate, completes Tristan.

Feliz face is just short of crimson red. Jupiter smiles.

– Congratulation, she says.

She offers her own hand in a handshake to each of them.

Finally, there are the Albert, the Saturn, the Bower and the Polaire, before she heads to the androids.

– Last but not least are Dopha Jewel, Ezin’s friend and Song Jade, Kalie’s factory sister. I could not transfer them to Ezin and Kalie, because I’ve found out that androids can not be owner.
– But she gave us our choice of owner and we choose to remain hers. No one else would give an android a choice, says Dopha.
– That must be because of your fondness for Data, murmurs Nino.

Jupiter smiles and playfully shove Nino with her shoulder, saying:

– You know me too well, Nino.

Then she says:

– Dopha is my Head of finance and Song is a pediatric nurse.

Aleksa and Nino surprise everyone in the room by offering their hand to shake to them too.

There is an electric flash in the mechanical part visible on top of their forehead, as if the gesture does not compute and then they carefully take their hand for the handshake.

– Very well, now that you’ve met everyone, is there anything you want to tell them? Jupiter asks her mom and aunt.

Aleksa murmurs in Jupiter ears and Jupiter answers in the same fashion.

– It would please us if you would call us Lady Aleksa and Lady Nino, she finally says out loud.

Jupiter’s people do acknowledging sounds and gestures. Jupiter smiles.

– Thank you all for meeting us. I want to meet Mr. Buzz, Madam Erminea and Captain Apini in my private office in 30 minutes. Dismissed.

Everyone leaves except Caine and Pavonia who are left to guard them.

Aleksa and Nino snorts at her use of “dismissed”. Jupiter faces them, speaking in Russian.

– What, I have to take my royal and leadership manners from somewhere. I use what I know.
– What else is there to see on this ship? Asks Nino.
– We can go check out my quarters. Jupiter answers.

They head out of the reception hall and walk down the length of the ship to her private quarters. Jupiter scans her sigil at the door and enters followed by her mother, her aunt and Caine. Pavonia stays outside the door since Falco and Veel are already in the guard antechamber. She crosses the room and goes to the grav-beam “elevator”.


– This is like an elevator, she tells them. Let’s go up first, I have not seen my garden yet.

Caine goes up first and when he signals that everything is safe, Jupiter goes up with her mother and aunt.

The sight of the garden makes them all gasp. It is almost like being back on Earth. While they walk around, she hears a now familiar buzzing sound and a tiny cloud of bees welcome her to the garden.

– Hi guys.

Jupiter feels they want her to follow them, so she does. They lead them back to their hive. It is a small hive and it seems in need of repair.

– I understand guys, she tells the bees.

Then she presses her comm bracelet.

[Yes, Jupiter] answer’s Kiza.
– Kiza, there is a small beehive in my private garden, and it seems in need of help. Could you check on it for me?
[Yes, of course, Jupiter]

She presses her bracelet again.

– Ok guys, Kiza will check on you, she is very nice.

They walk in the garden some more and head back down to the previous floor.

– Caine, check on the rooms here and on the bottom level, and then go write that report I asked you last night.
– Okay, Jupiter, he says.

While he checks on the rooms, Jupiter addresses the ship.

– Max, she says.
– Your Majesty? Says the voice.

When Max’s voice is heard, Aleksa shivers.

– Oh, I’m sorry mama, I forgot to tell you, if that is too weird for you, you can choose another name for the ship’s presence.

Aleksa shakes her head.

– It’s just too close to my Max’s voice… she murmurs.
– Oh, I can fix that.
– Max, use a different male voice.
– Yes Majesty, Max says.

The new voice has an American accent instead of English.

– It that better, mama?
– Yes, she says.
– Okay, Max, theses are Lady Aleksa Jones, my mother and Lady Nino Bolotnikov, my aunt. They are allowed access to this floor of my private quarters without requesting permission to enter.
– Very well, Your Majesty.

Jupiter receives a signal from Caine that everything is secure and she visits the rest of her private quarters with her mom and aunt. They visit the lounge and dining room on this floor which simply look like museums like the rest of her quarters, then head to the bottom floor to check on the recreational facilities.

After a theater, a small gym and a library, they come face to face with two sigil locked door.

– I’ll check these later, we should go back up to my office for the meeting.

***Work and information***

When she enters her office, Jupiter see that the sheaves have been reordered and there is a sheave front center on her desk.

– Mama, Nino, you can sit if you want.

She sits and turns on the sheave, it is the index for the sheaves. She reads the titles and some catch her eye. “To my recurrence”, “Earth, my favorite”, “New RegeneX” and “Changing the universe”. She stands and takes these sheaves from the shelves on the wall.

She turns on the first one, it is a letter from Seraphi to her, her recurrence.

“Dear recurrence,

I am writing this as I have decided to forgo regeneration after too many years and too many lifetimes spent in a system that crushes your soul and erase all morality from your mind. I can not live like this anymore. I was raised to accept that some lives matter more then others and I have unfortunately taught the same to my own children. I fear it is too late for me to change their minds, but maybe you could. I have observed the evolution of humans on seeded planets for so many years now and I have learned that there is another way of life, one of harmony and companionship, that comes naturally to humans and that we have forgotten in all our millennia. It is that, that I wish to bring back to the universe.

Has you can imagine, I have made many errors and abject actions in my lifetimes, but I hope to redeem some of that in the end of my life. To that end, I have started many secret projects in the hope of bettering the society and it is my wish that if I can not accomplish my goals within the rest of my lifetime, you will, dear recurrence.

I have gathered all the information on these projects and on how the universe works in this room, thinking of what you might need.

Be well, dear recurrence,

Seraphi Abrasax

P.S.: If you were born on Earth, my greatest wish has been fulfilled. If not, please protect Earth, it is the most precious planet I own.”

As Jupiter put down the sheave, Stinger knocks on the doorframe.

– Come in, Stinger, she says wish a sigh.
Stinger comes in and sits in a chair.

– Are you okay, Jupiter? He asks.
– I’m not sure, Stinger. I’ve just read a letter Seraphi wrote to her recurrence… me.
– I see, anything I should know about?
– Yes, and I have more reading to do too.

She says pointing to the next sheave.

– Your Majesty, Mr. Buzz and Madam Erminea await your authorization to enter, says Max’s voice.
– Let them in, Max, she says. We’ll talk about this after, she tells Stinger.

Then she looks at the sheaves on the shelves and grin. On these shelves are all the secrets that she needs to change the universe, but she will have to be careful if she does not want to end up like Seraphi did.

Buzz and Erminea enter with sheaves in their hands and sit on two chairs.

– Erminea, let’s start with the personal quarters’ reports. How are my people settled?
– There are no major requests from your people, Your Majesty.
– Erminea, in this office, you can call me Jupiter.
Erminea looks at Jupiter with eyes open wide and slowly nods.

– Now what are the requests?
– There are some lights and doors fixing, the Albert require another bed and the Saturn asked for curtains. She says handing over a sheave.
– That’s all? It seems very minimal. Have you visited the quarters Erminea, what is your opinion?
Jupiter looks at the requests, seals the sheave and hands it back to Erminea.

– The quarters are already above what splices are used to have, Jupiter.

Jupiter thinks quickly, above does not mean comfortable or fair. She remembers the guard’s room attendant her bedroom and how Caine called it luxury when for her it was dark, sad and lacking.

– Mama, aunt Nino?
– Yes? They say.
– I’d like you to visit the personal quarters and give me a real Earth opinion of their conditions. Especially for the families with children. I trust your judgement.
Aleksa nods firmly.

– What about the facilities, Buzz?
– The medical bay requires a major overhaul and the kitchen is empty, we have had to use the ship’s crew mess hall to feed your people. The training facility has some broken equipment and is in need of reorganization. And every department requires their basic equipment to perform their tasks. Buzz hands her a sheave. She sees a long list of equipment, sorted per department. She does not understand the vast majority of them, but she seals the sheave and hand it back to Buzz.
– That sounds like a shopping spree. Where is the best place to fulfill this list?
– Orous, Jupiter, says Buzz.
– Oh, then when we go to the Hall of Title for my mother and aunt, tomorrow, you will go shopping. What about the barracks, Stinger are they ready for the royal guards?
– Yes, the barracks are in normal conditions except for the uniform dispenser, it needs to be updated to modern legion uniforms and we should restock the armory with at least modern standard equipment, although I would recommend better. Also, the skyjackers need some equipment to maintain the wings.
– Okay, sure, get the best stuff out there, she says waving negligently in the air.


– I want you guys to have everything you need to protect me with the least risk to yourselves as possible. Someone getting injured or killed because of lack of or faulty equipment, is not something I want on my conscience. No one is expendable to me. Do you have a list?

Stinger hands her a sheave, she recognizes a few terms and can deduce what some means. She seals it and hands it back.

– Can you get all that on Orous too, Stinger?
– Yes, at the legion HQ.
– Great, anyone has any other requests?
– I do, says Caine, entering the room.

Jupiter smiles upon seeing him. He walks to her and hands her a sheave.
She turns it on and reads. It looks like some skyjacker’s stuff, a boot’s charger, a wing grooming kit, some personal items, a space-computer, a desk and a backless chair.

– What is a backless chair? It that like a stool?
– It is somewhere between a chair and a stool. More comfortable then a stool but the back of the chair is really narrow to fit between the wings. Its what skyjackers prefer. Explains Caine.
– Ah, we will need more then one of those, I have thirteen skyjackers to think of. Let’s see…

She counts in her head and on her fingers.

– 30 backless chairs should do it for now I think, we can put some in the mess hall, in the conference room, one in every skyjacker’s quarters, and one for your office Stinger. Do we have to buy those from the Legion?
– It would be preferable, says Stinger, they are specifically designed for us.
– All right, hand me back that sheave.

She adds the chairs to the list and re-seals it, then she gives the sheave back to Stinger.
She takes a final look at Caine’s requests and seals it. She hands the sheave to Stinger too.

– I trust you can take care of this too, she tells him.

Stinger looks at the list and nods.

– Good, did we get the report from Captain Marsden on the state of the ship and crew?
– Yes, says Buzz. Everything is in good general order but almost every system and facilities could do with some upgrades and fine tuning. The ship has been in standby for quite a few decades.
– Right, where do we go for that?
– The crew can do the upgrades, they just need the budget to do them.

He hands her another sheave, it is the budget for the ship’s fixing. She seals it and hands it back.

– Okay, what about the crew?
– The ship has a full crew complement if that is what you want to know.
– That’s good, but, I want to offer them the same deal I have offered my other people. If they have
families or people they want here on the ship with them. I want to know about it. I still have a lot of jobs to fill.
– Very well.
– Erminea, how many bedrooms are in each royal suite?
– Each suite contains at least 2 grand bedrooms and private accommodations and many smaller rooms for the royal entourage.
– Good, please assign one of the suite to my mother and aunt and have it prepared accordingly.
– Mama, Nino, do you want to sleep on board tonight or return to cousin Vassily’s house?
– I want to go home tonight, says Aleksa.
– Okay, so Erminea, have the suite ready for our trip to Orous tomorrow.
– Yes, Jupiter.
– All right, Erminea and Buzz you are dismissed.

They leave the room and Jupiter hands the letter from Seraphi to Caine.

– Read that, will you, then pass it on.

Herself, she turns on the sheave named “Earth, my favorite” and reads on.

“This is my history with the planet known as Earth.

When I was very young, my mother gave me a planet in a system of 8 planets orbiting a single star. That planet was the third one in the system and was inhabited by large and dangerous saurosapiens. Some of them had developed intelligence and mother had taken them away from the planet before gifting it to me. What remained did not have the genetics to develop intelligence again, and mother was watching what I would do. I knew what she wanted me to do, so I did it. I launched a large asteroid at the planet which caused the extinction of the saurosapiens. Then I Orousformed the planet for human life. I was gifted in the field of genetics and when the planet was ready for seeding I seeded the planet with all my favorite lifeforms. Within each lifeform I coded different variations of the same lifeform so the planet would develop many variations of each lifeform. It gave rise to such a diversity of plants and animals that mother was jealous.

The humans seeded on the planet developed communities and lived in harmony with the animals and the plant life. Mother was unhappy with that result. She told me peaceful humans did not grow a population fast enough to cover the seeding cost with the harvesting. I was sad, but I could not show it. I was not willing to change my creations, so I resorted in using a newly discovered specie in the diorite system. They would act to stimulate the human growth on the planet but my humans would remain the same at their core being.

I watched as the population grew and mother was happy. Mother passed when I was over 30 millennia and as the years passed I forgot about my love for my creation on Earth. That is what my humans had started to call their planet, Earth. When I was over 40 millennia, I visited my Earth. On it, I met an amazing man, who brought love back in my life for a time, his name was Taurem. I could not reveal to him that I was not from Earth, but together we had a son. We named him Balem. My first love died and I brought Balem with me to space. I taught him everything I knew, but I never told him who his father was. That was a mistake.

A little over five millennia after that, I was bored and I visited my Earth again, my humans had grown even more and I introduced myself into a king’s harem, it was fun to be someone else for a time. The king saw me and I got pregnant but when my daughter was born, I was chased away, because the baby was a girl and not a boy. I could not bring my daughter with me, I was forced to leave without her. Heartbroken, I returned to space and to Balem.
When I visited Earth two century after that, I found out that my daughter had succeeded her father on his throne and became a very powerful Queen, she also had many children, who also had children. I now had descendants on Earth. My love for Earth came back when I saw that, and I kept a close eye on it after that.

I kept visiting my Earth every 5 millennia to see my human’s progress. The Keepers made the population grow so much, it was hard to keep track of my descendants after all this time, but I found that those who had my genes in them would know almost instantaneously that they belonged together and they would form couples and have children together, recombining my genes. They called it “love at first sight”.

One of the last times I visited Earth, I fell in love with another man, Kalgir, we had a daughter together, we named her Kalique and when he died, I brought her to space to meet her brother Balem. She grew into a young woman and she learned from her brother that she was more important than other humans. Over the years she forgot about her father and our life on Earth, maybe I should have remembered her.

I visited Earth one last time a little over two millennia ago. This time I had twins, with a Roman man named Cassius Arsinius, Julius and Titus. We lived together for a little while, Julius got married, but not Titus and when I returned to space after my third love died, Titus came with me. Julius stayed on Earth with his wife and they had children. Which reintroduce more of my genes in my creations. I believe Titus still has memories of Earth, but I never told him on what planet he was born.

Now that I approach the end of my life, I have realized that my creations still have at their core to live in harmony and that what I created when I was very young and innocent, was good. It is my wish that one day, with my genes in them, my creation will give rise to my recurrence and that she will continue the good work I started at the beginning of my life and that I returned too at the end of it. Born on Earth my recurrence would have that core of goodness and harmony, that could be enough to undo all the mistakes I have done with my lives.”

When she puts the sheave down, Jupiter must wipe some tears from her eyes. Knowing that Balem, Kalique and Titus were born and raised on Earth and that Seraphi’s DNA is spread across generations of humans on Earth is such a weird feeling but does explain some things and gives her insight on who her predecessor really was.

She looks up at her mate, mother, aunt and “father-in-law” and they are all looking at her with question marks on their faces. Finally, aunt Nino breaks the ice.

– What is going on Jupiter?
– This is Seraphi’s history with Earth… it explains why she wished I was born on it. She says pointing the sheave.
– What is it? Asks Aleksa.
– Well, apparently, Earth was her first seeded planet and she liked what we are, when her own mother was unhappy that we lived in harmony, instead of changing us, she used the Keepers to grow the population faster to satisfy her mother. She liked us very much, so much so that she lived on Earth for brief periods in her lifetimes. That is where she had her 5 children, all with men from Earth, and these men she loved are the other reason why Earth was her favorite planet.
– Five? Who are the too missing ones, asks Stinger, already forming plans to find them.
– They are long dead Stinger, says Jupiter, waving a hand.

Stinger relaxes.

– According to this, she had a daughter with a king, when she was about 45 millennia old. She was
bored and lived in a harem for the trill of it. The king chased Seraphi away and kept the daughter. Her daughter became Queen and had children on Earth. Seraphi learned about that two centuries after the birth of that daughter. The other child is Titus’s twin, Julius. Their father was a Roman named Cassius Arsinius. Julius got married and had children on Earth too. He stayed on Earth when Seraphi returned to space with Titus. She loved these men enough to live on Earth for their lifetime and only returned to space when they died, except for the king that chased her away.
– Your father told me once that he had ancestors dating back to Britannia, says Aleksa, quietly.

Jupiter shrugs.

– It would make sense. These two children are the reason why there was more chance that she, I, we, recurred on Earth. Our DNA is spread like gems over 45 millennia of humans on Earth by that daughter and by Julius more recently. Seraphi adds that she noticed that humans with her DNA experience “love at first sight” and just know that they belong together, as if their genetic structure call to each other to reform her, me...
– Max, Aleksa murmurs.

Jupiter nods and Max’s voice is heard.

– Your Grace?

Aleksa jumps at the voice and remembers that the ships respond to the name “Max”.

– Nothing Max, I was thinking of my Max, she says, dismissing the ship.

After a pause to let everyone think, Jupiter asks:

– Anyone wants to say something?

They all look at each other and Aleksa starts:

– It would seem that Seraphi is not only our creator, but our ancestor too.
– And it took her 90 millennia to overcome the social structure she was born into and become the person you are now, says Nino.
– She wants you to complete her work and fix her mistakes, adds Aleksa.
– I have a lot to learn, Jupiter says, pointing to the sheaves.
– The information in here should be protected, points out Stinger.
– Right. Max?
– Your Majesty? Says Max’s voice.
– Access to this office is now restricted. No one beside us five are allowed in here without one of us present.
– Understood. Says Max.
– Stinger, I don’t expect anyone to be able to pass through my guards, but anyone managing to enter here without authorization will be arrested and detained, whom ever they are. Of course, there is a standing authorization to enter for emergency situation.
– Very well, Your Majesty. Approves Stinger.
– Caine, you have been really quiet. Anything on your mind?

Entitled, royal and recurrence had never been in Caine’s thoughts before Jupiter. Before he became pack and mate-bonded to a recurred royal. As a splice, he just always did what he was told to do, and now that he is equal to his mate and Queen, she is asking for his thoughts. His thoughts are hard to put into words, lycantant think more into images and smells and body chemicals but he tries too, because she asked.
– This is a lot of information to process. The “love at first sight” you mentioned makes me wonder who my human gene-print came from. It’s not something we usually think about, but I wonder if my human gene-print and not only my lycantant genes affected how we bonded.

– Would that be in your file?

– I don’t think so. Splicers are very protective of their work, they usually keep that information secret.

– I can imagine… if you want us to find out, just let me know.

He tilts his head and smirks. Who else in the universe would give him those kinds of possibilities?

– I am not sure about that… maybe?

– Anything else?

– I feel that you already started on the path Seraphi hoped you would take. Protecting the Earth and treating splices as you would human and giving a high position job to a second-generation splice. Giving choices to androids. It’s all unheard of in the ‘verse.

– Seraphi called it our “core of goodness and harmony”. That is so basic for Earthlings. No one is engineered for a task on Earth, we all have to learn and be trained. Splices are humans too, they can learn. I won’t treat people as less because they have extra DNA. Besides, you are like a real-life superhero, a mix between Wolverine and Hawkman. You would be worshiped by geeks everywhere on Earth…

She bites her bottom lip; Caine’s face goes blank.

– I don’t think he understood what that means, Jupiter, chirps in Nino.

– Yeah… I know. Something else to add to my list of things to introduce to them. How can I resume decades of superheroes history and culture? She asks her aunt and herself out loud.

Nino comes to her rescue.

– In Earth literature and movies there is a whole genera dedicated to superheroes. Humans with mutated DNA, special abilities and/or technologies or even aliens who save the Earth or the Universe. There are hundreds and hundreds of stories about them. They usually fight against other superhumans known as super villains.

– Right, and these superheroes have groups of dedicated fans all around the world. It’s a whole community of people that love these characters, sometime enough to dress up as them. There are many superheroes universes too… Anyway, in one universe there is a super named Wolverine, he has, amongst other things, heightened animal-like senses and strength and, in another universe, there is one called Hawkman, who has wings and flies around. All of this is to say that on Earth, superhumans are a common theme in books, movies and games and are never seen as subhuman, quite the opposite. Which might help you understand why I can’t think of splices as subhumans, beside the fact that freedom and equality are core values for Earthlings.

– Heros… I wonder if Seraphi had anything to do with that? Asks Stinger. Any bee superheroes?

– I’m not sure about Seraphi’s influence on the matter. If she did, it will be somewhere in there. She says jabbing her thumb to the wall behind her. Let’s see what the Internet says about bee superheroes.

She pulls out her phone and does a google search.

– According to this there is Bee-Man, Bumblebee and Red Bee… I don’t know them, but I am not the most knowledgeable on the subject.

Stinger nods.

– All right, it’s late. We’ll discuss things further when I’ve read some of this stuff. Now I want to go check on the sigil locked door we found on the recreational facilities deck. Curiosity is killing me.
Aleksa smiles, her daughter has always been curious.

– I’ll show you. They were not on the ship schematics, and I did not want to open them without security or backup, just to be safe.
– I knew right from the start that you were smart, when you refused to open the safe-room door on my word alone. Mentions Stinger.
– Blindly trusting people is a good way to end up dead or with a kidney missing. She says.
– I did not get all that, says Caine.
– It’s a story we tell young people to warn them about blind trust. Guy meets beautiful girl in bar, and they go to hotel room together. When he wakes up in the morning, he has stitches on his side and he is missing a kidney. Tells Aleksa.

They head down the grav-beam and Jupiter guide them to the doors.

– Earthlings might have a core of goodness and harmony has Seraphi said, but there are nasty people on Earth too, people who have shutdown that part of themselves. The ‘verse does not have the monopoly on bad or messed up stuff. Adds Jupiter.
– That actually sounds like a story skyjackers are told about, but in our case we don’t wake up and our body is found in an alley, missing the wings. Says Stinger.
– Holy crap, that is even worse, she says. Again, she murmurs, then adds louder, Kiza told me the wings were legion property, but I did not realize there was a black-market for them.
– Black-market? says Stinger confused.
– Hidden, illegal, outside of the law?
– Ah, yes, it’s called the Contraband ring, they sell anything to the highest buyer, no question asked on how the goods are provided or paid for.
– Yes… in there, no one is safe from that, not even royals, tells Caine.
– Yeah, I guess it’s like on Earth, these people care only about the money. There is always a worst version of Earth’s bad stuff in the ‘verse, she says desperately.

They have arrived at the locked doors. Jupiter looks at Stinger and Caine and after they nodded she scans her sigil. The door opens up and light reveals a trio of statues at the end of a shrine, like the one Kalique brought her too on Cerise, only smaller.

– Jupe…

Her mother’s voice is eerily when face to face with what could be a representation of her as a young girl, her mother and her father.

– Mama…

Jupiter takes her mother’s hand and holds it tight.

When she takes a step in with her mother, a chime is heard and then an old looking android wakes up and rolls to them.

– Queen Seraphi, I am here to serve you.

Then the android blanches when it sees Aleksa.

– Queen Ovidia, how can this be?

Jupiter winces then addresses the android.
– What is your name?
– I am referred too as Maintenance bot K-Y-L-1-3, Your Majesty.
– Designation are way to impersonal. Kylie it will be.
– Your Majesty, says the android, bowing.
– Now, I am not Queen Seraphi, and this is not Queen… Ovidia, is what you said?
– Queen Ovidia was Queen Seraphi’s mother, how can this be?
– Well, Kylie, I am Jupiter Jones, signified recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax, first prime and Queen of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones, and this is my mother the Grand Duchess Aleksa Jones.
– Your Majesty, Your Grace.

Then the android sees the people behind Jupiter and its eyes flashes.

– This is the Duchess Nino Bolotnikov, my aunt, and Captain Singer Apini and Commander Caine Wise.
– Your Grace, Captain, Commander. Your Majesty, there is no need for security in here, the door field would not let anyone without royal blood through.
– Thank you, Kylie, this room did not show up on my ship schematics and I have ascended only a few days ago, so I am still getting used to everything. How long have you served the Abrasax family?
– Queen Ovidia purchased me when she was in her second millennia, she was 30,439 years old at her death. I have been preserved in between her visits and then Queen Seraphi’s visits.
– When did you last see Queen Seraphi?
– She last visited the family shrine in the year 60,350 of her reign.
– That is 227 years ago. Mentions Stinger.
– About 89,016 years, says Aleksa.
– Wow, that is a long time. What did Queen Ovidia and Seraphi do in here?
– The family shrine is where royals remember the departed, so they do not forget.

*Ah, logic, after millennia the memories must be hard to remember.* She thinks.

– What is the other room?
– I do not know, I was never allowed in there.
– Thank you, Kylie, you can go back in. I will let you know if I need your help.

The door to the shrine closes and Jupiter faces the second door. After scanning her sigil, the door opens up and Jupiter sees a room filled with so many knick-knacks, pictures and such that she does not know where to look.

Then a holopicture catches her attention, it’s a picture of Seraphi with a man and a young boy… Balem! There are more pictures of the same man, Seraphi and an ever growing up Balem. Then, preserved in air-less transparent containers, there are stone tablets with writing on them. Using a blank sheave, she scans the first one and she gets a translation in English in a few seconds. It’s a love letter from Taurem to Seraphi.

– This is her shoe box, she tells her mom.

Aleksa nods.

– Shoe box?
– Yeah, under my bed I have a shoe box in which I place and keep mementos, souvenirs, pictures, etc. of important events, people, memories in my life and I can use them to remember. This room is like my shoe box. It’s all her most precious memories.

She points to the section she is looking at.
– This is her life with Taurem and Balem.

She moves to another section and sees a picture of a man with a metal circle around his head, and another of a young baby.

– This is the king that chased her away, the father of her first daughter, and this must be her, she says pointing to the picture.

There is writing underneath the two pictures.

– This is ancient Orousian, Stinger says pointing to the text.

Jupiter scans it, it sounds like this could be a poem or a letter to her daughter.

Never to know you. Never to hold you.
Never to tell you, how much I love you.
Missing your firsts, missing your lasts.
My only comfort, to know you lived,
To know you ruled, to know you were strong,
To know you were fair, to know you were good.
My precious daughter, Jawal.”

Jupiter wipes some tears from her eyes and let her mother read the translated text. Aleksa cries too and wipes her eyes.

At a third section, she sees another family picture of a man and a little girl, and a fourth section contains pictures of a man with twins.

– Kalgir and Kalique, over there and Cassius Arsinius, Julius and Titus over here.

She goes through the fourth section and finds a picture of a Titus looking man with a woman and seven children.

– This must be Julius and his wife and their children.

All around the room there are objects in preserving containers. Besides the stone tablets, there are parchment looking letters and primitive paper ones. She can see children toys, pieces of clothing, tools. All the stuff a loving wife and mother keeps as souvenirs.

When she looks at her own mother, Aleksa has tears pearling in her eyes again.

– For all her faults, she really did love these men and her children. No one keeps this kind of stuff if they don’t love the people they relate to. Says Aleksa.

Jupiter nods.

– And there is nothing in here about anyone else but them, no other memories were precious enough to be kept and preserved like these. She adds.

This room is just too much right now. She can feel her emotions taking over, she does not want to crash here, in this room. She will have to come back to it later. She slowly counts to ten, then exits the room and says:

– I want to go home now. It’s late, I’m tired and I have an appointment at 8:00am.
She stops by her bedroom and goes pick an outfit for her appointment and then they head out for the docking bay.

They board the ship with Vespa, Pavonia and Aves for guards. Stinger lands on the same garage and they are brought down to street level by the guards. In front of the uninhabited house she sends away her guard except Caine.

– You can stay in there for the night, it’s close enough and you will be out of sight. Just be careful going in or coming out until I’ve bought it and have keys made for everyone.

Then they walk to cousin Vassily’s house and Aleksa and Nino say goodnight to Caine, take the outfit Jupiter brought from the ship and go inside the house. When she is alone with Caine the weight she has had on her chest and shoulders all day vanishes and she breathes better.

– Today turned out to be nothing I wanted, it was crazy and intense but it was a good day. Tomorrow will be even more crazy, I don’t know when we will be able to have some time alone so I just want to be alone with you a little before going in.

For only answer Caine brushes his hand on her cheek and kisses her.

They end up at a coffee and tea shop where she shows him how to use his bank card for purchases so he can get breakfast for the guards in the morning and they head back to Vassily’s house.

Back in front of Vassily’s house they kiss and wish each other a good night and Jupiter goes into the house.

---On the roof---

Like her first night back, Caine flies unto her roof and listens to her getting ready for bed and he thinks back on this day. This day saw so many ups and downs, he is amazed how Jupiter has been able to cope with it all. From learning her mother and aunt remembered the Sargons, telling them the whole truth, protecting him from Aleksa. That whole situation with Tristan, his insecurities when he learned about the ring stuff. Then the meal and the honey and RegeneX situation. And then introducing her mother and aunt to her household, forming a second House and the grand finally, all that stuff from Seraphi they discovered. She is right it’s been a crazy day and she is freaking amazing at being a Queen. He feels a warmth in his chest, he does not know what to call it, but he feels it is a good thing.

And then he hears a sound that breaks his heart, he hears his Jupiter cry. It’s not soft calm cries, its something deeper, primal, hurting. Her pain hurts inside him, he can’t smell her to know why she is crying so he opens his ears and listens closely. He hears Aleksa saying soothing words in Russian, similar to what she said to him back on Orous in the maintenance conduit, and disconnected words from the woman he loves. He is torn between keeping his post and going in to comfort her. He listens, hoping for some clues on what is going on. After about five minutes, she finally speaks coherently and he relaxes and then his ears flush red in the cold night and he smiles. He does not need to smell her to know how she smells now.

---Inside the house---
Jupiter sits on her bed, curled in a ball. Tears in her eyes.

– Are you okay, Yupiter. Says her mother, sitting on her bed.

And then she can’t hold it in anymore, she starts to cry, sob and weep. Alekxa hold her in her arms and tries to sooth her, but nothing seems to work. Her daughter has so much ridding on her, and she does not know all of it yet. Alekxa can only imagine how her daughter feels. Letting go of an ordinary life, becoming a Queen, so much responsibilities. She lets her daughter vent off. Nino stays quiet in her bed. She learned over the years that sometimes it’s the best way to help her sister and niece.

After a few gut-wrenching minutes, Jupiter calms down.

– It’s just so much mama, everyday it’s like cramming for an exam. Filled with too much information, rules and surprises. I have to be strong and not show how much I am stressed out and scared by everything. I don’t want to let go of who I am, but I have to be the Queen at the same time. It’s hard to do.
– I am very proud of you, Yupiter, and your father would be too.
– Thank you, mama, I think I just needed to evacuate the overflow before I blew up in someone’s face. You know how ugly that can be.
– I am impressed by how good you control your Bolotnikov temper actually.

Jupiter snorts and blows her nose in a tissue Nino just handed her.

– That’s because you did not see me knee-jerk Titus and Balem and shoot and beat Balem up with a pipe and slap the rat-splice who was in the house so hard his head almost faced backward.
– But you had valid reasons to lose your temper then.
– You know all those space and superheroes movies and shows I watch all the time. I think they prepared me for this in a way. Quotes from them keep popping in my head when I do not know what to do or say in a situation.
– Like that Spock fellow?
– Yeah, “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few”, but also the one from Spider-Man’s uncle “With great power comes great responsibility.” The lives of so many people depend on me mama and a few days ago I was bickering with Vladie about money for a telescope and cleaning toilets. I feel so unequipped for the task.
– You are doing great as far as I have seen. Says Aleksa.

She hugs Jupiter and then backs away to ask a very important question.

– What about your relationship with Caine, are you stressed or scared about that too?

Jupiter’s face brightens up and she has a smile that all man wishes someone would have for them.

– No mama, in this whole insane thing if there is one thing I am completely certain about its my feelings for Caine and his for me. I know I do not know him well, I do not even know if he has a favorite color or what his favorite food is, but I know him. He is courageous, caring, respectful, strong and protecting. I also know that this society has drilled into his head that he is less then he is, that he does not realize how amazing he is. But I know that we belong together and that even if I could break our bonds, I would not, I love him, he is mine and I am his. I’m always calmer when he is beside me, complete. I feel safe and not only from physical harm. We bring out the best in each other and we help each other with the areas where we have more trouble.
– I am glad you have found him, Yupiter. Says Aleksa, hugging her.
– Thank you, mama.
She pauses and then speaks to Caine on the roof.

– I’m fine Caine, moya sud’ba, I’ll see you in the morning. Don’t stay up all night.

A message comes in through her comm bracelet.

[As you wish, Your Majesty]

Jupiter smirks and turn off the comm.

Aleksa looks confused.

– Jupiter, you did not use your communication device to talk to him.
– What? Oh! Don’t need to, he has the first watch, he is on the roof.
– And he can hear you from up there?
– Erm, yes… Those ears of his are really good.

Aleksa tilts her head.

– Anything else I should know about?
– You mean, beside the pointed ears, the fangs, the wings, the enhance senses of smell and hearing?

Aleksa rolls her eyes and nods.

– His sense of taste is also enhanced, goes with the sense of smell, and he can see in the dark. He is also stronger and faster then a pure human would be. Nothing too weird.
– Does he have a tail?

Jupiter looks at her mother and simply collapses laughing out loud. She laughs so much she starts wheezing and her ribcage hurts. When she calms down with some hiccups she says:

– That is what you think about? A tail? No mama, he does not have a tail. I’ve seen splices with tails or insect wings, or other weird stuff, you would see it if he had a tail.

After a last hiccup.

– Good night mama. Thank you for the support… and the laugh.

On the roof Caine shakes his head and smirks. Jupiter’s laughter was a balm on his heart after hearing her cry. He wonders if Aleksa asked about a tail on purpose, to make her laugh and feel better.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Jupiter, I seem to cram tons of stuff in each day. I'll try to loosen her schedule in the following days. But not tomorrow, there is another full day planned for tomorrow. I've already started on a story about a stool that brings anxiety for Caine. How could a stool make Caine anxious? You will have to wait for the next chapter to know that.
Acquisitions

Chapter Summary

An eventful morning for Jupiter.
Caine is anxious because of a stool.
Jupiter buys lots of stuff and changes lives.
The Keepers start to have a role.
What happens when the police thinks the Queen of Earth is a mobster?
Katherine Dunlevy and fiancé Austin Davis had a bad time because of Balem and
Jupiter has to fix that.

Chapter Notes

The "Bolotnikov's Best Russian Cleaning Service" phone number is the one on the the
station wagon in the movie.
The birthdays are my own idea, the only clue we have about Jupiter's birthday is that
she was born in the house of Leo, so between July 23 and August 22.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stool

In the morning, Aleksa and Nino let Jupiter sleep in. They go up and prepare the coffee and
breakfast and Aleksa speaks up to Caine.

– Caine, you can come in for breakfast if you are up there, moy syn.

30 seconds later she hears a knock at the back door.
When she opens the door, she is face to face with human-looking and head bowing Caine. It feels
weird, incongruous, and even more when he salutes her and Nino with a “Your Graces”.

– Caine, we are family, you can call me Aleksa.
– And you can call me Nino.

Caine raises his head and smiles, a big genuine smile, which would show fangs without the
anonymizer. Her Majesty’s family is so accepting, just like her.

– Good morning, Aleksa, Nino.
– Ah, that is much better. Come in.

They step to the side and Caine enters the house. When he heads to the kitchen, Aleksa grabs his arm
and pulls him to the table.

– “Nahan”, in here you are guest, you get served, you don’t serve.

He sits on a chair, careful not to sit back and Nino remembers about the wings and pulls out a stool
from the kitchen and offers it to him. Caine accepts the offer with genuine gratitude and a little bit of bafflement. An Entitled thinking of the comfort of a splice. The universe is really upside-down on this planet, or maybe the world is upside-down in the universe. He is not sure anymore which way it should be, but he likes the way things are on Earth.

Jupiter wakes up at 5:30am. Wow, I was really tired to go past 4:45. Her mother and aunt are already up, and she can smell coffee and breakfast. She dresses up in yoga clothes and goes up with her yoga mat because there is not enough room in the basement for yoga.

The sight of Caine eating syrniки and blinis at the dinning table makes her smile, she puts down her mat to go kiss him. He stands up to greet her properly and when he sits back Jupiter realizes he is sitting on her stool. Caine smells things change in her scent. He is not sure what it means, he can smell conflicting emotions, some warm, some cold, there was a lightning in there and some melting heart, a black flash and lots of strong and hot coffee. He looks at her inquisitive and he smells the salt of unshed tears. A huge knot is forming in his gut. His hands have formed fists and the right one is shaking slightly. He is not sure what he did, but he knows her emotions are somewhat directed at him. He draws in his shoulders and makes himself smaller without realizing it.

Jupiter is trying to figure out how she feels about him sitting on her stool. Her temper is on a short leash at the moment, she does not want to snap at Caine and she knows he can smell her internal conflict. But it is her stool, no one has ever been allowed to sit on it but her. In the whole house, beside her bed and few personal items, it’s the only thing that was only hers. Caine’s body reactions register somewhere in Jupiter’s mind and she takes a deep breath to try and calm down. Nino steps in from the kitchen at that moment and Jupiter looks at her. She reads her nieces face like a book and feels bad.

– Oh, Jupe, I’m so sorry, I should have asked you. I did not think you would mind for him. He seemed so uncomfortable on a regular chair.

Caine is confused and really anxious, looking from one to another, back and forth. Jupiter can not fault her aunt’s logic and it seems silly, when she thinks about it, to be upset about a stool. Especially since they are sort of married. She takes another deep breath, pats Caine on his shoulder and heads over to her aunt and hugs her.

– It’s okay Nino, you did good. I just had to sort out things in my head.

Nino nods, proud of her niece. She can remember vividly a meltdown she had when she was 12 because Vladie had tried to sit on her stool. A huge argument had ensued with a “Your name is not written on it.” boasted by Vladie. Which had prompted Jupiter to engrave the bottom of the stool with her name.

Jupiter heads into the kitchen and comes out with a knife. She walks over to Caine and signals for him to stand. Caine is still confused but Jupiter smells determined, like when she takes an important decision and nothing can change her mind, so he stands.
He watches baffled as Jupiter puts the stool upside-down on the table and engraves something on the bottom of the stool. When she is done, she shows it to him. Beside a “Jupiter” she added her symbol “♃” then she added a “+” and then a “Caine” and a reversed Jupiter symbol, representing him.

Nino comes over and starts to laugh and shakes her head.

– Jupe, you are so devious when you want to.
– Stinger said it was almost scary, she says winking.

Caine looks at the two women, tilting his head in utter confusion.

– You started this, Jupiter says to Nino. You explain it to him.

And she picks up her mat and goes in the living room and starts her routine.

– You have a good nose, Caine. What can you tell about this stool? Says Nino.

Caine looks at the stool. It looks like an ordinary stool but he closes his eye and takes a breath, mouth open. Besides kitchen and house smells, it smells of Jupiter, a lot of Jupiter at different ages, and of no one else. Caine looks at the stool like it’s a burning fire. Like it can punish him for sitting on it.

At Caine’s reaction, Nino can tell he smelled it.

– Yes, this is Jupiter’s stool, she says. Jupiter had very few possessions has an ordinary Earthling. No one but her was ever allowed to sit on this stool. She sat on it watching us cook, learning to spell, getting her hair cut, etc. Once she caught Vladie trying to sit on it and it turned into a huge argument and that is when she engraved her name under because Vladie told her, her name was not written on it. I should have asked her before offering it to you even if you are bonded. It was my oversight.

Caine can feel his heart pounding, he sat on his Queen’s stool, a stool only her sat on, it’s almost as bad as if he sat on her throne… Nino can see through Caine’s body language, she has a knack for that sort of things. He feels so low right now he would go grovel at Jupiter’s feet begging for forgiveness. She quickly places her hand on his arm to stop him from begging or fleeing. He has a flinching reflex, so Nino adds.

– It’s okay, Caine. The fault was mine, not yours and she forgave me.

Caine looks at Nino. He is not sure what he was expecting, but certainly not that.

– Jupiter was just confused on how she felt about it, especially since it came as a surprise. She has had quite a few surprises recently… But she is fine with it, proof is she wrote your name under the stool. It means that this is now your stool too. And… she will be able to shut Vladie up when he undoubtedly says something stupid about you being allowed to sit on it even if your name is not written on it.

Jupiter snorts loud enough in the living room for them to hear. Nino goes back to the kitchen.

Caine brushes his fingers on his name engraved on the stool. He takes a breath and concentrates on the scent Jupiter left while marking his name on her stool. This means much more then just that he can sit on the stool and that the stool belongs to him. There is so much of her cinnamon heart scent left behind that it hits him like a brick wall. This is sort of an unofficial proposal, she is proposing with one of her most precious possession. He takes out his combat knife and engraves his brand underneath their names and symbols.
Jupiter comes back after her yoga, just has Caine finishes his marking and puts his knife away. Her eyes flash when she sees his engraving and she smiles at him. He takes the stool, places it back on the floor. She comes close and murmurs really low.

– One day, we will make it official.

He takes her hand and places it on his chest so she can feel his answer. There is a deep rumbling beneath her fingers and she brings him down into a kiss with her other hand behind his neck.

Just then Vladie comes down the stairs.

– Eww… Jupe, no PDA in the morning he almost yell.

It brings Alekza and Nino out of the kitchen.

– You little shit Vladie, leave her alone, says Aleksa.

– Vladie, has you said: “Shit rolls downhill. Profits flow up.” I’m the up one now, I’ll decide just how much PDA I need in the morning.

Nino walks to Caine and Jupiter and murmurs something low enough Vladie can not catch it, but Caine has a feral smile and slowly sits on the stool with respect to its signification but also as defiance to the Queen’s cousin.

– Woah! Jupe! What’s happened to you? You got such a big head from that money that you even let some guy you’ve known for less then a week sit on your stool. You were so angry at me when I tried to sit on it that you carved your name in that stupid stool.

Caine lets out a very low growl, Vladie can not hear it, but Jupiter feels it in her hand that he still holds on his chest. She moves her hand from his chest to his arm and squeezes lightly. Then slowly and Queenly she turns to Vladie.

– Vladie Bolotnikov, you have no idea how lucky you are that you are family to me, otherwise you would be in a dire situation at the moment.

Vladie visibly swallows, this is not his small and frighten cousin anymore, or the little girl making a temper tantrum. She is serious. Jupiter takes a few steps in Vladie’s direction and Aleksa and Nino step in behind her. Caine smirks at the smells emanating from the cousin.

– Listen carefully Vladie, because I will not repeat this. Many things have changed in my life, I’ve shared some of them, but not all of them. I am still your “cousin Jupe”, but I am also so much more. If you don’t push your luck you will not have to see this side of me again.

She turns her head to talk to Caine.

– Caine, would you bring the stool here, please?

Caine stands.

– Of course.

Jupiter can almost hear the “Your Majesty” in the way his eyes crinkle.

– You see Vladie, Caine is not “some guy I’ve known for less then a week”. Not only do we love and respect each other on a level you can only dream of achieving, but he has sworn his life to
protect me. He has already saved my life. So, not only can he sit on my stool, but, you see…

She takes the stool from Caine and turns it over.

– It is *our* stool.

The flabbergasted look on Vladie’s face is priceless but Jupiter does not want to start laughing hysterically so she turns around walks away and places the stool back at the table. Caine followed her and he sits on the stool. Jupiter sits at the table, and she is just Jupe now, an ordinary girl eating breakfast. Aleksa and Nino joins them. Vladie relaxes and sits at the table to eat too and although his cousin is back to being “Jupe” he can see it now, even when she is only Jupe, there is something more about her and Aleksa and Nino seem different too.

– Did you manage to get any sleep last night Caine? Jupiter asks.
– About four hours. He replies.

Jupiter smiles, she remembers what he told her about the nightmares.

– Good.
– Woah man, four? I can’t function with less then 8 hours. Exclaims Vladie.
– He was working Vladie, says Aleksa.
– At night? That sucks man! Whines Vladie.
– It is a much better job then what I had before. He retorts.

Jupiter, Aleksa and Nino snort a laugh.

– I would sure hope so. Nino chirps in, fixing her glasses on her nose.

Vladie sure feels like he is missing something but he keeps quiet, not wanting to bring the other Jupiter out, and eats fast and quickly leaves to play some video games.

– Okay, I’ll go get ready for my appointment. After it, I want to visit the apartment to see the layout. And then mama, Nino and I have some shopping to do. Caine, you should get breakfast for the others.
– Oh, we have not forgotten the others, says Aleksa. There is plenty for all of them, just tell them to come to the backyard.

Caine contacts Aves, Vespa and Pavonia and Jupiter heads downstairs. When she comes back up in a white and royal blue dress with matching heels, she is stunning. More of the family are sitting at the table, eating, and there is a small hubbub of compliments. Nino points from Jupiter to the back door and Jupiter goes outside. Outside she is greeted quietly by her guards, including Caine, and Stinger and Kiza.

– Hey guys. I guess you are on pilot duty Stinger?

He nods.

– Okay, why are you here, Kiza?
– I thought it would impress the lawyer more if you had an assistant with you. I also arranged to have the sellers or their lawyer present, so we can clear all the paperwork right away.
– Oh great. What would I do without you?
– Hire someone, she says with her tongue struck out.

Jupiter winks at her.
Your ride should be here any minute, I’ll meet you upfront. Kiza says.

She nods and enters the house with Caine.

Mama, Nino, I’ll pick you up after my appointment, same place then yesterday. I’ll call you before I get there.

Okay, they call out.

Jupiter makes sure she has all that she needs and exit by the front door with Caine. Kiza is standing underneath the living room window. Jupiter checks that the window is closed before addressing Kiza.

So, what’s my ride?

A black limousine, what else? She answers.

No flags and police car please!

I’m not that crazy! She retorts.

Properties

When the limousine gets there, the driver opens the door and they board. Jupiter and Kiza are comfortable but Caine is fidgety.

What’s wrong Caine? Not enough room for your wings? Jupiter murmurs.

No… I can’t see, hear of smell threats in here. He says.

Oh, I see, we can open a window I guess or do you want to sit at the front instead?

He tilts his head down and to the side.

No, I’m okay, it’s just unnerving. I know the others will do their job. I’ll just stay in contact with them.

Everything goes fine on the way to the lawyer’s office but once there, there is a crowd and news reporter with cameras crews and all, at the door.

Holy crap, what is going on? Jupiter asks.

I do not know, Your Majesty, but let us exit first. Says Caine.

Yeah, no kidding… better call in the others too. Just to be safe.

Close protection details, he says after tapping his implant.

They wait about a minute until a tap on the window sends the all clear.

The driver opens the door and Caine exists first, breathing in deeply, he does not smell any physical threat, so Kiza exists and then he offers his hand to Jupiter to help her exit. After that they place themselves in a square pattern around her and Jupiter holds Kiza with her.

Just then the reporters step in like vulture.

Ms. Jones, are you aware you are buying Barinov Petrovich’s property?

What kind of deal did you do with Mr. Petrovich?
– Are you not afraid of the Russian mob?
– Why would you want a property there?

Clarity comes to Jupiter’s mind. That is about the house near cousin Vassily. The one she wants for her guards when she visits her family. She raises a hand in her most Queenly way.

– I have not made any deals yet, I did not even know the house belongs to Mr. Petrovich as my assistant took care of the paperwork, but I’m sure he will be nice to me, I used to play with his daughter Yulia.
– Then you are Russian?
– Konechno, I just want the house for my mother and aunt, our cousin lives three houses down. Maybe you’ve seen us around, “Bolotnikov best Russian cleaning service”? And, no, it’s not a front for the mob, until I got an inheritance, I used to clean toilets for a living.
– But won’t your money help the mob?
– There is always a way to pay someone that does not help the mob. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I don’t want to be late to my appointment.

Caine and Aves break out the crowd of reporters for her and Jupiter can’t help but imagine what the reporters would report if she ordered the anonymizer turned off. She tugs Kiza along and Vespa and Pavonia bring out the rear. Once inside, clear of reporters, Jupiter starts to laugh.

They look at her surprised. She sobers up and shakes her head.

– Sorry, I just imagine their heads and the headlines if I told you all to turn the anonymizer off. I bet the story about a girl buying a house would drop in their priorities…

Kiza shakes her head, Caine smirks and Jupiter can’t help but start laughing again, but a little quieter. She walks to the elevator, still laughing, and a plaque with a list of building tenants tells her that Miller & associates offices are on the tenth floor.

Vespa stays on guard in the lobby, Pavonia stays on guard on the 10th floor landing and Aves guards from the office lobby.

She is introduced by Mr. Miller’s assistant.

– Welcome, Ms. Jupiter Jones, I am Mr. Greg Miller, says the lawyer, handing his hand.
Jupiter takes his hand and shakes.

– Pleased to meet you Mr. Miller. This is my assistant Miss Apini.
– Yes, we spoke on the phone, nice to meet you Miss Apini, says the lawyer.

They shake hands.

– And this is Mr. Wise, a friend.
– Mr. Wise, says Mr. Miller, offering his hand.

Caine takes it, careful not to put too much strength in his grip.

– Now, Mr. Miller, I have a very busy schedule so we should get to it. I believe Miss Apini gave you the information on the property I wish to acquire. There should be a house in the Russian neighbourhood, an apartment floor in downtown Chicago, a Storage building in Fulton River District and a farm in the country.
– Yes, I have prepared all the paperwork, we are waiting for the sellers or their lawyers. Do you have bank approved mortgages for these properties?
– I do not need mortgage, Mr. Miller.

The lawyer does a double take at Jupiter, and she simply smiles.

– I see… which method of payment will you be using?
– Certified wire transfer.
– In trust I presume.

Jupiter nods.

– Very good.

A knock at the door announces the arrival of the sellers.
An elderly couple enters and Kiza welcomes them.

– Mr. and Mrs. Abernathy, sorry for dragging you out here this early.
– Kiza! You found us a buyer, distance is not important. Mr. Abernathy says warmly.
– You bet! This is my new boss, Ms. Jupiter Jones.

They salute and shake hands. Another man and woman enter.

– Hello, I am Mr. Scott, here on behalf of the Gocachi apartment complex.
– And I am Ms. Anita Roger, owner of the Roger warehouse.
– Welcome Mr. Scott, Ms. Roger, says Mr. Miller. I am Ms. Jupiter Jones’ lawyer.

After they salute and shake hands a young woman Jupiter’s age enters.

– Yupiter? Papa said it was you, but I could not believe it! But who else could it be, no one else is named Jupiter.

The two women embrace each other.

– You are here on his behalf or is he coming too?
– Unfortunately, he can not be here, following an accident he lost too much capacities. I have power of attorney.
– I will need to see a copy of that, says Mr. Miller.

Yulia lift her gaze to the man.

– I am Ms. Jones’ lawyer.
– Of course. She looks in a briefcase and hands over the document.
– Good, good.

He looks up at the amount of people in his office.

– Please follow me to the conference room to continue.

They head over and Caine steps in behind the lawyer so he can check the room first. Kiza pulls Jupiter at the back of the group.

– Let’s pretend to discuss something while he checks the room. She tells Jupiter.
– Not pretending, do the Abernathy had to reduce the ask price on their farm?
– I believe so, it’s listed lower then the evaluation.
– Okay, thanks, go in.

Kiza enters the conference room and selects chairs for herself and Jupiter.

– Caine, place yourself in front of me and let me know if someone is telling the truth or lying nod your head for truth and shake it for lie, she says to the air before entering the room.

The crinkling at the corner of his eyes let her know that he understood her and he stands, facing her. Her lawyer starts with the farm property, since the Abernathy have traveled far.

He hands her a form to complete.

– Mr. Miller, can I see the property evaluation please?

He hands her a document. They are asking for $ 350,000 lower then the evaluation.

– Mr. Abernathy, what would be an actual fair price for your property? Because I will not take advantage of you and offer you less then what it is worth. I know you had to lower your price, that much under the evaluation is an insult to your life and hard work.

Mr. Abernathy’s jaw hangs for a moment and Mrs. Abernathy squeezes her husband’s hand.

– At current market value, the house and property are worth $ 1,250,000.

Caine nods.

– Okay, and does that includes equipment?
– No, there is about $ 750,000 worth in equipment including the different farm vehicles and the harvester for the corn.

Jupiter writes down her offer. 2 million for the property and equipment and they have to stay in the house and manage the property until the harvest is done for this year. With a budget to hire help.

She hands the offer to her lawyer who looks it over, fixes minutes details, hand it back to her and she signs it before handing it to Mr. Abernathy.

Caine smiles, even on her Earth, Jupiter changes people’s lives. He smells relief and joy from the Abernathy.

They accept her offer with smiles and tears. Mr. Miller completes a legal document on his laptop and prints it. Then opens a secure bank transfer and Jupiter transfers the 2 million dollars to Miller & associates in trust.

Mr. Miller comes back with the completed deed and they all sign it, then shakes hands.

– Thank you for coming all the way into the city. Mr. Miller will take care of everything else. Here is my number if there is anything or Kiza can always join me.

They leave and the process repeats for the apartment floor and the warehouse. Prices are reasonable and there is no indication they are lying to her. After transferring the money, signing the deeds, shaking hands and receiving the keys. Jupiter arranges with Ms. Roger to visit the warehouse with her in an hour, since she knows the layout better then anyone else.

Finally, she can deal with Yulia.

– Tell me Yulia, why have you never sold the house?
– I do not know Jupe, I’ve been taking care of things for papa for only a month now. It’s a lot and papa was in some scary stuff.

Jupiter can relate to that.

– So, what will you do with the money? She asks her childhood friend.
– I want to place it into a school trust for my child, so he or she can escape the world I grew up in.
She says, placing her hand on her stomach.

Caine nods.

– Oh, Yulia! Congratulations!
– Spasibo, Yupiter.

After that everything goes smoothly and they embrace each other before Yulia leaves.

– Mr. Miller, thank you for your work. I know you have more work to do to finalize everything, so send me your bill at the Gocachi complex, top floor, when everything is complete.

They shake hands and she heads for the lobby, collecting her guards along the way. She was heading outside when she spots the reporters again.

– You know what? I don’t want to talk to them again and it will be faster if Stinger picks up my mom and my aunt and comes to pick us up, let’s head for the roof.

Jupiter calls her mom. While Caine contacts Stinger.

– Mama, Stinger will pick you and Nino up and bring you to me.
– Okay, everything good?
– Yes, but too much stuff to do in short amount of time.

Visits

----Apartment----

A little later, Stinger lands the ship on top of the Gocachi building and they go down to the ground level in the back alley, so they can enter through the front door and greet the doorman and security guard.

– Good morning, I have never seen you before, are you new to the building? Greets the doorman.

Jupiter stops at the doorman and returns the greeting.

– Good morning. Yes, I am.
– Welcome to the Gocachi, be sure to register at the front desk. He says, opening the door.
– Thank you.

They enter and walk to the front desk.

– Hello, says a middle-aged man with grey hair.
– Hello, I am Ms. Jupiter Jones and I just bought the top floor. The doorman told us to register here.
– Oh… yes of course… the lawyer informed us. May I see an ID?

Jupiter starts to lift her sleeve, but her mother stops her and murmurs “Green card” in her ear. Oh, right, Earth ID… I have to learn to be careful. She tells herself. She reaches for her wallet and takes her green card out.
– I have not had time to get ID cards with picture yet.
– I see... Anyone can vouch for your ID?
– Katherine Dunlevy, Austin Davis’s girlfriend, no wait,

She pulls out her phone and checks her text messages.

– fiancée now, she says, showing a picture she received from Katherine.

The guard has a strange expression on his face…

– What? What is it?

He hands her the newspaper he was reading. On the front page, there is a picture of a beaten-up Katherine, and a big title “Austin Davis still claims his innocence”.

– God no… I was out of town…

She reads the article, then pulls out her phone and reads all that she can about what happened to Katherine. She was beaten up and they found Austin Davis DNA and no one else on her. Her last word before loosing consciousness was “dragon”. She is maintained in an artificial coma, and they do not know if she will recover.

She is so furious and she feels so guilty at the moment. She can not let an innocent man go to jail or her friend die because of Balem’s insanity and what she is.

– He is innocent, and I will prove it. She tells the guard, using a very queenly tone.

The guard flinch at her tone and how certain she sounds.

– I am sorry for your friend. He says.
– Thank you.
– Anyone else can vouch for your ID?
– Try my mom’s cousin, Vassily Bolotnikov. 773-197-2348

The guard calls the number.

– Bolotnikov’ best Russian cleaning service.
– Mr. Vassily Bolotnikov?
– Yeah.
– I am Mr. Henry Clark, the security guard at the Gocachi complex, I am calling to verify an ID for a Ms. Jupiter Jones.

– Hey cousin Vassily, says Jupiter.
– You okay, Jupiter?
– Yeah, this is just a high security apartment complex.

The guard takes the phone back.

– Was this Ms. Jones? He asks.
– Yeah, she is my cousin Aleksa’s daughter.
– And how come she does not have ID with picture?
– Leave the girl some time, she got her green card yesterday.
– Thank you, Mr. Bolotnikov.

He hangs up and hands Jupiter a form to fill and she faces an Earth-Space conversion problem, when she has to write the birthday for the people allowed to go up without being asked for an ID or to register.

– Okay, I’ve already calculated Caine’s birthday by Earth Calendar, but I’ll have to calculate yours’ Stinger and Kiza. Can you tell me your age to the day?
– I am 48 standard years and 150 days and Kiza is 20 years and 50 days.

Jupiter takes out her phone and calculates their age down the hour and converts it back in Earth years. Stinger is 55 and 80 days and Kiza will be 23 in 11 days. She then calculates their Earth birthdays.

Finally, she hands the filled form to the security guard.
He looks at the list of people and then names them.

Jupiter Jones, August 5, 1993
Aleksa Jones, December 14, 1961
Nino Bolotnikov, January 25, 1965
Caine Wise, September 5, 1993
Kiza Apini, August 11, 1993
Stinger Apini, Mai 11, 1960

They all nod in turn when they are named.

– The others are? He says pointing to the three guards.
– Aves, Vespa and Pavonia. Part of my security. Do I have to register them too? Although I suppose I can always add more people later on?
– Of course, Ms. Jones. You can also provide ID card to other people that they can just show and in time we get good at recognizing people that can go up.
– Oh, good, any good recommendation for ID card fabrication?

The security guard hands her a business card.

– Most of our tenants use this company.
– Thank you, Mr. Clark.

They take the elevator and, on the ride up, Jupiter lets her bottled up Bolotnikov fury out.

– I never thought that Balem would have sent people after Katherine… she says slamming her hand on the elevator wall. Now she is in the hospital after being beaten by Sargons and her fiancé is in jail because of it.

Everyone but her mom and aunt flinch at her tone. Aleksa and Nino know that temper too well, they know it is directed at herself, not at anyone else.
She slams the wall three times with her fist and then kicks it.

– Jupe, says Aleksa. It is not your doing, and you can fix it.

Jupiter looks at her mother and then she sees the look on her people’s face. She takes a deep breath to calm down.

– Right, okay. How?
– The Keepers would have recordings of what happened and where her fiancé was when it happened. Says Kiza.
– What about Katherine? Dr. Comb could fix her up, but she would look out of place in an hospital.
– We can lend her an anonymizer, says Stinger.
– Right. Okay…

She takes a deep breath.

– Stinger, arrange that for Dr. Comb, have her join us at the warehouse and brief her on the situation. Kiza, get me the recording from the Keeper. And have Seiza find Dr. Comb a proper outfit.

They get busy on the comm links. Caine can smell her turmoil still simmering under her outside calm and his heart hurts with hers.

They get to the top floor and the elevator doors open on a lobby on which four doors open up.

Jupiter takes out the keys she was given by the lawyer and unlocks the doors. Her guards go inside and check out the space for threats and then come back out. Shen enters the first apartment, first door on her left, with her mother, aunt, Caine, Stinger and Kiza. Leaving Aves, Vespa and Pavonia on the lobby.

The first thing Caine does when out of sight from the other guards is take Jupiter in his arms, and then, only then, she lets her tears flow. Angry and bitter tears.

– She’s my friend Caine, she says.
– Yes, a good friend who let you use her name, he says, remembering the form at the clinic she had signed with Katherine Dunlevy’s name. Now that you know, you will fix it, Your Majesty, he says stroking her hair. Don’t blame yourself for another’s action.

Jupiter smirks at that. It echoes her own words to him when she told him to stop blaming himself for her emotions. She hugs him hard and breathes in his scent deeply. And lets out a sigh.

– Okay, let’s do this so I can go and fix the consequences of a madman’s action.

Aleksa does not miss how Caine has a steadying effect on her daughter. She looks at her sister and they exchange an understanding look.

– Just like you and Max, Nino murmurs to Aleksa.

The apartments are all similar in configuration, only mirrored. Each apartment has three bedrooms, the master bedroom has a bathroom and walk-in closet attached, a Jack-and-Jill bathroom for the other two bedrooms, a water closet, a kitchen, dinning room, huge living room, laundry facilities, and an office. Jupiter takes pictures with her phone along the way.
Holy crap, that is a lot of space.
And previous tenants had some weird taste, adds Nino.
Yeah, but we can fix that. She says chuckling.

When they are back in the lobby.

Okay, I prefer the second apartment for my personal quarters. Mama and Nino, you can have one of the apartments if you want, I also bought a house on cousin Vassily’s street too. Or you can have both.

Aleksa and Nino look at each other a mother and discuss low.

We can not support you if we are so far away, *Yupiter*. We will take one apartment, says Aleksa.
Okay. Stinger, on a security standpoint, which one would be best for the guards?
I would prefer if the first apartment was used for the guards, makes for better security.
Sounds good. So, Mama and Nino, you want the third or fourth one?
If I may? Says Kiza.
What is it, Kiza?
It would be more logical if they took the third one. Private quarters at the back and security and business at the front.
What do you think? Shes asks her mother and aunt.
That works for us, says Aleksa after a look at Nino.
Great. We’ll talk about renovations later. We have to get to the warehouse right now. She says locking back the doors.

---Warehouse---

After taking the elevator back to the lobby, they fly back up to the roof and head over to the warehouse. Landing on the warehouse Jupiter thinks they will need an access hatch on the roof so they can grav-beam inside directly, especially in the winter.

A Keeper and Dr. Comb are waiting for them on the roof. They board the ship as soon has they land.

Your Majesty, says a human looking and dressed Dr. Comb.
Dr. Comb, good, you brought what you need?
Yes, Your Majesty, I even have RegeneX, she says pointing to a leather looking bag, but I know your guideline, to use only if absolutely necessary.
Okay, and about the “Your Majesty” part, call me Ms. Jupiter when on Earth, no one must learn of my title, at least for now.

After Dr. Comb acquiesces, she turns to the Keeper.

Hello, what is your name, can you speak English?
This one is designated Shrill, Your Benevolent Mother, says the Keeper, pointing to himself.
Benevolent Mother? She asks Kiza.
Majesty in Keeper language, she says.
Okay, Shrill, do you have the recordings I asked for?
Yes, the humans were easy to track.

Shrill hands her a sheave.
Thank you, now I want the top floor at this address thoroughly cleaned and cleared of any furniture or belongings of the previous owner. She says handing Shrill a piece of paper with the address of the apartment floor on it.

Yes, Your Benevolent Mother. He says, then blinks out of sight.

Jupiter plays the recording. They see Austin and Katherine getting engaged, Katherine taking and sending the picture she received on her phone, they see them rent an hotel room, she skips over their time in the hotel room, she does not need to see that to know what happened in there. Then they split outside the hotel room, Katherine gets into a taxi and Austin in another one. The next recording is of Austin Davis in a less then legal party celebrating his engagement with some friends. They are so wasted that no one takes a single picture or video of the party, when he leaves, the sun is coming up. The third recording shows Katherine exit her taxi and being abducted by two “man”, but Jupiter can clearly see they are splices of some sort. One has way too much facial hair and the second one is clearly Mr. Night. The next recording is hard to watch. They are in her apartment and Greeghan is torturing Katherine and asking her who uses her name, clearly looking to know who Jupiter is. Katherine keeps saying “I don’t know” and looses consciousness before she could name her.

Jupiter has tears rolling down her cheeks and her hands are curled up into fists. Caine had only once smelled her so angry, when she learned about Honey-Bee. She smells like the hurricane he went through to rescue her from Balem, her coffee scent is boiling, the sand on the beach is melting and her cinnamon heart feels like it’s being stabbed.


Aleksa comes to her side and starts to count with her.


Slowly, she calms down.

– We can fix this, Yupiter. Says Aleksa.

Jupiter nods and then speaks; her voice is raw.

– Kiza, can this be converted to an Earth computer file format?
– Yes.
– Good, I want the engagement part and the party part converted and on a thumb drive.
– I will have to go to my place to do so.
– Okay, do it right now, and come back as soon as possible.

Jupiter checks the time.

– Time to meet Ms. Roger.

They exit the ship, fly down to the street and meet Ms. Roger in front of the building. Dr. Comb stayed behind with Kiza on the ship.

– Ha, Ms. Roger, thank you for meeting me here! Allow me to introduce my mother Aleksa Jones,
my aunt Nino Bolotnikov and Mr. Stinger Apini, Miss Apini’s father, that you met earlier, and
you’ve seen Mr. Wise too.
– Nice to meet you all she says, handing her hand.

After some handshakes, Ms. Roger continues.

– Ms. Jones, I hope that what ever you have planned has nothing to do with the mob.
– Why would you think that? Jupiter asks.

She shows her the news on her phone. It is the video from that morning when she arrived at the
lawyer’s office.
Jupiter shakes her head.
– The house was for my mother and aunt, but their decided to live with me. I am not sure what I will
do with the house yet. I might use it when I visit my family. As for the warehouse, it’s for…
– Ms. Jupiter, stop, says Caine.

Jupiter turns around to face Caine. He touches his nose and shakes his head.
Jupiter turns back to face Ms. Roger.
– Ms. Roger, why are you being untruthful? Who really gave you that video?

Now, even Jupiter can see that Ms. Roger is uncomfortable, sweat is pearling on her forehead.
– Ms. Jones…
– Are you recording this? Asks Nino, who watches police shows on a regular basis.

Ms. Roger mutters something and pulls something from her hair.
– I am sorry, I had no choice, she says.

Jupiter nods and taking her Queen voice, she claims.
– Whom ever is recording this, if you want to ask me something come here right now, do not use
other people to do your work.

Jupiter half expected to see a reporter come out of the warehouse, but not a police task force. In less
time then she could think of reacting, her, her mother and aunt were behind a wall formed by her
guards.
– Holy crap, you guys are fast. She says. No gun’s guys, they are only doing their jobs has you are.
No one needs to get hurt today, she tells her people.

The task force has their guns pointed at them, but if they do not move, they will not shoot.
– Ms. Jones, I am Lieutenant Martin Adams. Says a man she can’t see.
- Mr. Adams, if you would tell your people to put their arms away, we can talk like civilized people,
she says using a commanding voice.
– Ms. Jones, you must know I can not do that.
– Mr. Adams, I can assure you that what ever you think I am up too, you are mistaken or have been
misinformed. I can also tell you that any hostile action taken against me or my family would result in
none of you getting home tonight, and that would be most unfortunate has I value all lives.
– Ms. Jones, are you threatening us?
– No, Mr. Adams, merely stating a fact. I have actually instructed my people not to shoot anyone.
That is why you are all alive at the moment and why all their weapons are still holstered. I do not
wish for anyone to get hurt or die.
– It is hard to believe I have been misinformed when you have guards like that.
– I can see that Mr. Adams. Has a gesture of good faith I am willing to walk out of here and meet you in the middle with only one guard and you may do the same with no risk to your own life, you may even keep your weapons. But what I have to say can not be heard by everyone.
– Your Majesty, I must protest, murmurs Stinger.
– It’s the way it works on Earth, Stinger. And I’m sure you called in the others as soon has things got fishy and I trust in Caine’s abilities to protect me.
– They are landing right now, he answers.
– Ms. Jones, I will meet you in the middle if your guard is unarmed.
– Caine? She asks.
– I do not need a weapon to protect you. He answers.
– Okay. Give your gun to Stinger, she tells him. That is acceptable, Mr. Adams. She says speaking up.

Caine removes his gun and jacket, Jupiter steps out and he places his left arm in front of Jupiter. He can activate his shield to protect her if necessary. And fly away at a moment’s notice too. Slowly Jupiter walks out and a middle-aged man steps towards her, accompanied by what could be the toughest looking policeman she ever saw.

– Mr. Adams, nice to speak to you face to face. If you’ve been watching me has I suspect, you may have noticed Mr. Wise.
– We only took notice of you this morning, Ms. Jones.
– Ah, very well. And this is?
– Officer Sam Granger, he says.

Speaking to Caine, she asks.

– Caine, can I trust them?

Caine takes a deep breath, sifting through all the scents that he gets.

– These two yes, but there is someone not trustworthy to the left.
– I see… Thank you, Caine.

Martin Adams looks at Caine with curiosity in his eyes.

– How can he tell someone is trustworthy or not?
– It is one of his special abilities, Mr. Adams. Now, what is it you want to know about me that made you so afraid of me that you pulled a stunt like that?
– Ms. Jones, you have just made some expensive purchases, your new bank account has way more money then the inheritance that was suddenly found, one of the property you bought has been on the radar has a mob hide-out for the last five years and the paperwork for your citizenship magically appeared overnight. Can you explain all of this?
– So, you immediately thought I was the new mob boss?

He nods.

– I can see why you thought that, but Mr. Adams, the mob is so beneath me. I do not associate with the mob. Yes, I knew Mr. Petrovich when I was a little girl but only because his daughter was my friend. I had not many friend options has an illegal. Anyway, I stopped having time for friends when I was eight years old and I started working with my mother and aunt, cleaning toilets for our cousin’s cleaning business. I recently started to have friends again, and they are in high places, not low places like the mob. Now if you want to know who I really am, I can tell you, but you would not believe
me without proof. The whole truth is not for everyone and not everyone can handle the whole truth.
– What do you mean? Mr. Adams asks.
– Come with me if you want to know. She says.

At his hesitation, she adds.

– I swear on my mother’s head that you will both come back unharmed.

She turns around and heads for the warehouse, accompanied by Caine and after a moment’s hesitation Mr. Adams and Granger follow her.
Once inside she says.

– I suppose there must be roof access somewhere? I have not had the chance to visit my property yet.

Mr. Adams looks at her.

– What? She asks.
– You bought properties without looking at them first? He asks back.
– Now you are starting to understand. She answers.
– There is roof access at the top of the staircase. He indicates.
– Good. I suppose you bugged the place like you bugged Ms. Roger?
– Well…
– Please don’t lie, it is much easier when everyone tells the truth. And Mr. Wise would know if you lied.

Mr. Adams looks at Caine again and wonders how someone can be a walking lie detector.

– It is standard protocol, Ms. Jones.
– Very well.

She pauses and presses her comm bracelet.

[Your Benevolent Mother, this one is honored by your contact.]
– Shrill, I need a team of Keeper to clean the warehouse where we met earlier. Pay a close attention to remove all tersie surveillance devices.
[It would be our honor, Your Benevolent Mother]
– Thank you Shrill.

She presses her comm bracelet twice.

[Your Majesty?]
– Lieutenant-commander Felis, Commander Wise and I we are coming up to the roof, make sure all anonymizers are on and no weapons are out. I do not want any harm to come to the people with us.
[I understand, Your Majesty]

She presses her comm bracelet once more.

She turns to Mr. Adams.

– Do you still want to know the truth?
– Very well.

She turns back to Caine.

– Use my title, she murmurs. Commander, open the door, she adds louder.
– Yes, Your Majesty. He says, bowing slightly.

He opens the door and holds it open for her.

– Your Majesty, he says again, gesturing for her to step out.

Jupiter takes two steps, then turns around to face the two policemen.

– Come, you have nothing to worry about. What a Queen orders can not be disobeyed.

They step to follow her and when they exit on the rooftop, her guards kneel and salute and Caine joins them. Jupiter can distinguish some movement above each of their heads and she hears the rustling of feathers.

– Arise, she says.

They stand and Leo steps forward.

– Your Majesty, we are relieved to see that you are unharmed. Captain Apini’s order has worried us a lot. Are the Grand Duchess and the Duchess safe? He says.
– Lieutenant-commander Felis, thank you for your kind words. My mother and my aunt are safe at the moment. Has long has everyone keeps it’s cool, everyone will go home tonight.

She gestures to the two policemen to step forward. They seem quite stunned.

– Lieutenant Martin Adams and Officer Sam Granger of the Chicago police, please meet the rest of my personal guards, the Skybreakers.

She pauses.

– Skybreakers, turn off your anonymizers.

They do so and the two policemen take a step backward. Jupiter turns to face them.

– Do not be afraid. They will do you no harm, but you can see why I said the whole truth can not be handled by everyone.

They shakenly nod.

– Now, has you can see, lieutenant, we are not mobsters. Will you tell your people to let my people go?
– I can not do that yet, or they would think you have taken us hostage. He replies.
– Very well, can you at least tell them to put their weapons away?
– Yes, of course.

He gets on his radio with his second in command and orders his people to put their arms away. Caine receives a message from Stinger on his comm implant.
– Your Majesty, Stinger confirms they have put their weapons away.
– Good. Now, what I am about to tell you might seem like a delusion, but it is the truth none the less. It can be hard for tersie, people like us from underdeveloped world, to hear that our planet is not the only inhabited planet in the Universe.
– This must be a nightmare, says Officer Granger.

Jupiter chuckles.

– I did say something similar when I learned the truth a few days ago.
– So, you are from here? Asks Mr. Adams.
– Oh yes, I grew up in Chicago, but they are not from Earth, she says pointing to her guards.
– They are aliens?
– Of a sort. They are genomgineered humans, human DNA spliced with animals or insect DNA. Except for lieutenant Laing who is human, just not from Earth. And Lieutenant Lidal and Ensign Ketakeran are androids.

Tristan, Ezin and Kalie nod slightly.

– There are humans on other planets? Asks Mr. Adams.
– Actually, the humans civilization spans galaxies and they planted humans on Earth about 100,000 Earth years ago, after killing the dinosaurs.

Their jaws hang for a moment.

– Now, I will tell you the truth that you need, because the whole truth would give you nightmares. Let just say that space society is not a utopia like Star Trek. Everything bad that happens on Earth, there is a worse version of it in space.

She pauses, organizing her thoughts.

– A few days ago, I learned that I am the genetic reincarnation of a space-Queen. Which means I have the exact same DNA she had. In space DNA is everything and for space people, I am that Queen truly reincarnated and after claiming my title, I inherited all of her belongings. I am not done cataloging all that I have inherited from her, but amongst my inheritance, were ships, industries, peoples and planets. And the jewel of my inheritance, the most precious planet of them all, Earth itself.
– How can someone own the Earth? Asks officer Granger.
– The same way you can own a piece of land on Earth. In the universe people buy, sell and trade planets like humans on Earth do with houses, lands or cars. It is the way it is and legally everything and everyone on Earth belongs to me. That is how I got my money and my papers, lieutenant, I can have everything that I want, because it is all mine. Now my mother and aunt raised me well and I know the difference between a legal and moral right. I do not plan to rule the Earth but I do plan to keep it safe from external threats. I have actually already saved all humans on Earth from the previous owner’s plans.
– Which were? Asks Mr. Adams.
– Are you sure you want to know that? Asks Jupiter. It is an ugly truth to know.
– How can we tell if what you do is right if we do not know?
– Okay, lets see. In the Universe there are many planets like Earth, seeded with human life by powerful families. After a planet is seeded they wait for thousand of years. Once the human population grow beyond the planet’s capacity to sustain it, it is considered ripe for harvest. They come in with huge ships, collect every single human being, slaughter them like cattle and transform them in a serum they use to live for thousands of years. And in the Universe, Earth is the ripest planet there is. Which means Earth was next on the list of planets to be harvested.
The two policemen have lost all color in their faces. Jupiter waits for them to recover a little and adds.

– Now, tell me is saving every human being on Earth from being transformed in a fountain of youth serum for thousand of years old space royalty a good thing? Or a bad thing?
– Good, Mr. Adams murmurs, stunned.

Officer Granger looks about to faint and Kalie rushes to his side.

– It’s okay, she is a medic, she tells Lieutenant Adams.

When they have both recovered from the shock, Jupiter continues.

– Now do you need to know what I intend to do with my new properties?
– I will need something to write in my report.
– Okay, the house on our cousin’s street was really for my mother and aunt, but they chose to live with me on my new apartment floor. I will keep it for me and my people when I visit my cousin for Sunday dinners or the holidays. The apartments are for me, to live there and also some office space, and space for my guards. This warehouse will serve to land in spaceship and the interior will be used has a training facility for my people. And I will build a house for me and my people on the farm land I just bought. Has you can see, nothing illegal.
– Thank you, Your Majesty. Says Mr. Adams.
– Ms. Jones is fine. Even my personal guards do not have to call me “Your Majesty” in private. She says. Anything else you need from me?
– Authorization to search the house for mob related stuff.
– No problem. Search all you like, I have not stepped a foot in that house. She says, handing him a key of the house.

Mr. Adams takes the key; his hand is still shaking.

– Now I trust you will be able to write a report that will be satisfactory without mentioning alien, space-royalty and that the Earth belongs to me?
– Yes, I would lose my job and be sent for psychological evaluation if I wrote the truth.

Jupiter smirks.

– I know, the truth is outlandish, yet it is true. Officer Granger, I trust you will also keep quiet on this subject?

He nods, too shocked to be able to speak.

A thrill announces the arrival of a Keeper. When he comes into view, the policemen flinch.

– Your Benevolent Mother, it says, dropping a pile of surveillance devices at her feet.
– What is your name? She asks.
– This one is designated Squeaky, Your Benevolent Mother.
– Thank you Squeaky for a job well done.
– It was our honor, Your Benevolent Mother.

Squeaky fades out of view and the policemen take deep breaths.
– Oh, I apologize, I should have warned you. That was a Keeper, they work for a planet’s owner, in this case me, they are true aliens. Says Jupiter.

She leaves them a moment to recuperate from another shock.

– Ms. Jones, we should go back down before anyone gets nervous.
– Right.

She turns to her guards.

– Anonymizers back on guys, thanks for the help.

They salute with their wings above their heads, and then turn the anonymizers on.

– They have wings? Says Mr. Adams.
– Yes, they are bio-neural implants.
– Handy…
– Yes, she says, nodding.

She turns to Caine.

– Caine, would you get the door please?

Caine tries to open the door.

– It is locked, Your Majesty.

Jupiter sighs and tries the warehouse keys in the door. After the third key does not work, Caine steps in.

– May I? He asks, showing an iriser.
– By all means, go ahead.

Caine place the iriser on the door and activates it, glad to be useful to his Queen. He smirks at the police officer’s reaction and step through. Once Jupiter steps through and are convinced it is not a trick, they step through too and then Caine shuts it down.

On the way down the stairs Jupiter wants to deepen the bond of trust between her and the police officers, it could be useful to have humans who know the truth.

– Mr. Adams, I would like to do something for you in return for your understanding. Would you like to know who is not trustworthy on your team?

He looks at her and then at Caine suspiciously.

– How can you tell? He asks.
– In human terms you could say I can smell it, Mr. Adams. The splicing gives us abilities pure humans do not possess. Answers Caine.
– Mr. Wise is the best at what he does in the universe, Mr. Adams.
– I see…

He pauses.
– It would be handy to know who to watch closely.
– Very well. In return, I would like to know who is in charge of the Katherine Dunlevy and Austin Davis’s file.
– That is not my department, but I can find that out for you.
– Please do, she is my friend and I have proof her fiancé did not harm her.

Lieutenant Adams looks at her.

– How, no one could find anything?
– The Keepers monitor everything, Mr. Adams. She was beaten by Earth’s previous owner’s henchmen to try and find out who I am. I can not let her die or him be jailed.
– I understand, you have to fix someone else’s bad decision.
– You have no idea, she sighs.

They exit the warehouse and both group of people sigh of relief.

– Everything is fine, says Mr. Adams to his people. She is not the person we were looking for.
– Head on to the roof, Jupiter tells her people, everything will be fine, I’ll join you in a few minutes.

Once her people are out of sight, she walks toward the taskforce with Caine beside her and lieutenant Adams and Officer Granger walk behind her, out of respect.

– Ms. Jones has shown us proof that she is not affiliated with the mob in any way and that she is not involved in anything illegal, he tells his people. Ms. Jones, I must apologize for our actions, they were unwanted, he tells her.
– Mr. Adams, you were doing your job. This was all a big misunderstanding and I am very glad it did not end up in violence. Thank you all for being cool headed and disciplined, she tells the taskforce.

All the while Caine has been sifting the smells from the people in the taskforce. The amount of physical discomfort he gets from the group is disheartening. Legionnaire are not put on duty unless they are in peak condition, but these people remained disciplined even with all the discomforts. He knows that one has stomach pain, a female is pregnant, one has a breathing problem…

He turns to Jupiter and the police officers.

– I am amazed thses people kept a cool head, he says.
– Why is that? Asks Mr. Adams.
– They are almost all in a physical or mental pain of some sort, I can smell it now that the stress hormones are gone.
– Anything more important then a mild headache or virus? Asks Jupiter.
– Yes.
– What about the untrustworthy officer? Says Officer Granger.
– He is not here anymore.

Mr. Adams turns to his second in command.

– Did anyone leave while I was inside?
– Carter, sir, said he had a family emergency.
– Brown hair, green eyes, crooked nose and his height? Caine says, pointing to another officer.
– Yes, answers Mr. Adams.
They turn their back on the taskforce.

– Caine, what can you tell about their health? Asks Jupiter.
– I smell a twisted or broken foot, severe stomach pain, a pregnancy, a breathing problem…
– Pregnancy you say? Is it the third women from the left? Asks Mr. Adams.
– Yes, says Caine after a quick look.
– Officer Price has been trying for a baby for the last five years at least.
– Caine, get me Dr. Comb down here. She tells him.

Then turns to Mr. Adams.

– I’ll take care of your people, just find me that name.

Dr. Comb comes out of the warehouse and joins Jupiter.

– Ms. Jupiter, what can I do for you?
– Dr. Comb, I want you to discreetly scan these people and give me a status on their health. No treatment yet. She murmurs.
– May I request the help of a Keeper? They could scan them without being seen.
– Great idea, arrange it, quickly. She murmurs.

A few minutes later.

– Ms. Jones, I have that name you requested. Says Martin Adams.
– Great, who is it?
– Lieutenant-detective Julia Bates of the 18th district.
– Great, can you arrange for me to meet with her in 20 minutes?
– Yes, Ms. Jones.

He takes his cellphone out and make a call.

– Lieutenant Adams for Lieutenant-detective Bates... Detective, yes, I am given to understand that you are investigating the Dunlevy-Davis case? I have stumbled upon one of Ms. Dunlevy friend in one of my investigations, she says she has proof Mr. Davis did not hurt Ms. Dunlevy. She would like to meet with you in 20 minutes... Her name? Ms. Jupiter Jones... What, you have been looking for her? Yes, of course... At your district? Very well… I will inform her… Thank you and good day to you.

While he was on the phone, Dr. Comb came back with a report… on a sheave.

She turns around to hide the sheave and switching it to English she read the report. Amongst the worse situation there is a bleeding stomach ulcer couple with severe anemia; broken foot; lung cancer; migraine due to high blood pressure; PTSD and the pregnant officer. The others merely avec small virus or lack of vitamins, probably due to bad eating habits. Oh, and Lieutenant Adams is missing part of a leg, below the knee.

– Officer Granger, may I trouble you for a pen and paper? Jupiter asks.
– Of course!

She writes down the diagnosis for the officers.

– Ms. Jones, detective Bates will meet you at her office at the 18th district in 15 minutes now.
– Thank you, Mr. Adams. I am sorry about your leg, she adds.
– I did not think it showed…
– Oh, it does not, my sources told me.

He nods.
She turns to the officers.

– I have some information for some of you, I can not tell you how I got it, but it is important information. Please seek the help you need.

Then she proceeds to hand over pieces of paper to the concerned officers. She also hands a paper to Mr. Adams.

– If there is anything, you can reach me on that number.

They all seem to be in shock at what they read and officer Price starts to cry.

– Is this real? She asks.
– Yes, has real has I am standing here.
– How?
– I can not answer that, but it is all true.

The officer with the broken foot immediately steps off his foot.

– Sir, do you believe she is telling the truth?
– Yes, Jack. Mr. Adams answers.
– Then I should get to the emergency room, according to this, he shows his piece of paper, I have a broken foot, not a twisted ankle.
– Matt, go with him. He tells another officer.

Right before they leave, Jupiter says.

– Not that it was not a pleasure meeting you, but I have a busy schedule and I have to go. Lieutenant Adams, Officer Granger and all of you, I wish you all happy and long lives.
– Ms. Jones, says Mr. Adams.
– Yes?
– Good luck to you, he says handing his hand.
– Thank you, where I am heading I will need it. She answers taking his hand and shaking it.

Jupiter, Caine and Dr. Comb return to the warehouse and climb up to the roof.

Once up to the roof, Jupiter keeps going all the way to the ship with Caine guiding her. She climbs in and collapses onto a seat. Her mother and aunt climb in after her so do Kiza and Stinger. What they find is the opposite of what they expected. Jupiter is doubled over on a seat laughing. After a good laugh, Jupiter straighten up and simply says.
– Sorry, it’s either that or run away screaming. Holy crap, can’t I have a simple ordinary day? I’ll need a vacation after all that.
– The stars said you were destined for great things, but no where it said they would be easy. Says Nino, sitting beside her.
– Right, okay, I have to be at the 18th police district in ten minutes, see to it someone, right now I’m on break, she declares.

---18th police district---

Ten minutes later she was ringing the bell at the front desk of the 18th police district, accompanied by Caine. Kiza and Stinger had organized everything while she decompressed from the events that had occurred at the warehouse. Aves, Vespa and Pavonia had been switched with Kalie, Ezin and Tristan and they and the other Skybreakers had returned to the Maximilian Jones. Kiza had fixed her hair and given her the thumb drive with the converted recordings for the police. They landed on the building next to the district and they used an iriser and the elevator to exit the building.

– Yes? Says the front desk clerk.
– Ms. Jupiter Jones, here to see detective Bates. Jupiter says.
– And he is?
– Caine Wise. He says.
– Take a seat. She says pointing to a row of chairs.

They sit and Caine is on edge, he smells all sorts of deception and untrustworthiness, it makes his skin crawl.

The clerk picks up the phone.

– Julia? There is a Jupiter Jones with a Caine Wise here to see you. What? Okay!
– I’m sorry Ms. Jones, she will see you right away. I had not been informed you had an appointment.

She presses a button and an officer comes into the room.

– Gary, please escort Ms. Jones and Mr. Wise to Detective Bates. She tells the officer.

After being guided by Gary the officer, they finally meet detective Bates.

– Ms. Jones! She says with a smile. Come in.

They walk in, shake hands and sit.

– We have been looking everywhere for you!
– Why is that?
– You were the last person Miss Dunlevy sent a message too.
– Oh, yeah, she sent me a picture of her engagement, I had helped her to pick up her dress for the event.

She pulls out her phone and show her the texted picture.

– I see… The picture was corrupted beyond recovery on her phone, we hoped it was a picture of her attacker.
– I’m sorry detective, that is the last message I received from her. I did not reply because I was unreachable out of town.
– I can see why, she says with a wink.
Jupiter smiles in return. Caine’s ears are burning.

– I only learned today of what happened to Katherine. I was pretty shaken up, but I knew it could not be Mr. Davis’s doing. Continues Jupiter.
– And you found proof of that, Lieutenant Adams said?
– Yes, she says handing over the thumb drive.

The detective places the drive in her computer and plays the files. The detective watches the engagement dinner and sees Katherine taking the picture sent to Jupiter. The next file is of them arriving at the hotel together in one taxi and of leaving later in two different taxis. The final file is of the party where Austin Davis went.

– I understand why his memories of that night are sketchy, she murmurs.

She picks up her phone and contacts the taxi company. Two drivers confirm picking up Katherine and Austin at that hotel that night. Katherine was dropped in front of her apartment building and Austin at an address in the south.

– Well, it would appear you were right about Mr. Davis. Thank you for bringing this information to us.
– You are welcome.

She stands and they shake hands again. Another officer escorts them back to the lobby and they go back up to the next building into the ship.

---Hospital---

Kiza had found out in which hospital Katherine was and Stinger dropped Caine, Jupiter and Dr. Comb on the roof. Heading down they take the stairs for two levels and then take the elevator down to the ground floor.

They were headed for the lobby to ask for directions when Caine says:

– I can smell her, this way.

And he starts walking down a corridor.

– You know her scent? Asks Jupiter.
– Yes, because you used her name, I had tracked her down first. He replies.
– Oh…

She is in there he says, pointing to a room with a policeman at the door.

– Okay, let me do this, she murmurs.

She walks to the room.

– Hello, officer Moore, she says reading the name on his uniform. How are you doing today?
– I am fine, thank you. He says.
– May we go in? Jupiter asks.
– I’m sorry, only authorized people may go in.
– I see, maybe detective Bates would let us in? Could you ask her if Jupiter Jones can visit her friend? She says with a gentle voice.
Jupiter Jones? Detective Bates is actually looking for you. Says the officer.  
I’ve just come from seeing her, actually.

The officer looks at Jupiter and calls detective Bates. After describing Jupiter and Caine, the detective gives them permission to enter.  
Katherine is plugged everywhere, it is hard to look at.

Dr. Comb, what state is she in? Jupiter asks.

Dr. Comb scans Katherine and lists the major trauma.

And would she recover if we did nothing, let the Earth doctors treat her?
It would take months and many surgeries… I can heal the deep injuries, her lung and kidney are particularly critical, and that concussion would take years to fully recover from.
Ok, heal the most important stuff, vital organs and such. And just speed up the process for the other stuff, shave maybe 50% of the healing time. If we heal her fully she would become a curiosity and I do not want that for her.
Ok, I can do that, says Dr. Comb.

She pulls out tools and starts to work on Katherine. It takes about 45 minutes and then she declares

I’ve done all I can according to your guidelines, Ms. Jupiter.
Thank you, Dr. Comb.

Jupiter is simply looking at her friend when some of the machines start to beep and an army of doctors and nurses rush in.

How is this possible? Says someone.
She is breathing on her own! Remove the tube, orders someone.

A nurse notices her.

Who are you? She asks
Jupiter Jones, her best friend.
What were you doing in here?
Praying really hard for her recovery, she answers.

It is a logical answer to give and the nurse seems satisfied.

Please leave the room to let us work. She asks them.
Of course.

They exit the room and wait in the corridor.  
In the end they remove all machines to keep Katherine alive and only keep the monitoring for her vitals and the hydration drip. They even stop the artificial coma medication.

After they exit, the nurse points her to a doctor.

I do not know who you prayed too, but she will make a full recovery. Says the doctor to Jupiter.
Thank you, doctor. Can we go back in?
Yes, and if she wakes up let us know.
– Of course, doctor.

Jupiter goes back in with Caine and Dr. Comb and nods to officer Moore before entering the room.
– Dr. Comb, can you wake her up?
Dr. Comb scans her again.
– She should wake up by herself in about five minutes. I would recommend that we simply wait.
– Okay.

Caine brings a chair closer for Jupiter and she sits beside her friend, holding her hand.
– Thank you to the both of you. She says then closes her eyes.
She opens them back when Katherine squeezes her hand.
– Katherine, she says softly. It’s okay, you are safe.

Katherine tries to speak; her mouth is too dry.
– Jupiter… the dragon… he was… looking for you. Katherine says.
– It’s okay, Katherine, I know.

She coughs.
– Water, she manages to say.

Caine brings her a glass of water and she takes a sip. Giving Caine an eyeful.
– Who is he?
– Caine Wise, he protects me. Says Jupiter.

Katherine nods.
– Katherine listen, I am not into anything illegal, they wanted something from me that I could not give them. I can not tell you everything, a lot has happened in the last few days, but the dragon has you call him, he is dead, I am safe and you are safe, no one will hurt you again.

She takes another sip of water.
– I can’t stay much longer, I just wanted to make sure you would pull through and help you has much has I could without anyone being suspicious.
– The police will want to know what happened and why… says Katherine.
– Right, they thought Austin did this to you, but I gave them proof he was no where near you. Just tell them it was three men in Halloween costumes, a dragon, a rat and a lion and you don’t know why because they did not speak English.

She nods.
– I have to go now, I have appointments to keep.
– Okay, Katherine murmurs.

She rings the nurse’s station.
– Yes? Comes in a voice through the intercom.
– She is awake, answers Jupiter.
– Thank you. Says the voice.
– I will be back later. Jupiter says to Katherine.

Jupiter squeezes her friend’s hand, stands and leaves her room with one look back at her.

– Officer Moore, she is awake, I’m sure detective Bates will want to be informed. She tells the officer.

She heads for the nurse’s station and see a man arguing with the nurse who spoke to her in Katherine’s room.

– I am telling you I am her fiancé and I was cleared of all charges against her.
– Austin Davis! Says Jupiter.

Austin turns around and looks at her.

– Yes? He says.
– We haven’t met in person yet, Jupiter Jones, she says.
– Oh yes, Katherine’s friend.

They shake hands.

– This is a nightmare, they can’t seem to understand that I did not do this to her. He tells her.

Jupiter places a hand on Austin’s arm to calm him and speaks to the nurse.

– What is your name?
– Nurse Carlee.
– Well, nurse Carlee, if you would ask officer Moore to call detective Bates, I am sure she can confirm that Mr. Davis can see his fiancée.

The nurse walks away.
She turns back to Austin.

– Thank you, I do not…

Jupiter stops him with a raised hand. She speaks low has to no be heard by anyone else.

– Listen closely, I will not repeat myself. She says serious. I know you are innocent of this crime, I brought the video evidence myself to detective Bates.
– How did you…?
– You don’t want to know. She cuts him off.

He looks at her surprised.

– What I saw on that video is not worthy of her. Now she will pull through but if you want to be worthy of the precious person that she is, you will mend your ways. You were extremely lucky in your bad luck that I could find that video, but if you had not party like that, you would have remembered where you were that night and you would not have spent time in custody and I would not have had to save your butt.

Austin Davis swallows hard and looks Jupiter in the eye.
– I will. He says.

Jupiter turns to Caine, who nods, she turns back to Austin and looks him in the eyes.

– Good.

Nurse Carlee returns.

– Detective Bates confirmed that you are free of all charges and can visit Ms. Dunlevy. I’ve informed the personnel, you should encounter no further resistance.
– Thank you, he says to the nurse, and thank you, he says to Jupiter.

Jupiter nods and continues on her way, followed by Dr. Comb and Caine.

Shopping

Stinger picks them up on the roof.

– Oh, wow, something smells good. Jupiter says.
– We went for lunch while you were tending to your friend, says Aleksa. Brought you back some Chicago deep-dish pizza.
– Oh great! I was wondering when we would have time to eat with all the delays.
– Well, no weapon was used, nothing exploded and no one was injured, I’d says we got off easy. Retorts Jupiter.

She walks to the ship’s table and sits with Caine and Dr. Comb.

– How much time is left for shopping? Jupiter asks.
– We should leave as soon as possible, says Kiza. We have been delayed by almost three hours.
– So, we have to be quick. Sorry mama and Nino, no time for 5th Avenue. Let’s see what is right here in Chicago.

She pulls out her phone and searches for women’s fashion stores in Chicago. Showing pictures of the types of clothes available to her mother and aunt, they choose a small boutique that is both high end and mature at the same time.

– Let’s go there, she tells Kiza, showing the address.
– Great. I’ll tell dad.

Kiza leaves and Jupiter shows Caine and Dr. Comb how to eat pizza.

– I was wondering what is this ship called? Jupiter asks Caine.
– Abrasax short range transport Δ-56-9. He replies.
– Wow, that is so sad. I guess people do not name their ship in space?
– Earthlings name their ships? Asks Dr. Comb.

Kiza comes back just in time to reply.

– It is considered unlucky not to do so…
– Okay, let’s see… mutters Jupiter.

She pulls out her phone.
– From now on this ship is the JJ-Δ-56-9 – Mercury.
– Going with planets? Asks Kiza.
– Yes and no, our planets are named after gods in the roman mythology. According to Wikipedia, Mercury is the son of Jupiter and God of travelers, amongst many things.

When the pizza is gone, she uses the on-board ‘fresher unit and then they grav-beam down behind the boutique.

Tristan, Ezin and Kalie are on patrol. Caine enters the boutique first and assesses any possible threats, then steps to the side and Jupiter, Alekha, Nino and Kiza enters while Caine guards the front door.

The sales associate looks up when Caine enters and the way he scans the boutique screams “guard”, so she knows that the people coming in will be important. When he steps to the side and the four women enters she greets them cordially even though they arrived if rather ordinary clothes, except for one young woman.

– Welcome, she says. I am Christine, how may I help you today?
– Hello Christine, I am Jupiter. We need outfits for my mother, my aunt and my assistant, says Jupiter.
– Any kind in particular or for any particular event?

*Waiting in line for hours* Jupiter thinks, but answers:

– Something corporate, but comfortable, no high heels or skirts.
– More like pant suits then?
– Yes, but with a touch of fancy.

The sales assistant looks at each of the three women in details, eye color, hair color, skin color and body type and goes to the clothes racks. She picks out a few items and comes back to the women. She hands each one a pair of pants, a shirt and a jacket and guides them to the changing booths.

Alekha comes out with some black pants, a white shirt and an aubergine jacket. Nino has some violet pants and shirt, but with a lime green jacket. And finally, Kiza has some navy pants with a white shirt and a red jacket.

– This is perfect, Alekha says.
– You have a gift, Miss. Christine, adds Nino.
– Yes, this will do quite nicely, says Kiza.
– Perfect, Miss. Christine, I am more then satisfied with your work. We will come back when we have more time. For now, we have to go, so let me pay you for these.
Jupiter pays for the outfits while they gather their things and they are out of the boutique in under 30 minutes.

Once on board the Mercury, they head to the Maximilian Jones.

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, I had lots of fun writing this chapter and messing with Jupiter and Caine.
Let me know what you think!

In the next chapter Aleksa and Nino travel to Orous. Which promises to be quite the fun time too.
Return to Orous

Chapter Summary

So much happens in this chapter. Jupiter has to play Queen a lot and Caine is on a hunt.

Chapter Notes

This is a long chapter that sees many characters in different environment.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Maximilian Jones

On board the Maximilian Jones, everyone leaves them except for Caine.

Seiza and Erminea greet them with portalling pills and glasses of water.

– Welcome back on board, Your Majesty. We were awaiting your arrival, says Seiza.
– Thank You, Miss Seiza.

Jupiter swallows her pills.

– What are those? Asks Aleksa.
– Portalling pills; portalling can be hard on the system, Lady Aleksa, says Erminea.

Aleksa and Nino accept the pills and swallow them.

– If you would come this way, we have prepared a suite for you, says Erminea.

They follow her to the suite closest to Jupiter’s private quarters.

– Here you are, you can ask Max, the ship’s presence, for explanation for anything, Erminea tells them, once she opened the door.

Aleksa looks at Jupiter.

– I will call home and tell Vassily we won’t be home tonight.
– Okay, thanks, mama, says Jupiter. I’ll be in my quarters.

Aleksa hugs Jupiter.

– Thank you, Madam Erminea, says Aleksa.

The door closes on Aleksa and Nino and Jupiter steps towards her quarters.

---Jupiter---
– Anything to report? She asks.
– The ship’s crew seems annoyed that we are using their mess hall to feed your people. Says Erminea.
– Right, we have to send Plume along with Buzz to shop for food on Orous.
– She will need an authorization to shop in your name.
– No, the sealed sheaves you gave them act has authorization.
– Okay. Come into my office, I’ll give you the authorization for Plume, she says.

They enter her personal quarters and head for the office. Jupiter sit and takes a blank sheave and writes a food shopping authorization for Plume Red-Tail. And gives it to Erminea.

– Here you go, give this to Chef Plume please. Your dismissed.

Erminea leaves.

– How long until we portal?

Caine checks with Commander Vang.

– Thirty minutes, Jupiter, says Caine.
– Very well. I’ll go for a short nap, it’s been a long morning. Seiza, bring me a cup of grula in twenty minutes please and I’ll need to change in something more comfortable for the Hall of Titles.
– Yes, Jupiter.

Once she is alone with Caine, Jupiter slumps on her desk.

– I am so tired, I don’t think I can make it to my bed, Jupiter murmurs.

Caine is at her side in two seconds and picks her up saying:

– This might make it easier.

Jupiter smiles in her half-asleep state and snuggles against his shoulder. He walks out of the office and heads for the bedroom.

– Mmm… you’re so strong, she mumbles.

Then her nose catches his scent.

– And you smell so good.

He does not want to abuse of his Queen half-conscious state but curiosity is biting at him.

– What do I smell like, Your Majesty? He asks close to her ear.

She takes a deep breath against his chest

– Mmm… Jungle, spices and…

The rest of it will have to wait, since she is now fully asleep. He enters her (their?) bedroom, places her on the bed and removes her shoes so she will be comfortable. He is not tired like she is, but he can not force himself to leave her side. She had quite the eventful morning and even asleep he smells she is not fully calm. He decides to strip to only his pants and he lies on the bed with Jupiter. That was a good idea has Jupiter snuggles against him in her sleep, placing her head on his shoulder and then all her agitation fades away.
He thinks back to the event of the morning and he cannot help but feel very impressed by his mate. Not only can she deal with the press and fix Balem’s actions, but she is so strong of character, she faced those police officers with courage, even if he could smell how nervous she was.

* I never met anyone like her, he tells himself. No wonder I bonded to her, she is courageous, determined, strong of character and she cares. She cares so much it hurts her when people she cares about are hurt in any way. And he smiles to himself when he remembers what is engraved under their stool in Vassily’s house, a silent promise of love. 

---Aleksa and Nino---

When the door closes on Aleksa and Nino, Aleksa takes her phone out to call Vassily.

– Hello. He says.
– Hello, we won’t come home tonight, just don’t want you to worry after what happened to Yupiter.
– No surprise.

Aleksa scoffs.

– Bye. She says.
– Bye bye.

After that the two sisters look around their suite. It is such luxury, they never even dreamed of such beautiful furniture and decorations. Like the parts of the ship they saw, their suite is like stepping in time to the Greco-Roman era, with columns around the rooms and lush and colorful fabrics draped over rafters. They visit the rooms, beside two grand bedrooms with private bathrooms, there is three smaller bedrooms, a small kitchen and dining room, living room, and office. And then they arrive at the servant’s section of the suite. There are doors on both sides of a corridor. On one side there are three doors that leads to small but comfortable offices with bedrooms above them and small bathroom attached and on the other side a wall with fifteen doors, five doors wide and three doors high. Each door leads to a bedroom, if you could call it that, there was room for a bed and a night stand and there were hooks on the wall to hang the clothes.

– We have more room then that at Vassily’s says Aleksa.
– Maybe we should check on Jupiter’s people quarters like she asked, says Nino.
– I hope they have more space then that, says Aleksa.
– Yes, Your Grace?
– How long do visitors usually stay when on visit.
– Most Entitled returns to their own ship when visiting another Entitled, on the occasion that an Entitled will stay aboard another’s ship, the average is 2-3 days. Entitled usually prefer to receive at an alcazaar.
– What is an alcazaar? Asks Aleksa.
– An alcazaar is the main residence of an Entitled on a planet.
– Thank you, Max.

They head for the main door of the suite and exit. Out the door they are greeted by one of Jupiter personal guards.
Lady Aleksa, Lady Nino. May I do something for you?
– Hello, what is your name? Asks Aleksa.
– Lieutenant Menura Bower, Lady Aleksa.
– Well, Menura, Jupiter asked us to evaluate her people’s private quarters, so we would like to visit them to do so.
– Of course. Let me get you a guide.

She contacts Stinger.

[ Lieutenant?]
– Sir, their Ladyship have to visit Her Majesty’s people accommodations, upon her request.
[ Very well, contact Madam Erminea and I’ll send someone to replace you.]
– Yes, sir.

[ Yes?]
– Madam Erminea, their ladyships are ready to visit Her Majesty’s people accommodations.
[ I will be right there.]

She cuts the communication off.

– Lady Aleksa, Lady Nino, Madam Erminea should be here shortly. She tells them.
– Thank you, while we wait do you mind if I ask you something personal?
– My Lady, you can ask anything you want and I would have to answer you.
That fact registers as wrong in Aleksa and Nino’s mind.

– Menura, that is so wrong to us. Please feel free to refuse to answer.

After an initial shock, Menura nods.
– What are you spliced with? Aleksa asks.
– Oh, that is not personal, Lady Aleksa, she says blinking royal blue eyes, I am a bowerbird-splice.
– I see, were you bred for the Legion?
– No, My Lady. Only pack-bonded Splices are bred specifically for the Legion and those rarely becomes Skyjackers, if they do, they are like our commander, they did not bond with their pack.
– And what is your area of expertise? Nino asks.
– I am a mechanic, Lady Nino.
– And how did you become a Skyjacker?
– When I was young, my owner was attacked and killed by a rival. I was inherited by his sibling who had no use for me, so he sold me to the legion. I went through basic training and put in a unit. We were deployed at Abukesh… after that, the survivors were given promotions and I transferred to the Skyjackers. It turns out that avian-splices make great Skyjackers since our brain are already wired to use wings.

Erminea and Castor arrived before they could ask what Abukesh was and they headed to the top floors, with Castor remaining on guard outside Aleksa and Nino’s suite.
The visit of the personal quarters was rather disturbing and depressing. Quarters were basic, with no colours, couples had double beds, children were sleeping 2-3 per bed, and they had almost no toys. The state of the wardrobes was also depressing, with each one having one or two changes of clothes. It left Aleksa and Nino wondering about what Splices must be used too is this was above it. Even they had more belongings and better quality of life in Vassily’s basement.
Max’s voice interrupted their thoughts.

– Pardon me, Your Graces.
– Yes? Aleksa says.
– Her Majesty said that if you wished to see the portal happen and have a first view of Orous, you were welcome to join her in her private garden.
– Let her know that we will be there shortly. Nino says.
– Yes, Your Grace.
– Madam Erminea, you may go back to your duties. Aleksa says.
– Thank you, Lady Aleksa.

They head back down to the royal deck and go to Jupiter’s private quarters. Menura stays out the door when they enter. They are welcomed by Aves and Pavonia.

– Lady Aleksa, Lady Nino. They say.
– Jupiter is expecting us.

They nod and they take the grav-beam up to the garden.

---Jupiter---

After fifteen minutes Caine shifts their position so Jupiter is on her back and wakes her up with soft kisses.

– Jupiter, Your Majesty, he says, it’s time to wake up.

Waking up in the arms of the man she loves feels so good, Jupiter sighs and stretches. The nap helped and she feels clear headed. She puts her arms around Caine’s neck and gives him a proper kiss.

– Mmm… if we had the time right now, I would… she mumbles.

There is a ring at the door and Caine gets up to open the door.

Seiza is right on time with the cup of grula for Jupiter.

– I brought your cup of grula, Jupiter.

Jupiter sits on her bed.

– Thank you, Seiza, she says tending her hand for the cup.

Seiza brings her the cup while Jupiter stands on the side of the bed and Caine picks up his clothes and equipment and goes into the guard room. Jupiter takes the cup and drinks from it.

– Mmm… this should wake me up for a while.
– What would you like to wear, Jupiter?
– Something comfortable and business like, no dress or skirt.
– All right, she says, heading for the closet.

Jupiter stands and drinks some more grula, then placing the cup on a side table she stretches the last of the sleep away. Caine come out of the guard room fully dressed and walk to Jupiter. She is so beautiful even with her hair all messy that he can not prevent his ears from reddening and his shy
Jupiter smiles back at him and looks at his ears intensively. Which only make them turn a deeper shade of red. Caine’s eyes flash with contained desire and Jupiter bites her bottom lip.

– Your Majesty, he murmurs in a low voice.

Then kisses her tenderly.

Seiza comes back out of the closet and smiles at what she sees. She has had the time to get used to the idea and now it gave her great joy to see that, somehow, for Jupiter, Splices really are people, and not just tools to be used and abused.

She takes a few steps and Caine lets go of Jupiter and steps away. Seiza walks to Jupiter with the outfit.

– I believe this will do quite nicely, Jupiter.

Jupiter nods and Seiza helps her change. Almost blue-jeans colored pants with a white long-sleeved tunic and a grey-silver shimmering sleeve-less over-vest that goes down to mid-calf, with a pair of silver boots and silver jewellery. Using a hair-grooming tool, she also fixes her hair in a curly updo.

Looking at her reflection in a space-mirror, she is more than satisfied with what she sees.

– Thank you Seiza, you do have a gift for this.
– Anything else I can do for you? Seiza asks.
– No, you’re dismissed.

Seiza leaves and Caine closes the distance between him and Jupiter. It is always spectacular to see her transform into the role of Queen, but the ever present and familiar cinnamon heart scent that come off Jupiter always reassure him that she is and remains his Jupiter, even when she must be the Queen.

– You look amazing, he tells her.
– Thank you, moya sud’ba, she murmurs, pleased.

Caine always has a chill when she calls him “My destiny” in Russian. It feels claiming and honoring. He gathers her in his arms and places his forehead against hers.

– Jupiter, say that again, he murmurs hoarsely.
– Moya sud’ba, she murmurs, against his lips.

He kisses her with tenderness and devotion, wrapping her up in his wings, and murmurs in her ear:

– That really works for me, echoing her words on top of the Willis tower.

She smiles and then a slight buzz from her comm bracelet indicates someone is trying to contact her. She disentangles herself from his arms and wings and answers the call.

– Yes?
[Your Majesty, Captain Diomika Tsing here, Officer Percadium requests an audience.] Says Captain Tsing.
– Sure, I’ll see him after we jump to Orous and before I go to the Hall of Title.
[Thank you, Your Majesty.]
– My pleasure.
She presses her comm bracelet.

– Phylo wants to see me, she tells Caine.

He nods.

– Max?
– Your Majesty?
– Tell my mother and my aunt they can join me in my garden if they want to see the portal happen and have a first view of Orous.
– Yes, Your majesty.

---Garden---

– All right, let’s go to the garden, she says to Caine, offering her hand.

Caine takes her hand in his and they step out of their room and grav-beam up to the garden floor. Once up, Max inform her that her mother and aunt will join her shortly. She was strolling with Caine in her garden when they encounter Kiza in a beekeeper outfit.

– Hey Kiza, how are the bees?
– The beehive is all fixed now, I brought material up from Earth to fix it.
– Oh! That is great, thanks.
– You’re welcome. She says, and after a pause. Well, I’d better go change.
– Of course, go ahead.

She continues on her walk and reaches the panoramic window at the front of the ship. What a view! She thinks.

– Jupiter? Says her mom’s voice loudly.
– Can you go get them, please? She asks Caine.
– Of course.

Caine leaves her side and reaches Aleksa and Nino easily.

– Hello Aleksa, Nino, he says nodding slightly. Jupiter sent me to guide you to her.
– Well, then, lead the way, says Aleksa.

He nods and starts to walk toward Jupiter’s location. After a few steps he halts and turns to face Aleksa.

– Mrs. Jones, he starts. I need your help with something.

Aleksa can see that he is nervous and wants to ask her something. If it was something part of his duty, he would not be nervous.

– *Moy syn*, you need my help has her mother?

He nods.

– I would like to offer Jupiter an Earth appropriate gift has a token of my love, but the only knowledge I have about that is an engagement ring, which seem premature for Earth culture and dangerous in space culture. He lets out.
Aleksa can see how it could be a problem, and that he wants to pledge himself to Jupiter according to her culture is endearing to her. Jewelry is always a good gift, but other then rings, other jewelry are not worn permanently. That is why rings are so popular.

She looks at her sister.

– Any idea? She asks her.

Nino has always been the more romantic, and she immediately has an idea.

– How about a promise ring? She says.
– It’s something popular with the youngster. It can be offered by anyone to anyone, and the signification is usually only known to the one offering it and the one receiving it, and it can be worn on any finger.
– That sounds perfect, says Aleksa. Now let’s go before she gets suspicious.

Caine nods and starts to walk again. They join Jupiter at the front window just has the portal’s white light forms and Jupiter feels her stomach contracts and relaxes. Aleksa and Nino wince and then they are gobsmacked by what they see.

– Mama, Nino, welcome to the overpopulated, oozing cesspool that is Orous.
– That is… nevozmožno… murmurs Nino.
– It’s not, Nino, I’ve been there, says Jupiter.

Canubulum system

---Separation---

– Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a meeting before we go there.
– We also have to talk to you, Jupiter, we visited your people’s accommodations, says Aleksa.
– Okay, I’ll meet Phylo, then I’ll come to your suite.

They all head out of the garden and her private quarters. Menura joins them outside and accompany them to the royal suite. Aleksa and Nino go in and Menura takes her post outside the door, relieving Castor. Jupiter enters the formal office, which she has not entered yet and sighs. The desk chair is a smaller version of her throne and the desk a bigger version of the one in her private office. She looks around the office and then sits at the desk. Caine stays by the door and when there is a chime, he opens the door and let Phylo Percadium in.

– Your Majesty, he greets her.
– Come in Phylo, come in. Call me Jupiter.

Phylo walks up to her desk and bows slightly.

– Please sit, Phylo. What can I do for you?

Phylo Percadium sits nervously.
– Your– Jupiter… when you said to Captain Tsing that if you could do anything for us to simply ask, did you mean for other crew members too?
– Well, that depends on the request, I am not a wishing well on two legs.

Phylo nods but does not add anything.

– Do you have a request, Phylo?
– Yes… he clears his throat. Erm… I did not have any news from my sister in over three years. We used to talk a lot, but she went undercover for a mission within the contraband ring and since then, no one knows what has happened to her.
– I see…

Jupiter pauses and reaches for a blank sheave.

– What is her name?
– Truly Percadium.

She nods and writes on the sheave.

– Caine? She says.

Caine walks to her desk.

– Yes, Jupiter.
– You know more about finding people then I do, is three years too cold a trail to track?
– Not for me, he says proudly, with glitter in his eyes.

Jupiter smirks and looks away.

– Right, best hunter in the gyre, she murmurs for herself.

She writes some more on the sheave, muttering things to herself, then seals the sheave and hands it to Caine.

CONTRACT # 053
ISSUED BY: Jupiter Jones recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax
TO: Commander Caine Wise, personal guard
TYPE: Track and gather information
TARGET: Truly Percadium
TARGET TYPE: Human
ASSOCIATES: Phylo Percadium (brother)
STIPULATIONS: 1) Target might be undercover, do not blow cover if this is so 2) Immediate extraction is sanctioned if target is in danger, held against her will or her judgement has been altered.

Caine takes the sheave and reads it, he smiles baring his teeth at the tracking contract. Has a Lycantant, tracking people is what he was bred to do, and now the idea of tracking someone for his mate and Queen gives him even more satisfaction. And then the thought of leaving her for an unspecified amount of time crosses his mind and his smile vanishes and his brain registers what his nose is smelling from Jupiter, the same feelings he was having, the unwillingness to leave each other mixed with the obligation to do so to accomplished his task.

Jupiter sees Caine’s emotions reflected in his body language. The contract has appealed to his Lycan genes, the hunter in him is pleased, but his body contracts and his wings shiver, and she knows he is unwilling to leave her. She feels the same, but she has to let him go.
Jupiter stands and walks around her desk, stopping in front of Phylo and Caine.

– I leave you two to it, you can use this office. Phylo, no one is better then Caine at finding people, she says.

Then looking up to Caine she simply says.

– I know, same here.

Caine nods and Jupiter leaves the office and crosses over to her mother and aunt suite and Menura opens the door for her.

– Thank you, she says.

Then she crosses the suite and slumps onto a floating sofa, with tears welling in her eyes.

Aleksa and Nino rush to her side but she raises a finger to stop them.

She presses her comm bracelet.

[What can I do for you, Jupiter?] Says Kiza.
– Is there any way to access the Internet from here?
[No, but you can contact the Keepers to find the information you need.]
– Thanks, see you later.

She presses her comm to contact Shrill.

[Your Benevolent Mother, your contact is an honor.]
– Hello, Shrill, could you access the Internet and tell me who was the roman god or goddess of the hunt?

A tweak comes through the comm, and then Shrill answers.
[Diana was goddess of the hunt and the moon]

Jupiter smirks. Wolves, Lycans, Lycantants, hunt, moon; it all goes together.
– Thank you Shrill.

And then she contacts Stinger.

[Your Majesty?] He says
– Stinger, I just gave a tracking contract to Caine, he has to find Phylo’s sister who disappeared three years ago.
[I understand.]
– I want a ship with portal capabilities renamed Diana and prep and ready for him, make sure he has everything he needs.
[Diana, Your Majesty?]
– After the Roman goddess of the hunt and the moon.
[I understand.]
– And I will need guards to replace him for our trip to the Hall of Titles.
[Of course, Your Majesty, I’ll send Leo, Veel, Castor and Kalie.]
– Thank you, Stinger.

After she presses her comm bracelet one last time, she finally let go of her tear ducts and her mother
and aunt cradle her.

– It’s okay, Jupiter. He will be fine, you told us he is the best.
– I know mama, but it still hurts to let him go.
– It’s what happens when kingdoms collide. You have to rule your worlds inside too, says Nino.
– It’s hard to play Queen, aunt Nino, when my soul wants to keep him by my side, Jupiter says.
– Yes, it’s too much for anyone to bear alone, but you are not alone. You have us and he’ll be back.

Then to her mother and aunt dismay, she just collapses laughing. When she stops, her mother asks:

– What was that about?
– “He’ll be back” she says using a low menacing voice.

Then Aleksa and Nino catch on the pun and laugh too. Their laughing fit is cut by a chime at the door.

– Come in! Calls Aleksa.

Caine comes in and smelling Jupiter’s emotions he immediately walks to Jupiter and kneel in front of her taking her hands in his.

Aleksa and Nino stand and move to the side of the room, giving them some privacy.

– I won’t go, if you don’t want me too, he says, looking deep in her eyes.
– No, I’m doing okay, she says with a shake in her voice.

She stands, making Caine stand with her and their kiss is as deep has their love and passionate has the anguish of him leaving.

– I spoke to Stinger, she says. You’ll have a ship and everything you need.

He kisses her again and breathes in deeply behind her ear, capturing every detail of her scent. Jupiter reciprocates the gesture and breaths him in deeply then murmurs:

– I’m not sure I said it all earlier, when I fell asleep on you. You smell like jungle, spices and log fire.

Caine has his shy smile and then holds Jupiter in his arms and brushes his fingers on her cheek.

– I love you, Jupiter, he says before kissing her again.
– I love you too Caine, but now go or I won’t be able to let you go.

Caine takes a step back and feels both joy and sadness. He forces himself to turn around and with every step the hole in his chest gets bigger. He knows he is leaving his heart behind. Aleksa and Nino ambush him at the door.

– Do not take unnecessary risks, moy syn. Aleksa tells him, squeezing his arm.
– We will take care of her while you are away, Nino says, patting him on his bicep.
– Thank you both, he says.

Knowing that she will not be alone comforts him a little but he still leaves the suite with tears in his eyes.

---Caine---
Once out of the suite, Caine heads for the military deck, at each step the pain in his chest becomes his companion and when he knocks at Stinger’s office door, he knows it inside out. The twitch when he remembers her smile, the twinge when he remembers her kisses, the stabbing pain at the memory of her scent and the cold emptiness at her absence.

– Come in, says Stinger.

When Stinger sees his XO, he knows exactly what he feels; he felt like that for 18 years.

– Hey, pup, Jupiter informed me, getting ready to go?

Caine nods.

– Sting… how did you manage to do it?
– I had Kiza, pup, I had to keep going for Kiza.

Caine sighs.

– Hey, don’t get yourself in a panic attack now, you will be with her again. I did it for 18 years, it won’t take you that long to track one human. And you can contact her on the comm.
– My head knows that, Sting, but my heart…
– I know, pup, I know. You have to snap out of it. The faster you get the job done, the faster you can be home again.
– Right, he says letting out a deep breath. Okay.
– Better, says Stinger. Now, here are some credits, fill your to-go bag with what you need and your ship is the Planet Jumper JJ-Π-234 – Diana.
– Diana?
– Jupiter asked that your ship be renamed after the Roman goddess of the hunt and the moon.

Caine smiles at the care Jupiter puts in everything she does. Then shaking his feelings, he straightens up, picks up the stack of credits and heads for the equipment room.

After collecting his equipment, he salutes his captain and heads over to their bedroom where he changes shirt, leaving the one he wore on their bed, for Jupiter. After that he feels ready and heads over to the docking bay. Boarding the Diana, he smiles thinking of Jupiter and slowly his smile turns into a hunter’s teeth baring.

After a system’s check, Caine requests permission to launch and heads over to the Aegis headquarters.

---Jupiter---

When tears threaten again, Jupiter takes a minute or two to do some deep breathing to shut down the pain stabbing her in the heart.

– I will be okay, she tells her mother and aunt, I just have to keep busy.

Aleksa nods and Nino gives her a sad smile.

– Your Majesty, says Max’s voice.
– Yes?
– The Aegis are docking, they are carrying Advocate Bob.
– Very well, we will be in the Reception Hall, inform Kiza to join us there.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

They leave the suite, outside the door, beside Menura, their complement of guards is awaiting. Leo, Veel, Castor and Kalie.

– Hi guys, we are going to the Reception Hall.

They nod and Jupiter queenly walks, followed by her mother and aunt and then by the guards.

– What did you have to tell me, mama? She asks in Russian.
– Your people, they have… Aleksa starts.
– What do you mean? Jupiter asks.

They enter the Reception Hall and walk toward the dais.

– We visited their rooms, and we have more belongings and space in Vassily’s basement then they have. Aleksa says.
– The children don’t even have toys, and they have a change of clothes or two. Adds Nino.
– And the children sleep 2-3 per bed. Oh, and everything is dark grey. It’s so depressing.

Kiza enters the Reception Hall at that moment.

– No toys, no clothes, no space, no colors… and Erminea said it was above what Splices are used too…

Aleksa and Nino nod.

They sit on their chairs and throne on the dais; Kiza stops at the bottom of the dais and Jupiter gesture for her to climb.

– Kiza, what are Splices used too, to accept such poor conditions?
– Well, a rag on the floor to sleep on for some… if they are lucky, they have a pillow. Aegis and legionnaires actually have beds and commanding officers sometimes can have an actual room. Explains Kiza.
– So, your house on Earth before I fixed it, it was what? A palace for a Splice?
– I was allowed such luxury, to blend in with the population, says Kiza.

Jupiter bottles up her anger at the society.

– Well, fixing this should keep me busy while Caine is away. I guess I will be giving gifts for my birthday this year.
– Caine is away? Asks Kiza, switching to English.
– Yes… she pauses. He is tracking Phylo’s sister who disappeared three years ago.

Kiza nods.
The door opens up to let Advocate Bob and Captain Tsing through.

– Your Majesty, Your Graces, I am Intergalactic Advocate Bob, here to assist you through the identity creation process. He says with a smile.
– It is nice to see you again Advocate Bob. Says Jupiter.
– Your Majesty, if you would permit it, the Aegis will escort you to the Commonwealth Ministry. Says Captain Tsing.
– Of course.
They all head for the docking bay and board the Aegis cruiser.

---Stinger---

After Caine left his office, Stinger feels his old pain creep on him and he checks in with Max to know where Honey-Bee is.

– Madam Apini is currently with Ms. Silver and La Jade in the nursery.

Knowing she is here, the deck above him makes him smile and he has a sudden desire to hold her in his arms. He calls in Aves to replace him and when he is there, he exits his office and heads to the nursery. When he is on the nursery deck, he can feel her presence. At the nursery door he hears Song Jade instructing Feliz Silver in the care of infants.

Honey-Bee is supervising Feliz Silver’s instruction when she feels a familiar presence nearby and then she hears a low buzzing sound. She stands and Song Jade pauses her instructions.

– Continue, I will be back shortly.

Stepping out of the nursery she is caught by strong arms. She returns the embrace and pulls Stinger in her office, which is nothing but an empty room at the moment. She closes the door on their way in.

– Love, what is it? Says Honey-Bee.
– Honey-Bee, he breathes out.

Then after hugging and kissing her he says.

– I needed to make sure it was all true.
– Oh, love, I’m here, I will always be here. I belong to you.
– I know, my Queen. I just needed to remind myself.

He kisses her again then murmurs:

– I have to go.
– I know, and I have work to do.
– I will see you tonight.

They both emit their buzzing sound and exit the office. Honey-Bee returns to her work and Stinger gathers the personnel who have shopping to do.

---Hall of Titles---

– Sheave… says the front desk clerk.
– These are Their Graces the mother and aunt of her Majesty Queen Jupiter Jones and we have come to seal their identification.
– You need to file an identification petition. If the identification is held, you need a creation of title.
– Thank you.

They move to a first line where Aleksa and Nino’s gene-print are scanned against all available gene-print on file. When none returns but the gene-print clearly indicates they are Entitled, the clerk tells
them:

– File a Creation claim through Central services, section 10-24.

At Central services, the clerk tells them:

– This is for Join claim, not Creation claim, Creation claim is at section 10-25.

They change section and the Creation claim is empty. Advocate Bob rings the bell, and a clerk comes to the booth.

– Hoofpaw! I have not seen anyone here in years. What can I do for you? Says the equine looking Splice.
– These are the founders of a new House. Says Advocate Bob handing over some sheaves.

The clerk processes the sheave work for the creation of a new House.

– Who is the head of the new House?
– Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of House Abrasax.
– Queen of two Houses, interesting. Please seal this.

Jupiter seals the sheave with her seal and the clerk hands it over to Aleksa:

– Press your thumb into the depression.

Aleksa scans her thumb and the clerks hands a small sheave to Advocate Bob.

– Your Grace, he says to Aleksa, handing her the sheave.
– Your turn, the clerk says to Nino.

Nino scans her thumb too and the process repeats.

– Seals and signets are on Sub-33. Says the clerk.

Advocate Bob leaves them and they head down to Sub-33. Jupiter has some flashbacks of maintenance conduits, but with their fours guards, they should be safe today. At Seals and Signets, the same strange man welcomes them.

– Your Majesty is looking well. He says.
– Very well, thank you.

He takes Aleksa’s small sheave, makes his steampunk looking machines work and tells her to place her wrist in the seal machine. He makes the machine works, and Aleksa receives her seal. Then he hands Aleksa two sheaves: “Code and Conduct Guide” and “Entitled ways and means commission”. After that the process repeats for Nino.

– Congratulation, Your Graces.
– Thank you, they say.

When they are done, they head back to the Aegis Cruiser and back to the Maximilian Jones without any problems.
Before leaving his ship, Caine reviews all the information Phylo gave him on his sister. He also memorized Phylo’s scent and the faint scent that was left on a scarf she has forgotten the last time she visited him. He also has a holopicture of the woman, and her name Truly Percadium. If only the trail was not three years old, he would be done in a day or two… Maybe the Aegis will have more information then what they were telling Phylo, and Her Majesty’s contract would grant him access to it.

He exits the Diana and heads over to the Aegis headquarter. Legionnaires do not often enter the Aegis HQ unless they want to switch from one to the other and Skyjacker can not change like that. The Aegis clerk welcomes Caine with a smile.

– Hello, welcome to the Aegis. Are you here for an employment switch?
– No, replies Caine, unfolding his wings.
– Oh, I see… what can the Aegis do for a Skyjacker?
– Her Majesty, Queen Jupiter Jones, first prime of House Abrasax has contracted me to gather information about one of your members.

The clerk swallows at the mention of royalty.

– And you are?
– Commander Caine Wise.

The clerk somehow manages to keep upright, the reputation of Caine Wise precedes him, and contacts a superior.

– Sir, I think you should come to the lobby… No, not over the comm… Yes, I am sure… Thank you, sir.

Caine smirks slightly. The clerk felt panic at his name. His reputation served him well in the gyre. Then he felt a prick in his chest as the memory of Jupiter asking him his name snaked its way into his mind. It all lasted a mere second but it reminded him to be careful what he thinks about.

– What is it Maikle? Says a man entering the lobby.
– Sir, this is Commander Caine Wise of the Skyjackers.

The older man flinches at the name but hides it away fast. Caine is impressed.

– I am General Kiran Toly. What can I do for someone of your reputation?
– Perhaps we should talk in private, sir. Says Caine.
– Of course, please follow me.

The man smells truthful, so he steps in behind him. General Toly guides him to his private office and closes the door on them.

– Now, what can I do for you Commander? He asks again, feeling nervous.
– Sir, you have nothing to worry about, Caine says with a smirk.

The General relaxes slightly.

– I am here because I am under contract from Her Majesty Queen Jupiter Jones, signified recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax, to track and collect information on a member of the Aegis.
– Intelligence? That does not seem like a good use of your skills. May I see your contract?

Caine hands over the sheave and General Toly stares at it for a long time.
General?
I’m sorry, I was her… supervisor…

At the way he smells and looks when saying the word supervisor Caine understands that he was way more then that.

You were more then her supervisor.
Yes, we were lovers, but that is not permitted in the Aegis. We talked about leaving the Aegis to be able to be together. But when she vanished, I stayed and put all the resources I could into finding her… If anyone can find something about her, it’s you. No one has heard from her since...

What happened?
I do not know, she did not report in of show up for information drops. We have sent people to look for her and nothing. The drop points are still monitored and even after all this time not a single drop of information or contact.

The General pauses. Then accessing data with a holocontrol he transfers it to a sheave and gives it to Caine.

This is all the information and mission parameters for her last mission. I would just like to know…
Yes?
Do you know why she is doing this?

Caine smirks, even at distance Jupiter changes people’s lives.

Because Truly’s brother asked her.
Phylo? Why? How does he know her?
Access the Aegis report on the events at the Jupiter refinery. Phylo is the commander on the cruiser that saved Her Majesty and her family.

General Tylo nods, then looking in a drawer he hands Caine a holopicture of him with Truly.

This might help.

Caine takes his leave and returns to his ship. On board he studies and process his new information and memorize it with the General’s scent too.

---Legion HQ---

After dropping Erminea, Buzz and Plume at the shopping district, Stringer lands the Mercury at the Legion headquarters. He gets in fast with his credentials, being the commander of the best Skyjacker unit grants you access without too much harassment and being the chief of security of a royal, removes most of the other delays.

Captain Apini, welcome to the Legion headquarters. Says the front desk legionnaire.
Good day, ensign. Can you give me the direction to the Materiel supply?
Of course, Captain, left corridor all the way to the end and turn left.

Stinger nods.

Thank you, ensign.

Following the indications, he arrives at Materiel supply and is greeted by a grumpy lieutenant.
– I am sorry sir, but we have no replacement boots if you forgot to charge yours.
– What is that attitude lieutenant? And my boots are fine.

The young lieutenant spine snaps straight.

– I am sorry sir, I have had 8 officers asked for replacement boots just today. What can I do for you?
– I require a few items. He says handing over the two sheaves.

The lieutenant takes the sheaves.

– Material request can be processed through… he starts to say.

But he sees the name and long list of items and upgrades and stops himself.

– Oh, you’re the Captain Apini…

Stinger nods.

– I see why you came in person, sir, that would have gotten stuck in identification and authorization for days. I do not recognize the seal, who is it for?
– Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of House Abrasax and House Bolotnikov-Jones, signified recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax. He answers with a proud grin.

The lieutenant nods.

– A recurrence, that explains the long list of requests, he says.
– Yes, what she inherited is out of date or not in prime condition.
– Will you be taking the items with you or do you want a delivery.
– I will be taking the items from the short list that you can fulfill and I will need that sheave back.

The long list can be delivered to the Maximilian Jones.

– Sir?
– That is the name of Her Majesty’s royal clipper. JJ-A-Ω-5 – Maximilian Jones.
– I understand, I will contact them to arrange delivery. Please land your ship on loading pad LHQ-5 for the fulfillment of the other requested items.
– Thank you, lieutenant.

Stinger leaves the headquarter and boards the Mercury.

– Captain Stinger Apini requesting lift-off permission from landing pad and landing permission on loading pad LHQ-5 for the JJ-Δ-56-9 – Mercury.
– Permission granted JJ-Δ-56-9 – Mercury. Comes a voice through the comm.

Stinger lands on the loading pad and the lieutenant from Material supply supervises some junior legionnaire in loading the items on the list. Once loaded the lieutenant marks the items as delivered and gives the sheave back to Stinger.

– Have a good day Captain, he says saluting.

Stinger returns the salute and board the Mercury back. After receiving permission to lift off he lands at the shopping district to complete the request from Caine. He gathers the few items quickly and loads them into the ship.

He was about to ask for a status report from Aves, when he contacts him on the emergency channel.
When Erminea, Buzz and Plume are dropped at the shopping district, Erminea and Plume are overwhelmed by all that they see. Has an ex-Legionnaire, Buzz has seen more overwhelming, but he remembers how he felt the first time he saw such luxuries and articles spread across miles of shops, so he lets Erminea and Plume process the maze of shops.

When they are steady, they start the shopping. It is a long list but everything was going fine until they hit more high-end stores for some equipment and food. People started to get suspicious. Asking for whom they were shopping, but they were satisfied when they showed the sealed sheaves.

Once they got to the Entitled shops though, all hell broke loose. They were arrested by shop keepers and accused of crimes ranging from impersonating royal personnel to shopping out of livery to forged identity and even being from the contraband ring.

In all the commotion, Plume had just enough time to tap her implant and send a coddled message to her husband. He immediately contacted Stinger on the emergency channel.

– Yes?
[Sir, I’ve received a coded message from my wife, seems the shopping team is in trouble.]
– Stay on the line, I’ll check it out.

Stinger exits the Mercury and taking to the air he immediately sees a crowd near the more exclusive shops. He flies above the crowd and sees their people in the middle and hears the accusation made against them.

– Aves, we need Her Majesty in full regalia, the shop keepers don’t believe they are shopping for her. Brief her, I’ll keep an eye on things from here.
[Yes, sir.]

Ten minutes later a cruiser flies over the shopping district and a gray-beam activates under it. The crowd gets quiet, usually people are not allowed to beam down in the shopping district. Kiza beams down and then two by two the Skybreakers follow, wings open. Pavonia and Kalie, Ezin and Falco, Menura and Castor. After that Aleksa and Nino beam down with Tristan and Veel orbiting the beam. They take a step back once on the ground so Jupiter lands in front of them. Jupiter beams last with Aves and Leo orbiting the beam. Stinger joins them and lands at the same time as Jupiter, behind Aleksa and Nino.

Jupiter took the time to change into a remarkable dress, studded with diamonds and crystals and added a diadem on her hair.

– Captain, Jupiter says.
– Majesty, Stinger says with a full salute, raising his wings above his head.

Jupiter does a small gesture with her hand and Kiza speaks.

– Make way for Her Majesty. Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones and Their Graces the Grand Duchess Aleksa Jones and the Duchess Nino Bolotnikov.

The crowd splits in two and Jupiter and all her people walk toward Erminea, Buzz and Plume. When Jupiter gaze upon them, she is glad that they do not seem physically hurt.
– You will release my properties. Jupiter says loudly and wincing internally at the word property.

The people still holding Erminea, Buzz and Plume let them go.

– Red-Tail, Gulo, Ketakeran, Jupiter says, gesturing for them to go to them with her index finger.

The three Skybreakers leave their position and the others reorganise themselves so that there are no gaps in security.

When they signal that they are fine, she nods and they move into their proper position in her honor guard.

– Kiza, take note of the shops who did not mistreat them and give the list to Buzz, telling him to shop there first, says Jupiter softly, in Russian.

Kiza nods and Jupiter speaks up.

– It may be hard to understand for those who lack logic in their genetic make-up but they, she points to her people, are out of livery for the very simple reason that they do not have a livery yet. They are actually shopping for, amongst other things, the equipment to make their livery. Now you will let them shop for everything I require or I will file heavy tax grievances against anyone who does not comply.

The crowd is so silent you could hear a pin drop. No one moves, no one dares to breathe.

– What are they waiting for? Asks Jupiter in Russian,
– Punishments, answers Stinger.
– Oh right, I’m a royal so I must be petty and cruel... Let me think...

Switching back to English.

– Captain, I want who ever started this to be brought before me. She orders.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

While Stinger consorts with Buzz, Erminea and Plume and then brings three humans to her, Jupiter takes the time to think on how to punish those who started this. Jupiter looks at the three humans, a cold smile on her face. Her glare must be working, because they flinch.

– Miss Kiza, details? She asks Kiza.

Kiza scans the three humans and their files are displayed on a sheave. All three are shop employees of a sort, good. She takes the sheave and places a sentence of two days servitude on the three humans.

– Madam Erminea, Mr. Buzz and Chef Plume, each of you choose one of them to be your servant for the next two days.

The crowd gasps. Humans are not made servants of Splices. It sends a clear message to everyone not to harass her people.

Erminea, Buzz and Plume go ahead and choose their servant and when it is done she turns around and walks to Stinger.

– Stinger assign them some security and stay here with the Mercury. She says in Russian.
– Leo, Tristan, you stay with them he says.

They leave the honor guard and join the shopping team and the humans.
Jupiter presses her comm bracelet contacting Vespa who stayed on the cruiser and says “Now”.

The up grav-beam activates and Jupiter goes back up to the cruiser with Aves and Veel orbiting the beam and the rest of her people go up in order, with Kiza going up last after she gave the sheave and instructions to Buzz.

The cruiser departs and the people in the shopping district slowly go back to business as usual.

Stinger returns to the Mercury and the shopping team with their humans and security on tow return to their shopping.

On his way to the Mercury Stinger thinks. *Jupiter is going to change the universe without realising it. She probably does not even know what a huge punch she just gave to the society by making humans serve Splices, even if it’s just for two days.*

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At the opposite end of the shopping district, Caine pretends to be browsing items in a shop, waiting to meet a contact he has in the contraband ring. He picks up an item, scrutinises it and places it back. The shop keeper eyes him so he moves on to the next shop, still pretending to browse. He does not wait long before he hears a familiar bird whistle. Going around the next shop he meets his contact. Razo is standing there with huge blue hair and her facial flower tattoos.

– Razo. He says.
– Wise. She says.
– I am looking for someone.
– That’s not new.

He smirks.

– She disappeared three years ago.
– That is a pretty cold trail, but if anyone can find someone after this long it’s you. You got a holo?
– Yeah.

He shows her the holos he got from Phylo Percadium and Kiran Toly.

– Have not seen her before and I’ve been in the ring for long time. She could be an unregistered.

Caine shivers at the thought. Unregistered were sentient bought illegally, their owners were usually not very nice.

Caine always keeps an ear open in public spaces and this time was no different. When the commotion starts he warns Razo.

– Something is going on. Caine says in a low voice.
– I know.
– Do you have eyes?
– No, that is too far away.

Suddenly a chill goes down his back when he sees his captain fly above the crowd. He knows it’s Stinger at the way he flies. He can not contact him at the moment so he turns back to Razo. She has a
confused look on her face.

– What is it?
– I can’t place it, he seems familiar somehow, but according to my implant I’ve never seen him around, she says pointing to the general.
– Anything else you can think of?
– Three years, you’ve said, Ibis might know more then I do. I stayed with the Aegis for half a year three years ago. I missed some stuff.

Caine nods, smugglers and contrabanders all considered normal to spend some time in a prison or another at a moment in their life.

– Can you arrange a meeting?
– Let me see what I can do.

Her flower tattoos shift and she goes still.

Caine keeps an eye and an ear out to the situation in the shopping district wondering what is going on.

– He will be back in the system tomorrow with a load for his shop, you can meet him anytime after mid-day.
– Okay.

They were about to part way when a cruiser flies in and stays above the shopping district.

– What is a cruiser doing here?
– I don’t know but no one is moving and if we move…
– Right, let’s wait this out.

When a grav-beam activates and Skyjackers start pouring down, Caine knows who is about to come down and he was not mistaken. His heart beats faster in his chest and his breath catches in his throat. Her sparkling dress reflect every ray of light, it is a glorious sight. With Stinger joining her, he counted 11 Skyjackers and he noticed Aleksa and Nino too. Full regalia, this must be important.

Her voice carries in the silence and he hears her say:

– You will release my properties.

He and Razo stay silent like everyone else and they wait.

After a few minutes he hears people gasping and the grav-beam reactivates and they all go back to the cruiser except three Skyjackers.

After the cruiser left and people went back to their business, he parts way with Razo and goes back to the Diana, where he contacts Stinger.

[Hey, pup, don’t tell me you found her already?]
– Not yet, but I have more information then I had.
[Then why are you calling? It’s not been long enough to report in]
– I am in the shopping district.
Oh, and you want to know what happened.
Caine makes an agreeing sound.
Well apparently, it’s suspicious to shop for a Royal out of livery and Erminea, Buzz and Plume got in trouble for doing so. Jupiter just put in a very good show and punched society in the face.
– What do you mean?
The three humans responsible for restraining them are now servants for Erminea, Buzz and Plume, for two days.
– She did not?
[Yes, she did.]
– Incredible!

---Maximilian Jones---

On board the Maximilian Jones, Jupiter is exhausted. Being Queen in front of so many at a time drained her, her dress is so heavy she has trouble walking in it and she misses Caine so much.

– Kiza, get your sister and join me in my bedroom. She murmurs.

She starts to walk and nearly falls flat on her face, she only stays upright because Ezin and Menura catch her.

– Sorry, she mumbles, I’m exhausted and this dress is not made for walking.

She does not catch Aves’s order, her brain is in such a fog, but she registers a “If your Majesty will permit?” and she nods. Suddenly, she is picked up and sat on Veel and Castor’s linked arms and carried to her quarters.

When she is sitting on a couch, she slumps backwards with a murmured “Thank you”.

– We will be in the antechamber, Jupiter, says Castor.

She nods and closes her eyes. She was almost unconscious when Kiza and Seiza enter her room.


– Oh God, Seiza, help me get out of this dress. Jupiter says, trying to stand.

In the end both Kiza and Seiza had to help her get out of the dress and change into something comfortable.

– No wonder you could not walk easily in that! Exclaims Kiza, holding the dress. There is enough diamonds and crystals on here to eliminate hunger on Earth.

Jupiter’s mouth hangs open a moment and then a huge yawn takes over.

– Why am I so tired suddenly? What time is it?
– It is almost dinner time, standard time.
– That is what in Chicago time?
– Almost 9:00pm.
– Arg… yeah, I understand now, that is my bedtime. She shakes her head. I’m going to bed, Seiza, you are dismissed until morning. Kiza, check on my mom and aunt but they might have gone to bed too, also assign room to the three humans, nothing better then what you guys have.

The sisters leave and Jupiter sleepily walks to her bed, removing her bra while walking. Her head is
in a fog and her heart is aching from Caine’s absence. She was ready to collapse on the bed when she notices Caine’s shirt on it. It warms her heart and brings tears to her eyes, then taking the shirt she brings it up to her face and smells it. It smells like him. She puts Caine’s shirt over her own, snuggles herself into it and climbs into bed. It does not take long before she is asleep from exhaustion. It has been a very long day.

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In the shopping district, the shopping team, their two-day servants and security team encounter no more trouble while shopping. Using the list Buzz received from Kiza, they buy every remaining item on the lists. All the purchased items have been sent to a loading platform and once their shopping is completed Buzz arranges to have all items shipped to the Maximilian Jones.

They meet Stinger at the Mercury and return to the Maximilian Jones, right in time to see three gundalows, cargo type ships, hanging by in space.

Upon docking, they are greeted by Lieutenant-commander Enilorac Alil, the ship chief of security.

– Captain Apini! Since you were away on the planet, I’ve taken the liberty to do a preliminary security check on the incoming gundalows, everything seems to be in order, no forbidden technologies or illegal goods detected.
– Thank you, commander Alil. When I am unavailable, please check with commander Wise or lieutenant-commander Red-Tail, if commander Wise is unavailable too, not to create unnecessary delays.
– Understood, captain.

Stinger looks at the report on the gundalows.

– Very well, they may dock and you may tend to your duties.

Commander Alil leaves and Stinger, Buzz, Erminea and Plume head to the cargo docking bay, on a lower level. The human servants follow and so do Leo and Tristan.

After the gundalows have docked, the on-board personnel empty the cargo onto the floor and Stinger, Buzz, Erminea and Plume check out the content to make sure everything is accounted for. After that comes the long job of moving everything to the appropriate location. For that they use fermionic platforms to load items on and move them. The human servants work really hard at this and after two hours the equipment and furniture are all in the proper rooms, personnel will organise them according to their needs, the perishables are stored in the food preserver and the mess hall food distributor has been restocked.

After a quick meal in the mess hall, they all turn in and the humans are shown to a servant’s room, where three mattresses directly on the floor awaits them. Ezin replaces Leo and Tristan on guarding the humans and they also turn in for the night.

---Caine---

Back on Orous, Caine has met other contacts, bought a meal and rented a small room to spend the night. The room is not fully secured so he knows he will sleep with one eye open.

After eating his meal, he secures the room as much as he can and settles in on the bedding. Before closing his eyes, he reviews all that he has learned about Truly Percadium and then his thoughts shift
to another woman; Jupiter. How he misses her warm eyes and that sweet cinnamon heart scent that completely fries his brain when he smells it. He toys with the idea of calling her, but he decides against it, it would bring the pain back to hear her voice. When he closes his eyes, he only hopes that the nightmares won’t return since Jupiter is so far away. He has not slept without her since the first night in Chicago, he does not know what to expect.

Two hours later, He wakes up from a soft rain dream to a loud noise, someone just crashed through his door! He is up, mauler in hand, pointed at the intruder, when he recognizes the blue hair. Razo!

– Wise! I found something. She whispers.

Caine kneels and sees that she is injured badly. Keeping on alert, he grabs a can of ReCell in his bag and spray over the wounds around vital organs.

– Hang on, Razo.

Once the ReCell fixed the most urgent, he picks up his to-go bag, and anything that could lead back to him, helps her stand and they leave through the window. His boots surf easily and Razo holds on to him. He brings her to the Diana.

– Stay low, he tells Razo.

She nods slightly and he lands at the ship. Unlocking the door with his gene-print they get in and he locks back the door.

Razo is still injured and she is bleeding. He can’t bring her to a local medical clinic. There is only one option, the Maximilian Jones.

After using a royal clearance code, he lifts up and flies to the Maximilian Jones, while contacting Stinger on the emergency channel.

[Pup, what is it?]
– I’m on my way in, I need Dr. Comb in the docking bay.
[You hurt?]  
– Not me, my contact, badly.
[We’ll be there.]

– Wise, says Razo again.
– Keep your strength, Razo.

They land in the bay and he brings her out in his arms. He places her on the stretcher and Dr. Comb and Song Jade take over.

– Did you do anything? Dr. Comb asks.
– I sprayed ReCell on her torso.

She nods.

– Wise! Razo says a third time.
– What?
– I found out why he looked familiar, she says and she opens up a secret pocket on her jacket.

Her hand falls back and she loses consciousness. Dr. Comb and Song Jade rush Razo to the Med-bay, fortunately, it’s close to the docking bay.
Caine goes with them, so does Stinger.

In Med-bay Dr. Comb quickly scans Razo while Song Jade removes her clothing. Caine takes her jacket and leaves the Med-room, followed by Stinger. He looks into the pocket she opened and what he finds surprises him.

– What did she almost die for? Asks Stinger.
– A strand of hair…
– Is it hers?

Caine brings the lock of hair to his nose and inhale deeply. The scent is familiar, but it is not Truly, not exactly.

He takes the holo of Truly and General Kiran Toly and hands it to Stinger.

– It’s not hers, nor his, but it’s both of them at the same time.
– Beeswax, a child?

Caine can only nod.

– I hope she pulls through, only her knows where she got that. He says.

Stinger nods and then assessing his second in command he says.

– Go clean up, pup, I’ll stay here.

Caine nods slightly and he heads for the barracks, he is not about to go in the royal quarter filthy with blood and scare the life out of Jupiter. After a quick clean and a change of uniform, he goes back to the Med-bay.

– Any news? He asks Stinger.
– Nothing yet. What happened to her?
– I don’t know, she crashed through my door like that.

They wait for news, exchanging looks. It seems to take too much time and they get nervous. When Dr. Comb finally comes out of the Med-room, they look at her anxiously.

– How is she doctor? Asks Caine.
– Fully healed and asking for you, commander.
– Thank you, doctor. He says rushing into the Med-room.

Stinger follows.

– Wise, the woman says.
– Razo, what happened?
– That man in the holo, I found out why he looked familiar. There is a woman who comes to Ibis’s shop, she always has this toddler with her. The toddler and the man, they look the same, but he has the hair color of the woman in the holo.
– That is his hair? Caine says showing the short lock of hair.
– Yes. I managed to take and hide it before they caught me. They tortured me to try and find out what I wanted with the boy and I managed to escape.
– Who is they? Asks Stinger.

Razo looks at Caine, who nods.
Falque’s gang, one of the most vicious gang in the contraband ring. They deal in sentients.

You did a very good thing Razo, this, smells like them, that boy is their child. He says showing the lock of hair.

Then if she is still alive, she must be in one of Falque’s unregistered harem.

All three of them wince at the thought.

The woman who comes at Ibis’s shop, would he know who she is?

I believe so.

And would she know you are linked to him? Is he in danger?

I do not know…

You’d better contact him.

Razo nods and goes still.

Ibis knows exactly who we are talking about, he is coming back right now. She says after a few minutes.

Tell him not to return to his shop, and meet us at the Silent Nibble. Says Caine.

She goes still again.

Done. He should be there in about 30 ticks. We should get going too.

It is then that she realises that she is in a surgical gown.

Erm, if I had something to wear.

Song Jade enters the Med-room.

Ah Ms. I see you are awake. I’ve taken the liberty to run your clothing through the cleanser. She says, placing a pile of clothes on the Med-bed.

Thank you, La Jade, says Caine.

Song Jade, Stinger and Caine exit the room so Razo can put her clothes on.

When Razo is ready, they go back to the docking bay. Where Razo suddenly feels she missed too many details while she was bleeding out.

Wise? She asks.

Yeah?

Is that the cruiser from the shopping district? she says pointing to a ship in the docking bay.

Yes, it is.

And, where are we?

On board the Maximilian Jones, royal clipper of Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones.

You can come on a royal clipper like that?

I would sure hope so, I am Her Majesty’s favorite personal guard and my commanding officer is her Chief of security.

Rookery! You’ve gone up, Wise.

He smirks, thinking: You have no idea.

Come on, he tells her going to the Diana.
At the Diana, Kalie is waiting for them.

– Commander, the captain ordered me to accompany you, in case you need medical assistance. I’ve already cleaned the blood off the Diana’s floor and packed all the medical equipment I could need.
– Okay. Kalie, meet Razo, Razo, Kalie, field medic.

---Rescue---

20 ticks later Razo is sitting with a human looking Caine at a table in the Silent Nibble. He chose to activate the anonymizer because the wings would be like holding a sign that says “Does not belong here”. There are some Splices that can see through the anonymizing effect, but he does not see any present in the tavern. Kalie stayed on the Diana, androids are not welcomed in taverns.

They order drinks as not to look out of place and wait for Ibis. A console in a corner is displaying recent news. The tavern patron raises the volume when the story about the recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax is on.

[Today, we got our first look at the new Queen of the Abrasax, says the newscaster. The image changes to the scene of Jupiter descending in the fermionic field of the grav-beam wearing the stunning glittering dress with the Skyjackers orbiting around her. OrousNews has learned that three of her retinue were shopping for her and were taken into custody by shop keepers for being out of livery. It would appear that Her Majesty does not take too kindly to her belongings to be mistreated because she descended on the culprits in full regalia and with authority. They show a scene of Jupiter saying “It may be hard to understand for those who lack logic in their genetic make-up but they are out of livery for the very simple reason that they do not have a livery yet.”
That’s true says the second newscaster. We have learned that the three humans responsible for mistreating her retinue were sentenced to a two-day servitude and that Her Majesty gave them as servants to her spliced retinue.]

There are a few gasps and approving noises from the Splices in the tavern. Caine smirks.

[The newscaster continues. At this moment, we would like to turn to our panel of experts on royalty for their take on the events. I would like to says that has a recurrence, she is stepping quite nicely into her role, not letting anyone step on her toes. Says the first expert. For a Tersie recurrence, who ascended a few days ago, she is doing quite well. Of course, she has a lot to learn, but she seems to have acquired the loyalty of the best already, which is not a small feat. Says the second expert. And let me tell you, having Skyjackers as personal guards is another demonstration of the power she already has. Not only that, says the third, but they are not just any Skyjackers. My source in the Legion told me that they are the legendary Skybreakers, that she specifically requested their unit and that they are lead by the also legendary Stinger Apini. Don’t forget the also legendary and second in command, the one everyone fears in the night, Caine Wise. Adds the first expert.]

At his name, Razo looks at him and they both smirks. If they only knew.

[Unfortunately, that is all the time we have today but I am sure we have not heard the last of Her Majesty. Concludes the first newscaster. From everyone at OrousNews, have a great one.]
listens in a little, but there is nothing threatening said, so he turns to Razo.

– She really did that? She asks.
– Yes.
– Why?
– Because she cares. He says with an enigmatic smile.

Ibis enters the tavern before she can ask for details. He is tall, dark skinned and sports black feathers instead of hair. He walks to their table and greets them.

– Razo, Wise.
– Ibis they reply.

And then he smells it, the sweetish scent of adrenalin, the acrid scent of anxiety and the acidulous taste of anticipation. He stands so fast, turning his shield and mauler on, that the table tumbles over. Ibis and Razo follow almost as quick as him and all three of them have weapons pointed at the man who stood in front of them, pointing a gun at Ibis.

– There is no scenario in which you come out of this successful and only one in which you stay alive, says Caine.
– I don’t know you and I have no problem with you, he tells Caine, but Falque wants to see these two, they have been poking around where they don’t belong.
– Well, you can turn around and leave and give Falque a message from me. Tell him that they have been poking around for me, are under my protection and that he can expect a visit from me.

He pauses, deactivating the anonymizer.

– Caine Wise.

The petrified crowd gasps while the man turns white and runs out the door.

He turns his shield off and they all holster their weapons.

– Let’s go, he says.

They all head for the door and before exiting Caine tosses 10 C’s to the patron for his trouble.

He calls in Kalie, and they follow the scared man’s trail. On the way they compare information. The woman coming to Ibis’s shop is a nanny, she takes care of Falque’s son, or at least the boy he thinks is his son. Through conversations, Ibis gathered that the boy’s mother is ill or something.

As predicted the man ran all the way back to Falque’s main compound. Through an open window he can hear the scared man tell Falque that Caine Wise is after him and Falque’s order to double security and that he will be retreating to the safe room.

– Keep watch outside, he tells Razo and Ibis. Kalie you are with me.

They get in before they could beef security and they find a side door leading to the kitchen. They activate their anonymizers and slowly, carefully explore the compound. After a fourth corridor, he catches a familiar scent, faint but vibrant, joyful and bubbly. He follows that scent until it leads him to a nursery. He found the child, but no trace of the mother. There is another female scent in the nursery, probably the nanny, and he can tell she is asleep.
He signals to Kalie to keep quiet and they enter the nursery. He was right, the nanny is asleep, so is the child. But at the back of the room, inside an isolation chamber, a woman is fully awake and staring at them. She does not seem afraid but Caine can not tell what she feels because of the chamber.

They get closer to the chamber and he presses on the intercom to communicate with the woman.

– Truly Percadium? He murmurs.

It’s been so long since anyone said her real name, that tears well in her eyes. She nods.

– Who are you?
– I was hired to find you and extract you if you were held against your will.

They deactivate their anonymizer.

– Skyjackers… Is this a trick? I don’t know anyone rich enough to pay for Skyjackers.
– Not a trick, it’s a favour My Lady owes your brother, Phylo. He helped save her family.
– Are you really ill? Or can you come out of the chamber? Asks Kalie.
– Not ill, it’s the only way I found to keep him away from me. But there is an alarm when the door is opened.
– We don’t need the door. He says showing his iriser. Is there anything you need to bring with you? Asks Caine.
– My son and his nanny.
– The nanny too?
– Yes, she knows who I am, she has been really helpful, taking care of Kiran, getting rid of the medication I don’t really need, taking notes for me.
– What is her name?
– Mirna Araminta.

Caine nods and goes to wake up the nanny.

– Miss Mirna, it’s time to wake up.

The nanny startles awake and Caine has to place a hand on her mouth so she wont scream.

– It’s okay, Miss Mirna, we are not here to hurt anyone. We have been hired to find and extract Truly.

She nods and Caine lets her go.

– You were right, she tells Truly, they did come.
– Mirna, get the to-go bags and the books.

Mirna gets up and pulls three bags from under her bed and fills them with clothes, two books, three sheaves, some personal items and a few baby toys and essentials.

– Kalie, you take Miss Mirna and the bags, I’ll take Truly and the child.
– Okay!

Caine place his iriser on the wall of the chamber and activates it. Upon exiting the chamber, she murmurs:

– Almost free.
She goes to the dresser next to the crib and picks a long piece of fabric and then picks up her child and wraps him on her back with practiced moves.

Caine places his iriser on the security window and activates it. Then they turn on their boots and taking their precious cargo, they surf out the window.

The nursery’s window was in the opposite direction to where they left Razo and Ibis, but it was at the back of the compound where it was merely a few feet from the external wall. Surfing above the wall they landed a street away and made their way to the front of the compound, keeping a street away.

When they reach the intersection that gives on the front of the compound, Caine howls lightly, to which Razo responds with a bird whistle. Spotting them, Razo and Ibis join them at the intersection and they make their way to the Diana.

– You’d better come up with us, he tells Razo and Ibis.

They nod and after boarding the Diana and taking off, Caine contacts Stinger

[Yes, pup?]
– We are on our way.
[You have her?]
– Her, the child and the nanny. Also, two of my contacts.
[I’ll let Jupiter know.]
– Thanks, Sting.

After that Truly speaks.

– There is one thing I don’t understand, why did Falque not show up tonight? When you two came in, I was expecting him, he always comes at that time.
– He heard I was coming to visit him, so he retreated to his safe room. As if a safe room can protect anyone from me… Says Caine with a snicker.
– And who are you for him to fear you that much?
– Caine Wise.

Truly trembles and holds her son close. Caine can smell her fear.

– Do not worry yourself, you are in no danger. I did not lie to you.
– How much did it cost to hire you to find me?
– Nothing.
– No one hires Caine Wise for free.
– She does not have to hire me.

Truly registers that information and when they approach the clipper she adds.

– Who is She?
– Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones, signified recurrence of Her Majesty, Seraphi Abrasax. He replies as they are entering the docking bay. And we, Skybreakers, are her personal guards.

Truly’s mouth hangs open for a moment and Caine smirks.

– I think you will be pleasantly surprised. He adds.
Reunions

---Percadium – Toly---

Caine lands the ship and precedes them on the exit ramp. Jupiter, Stinger and Kiza are waiting for them. Caine can still smell the remnants of sleep on them and a huge spike of cinnamon heart scent hits him like a punch in the gut. *Home*, he thinks and his eyes lock on Jupiter’s. He also can smell she is worried about him, so he gives her a small nod and he can smell her relax.

He steps down and behind him comes Truly, holding Kiran, Mirna, Razo, Ibis and Kalie.

– Your Majesty, he says.

Jupiter smirks.

– God, Caine, I sent you to find one person, disappeared three years ago, and you bring me back five people in less then a day… Your reputation doesn’t do you justice.
– Thank you, Your Majesty.
– Now will you tell me who all these people are?
– Of course, Your Majesty.
– Caine, please stop with protocol in the middle of the night, my brain is not awake enough for that.

Kiza collapses laughing and Stinger’s hand goes to rub his neck unconsciously.

– Okay, this is Truly Percadium and her son Kiran, Mirna Araminta, the boy’s nanny, and Razo and Ibis, contacts who helped me.
– You had your cake and ate it too, I see.

Everyone looks at her confused, except Kiza.

– Jupiter, I don’t think this saying translate too well, says Kiza.

Now the newcomers are even more confused at a Splice calling a Queen by her first name.

– Right… does “Two birds with one stone” translate any better? She asks, turning to Kiza.
– Yeah! Kiza replies.
– Good to know.

She turns back to Caine.

– Now is everyone all right?
– Yes.
– Great, then let’s go to the office.

She turns around and everyone follows her.

In the office, they all sit on chairs and sofas, Truly places her son on a sofa and sit beside him.

– Before I hear any report or details, did anyone informed Phylo?
– Not yet, says Stinger.
– Then contact captain Tsing, and have her send him over.
Stinger nods and taps his implant.

[Captain Apini, what can I do for you?]
– Her Majesty requests Phylo Percadium’s presence.
[Is this about his sister? Is it good news?]
– Yes, and yes.
[I will send him over right away.]
– Thank you, captain.

He taps his implant again.

– She is sending him over right away. He says.
– Good.
– Jupiter, if you would permit, there is someone else who should be informed too. Says Caine.
– Who?
– General Kiran Toly of the Aegis.
– He made General… murmurs Truly.

Jupiter notices that tears are rolling down on Truly’s cheeks. She goes and sits on the other side of Truly and taking her hands in hers she murmurs:

– Kiran, same name… is he your son’s father?
– I do not know, I always hoped so, he looks like him.

Caine can smell the turmoil raging inside of Truly. He murmurs in Jupiter’s ear.

– Truly, Caine has something to tell you. Jupiter says after she heard Caine.

He lowers to his knees and looks her straight in the eyes.

– I can assure you that this child is the general’s son.
– How do you know?
– He smells like him and you. Scent mixes in the same way gene-print mixes, there is no mistake possible.

Truly starts to cry, long held back tears, held back for three years, since she found out she was pregnant. Jupiter looks at Caine and nods, then she cradles Truly in her arms and lets her cry.

Caine stands and walks to Jupiter’s desk and activates the FTL communicator. After a short moment a sleepy General answer the communication.

– Commander Wise, he says.
– Sorry to wake you General, but I thought you would want to know right away.

The General seems to awake fully all of a sudden.

– Tell me.
– Regarding the matter we discussed, I was successful.

The general’s eyes open wide.
– I can’t tell you more on an open channel, please come up to the JJ-A-Ω-5 – Maximilian Jones as soon as possible.
– I’ll be there.

They cut the communication off and Caine returns to his Queen’s side. Truly has stopped crying. Razo and Ibis are in a corner like statues and Mirna is half-asleep on a sofa.

– He is on his way, he tells Jupiter.
– Do you want an official report? He asks.
– God, no. Only a quick overview. No official reports before breakfast.

He nods with a smirk.

– Okay. First, I visited General Tylo at the Aegis to get Truly’s last mission parameters. I learned from him that he was her supervisor and lover. He gave me a holo of the two of them together. After that I met Razo in the shopping district. She did not recognize Truly, but the general looked familiar. We split and I met more contacts, who had no useful information. Later, while I slept, Razo crashed through my door, badly hurt, she had been tortured. I brought her here, where Dr. Comb healed her. She brought me a lock of hair from Kiran, because she realized that was why the general looked so familiar. The hair scent informed me that Truly and Kiran had a child together. Razo told me a woman came regularly to Ibis shop with that child. It turns out the woman is Mirna, the nanny. We returned to Orous and Stinger sent Kalie with us, for medical backup. We rendezvous with Ibis in a tavern where one of Falque’s man tried to get Ibis and Razo to go with him at gun point, but he ran away really fast when I told him who I am and that I was planning to visit his master. After that it was really easy to follow his trail all the way to Falque’s compound. I heard Falque say he would be in his saferoom. Kalie and me went in while Razo and Ibis kept watch. We found the three of them in the nursery, Truly was inside an isolation chamber, pretending to be ill to keep Falque away from her. Mirna packed some bags, I got Truly out of the chamber with my iriser, and we flew out the window, met Razo and Ibis back out, got to the Diana and back here.

– Well, that is quite the events. I’m sure this Falque will be really mad in the morning.
– We should plan ahead, says Stinger.
– Right, what time is it?
– Okay, let’s see… Kiza, rooms for all my guests and I’ll need breakfast for 06:00 standard time.
– I’ve kept Erminea informed, the rooms are ready, I’ll let Seiza know for breakfast.

Jupiter nods.

– Stinger, Caine, I want full reports and files for 07:00 and once Phylo and general Tylo are here, no communication and no one is allowed in or out without your personal authorization and implement any other security measures that you deem necessary.

They agree and start discussing between them what should be done.

A few minutes later, Max’s voice interrupts their discussion.

– Your Majesty?
– Yes Max?
– Phylo Percadium and General Toly have docked and are on their way.
– Thank you, Max.
Jupiter stands.

– Razo, Ibis and Mirna, I am sure you are tired and weary, Kiza will escort you to your rooms, so you can rest. We will talk in the morning. Kiza, arrange for someone to escort the others later, and get some rest.

She nods and they exit the office.

– Truly, do you want anyone of us to stay with you or do you want to reconnect privately?
– If one could stay, I would feel better, I do not know how they will react to Kiran.

Jupiter nods.

– Stinger, would you stay? You have been in their situation, you understand.
– Of course, Jupiter.

Jupiter, Caine and Kalie exit the office and wait for Phylo and Kiran. They do not wait long before they see the two fast walking men.

– Your Majesty, Commander, says Phylo.

General Toly kneels when Phylo greets Jupiter.

– Your Majesty, he says.
– Please stand, Jupiter says.

The general stands.

– Better. You must be General Kiran Toly.
– Yes.
– I am glad to meet you. She says with a genuine smile.

She pauses to look at both men, tears of joy wells in her eyes and she blinks them away.

– I know you both must have many questions to which you want answers. Let me first alleviate your fears. Truly is here, alive and well.

Phylo closes his eyes and Kiran braces himself on the wall.

– She did not run away, or leave you, she was being held against her will and Caine successfully extracted her from the situation not long before you were contacted.
– Who? Both men say at the same time.
– A man referred to as Falque.

Kiran slams a fist in the wall.

– She was going undercover to investigate him. He says. I should have transferred her to another department.
– Remorse are part of life, general…

He nods.

- Now, before I let you see her, you have to know, Caine extracted two other people at the same time. A woman who is resting right now and someone very precious to Truly. Since you both love Truly, I hope you will both love him and consider him very precious too.
She does not wait for them to recover from the shock they got at her words, she opens the door and steps aside. They step in the office and freeze. Seated on Truly is a toddler, awake and looking back at them.

– Phylo, General, please meet Kiran… Jupiter starts.
– …Toly, the fourth. Truly ends.

Both men look at each other, then at the toddler and Truly. And as if of a common accord they slowly walk towards them and kneel.

– Hello Kiran, says Phylo.
– Hi sweetheart, says Kiran.

And as if in a perfect dream, the boy points Phylo, poking him slightly in the face and says “Ylo”, then repeats the gesture for the general and says “Daddy” and proceeds to clap his hands.

Jupiter does not see the men’s faces, but she is quite certain their eyes are filled with tears.

Truly gesture to Stinger with her head that he can go. Discreetly he stands, leaves the office and closes the door. Jupiter has tears of joy and wonder in her eyes.

– Well, I’m going back to bed now, good night Stinger. Jupiter says.
– Good night, Jupiter, he replies, and you too pup, he adds for Caine.

They split and Jupiter and Caine go to their bedroom.

---Jupiter and Caine---

They crossed the guard antechamber and enter the grav-beam and suddenly there is no more queen and guard, only Jupiter and Caine, Caine gathers Jupiter in his arms and his whole body shivers when she holds him back just as tight. They step out of the beam and into the bedroom still holding on to each other.

The door closes and Caine bury his face in her neck and hair, breathing her in, deeply.

– Jupiter, he breathes out.

Jupiter shivers and holds on to him, if she could she would meld into him. Caine can smell it, he spreads his wings and wraps her in them. That does it, all the tension, stress and worry that she kept inside since he left are replaced by the warm feeling of belonging. She lets out a sigh of contentment.

– I missed you, Caine, moya sud’ba. She whispers.

He lets out a small whimper in the crook of her neck that melts her heart. She pulls back just enough that he lifts his head to look at her. She lets go of him and tenderly places her hands on his biceps and runs them up softly until they are in his hair and brings him down into a gentle kiss.

– Your Majesty, he says against her lips, his voice is hoarse.

She brings her hands to his ears and caressing them she tells him:

– Make me forget everything, even my name.

Caine’s eyes open wide in confusion.
– I would never dream of removing your memories, Jupiter.
– What?! Oh…

She starts to laugh…

– I have got to stop using Earth sayings, she says, still laughing.

When she sobers up, she puts her hands back behind his neck.

– *Moya sud’ba*, that meant take me to bed and make love to me until I am so filled with your love that I forget about everything else, even my name.

Caine’s face brightens up in understanding and he smiles in a wolfish kind of way.

– I just want you to show me that you love me. She adds.

He lowers his mouth on hers and kisses her with tenderness, brushing his fingers on her cheek.

– I can do that, he murmurs on her lips.

Her hands go back to his ears and she caresses them tenderly. A flash like lightning goes through his body and he bares his teeth at her. She lowers her hands to remove her shirt and when he lowers his head and scrapes the skin of her neck and shoulder with his teeth she shivers in anticipation. His bite is loving and tender and she moans and shivers.

– Caine, she lets out airlessly.

He sweeps her off her feet and crosses the room to place her on the bed, proceeds to remove his equipment and clothing and then hers. When she is naked, he lets his hands explore all of her body, noticing the areas where she is ticklish and those that arouse her. Her own hands are tracing abstracts design on his chest and under his wings, lowering to his powerful legs and going back up to his shoulders arms and neck. It’s not a raging fire like the previous times, but more like wrapping yourself up in a warm blanket during a cold winter’s night.

His mouth follows his hands and she lets out sighs or pure extasy. When she can’t endure anymore of his warm and agonizing, delightful exploration of her pleasure centers, she straddles him and guides him inside her. Her movements are slow and languorous, her pleasure is rising steadily and then it blossoms, like a rare and magnificent flower.

Caine can not believe how beautiful she is in that exact moment, when she forgets about everything, even her name. He holds her there, in that moment, until she collapses on him.

When she returns to consciousness, he reminds her of his love and her name.

– I love you, Jupiter, he murmurs.

She stirs and raises her head to look him in the eyes.

– I love you, Caine Wise, you are amazing and everything you do make be crazy about you.

He shivers at her words and she adds to it by kissing him while caressing his ears.

His hips buck up and she rocks hers with him, bringing him closer and closer to the edge until his eyes roll back, and a stuttering sound comes out of his throat as he reaches the glorious peak of pleasure.
She lies back on him and hums of satisfaction and contentment until he emerges back to reality.

– Your Majesty, seems happy, he teases her.

She hums of approval, smiles and kisses him gently.

– My Majesty wants a shower and a good night sleep. She says, rolling off him.

He smiles and they both get up and go clean up.

While Jupiter puts some sleeping clothes on, Caine fixes the bed. Under her pillow he finds the shirt he had left her. He brings it up to his nose and breathes in deeply. His inside twist at the scent, cold rain, cold coffee, cold beach and cinnamon heart that seems to reach out for something missing. That is how much she missed him while he was gone.

When Jupiter comes out of her closet, Caine is standing still, holding his shirt. She walks behind him and hugs him from behind.

– I meant to say thank you for that, it really comforted me when I needed it the most. She says.

He turns around.

– You missed me so much, it hurts to smell it.

She gives him a sad smile.

– Moya sud'ba, of course I missed you, you are the other half of me. I guess sometimes that nose of yours is too good. You are back, alive and well, that is all that is important.

He hugs her tight.

– You are right.

She takes his shirt, folds it and stores it inside the night stand.

– Let’s sleep, she says.

He nods and they go to bed.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, please let me know what you think of this chapter. I’ve started on the next one already, because Falque sure won’t be happy. I appreciate comments and kuddos.
Aftermath

Chapter Summary

Jupiter deals with the aftermath of rescuing Truly and her son from Falque.

Chapter Notes

Orousian and Russian translation at the end of the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Getting ready

In the morning Caine wakes up before Jupiter, Splices usually needing less sleep then humans but he stays in bed thinking about everything that happened and changed since he first rescued her at the clinic in Chicago. Looking at his steady hands, he is forced to smile, so much has changed for him. From an Omega hunting across the gyre to being a pack and mate bonded personal guard to a Queen who love him, his brain being fixed, and finding out he is an Alpha-Beta and not an Omega. He does not understand how it is all possible, he simply knows that it is and bask in the happiness it has brought him. And the fact that he is free to feel is a miracle in itself. Jupiter called him a miracle, but she is the miracle.

Jupiter stirs beside him, he turns on his side, propping his head up with one arm. Her eyes are open and she is looking at him and smiling.

– Good morning, she says.

He smiles and kisses her softly.

– Good morning.

She stretches and sits up.

– Max, what’s the time?

She stands and stretches some more.

– 05:27, says Max.

– Oh good, I have time for yoga. I can tell I will need to be focused today.

She walks to Caine who also got up and brings him down into a quick kiss.

– Get ready too, Her Majesty won’t be happy if her commander has not written his official report. She tells him.
He smirks and kisses her again.
– Okay.

She kisses him one last time and says:
– Go.

She lets go of him and starts her routine. Caine grabs his clothes and equipment and goes into the guard room and smiles. A desk and a backless chair are waiting for him with every item he requested. He places his boots on the charging platform and gets dressed. While his boots charge, he opens up a weapon cleaning kit and proceeds to clean his mauler. He had to use it a lot in the last week and it is getting sluggish. Once that is done, he tweaks his forearm shield and put on his freshly cleaned and charged boots.

The chime at the bedroom door signals Seiza’s arrival with breakfast. He pokes his head out to see if Seiza brought breakfast for one or two, right in time to see Jupiter bend and twist in some weird contortion with one foot and one hand on the floor and the second hand holding the second foot up in the air.
– Come in, he calls.

Seiza enters with a smile and breakfast and stops dead in her track. Jupiter untwists herself and doing a simpler pose she explains.
– I have been trying to master that pose for months, it’s a hard one but I can hold it for a few seconds now.

Seiza resumes her stride and places the breakfast on a small table.
– I brought enough for you too Caine, she says.

He nods and steps out of the guard room. Jupiter is done with her routine and grabs a bathrobe in the closet.
– Be right back, she calls.

She washes up and puts on the bathrobe and goes back to eat breakfast. Seiza is in the closet, picking up an outfit for the day. When she comes out with a sparkling navy and gold dress, Jupiter says:
– Seiza, the event at the shopping district yesterday got me thinking. I have to design a livery for my people. Can you compile a sheave on what is being done in the ‘verse so I can have an idea on the direction I should go? I have some ideas, but I’m not sure if it would be Entitled enough.
– Of course, when do you want it?
– When we go back to Earth, probably tomorrow.
– Okay.

After breakfast, Seiza helps Jupiter get ready, doing her hair and make-up and leaves with the breakfast tray.
Caine stands.
– I have to finish my report for My Queen, he tells her.
– Okay, go, I don’t want her to be mad at you, she says teasingly. I’ll be in my office.

He goes back into the guard room and she steps out of her bedroom and goes up to her office.
The bouquet of wildflowers from Kiza’s place greets her and put a smile on her face. She sits at her desk and thumbs on a sheave, It’s the letter from Seraphi. She skims over it and smiles, then places it back on the shelves. She thumbs on another sheave, the one about Earth. That one she places it on the corner of her desk. She thumbs on a third sheave, it’s the one titled “New RegeneX”. She had hoped that it would be about replacing RegeneX with something else, but it’s a scientific article about using honey in the conservation of RegeneX since honey does not spoil and is biocompatible. *That’s disappointing, but it confirms what I thought back at Kiza’s place with the honey cake debacle,* she thinks.

She stores the sheave back on the shelves and thumbs on the fourth sheave she had pulled out days ago. “Changing the Universe”, it turns out to be Seraphi’s to do list to change the Universe. Jupiter skims the very long list, she notices “Abolish termination of splice with new abilities” “Find a replacement for RegeneX” “Abolish war games” “Allows Splices to own themselves”. *Seems Seraphi really did turn over a new leaf. I should keep this close by, why redo a list, when it’s already done.*

**Reports**

07:00 comes around and Stinger and Caine knock at her door.
– Come in guys.

They enter and sit on chairs.
– Good morning Jupiter, here are the files you asked for. Says Stinger placing sheaves on her desk.
– And here is my report, says Caine handing her a sheave.

She takes the sheaves.
– Thank you, how are things this morning?
– On a security standpoint, everything is the same.
– The calm before the storm I’m sure.
– Storm? Stinger and Caine say.
– Wow, I keep using phrases you don’t understand. It means the peace before a crisis.

He nods and shift on the chair.
*Oh! I forgot to get backless chairs for my private office!* She thinks. She pulls her phone out and makes a note of it.
– Okay, let me read these, then we’ll talk.

She reads Caine’s official report. She notes that Aegis members are not supposed to be in a relationship with one another, and that Kiran and Truly wanted to quit the Aegis to be together before she disappeared. Falque believes that Kiran is his son, Caine believes he raped Truly and kept her when he found out she was pregnant. Truly pretending to be sick to keep Falque away is a good indicator of that. Falque will probably ask for Kiran back. The incident in the tavern gives her a clue as to what exactly Caine’s name means to anyone else. She wonders if he thought she would be scared of him when he told her his name, back in Chicago.

After that she reads the medical report on Razo. Caine had to use some ReCell to keep her alive long enough to get her to Dr. Comb and Dr. Comb had to use some more to save her life. Her stomach
twists at the thought and at the same time she evaluates that it saved Razo, Truly, Kiran and Mirna in the end. The dichotomy of the situation is not lost on her. That stuff is powerful, finding a replacement as effective will not be easy. The extensive damage done to Razo is a good indicator that Falque is very protective of the young Kiran. He will need proof he is not his son.

The next sheave contains the files on general Kiran Toly, Truly Percadium, Mirna Araminta, Ibis and Razo.

HUMAN FILE #8435816
GENDER: Male
AGE: 53 Standard years
ASSIGN NAME: Kiran Toly
EMPLOYER: Aegis
RANK: General
PARENTS: Kiran & Tamira Toly
STATUS: Living, healthy
WORK AVAILABILITY: Yes

HUMAN FILE #67876819
GENDER: Female
AGE: 36 Standard years
ASSIGN NAME: Truly Percadium
EMPLOYER: Aegis
RANK: Commander
PARENTS: Bendi & Djina Percadium (deceased)
ASSOCIATES: Phylo Percadium (brother)
STATUS: Missing in action
WORK AVAILABILITY: No

HUMAN FILE #846794249
GENDER: Female
AGE: 25 Standard years
ASSIGN NAME: Mirna Araminta
PARENTS: Rajah & Shadaj Araminta (deceased)
STATUS: Orphan, Missing
WORK AVAILABILITY: No

SPLICE FILE #68764654
SPLICE TYPE: Born Mixt Splice
GENDER: Female
AGE: 31 Standard years
ASSIGN NAME: Razo
PARENTS: Unknown
ASSOCIATES: Ibis (Bred Rook)
STATUS: Living, wanted for crimes against capitalism
PURCHASE AVAILABILITY: Yes

SPLICE FILE #5768426871
SPLICE TYPE: Bred Rook
GENDER: Male
AGE: 16 Standard years
After reading all that Jupiter raises her head and looks at Stinger and Caine.

– Well, that is a complicated mess to untangle. If we report finding Truly and her child, that would complicate things, Kiran and Truly can’t be together if they are Aegis, but my heart tells me they will want to be together.
– If he left the Aegis before the report on Truly comes in, he would keep all his acquired benefits, but he would need another employment before he could leave the Aegis. Says Caine.
– Okay… I should talk with him, see what he wants to do, maybe I have a job to fill he would be good for. What’s your opinion?
– His record is exemplary, except for fraternizing with a subordinate. Stinger inputs.
– Well… you could say the same for me, she teases.

Caine’s ears pink a little.

– Then may I suggest a position he would be good for? Says Stinger.
– Sure.
– You need a fleet manager.
– Oh! that is a great idea! She exclaims.

– Max are General Toly and Truly Percadium awake? She asks the ship presence.
– Yes, Your Majesty.
– Please inform them that I require their presence in my formal office.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

She stands, picks up the reports and files, her phone and heads out of her private office and over to her formal office. On the way, she asks:

– Any repercussions from my little show of force in the shopping district?
– It actually made the news, says Caine. I saw it when we were waiting for Ibis.
– Really, what did they say?
– That you did not like your belongings to be mistreated, when they said that you gave humans as servant to your Splices, there were quite a few shocked reactions in the tavern. They also had those royalty experts pitch in, they said that you were doing quite well for a recurrence who ascended a few days ago. One of the experts pointed out that you had acquired the loyalty of the best already, and that it was a demonstration of your power.

Jupiter snorts.

– If they only knew how this all came to be, they’d be surprise.

Caine smiles.

– They mentioned Sting and me specifically…
– Oh yeah? What did they say?

She opens her office door and steps through.

– “My source in the Legion told me that they are the legendary Skybreakers, that she specifically
requested their unit and that they are led by the also legendary Stinger Apini. Don’t forget the also legendary and second in command, the one everyone fears in the night, Caine Wise.” He quotes.
– Wow, the one everyone fears in the night? They make you sound like the grim reaper. She says sitting at her desk.

At their confused face, she clarifies.
– The personification of death itself.

Stinger rubs his face and neck and Caine looks away, while they sit.
– Really that’s your reputation?

They give an approving nod.
– Must have been nice, back in Chicago, that I was not scared of you because of your name.
– Yes, it was. Says Caine, shyly.
– I guess I understand better why you were surprised too, in the car, when I thanked you… It would be odd thanking the grim reaper. At least you don’t walk around with a black cloak and a scythe…
– A scythe, it’s a medieval tool used for harvesting crops, the grim reaper is always depicted with one, as he harvests the souls of the deceased.
She pauses.
– Maybe I should write a fairy-tale about us, “The grim reaper came for a poor maid, but when he saw her, instead of taking her life, he fell in love with her, took her to his realm where she ruled as his Queen.” I bet that would sell.

Caine and Stinger do not know what to answer to that, fortunately, there is a chime at the door and Caine goes to open it.

New people

General Toly and Truly Percadium step in and bow.
– Your Majesty requested our presence. General Toly says.
– Yes, please, come in and take a seat.

General Toly and Truly sit on chairs.
– Good. Now, I know you must still be on edge with all the changes in your lives. Getting the woman you love back and finding out you are a father must be quite a shock.

He nods.
– And being free after so long must feel like a dream.

She nods.
– But I was wondering if you knew what you wanted to do now. If I report finding Truly and your child, it would create problems for you with the Aegis. I know you had spoken of leaving the Aegis before Truly disappeared, so you could be together. But what about now?
Kiran and Truly look at each other.
– May we discuss it between us?
– Sure, she says and taking her phone out she starts to write a medieval story about a maiden and a grim reaper.

Jupiter has the time to write a first draft of her story before her attention is being brought back to Truly and Kiran.
– Your Majesty?

She looks up from her phone and places it on her desk.
– Yes?
– We have decided… We will both be leaving the Aegis. We would appreciate it if the report of our child be delayed until I can find new work so I do not loose my benefits.

Jupiter nods.
– That is another item I wanted to talk to you about. Ms. Truly, what is your area of expertise?
– Development and decryption of cyphers and codes.
– What do you think? She asks in Russian.

Caine nods.
– Mr. Saturn would be happy to have more staff. Stinger says.

Truly’s interest is peaked when she hears the unfamiliar language.
– Perfect. She tells Stinger.
– Listen, to what I am proposing… General, I need a Fleet manager and Ms. Truly, my intelligence department would sure appreciate your expertise. Now, I am offering you these jobs, but understand this, I will not force you to take on these jobs. I know that legally I can, but morally it is wrong and I wont, it has to be your decision. And if one of you does not want to work for me, I will not accept the other. I will have to move around a lot and I will not have a family split on my watch. I am sure you will quickly notice that I am not a regular Entitled.
– I noticed already, no Entitled would send someone of Commander Wise’s caliber to find a MIA Aegis agent simply because her brother asked for it. Says general Toly.

Jupiter nods.
– A point to consider in your decision-making is that equality is an integral part of who I am. Everyone under my care is equal, whether you are human, augmented human, bred-splice, born-splice, android or alien does not matter to me, if you are not comfortable with that arrangement, you are free to refuse my job offers.

Truly and Kiran discuss the idea of working for her and the tenet of equality. Jupiter has returned to her story. She is almost done when they are ready to share their decisions.
– What have you decided?
– I will accept your offer right away, says general Toly.
– I will too, as long as I can turn in my report on Falque’s gang to the Aegis.
– Of course, I would hate for the past three years to serve no purpose at all, and you may take as
much time for yourself as you need before starting to work.

Truly’s eyes go wide.

– You are really a different kind of Entitled, she says.
– Thank you. Jupiter says with a smile.

– Max, I need to see Mr. Buzz, Phylo Percadium and Miss Araminta in my office.
– Yes, Your Majesty. Miss Araminta is with the young Kiran at the moment. Says Max.
– Tell her she can bring him with her.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

– Ms. Truly, we have to prepare for what ever comes from taking you and Kiran away from Falque. What can you tell us about him?

Stinger nods in approval.

– He is an augmented human who used to be a bounty hunter. His favorite weapon is a sound canon. He started small in the contraband ring and built his gang to what is now the most ruthless gang in the ring. They deal in everything others won’t, especially sentient. He tests his merchandise himself before selling it and when he finds one he likes he keeps it for himself.

Even phrased like that and at the look on her face, everyone understood that it had happened to her. General Toly takes her hand in his in support.

Caine never smelled Jupiter so outraged, it did not show on the outside except for the cold light in her eyes, but he could smell it. It was not hot like when she learned about Honey-Bee’s sacrifice, it was cold, icy cold. The rain in her scent changed to frozen ice, the coffee is one solid block and the beach is covered in snow.

– Stalin’s balls, she says.

No one understood what that meant, but her tone was clear enough and they all agreed with it.

Caine sees her taking deep breaths and he knows she is counting to ten over and over again in her mind. When she looks at him, he nods in support. She takes one last deep breath and asks:

– From the information I received I gathered that he believes your son is his?
– I’ve let him believe that so he would not kill us both.
– I understand, a mother would do practically anything for her child. Says Jupiter thinking of her own mother’s sacrifices.

Stinger feels his old pain in his chest as he remembers the sacrifice his Honey-Bee had done for her own child.

– What do you believe he will do ounce he finds out I am ultimately responsible for taking you away from him?
– Legally, nothing. But illegally, he has a whole array of possibilities. From sabotage to assassination.

Jupiter smirks.
– I’ve been through that already, it backfired really hard for the two peoples who tried to have me killed. And they had much more power then a gang leader. The first one sent Caine after me; he switched sides and I got the Skybreakers for personal guards. The second one ended up… quite dead.
– You survived a Caine Wise contract?! Exclaims general Toly. No one has ever survived a Caine Wise contract.
– I know, Jupiter replies with a grin.

She looks at Caine with an enigmatic glitter in her eyes.
The general looks at this young Queen amazed. Whom ever can survive a Caine Wise contract is bound to have an incredible destiny.

There is a chime at the door.
– Come in! Jupiter calls.
The door opens and Buzz, Phylo and Mirna Araminta enter.
– Your Majesty, they say.
– Good morning, please take a seat, she says.

Mirna is holding the young Kiran in her arms. When he sees his parents, he squirms and fusses but Kiran and Truly stay seated.
– Go ahead, she tells them, pointing to their child.

Truly smiles and takes her son on her laps but he reaches for his father and he takes him. Jupiter can see the general blink away tears and she feels really happy to have changed more peoples lives for the better.
– Hello, Kiran, she says to the child.
– Daddy! Says the child, pointing to his father.
– Yes, he is your daddy, I am happy that you can be together now.
– Mirna had managed to get his holo from an Aegis file, Truly explains before Jupiter could ask how the child knew he was his father.

Jupiter nods then she takes a deep breath and readies herself.

– Okay, we have a lot to do in the wake of yesterday, and we have to do it in the proper order. First off, Buzz we need a work contract for General Kiran Toly, he has accepted to be Fleet Manager, starting immediately. My usual conditions.
– Will he be keeping his rank? Asks Buzz, writing on a sheave.
– I don’t see why not. Unless general is not the proper rank for a Fleet manager?
– General is usually for troops, not ships. Says Stinger.
– I see, then what is the corresponding rank?
– Fleet Admiral, provides Stinger.
– There you go Buzz, Fleet Admiral Kiran Toly.

He nods and completes the contract then hands it over to Kiran.
– Your Majesty, that is very generous. He says handing her the sheave.
Jupiter checks the contract.

– Buzz, are you sure about that? It seems low to me.
– I could not verify my data because of the communication lockout in place.
– Oh, you only need Stinger’s authorization Buzz. She hands him the sheave, please verify your data.

Stinger thumbs his authorization and Buzz updates the contract.

– You were right Jupiter, it was low.

He hands her the sheave.

– Ah, that’s more like it!

She seals the sheave and hands it to Kiran.

Kiran had followed the exchange attentively, and when he saw his sealed contract he could not believe his eyes.

– Your Majesty, that is…

Kiran could not finish.

– How I treat everyone who works for me. Jupiter completes.
– Thank you, Your Majesty.

She nods.

– Please file this immediately, Buzz.

Buzz files the contract and Jupiter’s data updates on her sheave.

HUMAN FILE #8435816
GENDER: Male
AGE: 53 Standard years
ASSIGN NAME: Kiran Toly
EMPLOYER: Queen Jupiter Jones
POSITION: Fleet manager
RANK: Fleet Admiral
PARENTS: Kiran & Tamira Toly
STATUS: Living, healthy
WORK AVAILABILITY: No

– Okay, now Phylo, I need to report to the Aegis that I “found” Truly Percadium and Mirna Araminta. You think you can help me with that?

Phylo smiles.

– Of course, Jupiter.

Kiran, Truly and Mirna’s eyes go wide at Phylo addressing the Queen by her given name.

– Stinger, while he prepares that, please prepare the work contract for Truly, as discussed earlier. *Same criteria then Mr. Saturn, but job title “military programmer”*. She adds in Russian.

Stinger nods, Truly looks at Jupiter with curiosity.
– Your Majesty, may I ask what code this is? I’ve never heard this one before, I might be behind on the most recent codes.
– It is not a code, Ms. Truly, it’s the mother tongue of the Bolotnikov, my mother’s family, and only a few people outside of my home planet understand it.
– That is quite ingenious, says Truly.
– Thank you.

She turns to Mirna Araminta.

– Miss Mirna, I saw on your file that you are an orphan, is there anyone, relatives or friends, we should inform of your return?
– Not really, I was abducted from the orphan house when I was 15.
– Then, do you know what you want to do with your life now that you are free?
– Not really… Would it be possible to remain Kiran’s nanny?
– Of course. Would you like to work for me or his parents?

Everyone except Stinger, Caine and Buzz look at her as if she suddenly had grown a second head. Caine actually has a small smile on his lips. She is turning the universe upside-down again. He thinks.

Jupiter sighs.

– You people are really not used to having the possibility to make choices for your lives. God, I had more freedom then that when I was an illegal, cleaning toilets for a living.

That only made their jaws hang lower.

– Okay, listen. I was not born to this life, to this society. Where I come from, equality, freedom and self-determination are basic and universal, it’s not because I’ve become an Entitled that what I believe has changed. Anyone who works for me is entitled to choose what they want to do with their lives.

Slowly, they seem to understand what she said, because they close their mouths and nod and smile.

– Good. Now, Miss Mirna, who do you want to work for?
– Working for you would provide me with more opportunities I believe, Your Majesty.
– Very well. Buzz, please prepare a nursemaid contract for Miss Mirna.

Phylo clears his throat.

– Jupiter, the Aegis will require a report on how and where you found my sister and Miss Mirna.
– Of course, you can use Caine’s report. She says handing over a sheave.

Phylo copies the data and returns the sheave to Jupiter, then he hands her the found person reports.

– The reports are ready. He says.

Jupiter takes the reports and after reviewing them, she seals them.

– Here you go, please file these, right away.

After obtaining Stinger’s authorization, Phylo connects to the Aegis database and transfers the
reports, updating Truly and Mirna’s file and missing person reports. The change is reflected on Jupiter’s sheave almost instantaneously.

– Great, she says after the Missing status is removed from their files. Now for your work contracts.

Stinger and Buzz give the two women their contracts. They review them and hand them to Jupiter for her to seal them. She does so and turns them over to Buzz for filing. After their files update, Jupiter can pass to the last step.

– Now the only thing remaining is for you to register Kiran as your son. She says pointing to the toddler.
– I believe my wife will be able to help with that, says Buzz.
– Perfect, let’s go to the Med-bay and we will show Miss Mirna the way to the nursery at the same time.

In Med-bay, Dr. Comb welcomes them.

After scanning Kiran’s gene-print, she scans Truly, Kiran and Phylo, she asks Truly questions about his birth and completes a birth report to add to Truly’s file. With Stinger’s authorization all sheavework is filed and a new file is created for the young Kiran.

HUMAN FILE #84868635816
GENDER: Male
AGE: 2 Standard years
ASSIGN NAME: Kiran Toly
PARENTS: Kiran Toly & Truly Percadium
ASSOCIATES: Phylo Percadium (uncle)
STATUS: Living, healthy
WORK AVAILABILITY: No

Kiran also appears on Kiran and Truly’s files.

Heading out of the Med-bay Jupiter dismisses her people.

– All right, Miss Mirna, you can take Kiran to the nursery now. You will work with Ms. Silver, under the supervision of Madam Apini.

She bows, takes the child and leaves.

– Phylo, I do not know how much leave Captain Tsing gave you, but you can stay on board for as long as you need.
– I actually have to go back, Jupiter.
– Very well. Stinger will give you an authorization to leave the ship.

He says his goodbye to Truly and takes his leave of Jupiter.

– Now for the two of you, she says to Truly and Kiran. You will need offices and equipment. Truly you will be working with Mr. Saturn, his office is on the military deck, near Stinger’s. He can guide you there. Check with Mr. Saturn to set up your office and if there is any missing equipment you need, make a list and give it to Stinger. You can take as much time as you need to make your report for the Aegis and then to recover from the last three years.
– Thank you.
– Admiral, since you are the head of your department, you can choose your own office. Mr. Buzz can help you with that and any equipment requirement can be transmitted to him. Once you are settled in, your first task will be to prepare a review of my fleet of ships. You have two weeks for the preliminary report and two 40-days for the complete report.
– Thank you, Your Majesty.
– Also, you both have one standard day to gather or procure belongings and put your affairs in order. But you are not to travel alone until the situation with Falque is resolved.

She turns to Stinger.

– Stinger, I know it’s not part of the Skybreakers duties, but until the royal guards arrive we are a little short. Could you provide them with security?
– Of course, Jupiter.
– Great, I let you to get settled. Stinger and Buzz, come back to my formal office after you’ve helped Truly and Kiran.

They nod and she leaves, followed by Caine.

In her office she looks at Razo and Ibis’s files again.

SPLICE FILE #68764654
SPLICE TYPE: Born Mixt Splice
GENDER: Female
AGE: 31 Standard years
ASSIGN NAME: Razo
PARENTS: Unknown
ASSOCIATES: Ibis (Bred Rook)
STATUS: Living, wanted for crimes against capitalism
PURCHASE AVAILABILITY: Yes

SPLICE FILE #5768426871
SPLICE TYPE: Bred Rook
GENDER: Male
AGE: 16 Standard years
ASSIGN NAME: Ibis
ASSOCIATES: Razo (Born Mixt Splice)
STATUS: Living, wanted for crime against capitalism
PURCHASE AVAILABILITY: Yes

Then looking at Caine she asks him:

– Can you explain to me what is a Born Mixt Splice?
– It’s a born splice with mixt parentage, either a human with a Splice or two different kinds of Splices. Usually the former, the latter is very rare since the gene-print of different Splices are rarely compatible. If they are compatible, usually they are of the same genera of Splices.
– Like what? A cat-splice with a lionide-splice? Since they are both feline?

He nods.
– I guess that makes sense, like how you can crossbreed a dog with a wolf or a lion with a tiger, but you can’t crossbreed a dog with a bird or a fish with a bee. I suppose that explains what Stinger told me, that Splices tend to keep to their own kind for that kind of stuff.
– It usually makes things easier.
– All right. Any thought on what to do with Razo and Ibis? What can you tell me about them?
– I’ve known Razo for 10 years. She is very good at finding things. Whether it be information, objects or people. Ibis is a smuggler, he can carry anything anywhere without being caught, and he is very loyal to Razo. They have never dealt in sentient and I know Razo feels terrible for the unregistered.
– Unregistered?
– Sentient bought illegally.

Jupiter winces. On Earth that is called human trafficking.

– So, they are what? Good people on the wrong side of the law?
– Well, there are not many possibilities for Splices when their owner throws them away. They can’t have regular work and after a while they do what they have to, to survive. And after that no one wants to buy a criminal Splice, so they are stuck.
– Wait, what? Splices can be thrown away like an old pair of socks?

Caine smells that coldness again, a rage so deep it freezes all other emotions. He steps around the desk and kneeling in front of Jupiter, takes her hands in his, and looks deep in her eyes. He smells the coldness fading away and hot tears form in Jupiter’s eyes.

Jupiter rocks forward and places her forehead against Caine’s. She stays like that for a minute or two and then murmurs:

– What should I do?
– What you have been doing with everyone else. Offer to buy them. Their purchase price should be negligible because of the warrants. They could work for Hind Saturn. Razo could collect information where Entitled standard spies could not work, since she can blend in with the more rugged parts of society. And Ibis, with is smuggling skills could transport sensitive information, things too sensitive for standard communication, or even objects, ransom and such if it ever comes to that.

Jupiter winces at the word ransom.

– And I could trust them with sensitive information?
– I believe so, Razo survived torture to bring me a lock of hair, and I did not even ask her to look further into it. And Ibis would do almost anything for her, I don’t know why, I’ve never asked.
– Okay, I’ll talk with them, see if they actually want to be bought or work for me.

She places a kiss on his lips.

– Thank you for being here with me.
– I would not have it any other way. He answers, then kisses her.

Once they emerge breathless from a long kiss, Jupiter speaks to the ship’s presence.

– Max, tell Razo and Ibis that I want to see them.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

Jupiter returns to her story while she waits for them, fixing typos and such. Writing on a phone is not
as easy as it looks. When the door chimes and Caine goes to open it, she puts it down. Razo and Ibis enter the office and simply stand there. Jupiter can see that they seem unsure of how they should act or greet her, she decides to take a less formal approach and stands and walks to them.

– Razo, Ibis, hi, I’m Jupiter Jones. I was hoping we could talk a little. She says, gesturing to the chairs and sofa in the corner.

They sit, Razo and Ibis on a sofa and Jupiter and Caine on two chairs.

– First off, I would like to thank you for your help in yesterday’s events. Your quick thinking and courage saved the lives of three people and a family was reunited.

Razo and Ibis’s jaws hang low for a moment.

– You said we would be surprised Wise… Razo says. I’m sorry, Your Majesty, I never thought I’d live to see the day an Entitled would thank a Splice.

Caine and Jupiter smirks.

– You should have seen Caine’s face when I thanked him for not killing me. Jupiter says with a wink.

Caine chuckles and Razo and Ibis gasp. Razo looks at Caine, flabbergasted.

– Wise, you never told me you were supposed to kill her.
– That is a long story that we do not share much, says Jupiter. To make a long story short, yes, he was supposed to kill me, he did not because my scent was faked. And I saved him from a court-martial and every Splices in his unit from being sold off by requesting them as my personal guards.
– So, that is what you meant when you said she cared. Razo tells Caine.

He nods.

– Let me tell you a little about me, so you can understand who I am and where I come from before we discuss what to do with you. I come from the Tersie planet Earth. My father was murdered before my mother’s eyes before I was born. On Earth I was an illegal immigrant in the country I lived in and to provide for myself I cleaned houses and toilets for the rich. I can not count the number of toilets I’ve cleaned since I was 8 Earth years old.

She pauses to let them absorb the idea.

– Since my ascension, I’ve learned about many things and even if I still have a lot to learn I can tell that the ‘verse is an unfair society ruled in a shameful despotic way. Some of the basic values I grew up with and that I intend to keep and apply with my people are equality, freedom, fairness and self-determination for every sentient. While I may be an Entitled, I will not act like other Entitled in private. I may have to act Entitled when in public, but my people know that I walk a very fine line trying to remain myself while not become a pariah to other Entitled and put myself at risk.
– Pariah? Asks Caine.
– Oh sorry, it’s a borrowed word from India, it means outcast.

Pausing again she can tell Razo and Ibis are in shock or disbelieving her words.

– I can see you have trouble believing what I say…

She turns to Caine.
– Caine, why don’t you tell them a few things that I’ve done already that might help them understand. They might believe it from you.
– Razo, Ibis, you know I’ve never lied to the two of you, and I am not lying now, he says.

They look at him and listen attentively.

– Jupiter has done a lot of good since her ascension, let me point out a few examples. Everyone who works for her are on the same pay scale, humans, Splices and androids alike. Most of her people do not belong to her. When she took on the Skybreakers, she asked us who we wanted to have here with us and she went ahead and bought our families and friends and then turned around and gave them to each and everyone of us. Stinger had not seen his wife in 18 years and they have a daughter he did not even know about. All in all, beside the people she inherited, she owns three people. Mr. Buzz, her secretary, but she asked his authorization first and Song Jade and Dophia Jewel, because androids can not be owner, but she gave them their choice of owner, they chose to remain hers.

– Is that why you gave humans as servants to your Splices? Razo asks.
– In a way, I think of it as community service. I had to chose a punishment, but I did not know what to do. In the end I found it poetic that they have to serve the Splices they mistreated. And it told clearly to the ‘verse not to mess with my people…

Caine place his hand on her shoulder as support and Ibis eyes go wide.

– He can touch you? He asks incredulous.

She brings her own hand over his and squeeze lightly.

– Why not? it’s not like it’s going to kill me, besides he’s family to me.

That seems to be the final detail to make them realize that everything said was true.

– Now, I’m sure you are wondering why we have told you all this.

Razo nods.

– I have a proposition for you, but first I wanted you to know with whom you would be getting yourselves involved. You see, Caine explained to me how Splices can be thrown away and that it is how good people like you become stuck on the wrong side of the law. I wanted you to know that I really understand your situation, since as an illegal immigrant I was on the wrong side of the law my whole life and I, too, did what I had to do, to live.

Taking a breath, she continues.

– Now, I can think of three options for your future. You can return to your current lives and try to avoid Falque’s gang, I don’t think this would be safe, but you can choose to do so. We can drop you on the planet of your choosing and you can start new lives there or, and this is my proposition, I can buy you, pay off your warrant and you would work for me.

Razo and Ibis have a disbelieving look on their face.

– I have to point out that you both have to decide to come work for me for me to buy you. I will not split you apart. I do not need to know what the link between the two of you is to see that it is deep.
– What use could two criminal Splices be to a Queen? Asks Razo.
– Well that depends on you, if you always dreamed to become a dancer, hairdresser, seamstress or anything of the sort, that can be arranged, but Caine gave me an idea that I find quite good and that
would utilise your current skillset and contacts.
– And what would that be? Asks Razo looking at Caine.
– Spies and smugglers, Caine says.

Razo and Ibis look back at Jupiter.

– You see, I need people who have access to the criminal elements of the ‘verse, who can blend in with them to find out about threats against me or my people, gather intel, know what the non-Entitled think of me, and so on. I’ve survived five attempts on my life already and there could still be more contracts against me out there. A lack of information can kill and I’d rather not end up murdered like my predecessor. If I was to send in unknown people, they would come back mostly empty handed, but the two of you have free access and contacts. And a good smuggler is always useful to transport information too sensitive for regular communication channels or other things we don’t need others to know about.

They look back at Caine and then back at her.

– Think about it. It’s your choice. She says.

There is a chime at the door.

– Come in, she calls.

The door opens and Buzz and Stinger come in.

– Jupiter, they say, bowing and saluting.
– Hey, thanks for coming back. You are right in time, I’ve made a proposition to Razo and Ibis and am waiting for their decision. Please, sit with us. She tells them.
– Razo, Ibis, these are Stinger Apini and Hiven Buzz.

They greet each other and Stinger and Buzz sit on chairs.

*I need backless chairs in here too,* she thinks when she sees Stinger shifting to be more comfortable.

– Tell me how is Kiran doing? She asks Buzz.
– The Admiral has chosen the office beside mine, this way all your head of department’s offices are close together.
– I guess that makes it easier to communicate between departments.
– Exactly.
– Have you informed Madam Erminea that they will need permanent family quarters and Miss Mirna too?
– Yes.
– Good. And how is Truly? She asks Stinger.
– She seems a little shaken but relieved by the events.
– I can understand that.
– Mr. Saturn placed her in an office beside his.
– Did you inform him of the conditions of her work contract?
– Yes.
– Perfect. You guys are so efficient, I might have to give you raises.
– You already pay us way more then anyone else would, Jupiter, says Buzz.
– I know, I know... She says waving in the air.

In the corner of her eyes she sees that Razo and Ibis followed the conversation attentively and she
adds:

– I’m just trying to alleviate my guilt that I have to participate in this messed up society by buying people.
– But you give us the choice about it, says Buzz, you ask us first, and you keep families together.
– Or you give us back our families, points Stinger.
– And I know, better than anyone else, that you believe Splices are people and equals, adds Caine.
– One day, I will manage to change the laws of the ‘verse and you will all be free and equals, she tells them.

Razo and Ibis gasp. Jupiter smiles and looks at them.

– Yes, that is one of my long-term goals, she affirms. Have you decided what you want to do?

Razo looks at Ibis intensively and nods once. Ibis nods back.

– We have.
– What will it be?
– We will accept your proposition.
– Great! Buzz please prepare purchase contracts for the both of them, paying their warrants too.

Buzz brows raise but he says a simple:

– Of course, Jupiter.

When the purchase contracts are ready, he gives them to her and she seals them without even looking at the price.

– Thank you, Buzz, please file this right away, then you’re dismissed.

He nods and files the purchase and warrants payment, then leaves the office.
Razo and Ibis are looking at her funny.

– What?
– I think they did not understand “You’re dismissed”. Stinger says.
– Oh, right. I did not fire him guys, that is Earth lingo, it means “Go back to your duties.”

Their faces brighten up and they nod.

– Good, Stinger please prepare two spy contracts for Razo and Ibis, my usual conditions. Job name “Bothan”. She says smirking.
– Bothan? Stinger asks, looking at her curious.
– They are a race of spies and informants in Earth science-fiction culture. I’ll have to show you some Star Wars.
– Is that like Star Trek?
– Yes and no, both are space science-fiction, but Star Trek is based on Earth and the Milky Way, while Star Wars happens “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away”.

He nods and returns to his sheave.
When the contracts are ready he gives them to Razo and Ibis, who are once again taken aback by what they read.

– Your Majesty, are you certain about this? Razo asks while offering the sheave.
Jupiter takes the contracts, looks them over and seals them with a smile.

– More then certain. She says.

She gives the sheaves back to Stinger.

– Well, we should introduce you to the head of intelligence. She says standing.

Arrived at Hind Saturn’s office she knocks on the doorframe and he is very surprised to see her when he looks up from what he was writing on a sheave.

– Your Majesty! You should have called I would have come to you!
– It’s all right Hind. I wanted to introduce two people to you and this way I can see your setup at the same time. Oh, and please call me Jupiter.

He looks at her with wide eyes, but nods.

She gestures to Razo and Ibis to enter the office.

– Hind Saturn, Head of intelligence, please meet Razo and Ibis, spy and smuggler. They will work for your department and were highly recommended by Caine.
– Wait, not The Razo and Ibis? From the tri-galaxy heist?
– That was a good one, boast Ibis, while Razo nods.
– Jupiter, I do not know how you have done it, but they are the best smuggling team in the gyre. Says Hind.

Jupiter smiles.

– It would seem that simply being true to myself is enough to attract the best. She points out.

Then turning to Razo, she adds:

– You’ll have to tell me about that one day.
– Okay. Razo replies.
– Now Hind, I want all my Bothans to have code names for their reports, to protect their real identities.
– Bothans?
– Ah, yes, it’s the job title for spies, it comes from a popular science-fiction on Earth. Now as I was saying, Bothans will have code names so no one can identify them if their reports fall into the wrong hands.
– That is standard procedure.
– Good. Is there a standard way to assign code names too?
– No, it is usually random, something far enough away from their real name.
– In that case, I have an idea. Razo, you will be Leia, and Ibis, you will be Han.
– Leia and Han? Asks Hind.
– Two characters from the same science-fiction, the rebel princess spy and the cocky smuggler part of the rebel alliance, fighting against the oppressive government of the Empire.

He nods and she takes what looks like an ordinary pad of paper on Hind’s desk.

– This is a little low tech, no?
– Paper can not be broken into remotely like a database, Jupiter, Hind provides.

She nods.
– Give me soothing to write with she says.

Hind offer her an ordinary looking pen, she takes if and starts writing.

– I’ll get you a list of names when we get back to Earth, but in reports I will be referred to as Mon Mothma, Alliance leader, and you can be Madine. Truly will be Padmé, Stinger will be Ackbar, and Caine… she smirks, Luke.

Then she gives the pad of paper and the pen back to Hind.

– I’ve never heard names like that before.
– Good, I’ll let you three to get to know each other. Stinger, let’s go to your office.

Aegis & Falque

In Stinger office, Jupiter can’t hold it in anymore and she sits on a chair and collapses laughing.

– Sorry guys, I’ve just realized that what I am planning on doing is actually a lot similar to Star Wars. A small group of people working against the established order of things to bring forth better conditions for everyone. I just wonder who will end up with the code names Lando and Chewbacca.

They look at her funny and Caine finally asks:

– Who is Luke?
– Luke Skywalker, Jedi Knight, he starts out as a farm boy and turns out to be the best hope for victory.
– And Ackbar? Asks Stinger.
– Admiral Ackbar, leader of the Alliance fleet.

He nods.

– Trust me, I would not give you guys names from the dead, annoying or bad guys characters. No one deserves to be Jar-Jar…

At the look on their face she adds:

– Never mind, you’ll understand once you know who he is.

She pauses.

– Okay, let’s be more serious now, what is the ETA on my royal guards?

Stinger checks in some data.

– They should be arriving to Earth in about 14 hours.
– Okay, and any news on the Falque front?

Stinger checks on the system, at the face he does Jupiter knows something is up.

– What is it, Stinger?
– Falque reported the kidnapping of his son by Caine Wise to the Aegis. The Aegis have an order to search your ships and bring his son back.
– I see… well let the Aegis know that Mr. Wise was acting on my orders and that I will cooperate with them, if Captain Tsing is part of the investigation team.

Stinger nods and sends the message.

The Aegis reply comes in fast.

– They have agreed, they will be here in 30 ticks.
– Good, that gives us time to prepare the proof they will need that Kiran is not Falque’s son.
– Max? Have Admiral Toly, Ms. Truly, Miss Mima, the young Kiran and Dr. Comb meet us in the Reception Hall, and tell Dr. Comb to bring the gene-print identification for the young Kiran and his parents.
– Yes, Your Majesty.
– Stinger, I want every available Skybreaker there too.

He nods.

– You might want to have Kiza and Buzz there too, says Caine. And Aleksa and Nino too.
– Right. Full regalia.

He nods.

– Max? Please tell Miss Kiza and Mr. Buzz that their presence is required in the Reception Hall, and inform Miss Seiza that she is needed at the duchess’s suite.

She stands.

– Let’s go get my mother and aunt.

When she gets to the royal suite, Seiza is waiting for her. She rings the door and her aunt calls to enter.

– Hi mama, Nino, Jupiter says.
– Yupiter, this ship is amazing, says her mother. I’ve never slept better.

Jupiter smiles.

– I’m glad mama, but this is not a social visit. We have to get you two ready for my meeting with the Aegis.
– What is going on? Asks Nino.
– Go dress up and I’ll explain while Seiza fixes your hair.

And she does.

– Caine is back, he rescued Ms. Truly, but she was not alone. He brought back her son and his nanny too. But the man who held them captive believes that her son is his son and he reported the kidnapping to the Aegis. They have to investigate. We have proof that he is not his son, I just want you there for the form and support.
– Wow, what else happened since last night?
– Let’s see… Ms. Truly now works for me, so is Miss Mirna, the nanny, and Admiral Kiran Toly, the boy’s father is my new fleet manager. And I bought two of Caine contacts that helped save them.
– You bought them? Says her mother with a dark tone.

Jupiter winces.

– Yeah… I learned that Splices have to be owned to have legal work and that they had been thrown away – like an old pair of socks – so they had to resort to illegal work to survive. By buying them I paid their warrant and they are now as free as any Splice who works for me.

Jupiter can see the Bolotnikov temper firing behind her mother and aunt’s eyes.

– You will have to do something about that, Jupe. Says Nino, with Aleksa nodding.
– I know, I know, but Rome wasn’t built in a day, and I’ve been Queen for only a week. I can’t simply snap my fingers for it to happen, I’m not Mary Poppins.

Nino snorts.

Caine has a confused look on his face and Jupiter does an imaginary facepalm. She will have to explain that later on.

When they are ready they go to the Reception Hall and Seiza returns to her duties. Everyone she asked for is already there. After climbing the dais with her mother and aunt and sitting, she explains what is going on.

– Pay attention, we don’t have much time before the Aegis arrive, so I’ll make this quick. During the night Commander Caine Wise saved Truly Percadium, her son Kiran and his nanny Miss Mirna Araminta from a man known as Falque. They were held against their will. Ms. Truly is Phylo Percadium’s sister, from the Aegis cruiser. They all work for me now, so does Admiral Kiran Toly, Kiran’s father, as my Fleet manager. Now, the Aegis are on their way to investigate because Falque believes that the young Kiran is his son, and he reported this as a kidnapping. You are all here to make me look good and powerful, and to make sure that the young Kiran stay with his real parents and not his mother’s abductor. Everyone clear on that?

Some “Yes, Your Majesty” are heard. Then Stinger gives a command and the Skybreakers take position in the room. Two by the door, two at the bottom of the dais, Caine behind Jupiter’s left shoulder, Stinger in front of the dais’s stairs, and the other lining the room. Kiza and Buzz take place at the bottom of the dais, one on each side of Stinger.

– Your Majesty, the Aegis investigation team has docked, says Max.
– Thanks, Max.

She pauses.

– Admiral, take your family, Miss Mirna and Dr. Comb over there until I call for you. She says pointing to a seating arrangement mostly hidden in the back corner of the Reception Hall.

He nods and does so.

– Showtime, she calls, and takes her queenly demeanor.

A few ticks later the door chimes and the Aegis investigation team enters. Captain Tsing and two other Aegis bow slightly at the door and Jupiter signal for them to come
forward.

Stopping in front of Stinger the lead Aegis investigator speaks.

– Your Majesty, I am Captain Ekondula Bork, lead investigator. We have reason to believe that a missing boy is aboard your ship.
– I see, let me see your warrant. Jupiter says.

Captain Bork hands a sheave to Stinger who scans it for threats and then hands it to Kiza. Kiza steps up the dais and gives the sheave to Jupiter with a bow and a wink. Jupiter reads the warrant, it is for a boy with the description of Kiran, but named Stecan Falque son of Falque and Rejin Casrin.

– There is no one on my ship named like that, Captain Bork.
– I see, it was reported by many eye witnesses that your personal guard, Caine Wise, was going to visit Mr. Falque last night.
– Yes, he did. Commander Caine Wise, upon my request, found out that Commander Truly Percadium of the Aegis, missing in action, was held against her will by this Falque individual, and as per his contract he extracted her, along with her son and his nanny.

Captain Bork has a dismayed look on her face and Captain Tsing has a smile floating on her lips.

– You may want to access Truly Percadium and Mirna Araminta found person reports, captain, she adds.

Captain Tsing smile gets wider as captain Bork looks more and more shocked.

– Where are they now? Asks the captain.
– Not far, she says noncommitted. I’ll tell you after you’ve read the reports.

Captain Bork accesses the data.

– Could the rescued child be Mr. Falque’s son? Asks the captain after she read the files and report attached.
– That is what he believes, captain.
– Then where… she starts to say.

But Jupiter stops her with a hand gesture.

– Fleet Admiral Toly, please come forward and bring the others with you. Jupiter calls.

While they walk Jupiter talks again.

– Captain, let me make everything clear for you. The boy you are looking for is not Falque’s son. Three years ago, he abducted Commander Truly Percadium who was undercover with the assume name Rejin Casrin. While she was held against her will, she found out she was pregnant and Falque assumed the child was his, but he is not. Commander Truly got pregnant before going undercover. We were able to confirm this with gene-print scans.

The captain is even more shocked.

– Captain Bork, meet Fleet Admiral Kiran Toly the third, formerly General of the Aegis, Commander Truly Percadium and their son, Kiran Toly the fourth. Also, Miss Mirna Araminta, who was abducted by Falque too and took care of the boy as his nanny.

Captain Bork is frozen in place, so Captain Tsing takes over.
– Your Majesty, if we could see your data and do a second gene-print verification, I believe we would be able to close the matter and be on our way.
– Of course, Captain Tsing. Dr. Comb should have all that you need.

Captain Tsing signals the third investigator and he walks up to the family and scans their gene-prints. When he verified their identity and that the child is in fact their son he turns to the two captains.

– The data is 100% conclusive, that child is the son of Truly Percadium and Kiran Toly the third, and the gene-print matches the data found in Falque’s compound, so there is not another missing child, Mr. Falque simply does not have a son.
– Thank you, Jives, says Captain Tsing. Then facing Jupiter. Your Majesty, it would appear that we had been mislead, we apologize for taking your time and we thank you for your cooperation.
– Apology accepted, captain. I am sure your report will be more then clear that this child is not Falque’s son.
– That it will, Your Majesty.

Captain Tsing turns around and pulls the other captain with her, and Jives follows. Before exiting the Reception Hall, Captain Tsing turns and bows to Jupiter.

Then Caine chuckled behind Jupiter and she asks:

– What is it?
– Captain Bork, she just said to captain Tsing that she thought she was making a huge career move and coming to arrest a Queen for kidnapping a child.

Jupiter snorts a laugh, then she dismisses everyone except Kiza, and Caine, of course.

She stands and exit the Reception Hall with Caine and Kiza in tow. She goes to her formal office and picks up her phone she had left on her desk and verifies her notes and writes one about Rome and Mary Poppins.

– What can I do for you Jupiter, Kiza asks.
– First, I need you to check with Erminea that the people that got guest quarters last night have permanent ones now, since they all work for me. After that I need four of the backless chairs brought to my offices, two in each and then I want you to go through everyone’s quarters and make a list of everything that is needed according to Earth normal living conditions. From clothes to toys to furniture. I’m sure my mother and my aunt would be delighted to help you complete this task. Oh, and we have to jump back to Earth for my royal guards, they will be there in 12-13 hours, check with your dad. If anyone has shopping to do still on Orous, they should do it before then.

Kiza takes notes on a sheave.

– May I suggest something? Kiza says.
– Of course.
– You might want to do some shopping yourself to get an idea of what is available, and the duchesses need a full wardrobe, or a least a few outfits more then the suits you got on Earth.
– Great idea, we will go shopping after lunch. Max, inform my mother and my aunt that I am taking them shopping after lunch.
– Yes, Your Majesty.
– Anything else you can think of?
– Not at the moment.
– Okay, and how are things going for my birthday? Anything you need to buy here?
– Actually, it would be easier to buy them here, on Earth it would take too much time.
Okay, make a list, don’t forget to get clothing and footwear for everyone, including the ships’ crew and the royal guards arriving later. Have you found a location yet?
– I put the Keepers on it, they found an uninhabited island where they are building a temporary outdoor stadium.
– What about the food?
– I placed an order for food for 150 people – Splices can eat a lot – with a Russian caterer and for a birthday cake with a baker.
– Good, don’t forget water and drinks too and activities for the children.
– Very well. Now you said running, flying and gravity surfing races and precision shooting competition. I had the time to check the details before we left Earth.

She accesses data on her sheave.

– Which distances would you like for the races? There is 100, 200, 400, 800, 1500, 5000 meters for regular foot races, for the relay races there is 4x100 and 4x400 meters, the hurdles ones are 110 and 400 meters. For the shooting there is 10m, 25m and 50m, pistols and riffles. And do you want male and female races?
– Wow that is more complex then I thought. Can I see your data?

Kiza gives her the sheave. Jupiter highlights the races she wants and adds some.

– Okay, we will have three categories, men, women and Skyjackers for the races, for the shooting one group for non-Skyjackers and one for Skyjackers. Foot races: 100, 400, 800 and 1,500 meters. No relay or hurdles. Shooting: 10 and 25 pistols, 25 and 50 riffles. For the gravity surfing races, 100, 800 and 1,500 meters. For the flying races 100, 800 and 1,500 meters. That make 26 races or competition.

She gives the sheave back to Kiza.

– What about androids?
– Oh, I did not think about that. Caine, is it unfair to have androids running against organics?
– No, they only have the physical capabilities their position requires them to have. Ezin and Kalie have had quite a few upgrades over the years to become Skyjackers.
– Very well then, they will race according to their gender or Skyjacker status.
– You also need a speech and rules for the event, adds Kiza.
– Right, making sure everyone knows its for fun and no one will be punished or penalized for coming in last.

Kiza nods.

– All right, Kiza, I think we both have enough to do for now, dismiss.

A buzz on her bracelet tell her someone is contacting her.

– Yes? She answers.

[Jupiter, you have an incoming transmission from Falque, what do you want to do?] Says Stinger.
– I’ll take it in my office, Stinger.
[Very well, tell Max when you are ready to receive.]
– Thanks, Stinger.

She ends the communication and sits at her desk.
Falque, she says to Caine.

He nods and places himself behind her shoulder, with a menacing look on his face.

She takes a deep breath and declares “showtime”.

Max, patch him through.

A holographic screen materializes on her desk and a man with a lot of cybernetic implants appear.

I don’t know what you said to the Aegis, but I will be getting my son back. Falque says angrily. Why, hello, I am Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones, to whom am I speaking? She says as if she had not heard his angry words.

Falque’s human eye blinks and narrows to a slit.

They call me Falque. He says after a few second.
Well hello, Mr. Falque, why did you want to talk to me?
You took my son and his mother, I want them back.
You must be talking about the people I had extracted from your compound last night. That child is not your son, his gene-print confirms it and it has been tested by my personal doctor and confirmed by the Aegis.
He is still my son, I provided for him for over two years.
Abducting and raping a woman does not make a father out of you, even if the child is your genetic offspring. And in this case the child is not even your genetic offspring.
I will still get him back.
I would recommend against it; both his parents work for me now and so they are all under my protection. There is nowhere in the gyre that you could hide from my very loyal and very qualified Caine Wise. I can assure you that his next visit to you would not be for a rescue mission.

Caine bares his teeth at the holographic Falque.

And I will have you too. Falque adds.

Caine growls and almost jumps at the holographic Falque. His instinct yells “kill” and “destroy” it’s so powerful, he has to use all of his concentration to freeze in place and control himself.

Choose your words wisely now, the last people to threaten me regretted it immensely, well the last person regretted it for a few seconds only, death has that effect on people, and it was not Mr. Wise or any of my guards who killed him. She says with a cold calculating smile and one hand over her other hand in a fist.

Falque’s jaw hang for a fraction of a second, but Jupiter notices it.

Now, not that I don’t enjoy a chat and threats before lunch, but I have a very busy schedule, so goodbye. She says.

Then presses on a setting and the communication is cut off.

What a jerk, she says turning to Caine.
Caine has an unreadable look on his face and his whole body is contracted as though he is trying very hard to control himself.

– Caine? What is it? She asks, standing up.

Caine has no reaction, frozen like a statue. She places her hand on his shoulder.

– Caine? She repeats.

He stirs and looks into her concerned big green eyes, he takes her hand and kisses her fingers then bury his face in the crook of her neck, breathing her scent heavily.

– What is it? She asks again gently.
– I’ve never felt like this before, it was hard to control myself, he murmurs.

Jupiter wraps her arms around him.

– Tell me, if you want to.

Caine is not sure he wants her to know as his mate, but as his Queen she should know what is going on with his guard. He takes a step back and turns around, not daring to look her in they eye and confesses:

– I wanted to kill him, for threatening you.

Jupiter does not understand why he is so upset about that, it’s not like he never killed before, heck he was supposed to kill her. She steps to him and places her hand on his shoulder again.

– Caine, moya sud’ba, help me understand, it’s not like you never killed before. You even killed to save me.
– Yes, I’ve killed, but it was always under order or for defense never this, this was a sudden desire to harm someone, I wanted to jump at him and rip his throat out with my teeth, for threatening my mate.

She steps around him and looks him in the eye, then cup his cheek. She sees a vulnerability in his eyes and in the way his head is bowed. A little like when she learned that he might not be able to mate, like he is afraid she would stop loving him. She puts her forehead on his chest and inhale deeply before speaking.

– Feelings and desires are not good or bad, Caine. We can’t be held responsible for every stray thought or sudden feelings. It’s what you do with them that defines that. You were able to control yourself, that tells me much more about you then any desire to do harm.
– But it was so hard, what if I can’t control it next time? Maybe I should not be your guard…

Jupiter hugs him hard.

– Oh, Caine, no! This time you were taken by surprise because you did not know about that instinct. It seems that the mate-bonding comes with many things we don’t know about. Next time, if there is a next time, you will be aware of it. It is easier to control something when you know it exists.

Caine breathes easier, his mate is so comprehensive and wise emotionally. He returns her embrace and places a kiss in her hair.

– Thank you for being so… indulgent. He says for lack of a better word.
– It is not “indulgence” my love, moya sud'ba, she corrects. You are the other half of me, you are my heart walking outside of my body. It’s understanding, accepting and loving you with all your differences: genetics and cultural.

She places a kiss on his lips.

– We will learn together, I’m here to guide you with that, remember?

He lets out a little whimper.

– You are my strength and my weakness, he murmurs.

Jupiter smiles.

– I know exactly what you need right now, come with me, she says, untangling herself and heading for the door.

Caine follows.

– Max, send a copy of my communication with Falque to Stinger and tell him I will be in my private lounge if he wants to talk to me.

– Yes. Your Majesty.

In her private quarters, she grabs a blank sheave from her office, then goes to the lounge and sits on one of the lounging chairs with her legs spread on the seat.

– Kozha, she murmurs.

And Caine letting out another whimper, wraps himself around her legs, while she works on her speech and the rules for her private Olympics.

Later when there is a knock at the door, Caine stirs but Jupiter puts a hand on his head to keep him there. Anyone who is allowed here without requesting permission to enter knows about them.

– Come in, she calls.

Stinger comes in and smiles.

– Jupiter, Your Majesty.

– Ah, Stinger, come in and sit, I suppose you are here about Falque?

He nods and selects a foot stool to sit on.

– Before you report, do you have the details on my royal guards?

– Not with me.

– It’s okay, just get me a copy when you can, oh and make sure Buzz fix their payroll.

– Okay.

– Now, report, captain.

– Your Majesty, Hind and me have analyzed the communication with Falque. I’ve never seen anyone maneuver with so much expertise on their first communication with a gang leader.

– Thank you. Turns out a mob boss and a gang leader have much in common. I never thought that what I learned with Yulia, spying on her father, would come in handy. What else?

– We believe his treats against you and the young Kiran are serious. Hind has sent Razo and Ibis to gather information.
Caine shivers against her legs and she runs her fingers in his hair. Stinger notices and his hand goes to his brand, rubbing it.

– Are you okay, pup?

The way Caine is wrapped around Jupiter means he has his back towards Stinger.

– I will be, he says.

Stinger looks at Jupiter with question mark all over his face. Jupiter plays with Caine’s hair and explains:

– It was really hard on him and his instinct to hear Falque’s threats. He needs time to process and understand what he felt.
– I understand, it was hard for me to hear too, I swore to protect you, my Queen. But you and Caine are more then guard and Queen, I can only imagine how I would feel if someone made an open threat to my Honey-Bee, and right in my face, I’d probably beat them to death. Stinger says.

Jupiter smirks and Caine raises his head and sits turning to face Stinger.

– I wanted to rip his throat out with my teeth, he tells him, sheepishly.

Stinger nods.

– Don’t feel bad about it, pup. I would not expect anything less from a Lycantant. And that you controlled yourself when you were unaware of that instinct is proof of your strength of character.
– Jupiter said something similar, he says.

Admitting that out loud is the catalyst for his thought process to come to completion. His brain stops running in circle and he straightens up.

Jupiter and Stinger notice his change of posture and smile. Caine nods slightly for Stinger and squeezes Jupiter’s hand.

– All right, was there something else to discuss?
– Actually, yes, are you certain you want to go shopping after lunch with the current situation? Asks Stinger.
– Stinger, I’ve survived an assassination attempt, a Caine Wise contract, two ambushes, a proposal, a beating, free fall, an explosion, telling the truth to my mother, a news crowd and a police task force, I think I can handle shopping with my mother and my aunt, even if there is another jerk out there very unhappy with me.

Listed like that, it makes the two Splices realize just how much has happened in the last 8-9 days.

– Unless we learn something concrete, I am going shopping. I will not coward and hide away and stop living because of jerks.
– Very well, but I will assign more guard to your protection detail.
– Understandable. Anything else?
– No.
– Okay, then you’re dismissed.

Stinger leaves them and Jupiter turns to Caine.

– Are you okay?
– Yeah. It helps to know that I am not alone feeling this way.
She places her head on his shoulder and murmurs:

– *Moya sud'ba*, I would feel this way if anyone made threats against you.

He nuzzles and kisses the top of her head.
When her stomach rumbles he smirks:

– Your Majesty is again forgoing eating for my benefit.
– Can’t hide anything from you, she says chuckling.

He smirks.

– What about you? You must be hungry too.
– Famished actually, Splices bred for the Legion have a higher metabolism.

She nods.

– Max, I’d like a meal for myself and Commander Wise brought to my private office.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

She stands and Caine goes with her to her office.

– Sorry for a working lunch, but I want to read on my royal ways and means commission, see what I can do about Falque before I go shopping. She says sitting at her desk.

He smiles and sits on one of the backless chairs she asked for her office, some part of him is still disconcerted that she would apologize to him and another part relishes in the feeling of equality that she bestowed upon him.

– Anything I can do to help? He asks.

She hands him the “Changing the universe” sheave.

– You can go through that and tell me if some things have been done. It’s Seraphi’s “to do” list.

He takes the sheave and turns it on and Jupiter reads her own sheave.
Caine reads through the list and is really surprised by what he reads. There are things on this list that he took for granted but it would appear that Seraphi had managed to make a few things better for Splice before her death.
A knock at the door let them know that lunch has arrived.

– Come in, she says.

Seiza enters with their lunch.

– Seiza, that is not part of your duties. Jupiter says.
– Oh, I don’t mind, beside it’s not anyone else’s duty either.
– Is that a subtill attempt at telling me I need more people? Because I know, Erminea is looking into that.
– Oh, no Jupiter, I mean I really don’t mind, it’s a good break from my studies and besides it gives the two of you more privacy.

Jupiter smiles at her.
– Okay then.

Seiza places the platter on the desk.

– Do you need anything else?
– Not for me, but can you check that my mother and aunt got their lunch too?
– Of course.
– Thank you, you’re dismissed.

Seiza leaves and Jupiter and Caine eat their lunch.

– Anything done on that list? Jupiter asks before taking a bite from her meal.

The flavour of what ever she is eating is incredible, so far above the Aegis bland food. 
*Oh, wow, I must compliment Plume on her cooking, this is fantastique.* She thinks.

Caine takes a bite too and nods.

– “Ban systemic sterilization of Splices” and “Allow relationships and marriages between Splices”. I did not even know that it was forbidden before.
– She must have changed that a while back, I’m thinking on working on “Abolish termination of Splices with new abilities” first. I might be able to convince the other Queens of that by telling them it’s DNA improving itself or something.

Caine feels a warmth in his chest and smiles at her.

– Anything in your royal ways?

She nods with her mouth full and answers after swallowing her bite.

– I can file a complaint for harassment with the Aegis and a reprimand for violation of statute 87F-21 with the Ministry of Justice. It’s not quite what I was looking for.
– You can always send me after him.
– Not yet, it might be Tersie of me but I don’t want to use that specific skillset of yours as my first option.
– I understand, you value life, even the life of your enemies.
– Yes, but my enemies don’t need to know that. She says with a smile.

He smirks and takes another bite of his meal.

– Your Majesty, Their Graces are ready for their shopping trip. Says Max.
– Let them know I will be there in 10 minutes.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

– Better finish our meal, she says to Caine.
Then proceeds to eat faster then he ever saw her eat. Following her example, he finishes his meal and they head out, bringing the tray with them out of the office. They leave the tray in the guard antechamber and walk over to Aleksa and Nino’s suite.

**Language and shopping**
Castor is on duty outside the suite and he rings the door for her. Nino answers the door.

– Jupe! Come in. Aleksa, Jupe is here, she calls.

Jupiter and Caine enter the suite.

– *Yupiter!* This thing is amazing! Aleksa says arriving with the hair grooming tool.

Aleksa has her hair in a traditional Russian crown braid.

– Very Russian, Jupiter says. We can get you one for back home if you want.

Aleksa has a smile that Jupiter don’t remember ever seeing on her mother’s face, but she won’t say anything, she does not want to break what ever is going on with her mother.

– Are you two ready for some space-shopping?
– Oh yeah, let me just put this back in the bathroom. Aleksa says raising the hair tool.

When Aleksa comes back they head out and she says:

– Just so you know, they call bathrooms “Fresher room” in space.
– Now we have to learn another English? Your dad was British English, learned American English with cousin Vassily and now space English?
– It’s not really English mama, they all have had English language uploaded to their implant, it’s just what it translates too. I have a translating implant in my neck so I can understand and speaks to space people without the English package.
– What? How does that work?
– I have no idea, mama. Caine?

On their way to the docking bay Caine explains:

– The regular implant establishes a neural connection to the brain and processes information, it acts as a communication device, translator, memory and more. In time the brain learns the actual language and it stops translating. The translation implant, like Jupiter has, establishes connections to the language part of the brain and interprets oral and written languages for it and it takes over speech when an unknown language is heard. It contains the most common languages used in the ‘verse.
– Neat. Then what is your language? Asks Aleksa.
– Lycantant are taught Legionarian, language used by the Legion, and Orousian, language of the government. But I have acquired many more languages.
– And when you think, what language do you use? Asks Nino.
– Lycantant do not think in words unless it is to talk. The best explanation would be we think with our senses. Odors, texture, sight, tastes, images, everything mix. Putting words on our perceptions and thoughts can be somewhat complex. It’s like describing someone’s scent, words can’t explain all the details.

All three women stop walking for a moment to process that information.

– I don’t understand how that works, says Aleksa.
– Give them an example Caine, tell them what they smell like, Jupiter nudges.

Caine nods, then taking a deep breath, mouth open he senses their sent in every detail.
Lady Nino smells of star dust, beads and purple flowers and Lady Aleksa, is similar to Jupiter, soft snow, warm coffee and sunset on a frozen plain.

I’m soft rain, hot coffee and sunset on a beach, Jupiter tells them.

You like an angel, you smell our souls. Aleksa lets out.

Caine ducks his head and Jupiter adds in Russian.

– He can smell emotions and tell when someone is lying too. It’s quite astonishing, but the hallway is not private enough for personal questions and details. We can talk about that after our shopping trip.
– Right, no one must know he is more then your guard. Provides Nino.

Jupiter nods and starts walking again.

– The Skybreakers are aware that the Apini and Caine are family to me, but nothing more then that. Except for Leo, he can smell our bond. For the others, only Kiza and Seiza know, no one else. She clarifies.
– Changing back to space languages, should we get implants? Aleksa asks.
– It’s up to you, I find the translation implant very useful. I did not get the implant like Caine because I thought it would be hard to hide back home, but I have this for communication, she says showing her bracelet.
– If we don’t get it, people won’t understand us? Won’t they? Asks Aleksa.
– Without the English or Russian package, no. Answers Caine.

Aleksa nods and looks at Nino, who nods at her.

– Then we need translation implants.

Nodding Caine touches his implant and asks Kiza to bring two bio-neural translators.

Arriving to the docking bay, they are greeted by five Skybreakers, Tristan, Menura, Ezin, Vespa and Pavonia. They bow slightly and a few Majesty and Jupiter are said.

– Good afternoon guys. She says.

She goes to the Mercury and they all follow, she boards and goes to the private cabin on the ship accompanied by her mother and aunt. Caine gives some orders.

– We are waiting for Miss Kiza. Menura and Pavonia, you will be on close guarding position with me. Tristan, Ezin and Vespa, you will be on patrol.
– Yes, sir, they reply.

He joins Jupiter in her cabin and Vespa goes to pilot the ship. Kiza gets there soon after and gives indications on which shop they are going too, then knocks on the cabin door.

– Come in! Jupiter calls.
– Afternoon Jupiter, I have the bio-neural translator you asked for Caine, she says, entering the cabin.
– Ah good, thank you, Kiza.

Caine takes the injector and the two translator which are the size of a grain of rice and turns to Aleksa and Nino.
– Which one would like to go first?
– That would be me, says Aleksa.

Caine walks to her and placing the injector on her neck warns:

– This will sting for a few seconds and it takes about 30 ticks for the implant to integrate with your brain.
– Okay.
– Are you ready?
– Yes.

He injects the translator and Aleksa winces and her hand goes to the injection site and rubs it. He repeats the process with Nino and she also winces and rubs the injection site.

– You can turn the translator on and off by tapping it twice but I would recommend leaving it on for a few days first to let it integrate fully.

They nod in understanding and Jupiter closes her eyes for the trip down to the shopping district. They land on a platform in the Entitled only section of the shopping district and Kiza guides them to the clothing section.

– Have you been here before? Asks Nino.
– No, Lady Nino, but bee-splices have a keen sense of orientation.

Arrived in front of a shop Caine enters for a security sweep while Kiza explains:

– This is the shop with the simplest styles that are fashionable enough for people of your rank.
– So, nothing like Titus’s black dress? Jupiter says with a chuckle.
– Of course not, that was uzhasnyy.

Caine comes out with an all clear nod and Kiza precedes Jupiter, Aleksa and Nino inside. Menura and Pavonia guard the door and Caine enters to guard from inside.

– Welcome to the Emporium, I am Haspha Ruffling, says an android shop keeper.
– This is Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones, Her Grace the Grand Duchesse Aleksa Jones, first primary of House Bolotnikov-Jones, mother of Her Majesty, and Her Grace the Duchess Nino Bolotnikov, second primary of House Bolotnikov-Jones, aunt of Her Majesty, presents Kiza.
– May I see your seals before we proceed? Asks the Android.

Jupiter turns up her right arm showing her sigil and nudges her mother and aunt to do the same. The android scans them.

– Majesty, Your Graces, if you would follow me, we can begin.

The android guides them to a suite filled with plushy chairs and sofas and gives the three of them sheaves that turn out to be some sort of catalogues.

– Please ring me when you have made your pre-selections. She says showing a button.

The three women flicks through the images and when one finds something that could be interesting she shows it to the others and it’s marked with their sigil. Each catalogue contains 200 styles of dresses, outfits and other types of clothing. When they are unsure they ask Kiza’s opinion. In their preselection, Jupiter selects only 4-5 pants and shirts that look close enough to yoga clothes while her mother and aunt have over 50 items each.
Jupiter rings the android.

– Please follow me, the android says.

She guides them to the next room where they stand on a platform where they are scanned. After that their selected outfits appear on a screen where colors and options are proposed to them for each item, according to their hair, eyes and skin color.

It is a long process, but the women are enjoying it, it’s almost like playing dress up or with dolls. All along they chit chat about Earth, their cousins and how jealous they would be, especially Vladie and Irina, switching from English to Russian all the time, and using both languages in the same sentences. Asking something in one language and receiving an answer in the other.

Caine’s implant can’t seem to keep up with the constant language switch and by the look on Kiza’s face, hers either, and they are using too many Earth sayings and lingos for him to comprehend everything, but he is feeling a warmth in his chest at seeing his mate and Queen be happy and herself with her family. He has not seen her be so relaxed since he rescued her at the clinic.

Ringing for the android again, she comes back and asks:

– Have you made your final selections?
– We have.
– Please follow me, she says again.

She guides them all the way back to the entrance of the shop and going behind the front desk, she picks up a sheave and inserts it and a slot on a machine and repeats the process twice more and hands the sheaves to Kiza.

– For your verification and payment, says the android.

They each check their sheave order and seal their list, then Jupiter seals each one for the payment process.

– Thank you for choosing the Emporium. Where should the orders be delivered?

Kiza talks with the android for the delivery to the royal clipper and comes back to Jupiter’s side. She was about to open the door when Caine stops her, signaling to his implant.

The message he receives is a copy of a warning from Razo and a short message from Stinger. It makes his blood boil and wakes up that same “kill” and “destroy” instinct he had earlier.

Falque

[Leia to Madine, threat is real, Mon Mothma and family are in danger. Luke and guards to use extreme caution.] – Ackbar, on my way with cruiser.

The four women can see his tension.

– What is it Caine? Jupiter asks.

When he does not react again, she changes tactics.
– Commander Wise, report. She barks.

He automatically comes to attention.

– I apologize, Your Majesty. I’ve received a coded transmission from Stinger. We must get you three to safety. He’s on his way with the cruiser.
– Then do your job, commander.

He nods sharply and calls the other guards. After arranging their protection, they exit the shop and all six Skybreakers are on high alert. Walking to the ship, they all activate the controls for their shields and boots and have a hand close to their maulers. They walk with two guards in front of them, two behind and one on each side. Kiza is in the middle with them, eyes yellow, analysing patterns of movements. She pulls out two tiny weapons from a pack she was carrying and gives one to Jupiter.

– Hopefully it won’t come to that, she says.

Jupiter takes the weapon and nods. Right after that the sound and light of anti-matter weapon’s fire fill the air. Shields and boots turn on but a fraction of a second too late for Aleksa who is hit on the shoulder after Kiza pushed her out of the way.

– Mom! Jupiter yell.

She crouches to her mother, below the shields while they are pinned down.

– Stalin’s balls!

The familiar curse is a balm to her heart.

– Mama! Are you okay? She asks in Russian.

The use of the Russian title for Queen, “Tsarina” whips her into that cold anger state. The power the Tsars yielded and that her mom told her about fill her and she looks up into Nino’s eyes who also crouched to Aleksa’s side.

– You do what you must, you protect family, Majesty, Nino tells her.

Jupiter nods.

– Commander, she barks.
– I want him gone, you take him down, by any means necessary, she orders.

The order is given with such finality and is opposite what she told him at lunch that Caine looks at her briefly. What he smells and sees in her eyes says it all. “No one hurts my family and lives.”

– Understood, he says, while returning fire.

Her cruiser arrives and her six other Skyjackers pour out, boots and shields on, wings open and maulers in hand.
Kalie lands in the middle and immediately checks on Aleksa.

– Passed out from the pain, she declares, vitals are fine.

Jupiter breathes easier.
Aves, Falco, where is he? Caine asks to the hawk-splice and falcon-splice, who are still in the air. He receives indications from them and barks.

Stay with her Majesty. He orders.

He takes to the air and fly into the direction Aves and Falco told him. Jupiter never saw him fly this fast. The rest of the Skybreakers take them up into the cruiser with four of them orbiting the beam when they go up. Aleksa is placed in a stabilizing field and Nino sits beside her.

You go do what has to be done, I stay with her, she tells Jupiter.

Jupiter nods and joins Stinger on the bridge. The cruiser staff comes from her clipper, but Stinger is in charge. When she steps on the bridge, they salute and she nods, then walks beside Stinger.

Report captain.

Your Majesty, everyone is on board except Caine, Vespa and Kalie. Vespa and Kalie have gone for the Mercury. I have an open comm to Caine, but he is not responding.

He is doing what I ordered. She says with a steely glare and a cold tone.

Stinger is startled by her tone. This is not the simple Tersie talking, neither is it the manipulative Entitled that met with Titus, it’s the powerful Queen.

Can you put him through the ship’s comm?

He nods and gesture to the communication’s officer. He flips a holographic control and sounds come through the comm system. She hears the swoosh of the gravity boots and doors opening and closing. She can see him in her mind’s eye, baring his teeth and sneaking on his target. She hears a fight, shots fired, the barking of Caine’s Mauler.

In Falque’s compound, where he took refuge, Caine is taking down his guards and defenses room by room. All his senses are on high alert and his instincts are guiding him to his one true target. He follows his scent until he faces a wall. The scent stops at that wall. For a fraction of a second, he does not comprehend because he was acting on instinct alone, but when he thinks, he smirks at the fake wall and walks through it with his iriser.

On the other side of the wall, the scent is back and he follows it once again. There is no one to stop him on this side of the wall, he turns off his boots and walks unimpeded. The corridor leads straight to the safe room and at the door he snarls. It’s a recent model and he does not have the by-pass codes for it so he uses he iriser again.

He turns on his shield to protect himself and enters the saferoom, it’s a small bedroom with a ‘fresher unit attached. Falque is at the back of the room and he is pointing his sound canon at him. He quickly raises his shield in front of him, a sound cannon can knock you unconscious in one shot. It was a good thing too because Falque fires right away and he is shot back into the wall in a huge crash.

He gets up snarling and jumps at Falque, knocking him down with his shield and the cross of his mauler before he can charge up a second shot.

I have a message from Her Majesty, he says, placing his mauler on his head.

He pauses for a second and Falque steady himself.
– No one hurts her family and lives. He says with a dark tone.

Then he pulls the trigger. Blood splatters on him and he spits the drops he gets in his mouth.

On the cruiser, Jupiter, Stinger and the bridge crew heard everything.

– Send Kalie and Vespa to pick him up, she murmurs to Stinger. And let’s go back to the ship. I’ll be with my mother.

On that she leaves the bridge, walks like an automaton to the Med-bay and crashes on a chair beside her mother and her aunt.

**Getting to know you**

Later when Caine enters their bedroom, after reporting to Stinger and cleaning and changing in the barracks, he finds Jupiter sitting at the end of the bed and staring into midair. Kiza had informed him that Jupiter seemed absent-minded when she returned from Orous. But this is worse then he imagined, she does not even react to his presence. The air in the room smell of grief and pain but Jupiter has not shed any tears, there is no salt in the air, she smells of contained feelings. He remembers her last breakdown vividly, how her emotions threatened to overwhelm her and how she clanged to him like he was her anchor.

He is not sure if any of her feelings are targeted at him, but he takes his gloves, boots and weapon off so they don’t remind her of what he did on her order and he walks to her and kneels in front of her.

– Your Majesty, he says.

Jupiter still has no reaction. This is not the Queen wanting a report from her commander and she does not need the beta in him, maybe she needs the alpha, for him to be her anchor once again. He stands and sits on the bed beside her and wraps his arm around her back and places his hand on her shoulder.

– Jupiter, I’m here, let it out, he murmurs.

That was it, she stirs, turns her head looking at him and hot burning tears well in her eyes and start to roll down on her cheeks. Soon she makes a whaling sound that rips through his heart and he gathers her in his arms, her head on his chest, and enfolds her in the warmth of his wings. Shielding her from the outside world. Her whole body is shaking from the contained hurt in her heart and soul. Her hands grip at his arms and shoulders like only he can prevent her from drowning in her emotions. He holds her and lets her drain out all that she feels.

Jupiter’s mind had retreated into a blackhole, that is the only way she could describe it. A hole in which nothing existed. She had not heard Kiza’s words after they got back from Orous. She somewhat noticed her mother being taken to Med-bay and heard Dr. Comb say she would be okay, but she had walked away to her personal quarters, into her bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed and then there was nothing. A black void in her mind. She only emerged of her emptiness when she felt an arm around her shoulders, and then she heard the only voice she wanted to hear, Caine!
“Jupiter, I’m here, let it out” he’d said.

And then she realized that she was holding everything back. She had locked everything away because she did not feel safe to express it. She looked at him and she started crying. The pain in her mind and soul was tearing her apart and she could not hold it in anymore. She let it out clinging to Caine so her soul did not rip from her body.

– I’m here Jupiter, I’m here, Caine repeats in her hair. You’re safe with me, let it all out.

After she has shed all the tears she needed, and found back her inner calm and strength, she hugs Caine.

– Thank you, she murmurs, her voice raw from crying.

Caine simply holds her tighter and places a kiss in her hair.

She closes her eyes and snuggles against his shoulder, relishing in the comforts she gets in his arms. In that state, a phrase Stinger told her when he explained lycantants and packs to her comes back to her mind. “Center of gravity”. It makes everything clear in her mind. She takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly.

– I’m so lucky to have you. She confesses.

Caine is about to say something but she places a finger on his mouth.

– I don’t need you to talk, just listen.

He nods and holds her close.

– What feels like a long time ago, but was just last week, when you were hurt and dying, Stinger explained to me what a pack was to a Lycantant, he called it a “Center of gravity”. I did not understand then what that meant, but I think now I understand, at least partly. It’s similar to the binary star I told you about to explain the link between us. In a binary star system, the two stars orbit each other, there are still other forces pulling at them, but the pull between them is stronger then any other forces and it keeps them together.

She pauses

– Before you got back, it was as if a rogue blackhole had suddenly appeared and was pulling at me, because you were not there to keep me away from it. I was lost and shutting down without you. And when you got here, you pulled me away from the blackhole I was sinking into. It might not be coded in my genes, but you are my center of gravity, Caine. I always feel more stable, grounded, when you are near me. I could not survive the ’verse without you. Hence, I’m so lucky to have you.

Caine did not know what to reply to that but she did not seem to need a reply. He simply kept holding her close and breathing her in. After a few minutes she stirs and he lets go of her. She stands, stretches and sits back on the edge of the bed.

– Caine?

– Yes, Your Majesty?

– Can I teach you to say something, without translator?

– Yes, but why would you…

She places a finger on his lips.
– It’s important to me.
– Okay.

He disables the translator function of his implant.

– I’ve disabled the translator, he says.

Jupiter knows it’s true because she “feels” her implant translating in her brain, and what she understands does not matches his lips movement.

– I’ll turn my implant off now.

She turns off her own implant and says:

– Ya tebya lyublyu.

Caine has a confused look on his face, so she repeats slowly:

– Ya... tebya... lyublyu.

They spend the next minute teaching and learning until Caine says it perfectly. Caine has no idea what he is saying, he only knows that it makes Jupiter release puffs of cinnamon heart scent, so he keeps trying. His last attempt earns him a huge smile, an equally huge puff of cinnamon heart and a passionate kiss.

When Jupiter lets go, out of breath, she taps her implant.

– You can turn your translator on now. She tells him, feeling the implant translating.

Caine enables the translator.

– It is enabled now.
– Good, now, say it again.
– Ya tebya lyublyu. He says.

He grins, his implant translated the words for his brain, and now he knows what he was saying, “I love you” in Russian.

– Ya tebya lyublyu, he repeats, putting his feelings into the words.

Jupiter’s eyes close, her head rolls back and she lets a sigh of pure ecstasy out as the words reach her deep at her core. Russian is the language of her heart. Caine never heard and smelled her so deeply touched by his words. He wants to please her again, he places his mouth close to her ear while she is still vibrating of pleasure, and murmurs:

– Ya tebya lyublyu.

Her eyes open wide and she looks at him in a way he never saw before. The tears in her eyes are not of sadness but of utter and complete joy and the fire he sees mixed in makes his own heart swell. She hugs him with all her strength and he can feel the vibrations in her body. He closes his arms around her. He never knew words could be so powerful.

Once she comes back to reality, she sits sideways on his laps, places her head on his chest, takes a deep breath and sighs.

– I’m sure you smelled what that did to me, but do you understand? she asks.
– I don’t think I do, he says shaking his head.

She traces random lines on his chest with one finger.

– We all have a love language, a language that speaks to our heart. It usually is our primary language, for humans, the one our parents speak to us into when we are babies, the one our brain gets wired with. Although I speak English more often then Russian, the language of my heart is Russian. It is the first language I learned, the one my brain never translates.

– I think I understand, he says.

She places her finger on his lips and confesses, very low:

– I’ve never asked this of or let any boyfriend tell me they loved me in Russian. You are the only one.

Caine could not explain how or why, but that confession brings tears to his eyes. He feels his heart swell at knowing he is the only one to have told her these words and he holds on to Jupiter as if she was his life buoy.

– Jupiter, ya tebya lyublyu, he says, kissing her hair, holding her tight.

She shivers, relishing in the feelings.

– Do you have a language like that? She asks low.
– I am uncertain, he answers.
– Can we try to find out?

He nods.

– I know you enjoy when I bite you…

She takes his hand and gently bites at the finger pads. Fire burns in his eyes.

– But does that tell you more “I love you” or more “I want you”?
– I want you, he says, his voice husky.

Jupiter smiles, that was both an answer and a declaration.

– I won’t touch your ears, I already know what that does.

He lets out a chuckle.

– I know you said earlier that lycantants don’t think in words, but when you have to speak, what language do you use in your head?
– The one of the people I am speaking too.
– That’s not helpful… when you turned off your translation, what language did my implant translate my words into for you?
– Orousian.
– That is a language you learned after you left the gestator, right?
– Not exactly, it is coded in my gene-print, like Legionarian.
– Then your brain might be wired with both. Could be either or both, some people have more then one. You said earlier Legionarian is the language of the Legion. Does “I love you” even exist in Legionarian?
– Not really, it is a military language.
She nods.

– Would you teach me to say “I love you” in Orousian? She asks.
– Of course.

She goes back on the bed instead of his laps, so she can see his mouth when he speaks, and turns off her implant, gesturing for him to turns off his too.
He turns off the translation again and nods.

– Ti p’ougi, he says.

The sounds mean nothing for Jupiter’s brain, but they are simple enough compared to Russian.

– Ti p’ougi, she repeats.

Caine’s eyes light up and Jupiter knows that was it. She kneels on the bed so her mouth can reach his ear and she murmers in it as if it’s the biggest secret of all:

– Ti p’ougi.

Caine shudders. His hands shake and taking Jupiter by her waist he brings her astride him. He hugs her and she repeats:

– Ti p’ougi, placing all her feelings in those words.

Caine lets out a moan that turns into a howl. No one had ever told him these words, he does not understand how they can affect him this way, but he feels them deep inside of him. It’s a beautiful feeling, like a rare blooming flower.

– Ya tebya lyublyu, he murmurs to her.

Letting out a sigh she brings her arms around his neck and brings him into a loving kiss which soon becomes more passionate then loving. Her hands reach for his ears and when he brushes his fingers across her cheek she turns her head to gently catch the tip of one between her teeth.

His shudder is signal enough for her to continue. And she lays kisses and soft bites in the palm of his hand and all along his arm, his skin is warm and he smells so good. She nuzzles along his bicep tracing the lines of his tattoo and lets out moans.

– H’ijp ushxyaokdi, he sighs.

Jupiter has no idea what it means but his tone tells her he likes it. She pushes him flat on the bed and opens his shirt and starts kissing, biting and nuzzling his chest. She even dares licking the well define lines of his muscles and she can feel his trembling.

When she stops, he is out of breath and gripping at the bed cover and she smiles to him. She backs away and stands offering him her hands.

When she starts to back away Caine does not understand at first but then he understands her gesture and taking her hands he stands with her. When she pulls on his shirt he folds his wings in position so she can remove it. Her hands start to play in his wings, delicately, and he lets out a howl. Her puff of cinnamon heart scent in response is exhilarating. Her nails trailing on his back, underneath and between his wings mixed with her fingers in his feathers send explosions in his mind and builds a fire in his blood.
— *Moya sud’ba, ty takaya krasivaya*, she says with a sigh.

Caine understands the first part, she called him that often enough that his brain has learned what it means, and her scent at the second part clue him in that she is saying something about his body. It is strangely exciting not to understand each other’s words.

She stopped touching him and he smells some frustration in her scent. Curious he turns around to find her trying to untie her dress and not succeeding. He gently places his hands on her shoulders and turns her around.

— *Voujji-gyu qouxi*, he says, and starts unfastening her dress.

When he is done and the dress is in a heap on the floor, she says:

— *Spasibo*.

Caine somehow knows she thanked him, even if he can’t understand her words right now. She is so amazing. He had placed his hands on her shoulders again and he lets his fingers trail down along the soft skin of her arms, he smells her arousal and he can not hold it together anymore. His mouth is on her neck and trails in kisses and soft bites to her shoulder and he inhales her scent deeply at each kiss and bite. She shivers under his touch and her hand reach up to caress his ear. He lets out a growl and Jupiter turns around with a seductive smile. She hooks her fingers in his pants and pulls him back to the bed. She lets go of him and climbs on the bed, then turns to him and points to his pants.

Smirking he takes off the remainder of his clothing and join her on the bed. The look in her eyes speaks of love and trust, desire and want. When he starts touching her, her body vibrates with pleasure and her first climax is fast like a lightning strike, it explodes in her body and to add to it he murmurs to her the only thing he knows she will understand:

— *Ya tebya lyublyu*.

The layer of pleasure it adds is as powerful as another climax, but it is emotion, an emotional climax. His Queen has never been this unguarded and in that moment, he smells the purity of her essence and the rightfulness of her love. He sees her in all her layers and he loves each and everyone of them.

It takes a good moment for Jupiter to emerge to reality after that incredible orgasm. When she opens her eyes, Caine is looking at her like she is the first wonder in the universe. She is still dazed and can only find the strength to brush his cheek and murmur:

— *Ti p’ougi*.

Why does it send tears to his eyes? Caine does not know, but Jupiter seems to understand, she takes his head in her hands, gently brushing his cheeks with her fingers and lowers it so she can place soft kisses on his eye lids and a warm kiss on his mouth.

After that Jupiter blinks herself back to reality and gives a seductive smile to Caine. He takes that as a sign and lets his instinct guide him. When he is near Jupiter snakes her arms around his neck and brings him down close enough to murmur in his ear:

— *Ti p’ougi*.

Never has Caine felt this way, fulfilled to the inner core of his entire being. Not even his promotions through the legion ranks and getting his wings could come close to this. It is so powerful that he loses touch with reality and control over his body. His wings flare out and he falls boneless on Jupiter.
Caine is heavy in his dazed-out state and Jupiter is having trouble breathing.

– Field on, she murmurs.

The fermionic field of the bed turns on, thank God Max understands English, and takes Caine’s weight from her ribcage and she can breathe normally.

A few minutes later Caine blinks and realizes Jupiter turned the field on without him noticing. He has a sheepish look which make Jupiter say:


He smiles shyly and returns a:

– Ya tebya lyublyu.

Jupiter plays in his hair softly and traces circles on his shoulder and back, humming a Russian love song to herself.

She only stops when he closes his wings, rolling away and saying:

– Hsogw ríjohpuí.

The fermionic field deactivates and Jupiter get out of the bed, offering her hand to Caine for him to follow. He gets up too and they both go to clean up. In the cleaning cubicle, he hugs her from behind and murmurs:

– T’ougi hzobei woxpui ri pyu, Lypxi Gosjiptí.

Jupiter taps her implant and asks:

– What was that?

Caine smirks, ducks his head and repeats, this time it’s being translated by the implant:

– I love every part of you, Your Majesty.

Jupiter smiles and turns in his arms to hug him back and kiss him.

– And ti p’ougi, moya sud’ba. She says mixing three languages in the same sentence.

Getting out of the cubicle, he reactivates his implant.

– I should probably go back out there, I’m not sure how long I was catatonic and what I missed. I need to check on my mother and get a report from Stinger. And I’m hungry, are you hungry? And we have to go back to Earth for the royal guards… She babbles while putting on comfortable clothes.

– He joins her in her closet, wearing pants and holding his shirt.

– You were absent-minded for about 40 minutes. Yes, I’m hungry, it’s dinner time. Your mother is fine, she was furious to be injured, but Dr. Comb fixed her in no time. Nino took her back to their suite. There is still six hours before your royal guards arrive, so no need to rush. And I can report anytime you want.

He says the last sentence hoping she would not return to that state he found her in. Instead she smiles and wraps her arms around his neck.
– There is no reporting in the bedroom, Caine. Here you are my pack and my mate, my partner, the man I love, my center of gravity, not the commander.

He nods.

– And you are stable to go back out there?
– What does your nose tell you?
– You’ve never smelled this happy, he says.
– I have not felt this happy in years, or maybe ever.
– Then you might want to inform Kiza, she was really worried about you.

She kisses him quickly and lets go so he can put his shirt on.

– Okay. I must have worried a lot of people.

He nods.

She finishes getting dressed and leaves the closet, Caine follows and put his shirt and equipment on.

She presses on her bracelet.

[Jupiter! Are you feeling better?]
– Hey Kiza, yes, I’ve never been better.
[Really? You were on autopilot earlier]
– Yeah, sorry about that. I needed my companion star to help me steer away from a blackhole.
[Nice image, you two are so meant for each other, I’ve never seen Caine this solid.]
– Thanks.
[Were you calling only to chat, of is there something I can do for you?]
– I’d like dinner for Caine and me, in my private dining room, and reports from you and Stinger. Get enough for the two of you too, if you have not eaten dinner yet.
[Very well.]
– Thanks, Kiza.

She presses on her bracelet.

Entering the dining room, Jupiter winces at the dining chairs with their tall back and narrow seat.

– There is no way you’d be comfortable seating on those chairs. I’m not even sure I’ll be comfortable. Do you mind getting the two backless chairs from my office?

He smiles. She always asks, never orders.

– As you wish.

She smiles and looks down.

– I’ll have to show you that movie, she murmurs as he leaves.

He returns with the chairs and they sit at the table.

– Anything you want to talk about while we wait for dinner? She asks him.
– You let me chose?
– Why not?
– It is Your Majesty’s prerogative to chose the topic of discussion.
– Caine, she says shaking her head. It’s only the two of us in here. You are my equal, my pack, my
mate, if there is anything you want to discuss it is your right to do so. Even at the dinner table.
– I’m sorry, it’s instinctual.
– Never apologize for who you are, my love. She says sweetly.

He takes her hand and kisses her fingers gently.

– How did you know about love language? He asks.
– There are plenty of books and articles in magazines and on the Internet about that on Earth.
– I should not be surprised, Kiza told me that you have a holiday to celebrate love.
– Yeah, Valentine’s Day, when did you talk about that?
– After you told me about cinnamon heart candies, I asked her if she knew what they were.
– Oh, yeah, they are popular at Valentine’s Day.
– She also mentioned chocolate and heart shape. I know what chocolate is, but what is a heart shape?
– Oh, another thing to put on the list, Earth specific symbols.

She pulls out her phone and notes it and opening a new note she finds the heart emoji and show it to
him.

– That is a heart shape, it’s a worldwide recognized symbol for love.

Caine nods and Jupiter swipes through the emoji pages.

– What is this one? Caine asks pointing to a hand symbol.

Jupiter smiles.

– That is the Vulcan salute, it comes from Star Trek.

And doing the same gesture with her own hand she declares:

– Live long and prosper.

Stinger and Kiza arrive at that moment and Kiza puts her tray on the table and returning the gesture
she declares:

– Peace and long life.
– Wow that’s good Kiza, not everyone can do the salute or remembers the proper response!
– I love Vulcans. Kiza says.
– Too bad they can’t return the feeling, Jupiter retorts.

Kiza laughs, Caine and Stinger are a little confused.

– Dad, Caine, don’t look so shocked. She says, still laughing a little.

Jupiter shakes her head.

– I’ll explain while she gets a hold of herself. Jupiter says with a smirk. Vulcan are an alien race in
Star Trek. They used to be a violent race but since they have devoted themselves to pure logic they
repress all their emotions to a point where you would think they have none. So, they can not return
her feeling of love. The Vulcan salute is their proper greeting.
– Okay, Stinger says.
Caine simply nods.
– Okay, come in and sit guys.

Stinger sits on the second backless chair and Kiza on one of the uncomfortable dinning chairs. They start to eat and discuss things at the same time.

– How are my people Kiza?
– Everyone has installed their work space today. Things went well, I’ve heard of no complaint and the three humans were actually useful. The events on Orous shook some but everyone was relieved that you were unharmful.
– And the Skybreakers, Stinger?
– The same for them, shaken and relieved, but also proud and impressed that you really are a fierce enemy who protects her family.

Caine’s heart stutter when the events are mentioned, he looks at Jupiter but she seems fine and there is nothing of her earlier pain and grief in her scent, so he tries to relax.

– Good. Kiza, did you complete that list I asked for earlier?
– Yes, I was going to shop for it after your shopping trip, but we were… interrupted.
– Well, yeah that put a dent on everyone’s plans.
– I’ll have to go back down right after dinner to get everything we need before we go back to Earth.
– Okay, but take a guard with you, just to be safe, and check if Truly and Kiran need to go down too.
– Of course.
– Talking about Truly, has she been informed of his death?
– I’ve informed her myself after Caine reported in, Stinger says.
– Good, thank you. How is she?
– She looked relieved that he can not come after her and her son anymore.

Jupiter nods in understanding.

– Anything else to report Kiza?
– Not at the moment.
– Okay, then I suppose there is only your official report left, captain.

Stinger rubs his brand and neck.

– Your Majesty, at 15:43 Hind received a warning from Razo that Falque’s threats against you were real. I transferred the warning to Caine as he was leading your protection detail and gathering the remaining Skybreakers we took the cruiser to join you. While we were on our way, you exited the emporium to return to the Mercury. When we arrived, you were pinned down and your mother had been shot. Ensign Ketakeran determined that her vitals were stable and the Skybreakers extracted you after you ordered Caine to take down Falque. You joined me on the bridge of the cruiser and we listened to Caine’s transmissions. Stingers reports.

Caine takes over.

– I was pursuing Falque and his gang as you had ordered me. He had taken refuge back in his compound. They tried to stop me, but failed. I found Falque in his secure room where he shot me with a sound canon, but I manages to raise my shield to protect myself and after that I…

Caine stops. He does not want to stay “I shot him and it splattered all over me”.
– You told him no one hurt my family and lives. And he regretted it for a few short seconds. Jupiter provides.
– Yes. Caine agrees.
– After that we returned here and Vespa and Kalie picked up Caine as you ordered. Lady Aleksa was transported to Med-bay and treated for her injury and returned to her suite with Lady Nino, and you returned to your quarters. Stinger continues.
– When I got back I cleaned up and reported in with Stinger, debriefed and then joined you in our bedroom.
– Perfect, thank you both. Should I expect any investigation from the Aegis into Falque’s death?
– They probably will want a report, but there will not be any consequences from them. You are Entitled. Kiza answers.
– Right… okay, thanks.

They eat more and Jupiter checks notes on her phone at the same time.

– Stinger, you got that list of royal guards?
– I brought it to your private office earlier, Jupiter.
– Good. Is there an Oath thingy to be done with them too?
– There is a formal greeting, yes. I brought it with the list.
– Thanks, Stinger.
– Kiza, is there a space-tech that would do like e-mails? I could send memo and messages for small things like these crappy uncomfortable chairs. She says pointing to the dining chairs.
– Yes, you can use a Message sheave to send messages, I’ll show you later. And for the chairs, what would you like?
– I’m not sure yet, but probably something Greco-Roman to continue with that theme. It suits me, I’m Jupiter after all.
– I will have to check what that is on the Internet, when we jump back to Earth.
– Yeah about that, is there a way to boost Earth signals so I can access the Internet from far away?
– I am unsure. I will look into that, but I do not think sheaves would be the best to access the Internet.
– Right, I’ll get a laptop back on Earth, I’ll need one for my Earth based life anyway. I suppose we can find a way to power a laptop in space?
– Yes, electricity is easy. But we might want to consult one of your engineers so we don’t fry it.
– Right. Last thing I have noted is toys and clothes, but that is on your list, right?
– Yes, and I should be leaving actually.
– I think I’ll go with you. I did not get the chance to see much earlier. Unless that would not be safe?

She looks at Stinger and Caine.

– There have been no more reported threats, Stinger says.
– Great! Then I’m going shopping with you. Meet you in the docking bay in 15 minutes, I want to stop and see my mother before we go down.
– If you’ll excuse-me Jupiter, I will go arrange for your guards. Stinger says, standing.

She goes back to her bedroom and put on black pants, tucked in knee high boots, a white shirt and a gold calf-length, over-vest. She ties her hair in a ponytail and put a small diadem on her head.

– You coming? She asks Caine.
– Of course! She asks Caine.
She nods and offers him a smile. She puts her phone in an invisible pocket in the over-vest and heads to the duchess’s suite.

She rings the door after saluting Pavonia and Aleksa opens it.

– Dochena’ka!
– Hi mama, I wanted to see how you were doing. She says entering the suite.
– I’m fine Yupiter! I was worried about you! You were shutting down from what Nino told me.
– Yeah, I got better with Caine’s help.
– Beris’ drúzhno, ne búdet grázno.
– Exactly.

Aleksa hugs her daughter.

– I have to go mama, I have shopping to finish before we jump back to Earth.
– It’s safe?
– Yes, mama. I checked.
– Okay, be careful.

Jupiter places a kiss on her mother’s cheek and murmurs:

– Always.

**Shopping take two**

Back on Orous, Truly and Kiran go their separate way and Kiza guides them through the maze of shops, like a bee going from flower to flower.

In a clothes shop:

– What are you calculating, Miss Kiza?
– How much to buy, Your Majesty.
– Just buy three of everything. We can keep the overstock for the new people. Convert a cargo bay into an on-board shop where they will be able to choose what they like and what fit them best.
– Good idea, Your Majesty.

So, they went from shop to shop, buying three of everything, for each color and sizes, from babies to adults, from shoes to hair accessories.

They also bought some non-military bunk beds with drawers to save on space for the families and two mothering beds for the soon arriving babies. They looked like cribs but attached to the side of the mother’s bed. Very popular with litters according to the shop’s clerk.

After that they moved on to toys, gadgets and techs, Jupiter sees many things she does not have names for and Caine and Kiza fill her in discreetly, often in Russian. They buy many toys, grooming and hygiene tools, and a large collection of entertainment sheaves for the rec room.

– That is all for that list, now we need to shop for your birthday party. Says Kiza.
– Let’s start with the medals.
Kiza finds a shop where they can design the medals for her Olympics.

– Your Majesty, what symbol would you like to use on your medals?
– God, more things to think about... You got any idea? she answers in Russian, not wanting people to hear her indecisions.
– Unfortunately, there will be more too, have you thought of your personal symbol?
– Yeah, I read something about that in the ways and means commission, I was thinking about a lightning bolt, since I'm Jupiter and it is the god Jupiter’s main symbol.
– Oh, that is a good idea, no one else would use that, Entitled spend too much time sheltered from the elements or in space to really know what lightning are and can do. I've seen some very powerful lightning storms on Earth. They can be very terrifying.
– Then lightning bolt it is.
– Good, and what about Jupiter’s Olympic symbol? Any Greco-Roman traditional symbol?
– Yeah, actually... the laurel wreath, and it would work nicely, with my lightning bolt in the middle.
– I do not know what that is. Could you draw it?
– Sure, I'm not the best, but I can give you an idea.

Kiza shows her how to use the design console in the shop and Jupiter draws the laurel wreath with a lightning bolt in the center. The console actually corrects her drawing flaws and makes her design perfectly symmetrical.

– The year should be added between the tips of the wreath. What year is it actually?

Caine and Kiza look down.

– What?
– I suppose you did not read that part yet... Kiza starts.
– The gyre calendars resets to 0 with each new ruler of the main House, which as been... Caine continues.
– House Abrasax, for the last 500,000 years. Kiza ends.
– Holy crap, you are right I did no know that. You mean we are the year 0 of Jupiter?

Caine nods.

– Yes, Kiza replies.
– And before my ascension, what year was it?
– 450 of Balem. Answers Kiza.
– Wow, that explains why he thought he’d gotten away with murder...
– Oh, yeah, he killed his own mother. He thought I could remember it, that’s why he wanted to kill me too...

Kiza notes something on her sheave.

– Let’s talk about that later, when not in public. About the medals, since we are year 0 of Jupiter, let's go with that but use the planet Jupiter’s symbol “♃” to mark the year.
– You have so many good ideas, Jupiter! I will transmit the symbol to the Ministry of Time and Records to make it official. They will be glad that you chose one so fast, it usually takes centuries if not millennia.

Kiza submit the design with 0♃ between the tips of the laurel.

– What was Balem’s time marker? Jupiter asks while they wait.
– Two arrows in a “V”. She says pointing to a symbol on her sheave.
– Similar to his personal symbol, no?
– Yes, the coation’s antlers. It’s a mammal similar to a mountain goat, native to his Alcazaar’s planet, Diemia.
– And, what about Seraphi’s?
– She chose very late in her reign, a circle with a cross on top, you can see it here: ☽. She says pointing to another symbol.
– Really? She used that? Must have happened during the middle ages on Earth… Did she choose it 400 to 700 years ago?
– Yes, how do you know that?
– That symbol comes from Earth, it actually is the astronomical symbol for Earth.
– Interesting...
– You can say that again...

The medals are ready and Kiza arranges to have them sent to the Mercury and then they go to a training clothes store. At first the owner is suspicious of that huge order, but once Jupiter flashed her sigil he is more then delighted to show Kiza all the possibilities. Shirts, shorts, and footwear, enough for 150 people, in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors and a special order of shirts for her skyjackers, with wing slits. That goes fast and after that Jupiter decides to do some shopping for special items.

For her mother, she finds a nail coloring tool. Her mother always liked to have colorful nails, with this no need to put harmful nail polish anymore. For her aunt, she finds a guide to the stars and planets of the gyre and what each means. For herself she buys a series of sheave on the history of the 'verse and, for Caine, for Caine she buys an arm-cuff.

When she enters a jewelry store, she asks Caine and her other guards to wait outside and lets only Leo and Kiza in the shop with her.
– I would like to see these. She says pointing to space-leather arm-cuffs.

The clerk pulls out a tray and places it on the counter.
– Very nice.

She picks one up and looks at it on every side, how it opens and closes. It does not look solid enough to survive in a fight. She picks another up and it is also flimsy looking. She puts it back and ask:

– Do you have anything sturdier, that can take a beating?
– Not in these, Your Majesty, but we can make one any way you like.
– I’m sure you can. Very well, I’d like one like this one, but sturdier and in black. And I want a design engraved in the middle.
– We can do that too, Your Majesty. Do you have a specific design?
– Yes.

She pulls out her phone and going in the files she chooses a picture of Jupiter, the planet, and shows it to the clerk.

– Yes, we can do that.
– Perfect. And on the other side I want something else engraved.
– That can also be done.
She takes her phone and switches it to Cyrillic and writes “моя судьба” moya sud’ba and shows it to the clerk.

– Okay, we only need to scan the image and the writing for the engraver.
– Of course.

After the clerk scans both he hands her a sheave with the final details and she waves it to Kiza. Kiza takes the sheave and checks the details. At first, she is a little bit shocked by what she reads and then she can’t prevent the smiles that comes to her lips, her brother will have a most unique arm-cuff.

– Everything is in order, Your Majesty. Kiza says handing her the sheave.

Jupiter seals it and the clerk places the order.

– It will be ready in 10 ticks, he says.
– Perfect.

She sits on a plushy chair and starts on a new story since she is done with her “Grim Reaper” story and writing in Cyrillic brought her back to her roots and gave her an idea. This time it’s a Russian tale, about a princess and her wolf.

When an android brings the cuff to the clerk, Jupiter puts her phone away and rises to her feet.

– Your Majesty, it is ready for your inspection.

Jupiter takes the cuff and checks every detail. The Jupiter engraving is perfect, there is no mistake in the Cyrillic and the space-leather is sturdy enough to be almost armor.

– What do you think? She asks Kiza in Russian.

Kiza looks at every detail too.

– It is perfect. She finally says.

Jupiter nods, understanding that she means it is exactly what she asked for and that it is perfect for Caine too.

– Put it in a box, please, Jupiter says to the clerk.

The clerk does so and they leave the shop, Jupiter hugging the box, and they return to the Mercury. They pick up Kiran and Truly and their purchases and then return to the Maximilian Jones.

**Leaving for Earth**

In the docking bay Jupiter tells Kiza that once all the deliveries have arrived that they have to jump to Earth. And she returns to her private quarters. She goes to her office, places the box on her desk with a smile, sits and picks up the royal guard sheave.

Caine follows Jupiter as it is his duty and finds himself standing by the door of her office. He is really curious about what is in the box, and why Jupiter did not want him to know. His nose is telling him that Jupiter is excited by it, but she has been very cryptic in the store and he can not guess what it is. All that he gathered is that it is something for him, sturdy with a design and some writing engraved.
– You don’t have to stand guard in here Caine.

Jupiter’s voice startles him.

– What? Oh, I… erm, no, I wasn’t… I was thinking.
– About what?

He looks and points at the box.

– Oh, trying to guess your surprise?

He nods.

– Be patient, you’ll get it on my birthday.

Caine smiles.

– All right, he says.
– Are you going to stand there like that until I have somewhere to go?
– Are you sending me away?
– Of course not, moya sud'ba, but don’t you have things to do?
– Not at the moment.

Jupiter shrugs and shake her head.

– Very well, at least sit or something.
– I will go get the backless chairs from the dining room.
– Sure.

Caine exits the office and Jupiter opens the box quickly and looks at the arm-cuff she had made for Caine. She smiles and her heart stutter a little. It will fit with Caine nicely. It’s more a gauntlet then a cuff, in sturdy space-leather with a large metal piece at the front. It closes with adjustable straps and in the middle on the metal piece, the planet Jupiter is engraved quite beautifully and, on the inside, only visible when you remove the cuff, moya sud’ba is engraved in Cyrillic. He will be able to wear it with his Legion gloves and with or without shirt sleeves. She closes the box back when she hears Caine’s steps and takes a deep breath to calm her excitement.

What Caine smells when he gets back in Jupiter’s office, with the chairs, makes his heart stop and start back faster. He does not know what she did, but the whole room smells like cinnamon heart. It’s so intense that he puts the chairs down and holds onto one to brace himself and closes his eyes.

– Are you okay? Jupiter asks, when she sees him holding on to a chair.

He looks at her with fire in his eyes.

– Yeah, he manages to say.

She stands and steps to him.

– What is going on? She asks placing her hand on his arm.

He lets go of the chair and holds onto her instead, ducking his head to her neck, breathing in like a madman.

– So much cinnamon heart scent, he murmurs.
Jupiter’s eyes go wide.

– Oh! Sorry about that, I can’t control it.

He smirks and kisses her passionately.

A knock on the door frame makes them look at the door to a blushing Seiza.

– Sorry to disturb you, I brought you portalling pills and a message from Kiza.
– Thank you, Seiza. What’s the message? She says taking the pills and glass of water.
– “The last gundalow just left and we will be jumping in 10 minutes.”

She swallows her pills and gives the glass back to Seiza.

– Perfect, thanks Seiza. Make sure my mom and aunt got their pills too.
– They did, I brought them to them myself.
– Okay, thank you, you’re dismiss.

Seiza leaves and Jupiter gives Caine a quick kiss.

– I really have to read that sheave now.

Caine lets go of Jupiter, she sits back at her desk and Caine places the backless chairs in front of her desk and sits on one.

Jupiter turns on the sheave and reads the details on her royal guards. Their unit is named The Sentinels and their commander is Ottilie Wamsley, a human.

As requested she will be receiving a mixed unit and not a pack-bonded unit.

There are three humans besides the commander, five androids and the others 16 are a variety of splices. The unit has been successfully trained and has been working together for five years.

Commanding officer, Commander Ottilie Wamsley, human
Executive/First officer, Lieutenant-commander Exuvia "Via" Arachne, tarant-splice
Tactical Officer/Second Officer, Lieutenant-commander Adnar Yinrona, Human
Tactical Officer, Lieutenant-commander Khan Fangs, tigron-splice
Artillery specialist, Lieutenant Buck Elwood, coation-splice
Mechanic, Lieutenant Corion Rosefang, Android
Engineer, Lieutenant Billie Ursinus, bours-splice
Communication officer, Lieutenant Onyx Skye, vampi-splice
Artillery specialist, Lieutenant Giyne Swiftstone, Android
Mechanic, Lieutenant Devi Tasma, sarco-splice
Lead pilot, Lieutenant JG Bizzie Stripe, bee-splice
Communication officer, Lieutenant JG Myst Storm, moth-splice
Artillery specialist, Lieutenant JG Marsu Roo, kanga-splice
Scout, Lieutenant JG Cyclor Mouche, fly-splice
Second pilot, Lieutenant JG Pachy, elephant-splice
Weapons specialist, Lieutenant JG Jornaith Palen, Human
She feels a stab of pain in her heart when she reads the two lycantant names.

– What is it?

Caine’s question makes her look up.

– There are two lycantants in my royal guards, she says raising the sheave.

Caine nods slightly.

– What are the details?

Jupiter opens the individual files.

– Ensign Neuri Arcadia is a culling survivor that was sold at a loss.

Jupiter winces and pain stabs her in the heart again.

– Ensign Fenris Tyr is the sole survivor of a pack-bonded unit.

The pain in her heart increases.

– God, I don’t know which one is worse, surviving a culling or loosing your entire pack…
– Physically, the second one. At least that is what the companion told me when I was young and at the splicing facility.

Jupiter winces at his words. And again, when she feels her stomach twist from the portal.

Chapter End Notes

Grim Reaper story: https://archiveofourown.org/works/15584682
Russian love song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLu1ToHe8Dk
The princess and the wolf story: https://archiveofourown.org/works/15674409

Orousian:
Ti p’ougi = I love you
H’ijp ushxyaokdi = It’s amazing
Voujji-gyu qouxi = Let me do it
Hzogw rjohpulí = Deactivate field
T’ougi hzobei woxpui ri pyu, Lypxi Gosijpi. = I love every part of you, Your Majesty.
Russian:
Ya tebya lyublyu = I love you
Moya sud’ba, ty takaya krasivaya = My destiny, you are so beautiful
Spasibo = Thank you
Dochen’ka = Daughter
Beris’ druzhno, ne budet gruzno. = Take hold of it together, it won't feel heavy.
Kozha = skin
uzhasnyy = appalling
Yupiter, ty - tsaritsa, poymay yego. = Jupiter, you are the Tsarina, catch him.
Chapter Summary

Royal guards, lycantants, dealing with an ex, partying and bonding.

Chapter Notes

Disco is not dead.
Can you imagine Caine and Jupiter dancing?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Messages

After that her phone buzzes and chimes several times as it syncs and messages are received. Jupiter smiles looking at the notifications. 10 voicemails and way too many texts messages. It is 6:28 pm Chicago time. That is so Earth!

She deletes the spams texts and reads the others. Nothing major, Vladie asking for money, an ex asking her out, again, old clients wishing her well, and Katherine thanking her for her help.

She listens to her voicemails. There is one from Vladie, again asking for money. Katherine and Austin thanking her, a survey, two empty ones and some automated messages that she deletes. After that she has a message from Lieutenant Martin Adams asking her to call him back once she is “back home” and a final message from Fusion, the same ex that texted her, asking her out.

[Jupe, baby, it’s me, Fusion! Why are you not answering my texts? I want to take you out again. Please baby, you know you can’t do better then me. Come on, Jupe baby. Call me or text me! Or come see me, I’ll be at the Parallel Vortex tonight.]

When the message ends, Jupiter can not delete it fast enough. She sighs, annoyed and when she looks up from her phone Caine has pain and murder painted on his face.

Caine does not recognize the emotion he is feeling, there is something heavy crushing his heart and he wants to tear that Fusion limb from limb.

– I guess you heard that? Jupiter’s question adds to it.
– Who is Fusion? He asks, barely containing himself.
– Are you jealous?

Jealous? Is this what I feel? Caine is unsure if that awful feeling is jealousy but he knows he does not like feeling this way.

– I do not know…

She stands and walks around her desk and sits on his laps.
– There is only you, Caine, my love, *moya sud’ba*. She says, trailing her fingers from his neck to his shoulder.

He knows she is telling the truth, every part of him is telling him so, and the weight that was crushing his heart is released and he relaxes under her touch.

– I apologize if…

She stops him with a finger on his lips.

– You have nothing to apologize for. Jealousy is a beast we all have inside of us. The best way to control and kill it is with trust. If you trust me, trust that you are the only one for me, jealousy will not threaten you.
– I do trust you, he murmurs.
– And I trust you. *Ti p’ougi*.

That puts a smile on his lips and he nods slightly.

– Fusion’s real name is Luca Watson. He is an annoying jerk I went out with once and he did not understand that no means no. He usually tries once a month to get me to go out with him again.

Caine bares his teeth.

– I can take care of this, he says with a dark tone.
– He is not a danger, *moya sud’ba*, but… that gives me an idea.

She stands and picks up her phone and dials Fusion’s number.

[Jupe, baby!]
– Hi Fusion, don’t call me that.
[Sorry, forgot you don’t like it. You taking me on my offer?]
– In a way, I have someone to introduce to you, can you put me on the list for the Parallel Vortex tonight? Plus four.
[Sure, Jupe, you bringing some hot stuff?]
– You could say that.
[Great, I’ll be there at 10pm and I start at 11pm, oh and it’s a retro/disco night]
– I’ll be there, bye.
[Bye.]

She hangs up and turns to Caine, winking.

– Hey hot stuff, we are going out tonight, choose your three best-looking buddies and we are going to scare a puny tersie into leaving me alone.

Jupiter collapses laughing.

– Okay, let’s try that again. First someone hot, is someone very good looking, like you, she says biting her bottom lip. Second, choose the three best-looking Skybreakers to accompany us to the Parallel Vortex nightclub to make sure Fusion does not bother me anymore.
– Oh! Got it. How does Leo, Tristan and Castor sound?
After that she calls back Lieutenant Adams.

[You’ve got Adams.]
– Good evening Lieutenant.
[Who is this?]  
– Jupiter Jones, you left me a message?
[Oh, yes, Your Majesty. Thank you for calling me back.]
– Ms. Jones is fine.
[Okay, Ms. Jones, first, I would like to thank you again for what you did for my team. Officer Zoey Price is over the moon and has been put on desk duty and Officer Jack Morrison got a cast for his foot. The others have appointments for treatments.]
– It was the least I could do. How are you and Officer Granger dealing with what you learned?
[Better, but I think we are still in shock.]
– Give it a few days, took me about three days for the Universe to make sense again.
[Thank you for your advice.]
– Now, why did you want me to call you back?
[Oh, yeah, we have searched your property and found mob related items. We need you to come to the 15th district and give a statement.]
– Okay, can we do that tomorrow? I just got back and I am not on the ground yet.
[Of course, Ms. Jones. What time?]
– I have a late appointment tonight, so let’s say 10am to be safe.
[That would be perfect.]
– Can I use the house tonight?
[Yes, we have cleared all our equipment and I left the key in the mailbox.]
– Okay, see you tomorrow.
[Okay, bye Ms. Jones.]

She hangs up.
– Looks like it’s going to keep being busy.

Caine nods once.

Pressing her comm bracelet she contacts Kiza.

[Yes, Jupiter?]
– Hey Kiza, I have things to add to the schedule. I have to meet an ex around 10:30 pm tonight at the Parallel Vortex nightclub to show him why he should leave me alone, and I have to be at the 15th police district at 10am tomorrow to meet Lieutenant Adams. Chicago time of course.
[Okay.]
– Inform Seiza that I’ll need outfits for both and also for the greeting of my royal guards when they arrive.
[Of course. Do you have time for me to show you the Message sheave?]
– Yeah.
[Okay I’ll be there in 15 minutes.]
– Okay.
She cuts the communication.

She takes a deep breath and returns to her desk and picks up the second sheave and turns it on. It’s the official greeting for royal guards.

After reading it she looks up to Caine.

– I suppose I can modify this too?
– You can do whatever you want.

Jupiter smiles and taking her phone out she researches acceptance speeches.

A knock on the door frame has her looking up.

– Kiza! Come in!

Kiza enters and gives her a type of sheave she has not seen before.

– Hi Jupiter, this is a Message sheave. You can use it to send messages and notifications to anyone in your employ.
– How does it work?
– If you turn it on, I’ll show you.

Jupiter turns the sheave one and Kiza show her how it works.

– Wow, that works like a planner and e-mails at the same time.
– Yes, it creates tasks and sends messages to the appropriate people.
– Oh, nice.
– You can see the current tasks and their due time if you go to general view, here.
– That is perfect. Thank you Kiza.

Royal guards

Jupiter finishes her guard’s acceptance speech with something similar to her Oath right on time.

– Your Majesty, there is a message from Captain Stinger.
– What is it Max?
– The legion’s shallop carrying your royal guards has portalled into the system. They will be docking in 30 ticks.
– Let him know I got the message and send for Seiza, Max. Also inform the duchesses.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

On the way to their bedroom, she asks Caine:

– What’s a shallop?
– A troop transport.
– Right, thanks.

When they get to the bedroom, Seiza is already there, placing her new clothes in her closet. Caine goes to the guard room while Jupiter prepares.

– Seiza, I just sent for you and here you are.
– We received the clothes from the Emporium before we portalled. I was putting your new clothes away.
– Great. I have to get dressed for the royal guards’ acceptance.
– I know, I put an outfit together already.
– Okay then let’s get started, I have to learn my speech at the same time.

The dress chosen by Seiza is a long flowing dark lavender sheer fabric skirt with an emerald green bodice, all covered in crystals and silver. The bodice has one shoulder strap, made in the same sheer fabric as the skirt, but in the same green as the bodice, and at the junction of the strap and the bodice, a silver lightning bolt is attached.

Jupiter glides her finger on it.

– Kiza informed me of your symbol earlier, I hope it is satisfactory?

Jupiter turns to Seiza who seems genuinely worried.

– Seiza, it’s… perfect! You are so talented!
– Thank you, Jupiter, Kiza showed me the design on the medals to help.

Jupiter nods.

– Help me to put this on.

Seiza helps Jupiter, the dress fits like a glove and brings out her eyes. After that she fixes her hair and makeup while Jupiter learns her speech. She places a diadem on her hair and finally Jupiter put on matching shoes to her dress.

– We are done!
– Seiza, you have outdone yourself. Jupiter says looking at her reflection.

Jupiter smiles at herself.

– Are my mother and aunt ready?
– Yes, I already helped the duchesses to get dressed.
– Thank you Seiza, you can join the others in the reception hall now.

Seiza leaves and Jupiter pops her head inside the guard’s room.

– Caine?

He was writing on a sheave and he raises his head. The jaw hanging she gets as a reaction is quite telling.

– Pull yourself together, it’s time to go.
He put his sheave down and stands. Then walking around his desk, he comes in front of Jupiter and kneels.

– Your Majesty.

She blushes and bites her bottom lip.

– Arise Caine.

Caine stands.

– You look amazing, he tells her.

She smiles.

– Thank you.

Exiting her personal quarters Aves and Falco joins them and they get to the duchess’s suite. Kalie, rings the door and Nino opens it.

– Mama, Aunt Nino, wow Seiza did a wonderful job with the two of you! Jupiter tells her mother and aunt, entering the suite.
– It helps that we got these new clothes. Nino says.
– Yeah. Hey, I wanted to ask before I forget, where do you want to sleep tonight? I’ll be going down to Earth because I have to meet Fusion tonight, I will finally be able to get him off me, and I’ll sleep at my house. The apartments are not ready, but you can use the house too, or you can sleep at Vassily’s or you can remain on board.
– We should get down at Vassily’s, he left me many concerned messages. But not sleep there. Says Aleksa.
– The house then? I can send a team of keepers to transfer our things to my house.
– Yes, that would be perfect.
– Okay.

She presses her bracelet.

[Your Benevolent Mother, how can this one serves you?]
– Is this Shrill?
[Yes, Your Benevolent Mother]
– Shrill I need a team of Keepers to go clean my house and if they find any remaining items related to Earth crimes to place them on the kitchen table. And in an hour, I need a team in human disguise to meet my mother and my aunt at our cousin’s house to move our things from there to my house. They will tell you what to do.
[It will be done, Your Benevolent Mother]
– Very well.

She presses her bracelet again.

– Okay, Lieutenant Adams said he left the key in the mailbox, you’ll be able to tell them where to put stuff. Now we should get going.
At the reception hall, Kiza and Stinger are waiting outside for them.

– Everyone is ready inside. Kiza says.
– Aves, Falco and Kalie, go take your places, Stinger says.
– What’s the order? Jupiter asks.
– Lady Nino, Lady Aleksa and Queen Jupiter last.
– Okay. You should know I’ve changed the speech.
– I suspected you would, Stinger says.

Kiza enters the Reception hall and presents them.

– Her Grace, the Duchess Nino Bolotnikov, second primary of House Bolotnikov-Jones, aunt of Her Majesty.

Nino enters and walks royally to the dais, climbs it and sits as gracefully as possible.

– Her Grace, the Grand Duchesse Aleksa Jones, first primary of House Bolotnikov-Jones, mother of Her Majesty.

Aleksa enters and also walks to the dais, climbs it and sits on her chair.

– Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones.

Jupiter enters with Stinger and Caine at her back. Every Skybreakers flare out their wings and brings them above their head. Jupiter queenly walks to the dais with Caine and Stinger shadowing her and when she climbs it they stay at the bottom of the stairs. Jupiter sits upon her throne and gestures to Kiza.

– *Sentinels*, come forward and kneel.

The royal guards, who were at the front lines take a step forward and take to a knee. They are twelve on each side of the aisle and the commander is in the middle of the aisle.

– Listen and hear what your Queen has to say. Kiza says once silence returns.

– *Sentinels*, there comes a time in life when everything seems to make sense, this is not one of those times. As a recurrence, there is a lot I do not know and understand and after a week since my ascension I only begin to understand what I don’t understand about the Universe. What I had learned to be true has been turned upside-down and I am still coping with that. What I can tell for certain is that your own perception of the universe will be shocked and turned on it’s head. But that after 6 attempts on my life in 9 standard days, and reviewing The Sentinels accomplishments I couldn’t wish for a more capable and skilled team to join the Skybreakers in protecting myself, my family, my people and my assets.

Jupiter stands and walks down the dais, Stinger and Caine step aside and she faces Commander Wamsley.

– Commander Wamsley, on behalf of *The Sentinels*, will you pledge to protect your Queen, her family, her people and her assets, from threats from without and from within?
– I will.
– And will you pledge to be brave, honorable, loyal and truthful?
– I will.
– And will you, personally, work for Captain Stinger Apini, my Chief of security, and with Commander Caine Wise, knowing that they are ultimately responsible for my personal security. Commander Wamsley turns pale at Stinger and Caine’s names but still answers:
– I will.

Jupiter glances at Caine and he nods slightly.
– Then I, Jupiter Jones of Earth, daughter of Maximillian Jones and Aleksa Bolotnikov, signified recurrence of her Majesty Seraphi Abrasax, Queen and First Prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones, welcome The Sentinels to my court.

She pauses.
– Please stand.

*The Sentinels* all stand.

– Lady Aleksa and Lady Nino, will you join me?

Aleksa and Nino stand and walk down the dais to join Jupiter.

– Commander Wamsley, please do the introductions.
– Yes, Your Majesty. First, The Sentinels are split into three teams of eight: the Cosmic Sentinels, the Shadow Sentinels and the Fierce Sentinels.

Jupiter nods.
– Form teams. He orders.

The 24 legionnaires split into their three teams.
They walk to the first team.

– These are the Cosmic Sentinels. Lieutenant-commander Exuvia “Via” Arachne, Lieutenants Buck Elwood and Corion Rosefang, Lieutenants JG Bizzie Stripe and Myst Storm and Ensigns Blitz Needle, Putnam Pridecloud and Musca Ocelli.

The two bee-splices, Bizzie Stripe and Blitz Needle, eyes go wide when the three women come close and they kneel again.

– Lieutenant, Ensign, that is not proper protocol.

Commander Wamsley starts admonishing them, but Jupiter raises her hand.

– Don’t. It’s coded in their genes. Bees recognize royalty.

At the look on The Sentinels faces, she was already turning what they knew upside-down.
Addressing the two bee-splices.

– Thank you for your deference, now, please, stand.

And she raises her hand, palm up, to encourage them. They stand and Jupiter smile at them. Walking to the second team she murmurs to Stinger, in Russian.

– Stinger, have a word with them afterwards.
He nods.
Looking still shocked, Commander Wamsley presents his second team.

- Theses are the *Shadow Sentinels*. Lieutenant-commander Adnar Yinrona, Lieutenants Billie Ursinus and Onyx Skye, Lieutenants JG Marsu Roo and Cyclor Mouche and Ensigns Jacbane Farnala, Knuckles Void gust and Aldon Mourndown.

They move on to the third team, the one with the Ly can tants and Jupiter’s heart tightens.

- And these are the *Fierce Sentinels*. Lieutenant-commander Khan Fangs, Lieutenants Giyne Swiftstone and Devi Tasma, Lieutenants JG Pachy and Jornaith Palen and Ensigns Neuri Arcadia, Fenris Tyr and Mani Pholido.

At the look on the two Ly can tants’ faces, Jupiter knows something is up.

- *Caine, what can you tell?* She asks him, in Russian.
- *They are confused and suffering.* He provides.

He smells the sadness Jupiter feels and he wishes he could take her in his arms to comfort her.

- *Right,* she mutters.

Aleksa only whispers loud enough for Jupiter – and Caine – to hear:

- *You going to fix that?*

She smiles sadly at her mother.

- *I’m not sure I can, but I’ll try,* she says softly.

She looks closely at the two lyc ant ants and she can see the perspiration at the hair root demonstrating the effort they are doing to control their trembling. Their hands are shaking slightly even with all their efforts and their jaws are closed tight to prevent their teeth from chattering. Having compassion for them Jupiter decides to cut the greeting short.

- Thank you, Commander. Unfortunately, we have to cut the greeting short. Captain Apini will show your men the way to the barracks, they can have the night off, and start for the morning shift.

Some gasps tell her they did not expect that.

- I will see you, these two and Commander Wise in my office. She says pointing to the two Ly can tants.

Jupiter is in no way an expert on Ly can tants, but for splices who are supposed to be emotionless, they seemed genuinely surprised and scared to her. An idea blooms in her mind.

- Miss Kiza, stay, the others are dismissed, she declares.

*The Sentinels* look shocked.

Jupiter looks at Stinger and he nods with a half smile. Yeah, he will explain that to them. Everyone leaves and Jupiter is left with Kiza, Caine, Commander Ottilie Wamsley, Ensign Neuri Arcadia and Ensign Fenris Tyr.

- Follow me.
---In her formal office---

– Commander Wamsley, Ensigns, take a seat, she says pointing to a sitting area.

They sit and they look even more on edge to Jupiter.
She goes to her desk, followed by Caine and Kiza, but instead on sitting on her chair she only sits on the front edge…

– Kiza, Caine, I know Lycantants are supposed to be genetically coded to be emotionless, but these two sure seem to be on the verse of an emotional breakdown to me. Is this typical behavior Caine?
– Not typical, no. He says.
– Can you smell emotions from them? And Kiza, can you sense anything?

Caine takes a deep breath and Kiza closes her eyes.

– I don’t understand… they are… scared, surprised, confused? So is Commander Wamsley.
– I have not met that many lycantants, but they feel more like Caine then the other’s I’ve met.
– As I suspected. So more like Spock then Data?

Caine looks confused and Kiza snorts.

– Jupiter, how can you always find Star Trek in all of this?
– Hey, I use what I know.

Kiza nods.

– So, It’s more suppressed emotions like Vulcan rather then emotionless like Data?
– That could be it, I would inquire about their splicer… You might have a rogue splicer changing the Lycantant coding without anyone knowing. Suggests Kiza.
– Unless it’s the result of surviving the culling or loosing your pack… She thinks aloud.
– True, trauma can change the brain.
– Right, thanks, dismiss Kiza.
– Your Majesty, she says in English, and leaves.

– Okay, let’s find out what we are dealing with. She tells Caine.

And walks to the sitting area and sit on a chair. Caine stands behind her. The three Sentinels are so stressed and cranked up tight Jupiter is afraid they might break down.

– First of all, please relax, you have nothing to fear, this is not a disciplinary situation.

All three relax slightly.

– Good, she says nodding.

She pauses.

– Commander Wamsley, I’ve asked you here because you are Neuri and Fenris’s commanding officer. Amongst what I have learned are a few details about Lycantants that concern me regarding their well being.
For the second time that day she feels like she has grown a second head or something. She shakes her head and quickly glances at Caine; his smile and tiny nod warms her heart.

– Your Majesty, this should not be a concern of yours, says Wamsley.
– Yeah, well, that is something you will quickly learn about me, I care for my people, all my people. Regardless of how they came to be. It’s how I was raised by my mother and it will not change.
– Of course, Your Majesty, it is not for me to question your ways.
– Tell me, what do you know about non-pack-bonded Lycantants?
– Your Majesty, if they survive, they become the best soldiers and hunters, oh and they do not sleep much and have trouble keeping calm.
– That is all that you know?
– Yes, Your Majesty.
– All right.

Addressing the lycantants:

– I would have to be blind not to see how much effort you are putting into controlling your tremors, please, take a break, I’ve seen it already and I understand more then you know.

Jupiter can clearly see that they are surprised and scared to do so.

– Caine, she says so low she barely hears it herself.

After that she feels his low growls resonate through her and Neuri and Fenris growl back.

– They will not do it in front of their commander. Caine says in Russian.
– I understand, she tells them. Can you tell me who your splicer is?
– Mine was Kenda Pooran, says Neuri Arcadia.
– And mine is Saanion Tursin, answers Fenris Tyr.
– I see… Caine? She asks turning to see him.

Caine does not answer, he can’t, he knows both names and in his mind a maelstrom of images, memories and sensations are revived.

Jupiter does not know what is going on in Caine’s mind but the blood draining from his face and the trembling of his hands tell her he is not well and that he needs her, quickly.

– Commander Wamsley, you’re dismiss. Ensigns, stay.
– Right, you did not get the info yet. That means “Go back to your duties”.

He stands, salutes and exit the office.

As soon as the door is closed, Caine steps around Jupiter’s chair and kneels in front of her.

– Kozha? He asks.
– Always, she says with a smile.

And Caine places his head on her laps and his arms around her waist. Jupiter traces circles on his neck and in his hair.
– Better? She asks.

The only answer she gets is some shakes and trembling.

– It’s okay Caine, take your time.

The Ensigns are shocked and surprised.

– I don’t understand how this is possible, Neuri says.
– How can this be? Fenris asks.
– What can you tell? Jupiter asks back.

She sees them breathing deeply and opening wide eyes.

– He smells like you… you smell like… pack? Says Fenris, the one who survived losing his pack.
– Is that even possible? Says Neuri, the culling survivor.

Jupiter looks at Neuri for a long moment, then Fenris and simply says:

– Yes.

She pauses.

– You do not need to know all the details, but yes, we are pack. I really do understand, please relax, this is a safe zone.

Neuri and Fenris let their shakes happen. As Stinger had said about Caine, their shakes have twitches.

– Good, I’m guessing you get the nightmares too?
– Yes, but how? Neuri says.

Jupiter smiles sadly.

– Caine told me about that. You must not talk about all of this to anyone. Do you understand?
– Yes, Your Majesty, they say.

– Good, now, how long have you both been able to feel emotions?

Fenris looks terrified and Neuri turns pale.

– Lycantant do not have emotions, Your Majesty, Neuri says, trying to sound truthful.

An image of Pinocchio with his nose growing flashes through Jupiter’s mind.

– I know for a fact that that is not entirely true. You are both so scared right now that I can almost smell it even with my human nose.

They both rush to their knees and start to beg her.

– Your Majesty, please, please…
– …please do not have us terminated.
– We can control them.
– Neuri, Fenris, again, this is a safe zone, no one under my care will ever be terminated for having unsanctioned abilities. I happen to find that law objectionable.

At that they look up at her and she is smiling at them. They sit back on chairs with a stunned look on their face.

She turns her attention to Caine while they process that information and relax.

– Moya sud’ba, are you okay? What has you in such a state?

Caine raises his head and sits back on his heels.

– I’m sorry Jupiter.
– No apologizing for who you are, remember?

He nods.

– What happened?
– Their splicers...
– What about them?
– Kenda Pooran was my splicer too and Saanion Tursin was my companion. Hearing the name of my splicer and companion brought back so many buried memories and emotions. Waking up for the first time out of the gestator, being cared for by Saanion, being evaluated and prodded by Ms. Pooran. Being rejected by my litter, my culling, the fear of dying, Saanion continuing to keep watch over me even then. It all came back rushing and I was unprepared for it.
– Oh, moya sud’ba, I can only imagine.

She brushes her fingers gently around his face and wipes away a tear from the corner of his eye.

An idea makes its way in her head and will not let go… she looks up at Neuri and Fenris.

– He has emotions too? Asks Neuri, flabbergasted.
– Yes, she says nodding.
– And you are… Fenris continues.
– No, that is not possible… interrupts Neuri.
– Mates? Says Fenris.

Caine and Jupiter look at each other, and back at the ensigns and nod.

– How?
– Caine was not engineered, he is a runt. You are never to mention this to anyone. She says taking her queenly tone.

They flinch.

– Of course, Your Majesty.
– Neuri, Fenris, this is important, have you always had emotions? Like right out of the gestator?

They look at each other and back at her.
– Yes, they say.

She looks back at Caine then stands and starts pacing. Not something easy to do in her dress…
Caine stands too and looks at Jupiter, confused.

– Do you know what I’m thinking? She asks Caine.
– I can tell you are preoccupied… but I can not read your thoughts…
– Right… she says and paces some more.

Suddenly she stops. She looks at Neuri and Fenris and her eyes go wide.

– Max, tell Dr. Comb I want to see her and to bring a gene-scanning and comparing thingy.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

And she starts pacing again.

– They are not shaking anymore. She answers in Russian.

Caine looks at the ensigns and back at Jupiter.

– It can’t be?
– It can, if they are making splices using your gene-print.
– What?

Walking in front of the two Lycantants another idea hits her.

– Let me see your splicing brand.

Neuri and Fenris turn their heads and what Jupiter sees makes everything obvious.

– I should have guessed… she mutters.
– Look at their brands.

Caine looks at the brands, turns pale and looks at Jupiter.

– What does the second symbol mean? He asks low in Russian.
– Ascending.

Caine braces himself on a chair.
Neuri’s brand is the Jupiter symbol ☼ inside an ascending node ☓ and Fenris brand is what Jupiter considers now the Caine symbol, Jupiter reversed, inside an ascending node too.

– If I’m right, and I think I am, we’ll have to go see your splicer.
– She died 6 years ago…
– Then your companion who became the splicer.
A ring at the door announces Dr. Comb. Caine opens the door.

– Dr. Comb, what ever you learn here must remain within these walls, you are not to make any records or discuss anything you learn here.
– Yes, Your Majesty.
– Good, I need a gene-print comparison of Caine and the Ensigns.

Dr. Comb starts by scanning Caine and then scans Neuri and Fenris. The data comes in fast, but Dr. Comb has no idea how to say this.

– Your Majesty… this data…
– Let me guess, 50% with Caine?
– Yes… and 37% between the Ensigns.
– Please delete that data, doctor.
– Already done.
– Thank you, you’re dismissed.

Dr. Comb leaves and Jupiter paces again. She turns to face the three Lycantants.

– Okay, this will be a shock, but you have the right to know… but please Caine, sit first.
Caine grabs a backless chair and sits. Jupiter starts to pace again and stops after four steps, to turn and face them again.

– Holy crap, there is no easy way to say this, so I’ll just say it.

She takes a deep breath and lets it out.

– Caine, your splicer and now your companion turned splicer, they made splices using your gene-print. I don’t know if they are still doing it and how many they did, but these splices, they get all that comes with it. Neuri and Fenris, you each have 50% of Caine’s gene-print, and between you two, you have 37% of the same gene-print. That is why you have emotions, it comes from Caine.

All three are as still as statues.

– In human terms, Caine you are their father, and you, she turns to Neuri and Fenris, you are half-brothers.

Now she really feels like she has a second head, if not a third, at the way they look at her.

– And there is more…

She crashes into a chair.

– Neuri and Fenris, you stopped shaking…

Their eyes go wide and they look at their hands in amazement.
Max, send me Kiza and Stinger, she murmurs.

She closes her eyes. *God, I can’t catch a break! I might have hated my life before, but it was much easier.* She thinks.

When the door chimes, she calls:

– Come in!

Stinger and Kiza enter and stop at the door.

– Beeswax, what is going on in here? They both say.
– You need to sit for this. Jupiter says.

The tone of her voice gives them no other choice. Kiza sits on a sofa and Stinger grabs the other backless chair and sits.

– Okay, this will be a lot to take in, but we’ve been together in this stuff since the beginning and I know you can take it in.

She pauses, they nod.

– Where to start… Let’s start with the shock, then explanations. Neuri, Fenris, these are Stinger and Kiza, father and sister of Caine’s heart. Stinger, Kiza, these are Neuri and Fenris, Caine’s gene-sons.

She stands up, takes a few steps to gather her thoughts and turns back to face her space-family, who just got larger. All of them are more or less in shock.

– Okay, explanations. Kiza, you were right about checking the splicer, but it’s more complicated then a rogue splicer… Neuri and Caine have the same splicer, Kenda Pooran. And Fenris’s splicer was Caine’s companion, Saanion Tursin. I don’t know what they were trying to do, but they made splices using Caine’s gene-print. I don’t know how many, or if there are still doing it, but Neuri and Fenris are amongst them. I had Dr. Comb compare their gene-print… Neuri and Fenris share 50% of their gene-print with Caine and Neuri and Fenris share 37% of their gene-print between them. Which make them Caine’s gene-sons and them half-brothers.
– Then that is why they have emotions? Kiza murmurs.

Jupiter nods.

– But that is not all they inherited from Caine’s gene-print…
– Beeswax, that too? Says Stinger.
– Just look at them, they are not shaking and twitching anymore. I just don’t know if they bonded to me, Caine or both. Jupiter replies.

Kiza gasps.

– Beeswax! *Jupiter, their brains, they started to change too.* Kiza says in Russian.
– *Stalin’s balls. I can’t catch a break!* Oh, Kiza, a bonus for you, check out their splicing brand.

Neuri and Fenris turn their heads and Kiza gasps again.

– How can this be?
– You should ask the universe that question, because I don’t have the answer, but that is another of “too many coincidences” to be a coincidence.
– What is it? Stinger asks.
– Neuri’s brand, it means “Jupiter ascending” and Fenris… “Caine ascending” or technically “Jupiter’s equal and opposite ascending”

Stinger rubs his neck and brand, silence stretches.

– I just hope they have not made thousands of splices using Caine’s gene-print. That would make for a very, very large pack… And that is the second reason I asked for you both. I have to fix this and for that I need your help. In the immediate Stinger, I need Neuri and Fenris to be put on special assignment or something. Find an excuse and arrange it with Commander Wamsley. I’ve had enough of one severance shock scare, don’t want to relive that again.
– Yes, Jupiter. How about “Special Lycantant training”.
– Perfect. And the next thing I need is information. Use official and unofficial channels and get me a clear portrait of the situation. I need to know how many Lycantants out there share Caine’s gene-print, if they are still breeding them and so on. Also, I need to meet Saanion Tursin, unofficially. Arrange that too, as soon as possible.
– Yes, Jupiter.
– Very well. Kiza, have my mother and aunt gone down to Earth yet?
– Yes, with Kalie and Veel.
– Okay, thank you both, dismiss.

They leave and Jupiter stands and so does Caine.

– Follow me, she tells Neuri and Fenris.

They stand too and they all leave the office and go to her personal quarters, she goes to the lounge and picks up the sheave, her speech for her Olympics, that she had left there and leaves her three lycantants there, drops her sheave in her office and goes to her bedroom.

Fusion & Parallel Vortex

In her bedroom, Seiza is rummaging through her closet.

– Jupiter, I have no idea what you are supposed to wear in a tersie nightclub! I keep taking things out and putting them back.
– I’ll help, but first help me take this dress off.

In her underwear, Jupiter picks up her phone and accesses the internet and searches for retro disco outfits for nightclubs and shows them to Seiza.

– Here you go, look at that while I go clean up. She says handing her the phone.

Seiza scans through the pictures to get an idea and goes back into the closet. There is nothing quite matching the colorful outfits and the dresses are all too long, but she finds a dark burgundy tunic at the back of the closet that could do the trick and she pulls out a pair of golden heels to go with it.
Jupiter comes back and she tries on the tunic. It is the perfect length to go out to a nightclub and the heels are really comfortable. And a big plus is that the tunic has some of those invisible pockets.

– Seiza, you do wonders, ok hair and makeup. I need big hair with lots of waves and curls and big sparkly eye makeup, matching the dress’s color and red lipstick.
– Really?
– Yeah, they were a little bit crazy in those years.

Seiza shape her hair and applies her makeup; the result is stunning for the 70’s and a disco themed night out.
Jupiter looks at her reflection.
– That’s perfect! Thank you Seiza.

Jupiter picks up her phone, wallet and keys, puts them in her invisible pockets and walks out humming a tune.

She goes up to the lounge to pick up her lycantants.
When she gets in the lounge, she collapses laughing at the faces Caine, Neuri and Fenris make.
– Wow, okay, it was worth dressing retro like this just to see your faces. Come on, we have a long way to go. Are the others ready Caine?
– I’ve switched Tristan and Castor with Neuri and Fenris. Leo is waiting at the Mercury, I’ve informed him of the situation, Jupiter.
– Perfect, let’s go.
– Are we dressed properly in our uniforms? Ask Neuri.

Jupiter looks at the three of them. Legion uniforms are really form fitting.
– Remove the sleeves and that will be perfect, she says.
– Of course, Your Majesty.

They take their sleeves off
– Oh, we have to clear that, on Earth, you may not address me as Your Majesty. It is a Tersie planet.
– How should we address you? Is Alpha proper?
– No, that would sound stranger then Majesty. You may call me Ms. Jones, Jupiter or Jupe but where we are going, either Jupiter or Jupe would be best.
– Very well, Your Majesty.

She turns around and steps out of the lounge followed by her lycantants. In the antechamber Falco and Vespa do a double take and Jupiter gives them a big smile.

– Good night guys.

She leaves her personal quarters and someone must have passed a communication along because the corridor is filled with lots of her people. She walks the length of it with her people looking on and
Caine, Neuri and Fenris at her back.

Kiza is standing at the docking bay airlock. Jupiter stops there.

– Who did this? Jupiter asks.
– Seiza said you looked stunning… word got around… and she was right! You will do a killing tonight!

That expression has Caine, Neuri and Fenris shocked.


Kiza and Jupiter look back at Caine and snort.

– Relax Caine, it’s an Earth expression, no one will die, Kiza says.
– It means to be very successful, Jupiter adds.

Caine relaxes.

– Thank you, Kiza. Enjoy your night too. Jupiter tells her.

Kiza opens the airlock and Jupiter walks on to the Mercury. After greeting Leo and having him remove his sleeves they launch and are Earth bound.

Caine pilots the ship and on the trip, Jupiter explains some part of the musical culture to everyone and a little of what to expect in the nightclub.

– Listen guys, where we are going it will be really noisy and the music will be really loud. I’m not sure if that will be painful for you guys, with your sensitive ears. Also, the lighting will be really bad. Oh, and things can get wild in nightclubs, this one is a legal and expensive one, so that can be either a lot better or a lot worse. Depends who is there tonight.
– Is this somewhere you should go? Asks Leo.
– I’ll be fine Leo. I’ve been to a lot of worse ones. I just want you to know what to expect to prevent over reactions. That means, let me deal with the jerks myself first, I’ll let you know if someone is really bothering me.

They beam down on the side of the next building, with what Jupiter has now learned is called a fermionic portal, and Caine lands the ship on top of the nightclub. He joins them using his boots.

– Oh guys, anonymizers on. I don’t want to have to call the keepers.

They turn them on.

– God. that’s still so weird.

Caine huffs a laugh and they start walking towards the club.

– Okay, remember guys, here I’m Jupiter or Jupe, Caine is my boyfriend – she hooks her arm in his – and you are his buddies. Oh, and if someone tells you, you are hot, it means they find you
They nod and Jupiter guides them to the Club’s entrance. She skips the line and walks straight to the bouncer.

– Name? He asks, looking at Caine.

Jupiter shakes her head.

– Nah, I’m not his arm candy, they’re with me. Jupiter Jones, plus four. Jupiter says.

The bouncer looks at Jupiter, surprised. He checks his list and waves them through.

Once inside she walks to the bar and sits. Caine and the others stand behind her.

– Hi, I’m Johnny. What can I get you? Asks the bartender.
– A shooter of vodka.
– You sure you can handle that?
– Da, I’m Russian.

The bartender nods and grabs a bottle of vodka. Caine’s nose picks up the strong alcohol content.

– Jupiter, it is not my place to question your choices but this is quite strong, is it safe? He asks in Russian.

She turns around on her stool and hooks her fingers in his belt.

– Moya sud’ba, it’s the Russian national drink. It’s strong, but safe in small quantities. Don’t worry, I’m having only one tonight, I don’t need a hangover in the morning.

Johnny serves her, her drink.

– Poyekhali, she says and swallows it straight up, and place the glass upside down on the counter.

Johnny looks impressed. She pays for her drink and he asks:

– What about them?
– Not sure yet, who do I talk to for a VIP booth?
– That’d be Casey, I’ll get her for you.
– Thanks.

He moves away but Caine listens to what he says.

– Casey! He calls.
– Yeah? Answers a girl in a purple lamé dress.
– The lady with the four hunks of men wants a VIP booth.
– Johnny, watch your language.
– Hey, you’ll see for yourself!
– Okay, okay, I’m on it!

Caine lowers to her ear and murmurs.

– Jupiter, he called us hunks of men. What does that mean?
She backs away with a teasing smile.
– Hunk of a man, heh… yeah, he’s right, she says eyeing him from head to toe and back up.

He looks down and away.
– I understand, he mutters.

Jupiter smirks

Casey comes beside Jupiter.
– Hi, I’m Casey… Wow Johnny was right. She lets out looking at the four men.

Catching herself she stops and faces Jupiter.
– Sorry, I’m told you want a booth?
– It’s okay to look, she says smirking. And yes, I would like a booth.

Casey smiles and quickly eyes the men.
– Okay, if you’ll follow me, I’ll show you what is available.

Thinking of Caine and the others Jupiter chooses a booth on a side section, it has a U-shaped bench with a rectangle table. It is also one of the two booths that has no back on the end of the bench, so Caine and Leo can actually sit. It is still close enough to the dance floor but further away from the speakers for their sensitive hearing.

– Here you go, we have bottle and food service. Says Casey, showing them the booth and placing a menu card on the table.
– Thank you, can you let Fusion know that Jupiter Jones is here?
– Of course… Wait, what, Jupiter? You’re the girl he’s been bragging about?
– God, what did he say again? I’m not his girl!
– Oh, nothing bad, but unless you got girlfriends joining you he will be disappointed. He kept saying you were the hottest girl he knew and that you were bringing hot girls with you.

Jupiter snorts.
– Nope, he keeps trying to make me go out with him, he thinks he’s so hot and I can’t do better then him… So, I brought my boyfriend and some of his buddies.

Casey eyes the four legionnaires and looking back at Jupiter she smiles and nods.
– I will bring him back here myself. I just have to see his face!
– Thank you, Casey.

She leaves and Jupiter sits on the plush bench and picks up the menu.

While reading the menu she asks:
– You guys want anything?

She looks up to find them all standing on guard.

– Erm guys, sit.
– Sit! You’ll draw attention to me if you stand like that.

They understand and sit, Leo and Caine taking the backless ends, Caine on the side of Jupiter.

– Better! Now, you want anything to eat or drink?
– We should not be drinking substances that could interfere with our abilities, Jupiter. Mentions Caine.
– Okay, so no alcohol, that’s fine, we can order virgin drinks, anything else you can’t eat or drink?
– Lycantant can eat anything edible.
– And you Leo?
– I can consume anything but I do prefer meat-based foods.
– Same for you guys? She asks Neuri and Fenris.

They nod.

– Jupe, baby! Fusion’s voice cuts the air.

Caine growls. Jupiter cuddles on his chest and he instinctively puts his arm around her shoulders.

– Showtime, she murmurs.
– Jupe! Fusion says again, stepping in the booth with a huge smile which disappears in an instant when he sees the fours legionnaires.

Even with the anonymizers on, they are quite impressive.
Jupiter straightens up and stands with a huge smile.
Casey is in the corner grinning and winking.

– Hey Fusion, I told you not to call me that! She says stepping towards him with her fist up and bringing Caine along with her.

Fusion has his jaw hanging.

– Wow, you look amazing! He says, gapping with his fist stuck in the air.
– Thanks, she says shaking her fist.

Fusion bumps her fist with his.

– Thanks for the invite, I’ve had a hard week and I needed a night out.

She turns to Caine and places her arm around his waist.

– I’d like you to meet by boyfriend. Caine, Fusion; Fusion, Caine.

Fusion is not a tall man and he has to look up at Caine. He stares for a few seconds then he offers his hand.

– Hey, man! He says.
Caine shakes his hand, squeezing just a little tight and has a grin that would show his fangs without the anonymizer.

– Woah, what a grip! Fusion says shaking his hand.

Caine smirks.

– Jupe, I thought you were going to bring hot stuff?
– I did, don’t you think my boyfriend is hot?
– Sorry but I don’t go that way.
– Well, you never asked me to bring someone for you.

Fusion hangs his head for a second.

– Fair enough. You got any music requests for later?
– Which decades?
– Anything from the 50’s to the 90’s, it’s all retro now.
– Wow, that is a large selection, but I’m not a musical expert. What’s the song about being alive?
– Do you mean *Stayin’ Alive* by the Bee Gees?
– Yeah! And *Hot Stuff* is a good one too. Oh! and the final song from *Dirty Dancing*!

He takes his phone out and does an Internet search.

– You mean *Time of my life*?
– Yeah.
– Anything else?
– Nah, I’m good.
– Okay, I have to go prepare, I start in fifteen.
– Okay, see ya.

Fusion leaves and Jupiter and Casey start to laugh.  
Casey walks to Jupiter and Caine.

– Oh, that made my night. I’ve known Fusion for years and never saw him so disappointed!  
– I do believe he will leave me alone from now on.
– I think so too. Now can I get you anything?
– Actually yes. We need drinks, but they need them virgin, they are on call. Anything you can do about that?
– Sure, we have virgin Long Island ice tea, pina colada and sangria.

Jupiter sits back and Caine follows.

– Perfect! Order us a pitcher of each.  
– And do you want anything to eat?

Jupiter picks up the menu card.

– We’ll do the skewers and the mini-smoked meat.  
– Individual plates or family style?
– Family style, but order for 8 people.

She inputs the order on a tablet.

– Thank you very much, enjoy your time with us.
And leaves.

– Ok, before the music starts and we can’t even hear ourselves think, if you two, she points to Neuri and Fenris, get any indication that the touch-hunger kicks in, you have to let me know, and also if you get indications of to whom you are bonding. And you two, she points to Caine and Leo, if you see them shaking, even a tiny bit, you interrupt my dancing and partying. I don’t want any risk of severance shock, understood?
– Yes, Jupiter.
– Good.

Cuddling on Caine for a moment she enjoys the steady beating of his heart.

– Feeling better now that you’ve met Fusion? She asks him, using Russian for privacy.
– I did not need to meet him to feel better, your word was enough.
– Good.
– Ya tebya lyublyu, he murmurs.
– Ti p’ougi, she returns.

That private time in the middle of the crowd is cut short by Casey and another girl arriving with their drinks and food.

– Here you go, she says placing the food on the table.
– Thank you.

The other girl places the pitchers and glasses.

– Let me know if you need anything else.
– Okay.

Casey and the girl leave and her people look at the food and her curiously.

– What is it guys? Dig in!

Jupiter tilts her head looking at them and takes a skewer and starts to eat it.

– That is your food, Your – Neuri starts.

Jupiter raises her hand in a stop gesture.

– What did I tell you guys before we got here?
– There are no utensils, Leo says.
– Of course not, it’s finger food.

Caine smiles and takes a skewer too.

– Oh, that is good, Caine says.

That is enough for the others to start to eat too. Jupiter picks up a pitcher and serves drinks to her people and stuns them again.
– Hey, welcome everybody, DJ Fusion here for the night. Are you ready for a night of retro and disco fun?

Fusion’s voice comes through the speakers. Jupiter is excited and squirms on the bench. People cheer.

– We’ll kick things off with a request from a very special girl, a friend of mine. Jupe, this is for you.

A spotlight lights Jupiter up and Stayin’ Alive by the Bee Gees starts to play. She gets up and walks to the dance floor, stepping to the music. People part and make room for her. Caine follows her but stays off the dance floor. The crowd cheers and sings “A, a, a, a, Stayin’ alive” on the music. Caine observes the crowd, not only for threats, but to learn about Jupiter’s culture. A few more songs play, including Eye of the Tiger, We Will Rock You, La Macarena and You’re the One That I Want.

Caine is startled when everyone starts stumping and clapping their hands in sync on a song and when everyone falls into places and seems to do the same moves over and over again on a song he does not understands the words, but Jupiter is really having fun and he feels really happy to see her so free, if only for a moment.

– Wow, you guys are hot tonight! Fusion’s voice says. This next song will not help with that! Here is Hot Stuff from Donna Summer.

Jupiter dances on it and Caine listens to the words of the song and he realizes that Jupiter chose that song thinking of him, has her hot stuff. Jupiter glances at him a few times and every time he smells a huge cinnamon heart puff and he is pleased.

After the song, a guy in a gold lamé shirt approaches Jupiter and tries to get her to dance with him.

– I’ve been looking at you, you are the hottest girl in here tonight.
– Thank you!
– Can I be your hot stuff? He says.
– I already have someone way better then you. She tells the guy.
– Is it Fusion, ‘cuz I’m sure he would share.
– Eww, no, a woman like me needs a man, not boys like you and Fusion.
– Oh, come on, a hot girl like you can have way more then one boyfriend he says in her ear.

Jupiter can clearly smell and see that the guy is drunk. The song has changed and Jupiter smirks internally at “I Will Survive”. The guy makes another attempt and grabs her arm.

– You’ll dance with me, he says.

Still dancing Jupiter crushes his foot with her shoe heel. The guy gets angry.

– What was that for?

Instead of answering his question she says only one word.

– Caine.

The guy is confused but not for long has a hand grabs him by the collar of his shirt and holds him in place. The guy squirms and a small crowd is now looking at them.

– Meet my boyfriend, next time a woman tells you no, remember this very simple phrase “No means no”.
The women close enough to hear cheer.

– *Moya sud’ba*, let him go, Jupiter says, placing her hand on his arm.

Caine looks down and realizes he is still holding the guy by his shirt and opens his hand.

– Be glad this lesson only cost you a stomped-on foot and a scare, she tells the jerk.

The guy flees and Caine stands there unsure of what to do now. Jupiter looks into his eyes and steps to him and puts her hands on his arms and he brings his around her and they hold on to each other.

– Are you okay? He asks low.
– Yes, you?
– Yes, but it was hard not to interfere.

She brings him down into a kiss that has some people cheering again then steps back and grabs his hands.

– You can interfere by dancing with me.
– I don’t know these dances.
– That can be said of half the people in here, almost everyone in here was not even born what that music was popular. Just move with the music, it’s what I do.

Caine nods and keeping his eyes peeled and his ears open he moves to the music. *I Will Survive* ends and the next one is *I Got You (I Feel Good)* from James Brown.

– Now it’s time to pair up for the final request from my friend, I’m sure everyone knows this song, *Time of My Life*, from the movie *Dirty Dancing*. Fusion announces.

The song starts and Caine is unsure what to do, he looks at the other couples and everyone seems to be doing something different.

– It’s ok Caine, think of it as fighting practice while holding hands, no punches and with music, she tells him.

He nods and tries to do just that even if it feels awkward. Jupiter does not seem to notice and she twirls in and out of his arms. She sings the words of the song and he can smell she means them; her scent makes him dizzy and he gets adventurous with his dancing and his hands. She places her arms around his necks and he lifts her and she hooks a leg around his waist while extending the other one. They are in their own bubble when people start to say “Do the lift”. That is when they realize that everyone has moved back and is looking at them.

– Okay, she says.

Caine looks confused but she murmurs just for him.

– I run toward you and jump, you hold me by the thighs and you lift me above your head and hold me there for about 10 seconds, then you put me down. I’ll do the rest. I trust you.

She twirls away letting go of his hand.

– Ready? She asks, low.

He nods and she starts to run, jumps and the lift happens. People starts to clap their hands and Caine brings Jupiter down.
Jupiter waves to the crowd and walks out of the dance floor on the last beats of the song. Caine following her.

She gets to her booth to find the food and drinks gone, except hers and Caine’s glasses. She crashes in the booth and empties her glass in one go.

Casey arrives in her booth.

– Jupiter, that was insane. You two are such good dancers.
– Thanks, but we actually never danced together before.
– That is even more insane then, you nailed it!
– Thanks.
– Can I bring you anything else?

Jupiter takes her phone out and checks the time.

– Actually, it will be time for us to leave, so the bill.

She pulls out a small payment machine and Jupiter pays for the booth, food and drinks. And then they leave.

Leo goes for the ship and the others walk to the opposite side of the next building and are lifted up into the fermionic portal.

The house

Leo drops them near the house and goes to park the ship on the garage they have used before and joins them before they reach the house.

– Don’t make noise, my mother and aunt must be asleep, she says climbing the stairs and taking her keys out.

She unlocks the door and they enter without making noise but Aleksa is waiting for them in the living room. Jupiter takes off her shoes and walks to her mother.

– Mama, why aren’t you asleep?
– Old habits die hard, Jupiter. You okay, you don’t look drunk?
– Yes, mama, I’m perfectly fine. I only had one drink. I don’t need a hangover; my life gives me headaches on its own now.
– Humph, what are they doing here? Aleksa asks pointing to Neuri and Fenris.

Jupiter looks at them and back at her mother.

– It’s rather complicated and I am way too tired to get into that right now.
– Okay, Jupiter. We gave you biggest room, up the stairs, at end of corridor. We had Keepers fix it up a little.
– Thanks mom.

She gives her a kiss.

– Good night, mama.
Good night, *dochon'ka*. Jupiter climbs the stairs and is greeted by Veel at her bedroom door.

- Good night, Your Majesty, Commander.
- Good night, Veel.

Jupiter opens the door to her room steps in, walks forward for a few steps and then, slowly does a complete turn to look at everything.

- Commander, Kalie is keeping watch on the roof. Says Veel.
- Perfect, you and Leo go get some rest, Neuri, Fenris and I will guard from the inside, 4 hours standard rotation.
- Yes, commander.

Veel and Leo leave. Caine turns and enters the bedroom, Neuri and Fenris follow and they take position by the door. Caine finds Jupiter standing in the middle of the room with tears rolling down her cheeks.

- Jupiter, what is it?

He puts her hand on her shoulder.

- These, these are all my things. Everything I had on this world, before I met you, before I became Queen. I had so little space that everything had to be stored in boxes, now I can see them all. This, this is who I am, these, these are my roots. Being here is so comforting, so normal for me. It’s what I became Queen for, to save all of this.

She walks to the left wall where on shelves all of her things are displayed.

- This is the only picture I have of my father, she says brushing her fingers against the frame. This is the piggy bank I got for my 3rd birthday, and this is my rock collection, I did not even remember I still had those. My books, my music… And this, this is the only thing I have that belonged to my father.

Her hand trails on a representation of Earth and one of Jupiter. She turns a mechanical key in the planetary music box, Earth and Jupiter start to spin and *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* begins to play. More tears roll down her cheeks.

Caine walks to her side and puts his hand on her shoulder again.

- I’m okay, just too tired right now.

He nods and remembering an earlier time he murmurs:

- Roller-coaster? What ever that is…

She starts to laugh and wipes her tears with the back of her hand.

- Yes.

She pulls out her phone and does an internet search for roller-coaster.

- Here, that are roller-coasters. My life is just like that these days, up, down, around and up-side-down. She says showing him pictures of roller-coasters.

Caine looks at the pictures and he gets a sense of what Jupiter means. Earth tersies rides carts in
structures that go up, then down, do loops and other things. Just like her life since they met. But he
does not understand why tersies would ride such devices.

– What is the purpose of these, are they for training? He asks.
– No, moyasud'ba, they are for fun, she answers.

Caine looks stunned.
She shakes her head and goes to the right corner of the room where a sofa is and she proceeds to
remove the cushions.

– I’ll have to show you videos of some of the crazy stuff people do for fun.

The three lycantants look at what she is doing but are unclear on if they should be doing anything.
Jupiter pulls on something and the metal structure of the sofa expands into a bed.

– Neuri, Fenris, I don’t like being stared at while I sleep. You can use this to sleep, it’s not the best
but better then the floor.

Jupiter turns around and goes to her dresser, the same one from Vassily’s basement, with the
butterflies and heart stickers on it, and selects a pajama and heads to the en-suite bathroom. She does
not see the stunned look from Neuri and Fenris as they process what she said.

On the wall by the bathroom door, all her posters are pinned. A galaxy chart, The Dark Side of the
Moon by Pink Floyd – light passing through a prism making a rainbow – singers, actors, Jupiter’s
symbol and right in the middle is her poster of Jupiter, the planet.
Jupiter walks to the wall, places her forehead on that poster and murmurs:

– Thank you for sending him to me, daddy.

Caine ears pink a little and he ducks his head.
While she is in the bathroom, Neuri and Fenris turn to Caine.

– Sir, did she really mean we should sleep?

Caine smirks, these two have had their universe turned on its head already and they are having
trouble coping with the changes.

– Yes, she wants you to sleep.
– But should you not have the bed, sir?

Caine has to smirk again.

– Boys, I’m her mate, if I was to use that bed, she would come and get me by the ears and drag me to
her bed.

They look at him with wide eyes.

– But she is a Queen… Neuri provides.
– And I’m a splice… Yeah, I know what it usually means. But you will find out that she is not like
other Entitleds. For her, Splices are people, not tools.

At the look on their faces he adds.

– I had the same reaction. Give it a few days, it will help.

Caine then proceeds to remove his equipment, boots and shirt. He places his gun on the bedside table
and his boots and gloves where he can reach them quickly. Jupiter comes out of the bathroom in a faded t-shirt and jersey pants and goes directly to bed, where she collapses very un-queenly like.

The bed is not her bed from Vassily’s, it’s a king-sized bed left from the previous owners, but her old blue, red and yellow bed cover is on the bed, neatly folded. She pulls it over herself and finds a comfortable position.

Caine joins her in the bed and she cuddles on his shoulder.

– *Ti p’ougi*, she murmurs.
– *Ya tebya lyublyu*, he returns.

A shiver goes through her spine and she hugs him hard.

A moment later she is asleep.

Three hours later Neuri and Fenris wake up Caine.

– Sir.

He opens his eyes and carefully sits up not to wake Jupiter.

– What is it boys?
– It’s the touch-hunger.

Caine looks at them, hands shaking, nostrils flaring.

– Who? He asks.

They close their eyes and inhale sharply.

– I don’t understand how, but it is both of you, sir, more her then you, but both of you, says Neuri.
– More you then her for me, says Fenris.

Caine nods and turns to wake Jupiter.

– Jupiter, Your Majesty, please wake up.
– What is it, Caine? She mumbles.
– They need us.

She passes her hands on her face and on her eyes while she sits and when she looks up she faces two shaking lycantant. She pushes the covers away and pulls on her hair.

– Right, that’s why they are here.

They end up bundled up with Neuri and Fenris in L positions. Neuri has his head between Jupiter and Caine’s shoulders and his legs around Jupiter’s head and Fenris has his head between their waist and hips and his legs under Caine’s legs.

Chapter End Notes
Here is the list of mentioned songs in this chapter. All are iconic in a way or another. If you do not know them, I would suggest you listen to them at least once in your life.

Retro-disco night:

Stayin’ Alive - Bee Gees
Eye of the Tiger - Survivor
We Will Rock You - Queen
La Macarena - Los del Río
You’re the One That I Want - Greese
Hot Stuff - Donna Summer
I Will Survive - Gloria Gaynor
I Got You (I Feel Good) - James Brown
Time of My Life - Dirty Dancing

Lullaby:

Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star
Hours later.

– Jupiter do you want… Stalin’s balls, what is going on here? Aleksa’s loud voice wakes up Jupiter and her lycantants.

In two seconds, they are up and armed while she is stretching the night out of her muscles.

– Hi, mama, she says.

The lycantants put their weapons away and Caine steps to kneel in front of Aleksa.

– Lady Aleksa, please forgive us if…
– God, Caine stand up will you, you have nothing to apologize for. Jupiter says, sitting up and stretching her arms. Mom, it’s not what you think, she adds.
– It better be, she says frowning.

Caine stands and looks confused.

– Mom, go get Nino, and comeback in 15 minutes, you both need to know this.
– Stalin’s balls, she mutters leaving the room.

Jupiter turns to her lycantants.

– Sorry about that guys, cultural misunderstanding. You okay, beside being scared out of bed by my
mother?
– I have never been this rested even when I had my pack, Fenris said.
– And I can’t remember sleeping without nightmares, Neuri provides.

She nods.

– Great.

She goes to her dresser and pulls out a pair of jeans and a t-shirt.

– You two got get ready before my mother and aunt come back. There is a bathroom in the corridor you can use. Dismiss.

They gather their things and exit the room.
Jupiter turns to Caine, who seems to have shrunk on himself, again.
She tosses her jeans and shirt on the bed and walk to Caine.

– *Moya sud’ba*, stop blaming yourself. You can not control how she interprets things.

He straightens up but has a confused look on his face. Jupiter grabs her clothes from the bed and heading to the bathroom she says:

– She is missing information to interpret what she saw. From an Earth perspective it looked like we had some sort of sex orgy.
– Oh! He lets out.
– Yeah, and as my mother she was shocked and angry, probably disappointed too.

He nods.

– Want to take a shower with me? She asks changing the subject.

He follows her, nodding.

When her mother and aunt come back, Neuri and Fenris are guarding by the door and Jupiter and Caine are standing in the middle of the bedroom and Jupiter is drying his wings.

– Good morning, mama, Nino.
– Don’t good morning me, tell us what is going on, Aleksa says.

She hands the towel to Caine who continues to dry his wings.

– Okay, do you want it straight up or with explanations.
– Shoot, then explanation.
– Okay, they are Caine’s gene-sons, we are pack, pack-bonding needs physical contact and you are their step-grand-mother and aunt.

Aleksa slowly walks to the sofa and collapses.

– Blasted curse, mutters Nino, joining Aleksa on the sofa.

Jupiter crouches in front of them and takes theirs hands.
– Remember last night you asked me if I was going to fix their situation, mama?

Aleksa nods.

– When I was talking with them, we realized that they have emotions, while lycantants are not supposed to. That was my first clue that something was off. Then we learned that their splicers are Caine’s splicer and companion, second clue. And my third clue was when they stopped shaking after being in close proximity to Caine and me. I had Dr. Comb perform a DNA comparison, which confirmed my suspicion. Both of them have 50% of Caine’s DNA, and they share 37% of their DNA.

– Half-brothers, murmurs Aleksa.

– Yes. My conclusion is that they used Caine’s DNA to make more splices, I don’t know why or how many, but they bonded to the both of us.

– Why the bed sharing? Asks Nino.

– For the bond to happen properly, it requires physical contact, and without that the bonding lycantant can go into what they call severance shock and die. It’s called the touch-hunger. And that is why they are here instead of two skyjackers, mama. Caine went into shock when this all started, it was really scary, I did not want to risk that happening again. Their first touch-hunger bonding started in the middle of the night, it was much more comfortable to lie in bed and try and get some sleep through it then try and stay awake doing a group hug. It can last a few hours and they can’t really move when it happens.

Aleksa lets out a long sigh.

– So, you see mama, nothing unspeakable happened, although it has to remain between us.

– That is crazy, Nino says.

– Oh, I kept the craziest bit for last aunt Nino. She says, standing up.

She turns to Neuri and Fenris.

– Guys, please come here and show them your splicing brand.

Neuri and Fenris approach, kneel and turns their heads. Nino gasps and Aleksa seems confused.

– It can’t be, Nino says.

– I know, but it is. Retorts Jupiter.


– His means Jupiter ascending, and his, Caine ascending. Nino says pointing to Neuri, then Fenris.

– Stalin’s balls! Aleksa lets out.

– It’s our family’s curse, Nino says.

– We are not cursed aunt Nino, it was all planned in the stars.

– What do you mean? Aleksa asks.

– I’ve had some time to sort through all that has happened in the last ten days… since Caine saved me at the clinic.

She glances at Caine and he smiles at her.

– Stand back up guys, she tells Neuri and Fenris.

They stand and return to their post by the door.

– I would not be the person I am if I had grown up in Russia with both my parents. If daddy had not
been murdered and both of you left everything behind in Russia, I would not understand first hand
the meaning of sacrifice and hard work. I would not have felt so torn inside by what Stinger and
Honey-Bee had to do for Kiza’s sake. I would not have understood Razo and Ibis’s situation if I had
not lived all my life as an illegal. I would not empathise with all these people if I did not have to
work with you both, cleaning for ungrateful rich people. Who knows who I would be if I had grown
in Russia? Would I have been willing to sacrifice my family and myself for my planet or would I
have been willing to become a regular Entitled? Yes, I’ve had a hard life, but it made me who I am, it
molded me to be what this universe lacks, a Good Queen.

Neuri and Fenris gasp. Jupiter turns to them.

– Yes, I wasn’t just born a Tersie. I was born a father-less, country-less, illegal immigrant and poor
tersie.

She looks at Caine and turns back to her mother and aunt.

– There are simply way too many coincidences for all of this to be coincidences. I think that from
where he is daddy sent them to me, to protect and accompany me when I would need it the most.
Daddy would say that we are like a binary star system. We are the suns and they are our planets.
– Humph, I hope you won’t find a thousand more planets, or you will need a very big bed. Aleksa
lets out.
– Yeah, me too. Jupiter snorts.

She takes a deep breath.

– Now that you know what is going on, what did you want to ask me when you came in my
bedroom, mama?
– Ah, yes, do you want blinis or syrniki for breakfast?
– Blinis, but you had time to do the grocery?
– I gave a list to Twitchy and the keepers filled the fridge and pantry.
– Twitchy?
– The head of the Keeper team who helped us move.
– Oh, okay. So, is there coffee too?
– Yes, strong coffee.
– Oh yeah! I need a cup right now, I’m missing some sleep.
She turns around and heads out the room with Caine, Neuri, Fenris, Aleksa and Nino following her.

Busy morning

Stepping into the kitchen she asks.

– What is the setup?
– Cups above the coffee maker, glasses left of sink. Dishes right of cups, utensils top drawer, pots
and pans left of oven. Nino answers.
– Thanks Nino.

She opens the cabinet above the coffee machine and grabs her favorite mug, the one with the planet
Jupiter on it, and pour herself a large cup. She opens the fridge and grabs the cream and puts a dash
of it in her coffee, then she stirs it and breath in the aroma.
– This is happiness, she says.

And right before she could get her first sip, Neuri takes the cup away.

– You Majesty, don’t.
– I apologize, your Majesty, that is poison.

Aleksa and Nino look at each other confused.

Caine takes the cup and smells the content and take a small sip.

– Sir! Neuri exclaims.
He hands the cup back to Jupiter.

– It is safe, Jupiter. He says.

She nods, takes a large gulp of coffee and sighs of pleasure. Neuri makes an indescribable face.

– Your Majesty, I… Neuri starts, then he shrinks on himself and looks to Caine with a pleading look.

Caine nods.

– It is a cultural misunderstanding, as you call them. Coffee is indigenous to Earth, it does not exist in the ‘verse. Because of that it registers as poison for most lycantants noses because it is not coded as edible in our genetic makeup.
– I see, are you sure it’s only that? Could it have something to do with your specific splice? Because coffee is actually poison, for canines.

Neuri and Fenris look at Caine, worried.
Caine ducks his head.

– Yes, it is poison for us.
– Caine! She exclaims.
– It’s okay in small quantities and I’ve had worse poison in my life. Besides the Standard Legion health implant will deal with it.

Everyone in the kitchen looks relieved.

– Still Caine, you are not my food taster! She exclaims.

She takes a deep breath and counts to ten once in her head to calm her flaring temper.
She turns to Neuri, who is still shrunk upon himself.

– Neuri, please relax, I’m fine. I’m not angry at you. You don’t have to blame yourself for cultural misunderstandings. You had no way of knowing that coffee is one of the most drank beverages on Earth.

Neuri looks up and relaxes. Jupiter takes another gulp of coffee.

– What else is poison for you? She asks Caine with a gentler tone.
– I am not sure about Earth food, but grula is worse then coffee.
– So, caffeine in general probably, that means no tea or energy drinks, and… oh, what about chocolate?
– Chocolate is fine in small quantities. There was a fruit called as’hatil that was apparently particularly nasty for us, but it can not be found since Seraphi’s death, I do not know if it is true.
– What is that?
– It’s a fruit with a green skin and green interior and a large seed.
– Avocados? Nino asks.

Caine looks confused.
Jupiter takes her phone out.

– Ok Google, show me pictures of avocados. She says.
– Pictures of avocados, here you go, her phone replies.

She turns her phone and shows the pictures to Caine, who shivers.

– Yes, those are as’hatil, wait you have those on Earth?
– We call them avocados, and yes, a lot of them.

Aleksa goes to the pantry and comes back with two avocados.
The three lycantants shiver.

– Well, from your reaction I guess I will not be making you guacamole.

Caine hesitantly takes an avocado and smells it, then gives it back to Aleksa.

– I would not even dare taste that, even with the health implant. He says.
– Good to know.

– Okay, out of the kitchen so we can make breakfast, or you’ll be late. Nino points out.

She goes to the dinning room and sits on a chair. Neuri and Fenris take two chairs and Caine sits on their stool. They are joined by Leo who looks at the chairs and seem to hesitate.

– Mama? Jupiter call.
– Yes, Yupiter? She calls from the kitchen.
– Is there something Leo can sit on in this house?
– There is bench in hallway, not sure about height.
– Thanks, mama.

Jupiter gestures to Leo with her head. He smiles and heads out. He comes back after a few seconds, carrying said bench. He places it at the table and sits on it, it is a perfect height.

An idea goes through her mind and she presses on her comm bracelet.

[Good morning Jupiter]
– Hey Kiza. Got a question for you.
[What’s that?]
– What flavor of cake did you order for tomorrow?
[Oh, I wanted it to be a surprise]
– I hope it’s not coffee?
[No, why?] 
– I just learned caffeine is poison for lycantant.
[Oh, I knew that, don’t worry.]
– Okay, and make sure there is no avocados in the food.
[Why is that?]
– Avocados are as’hatil, not sure if you’ve heard of those?
[Yeah, not good for lycantants according to the stories. Wait, what? You mean all this time I’ve been eating something thought to be extinct in the ‘verse?]
– Apparently. Seems Seraphi really liked Earth.
[Okay, I’ll double check on that]
– Thanks, Kiza.
[Oh, Jupiter, Seiza is on her way with your guards for the day.]  
– Ah, thanks. I forgot about that.

She presses her bracelet again.

After that Jupiter turns her attention to the items left on the table by the keepers.

– Anything interesting you guys can smell about these things?
– This is an explosive compound, Neuri says pointing to a block of what looks like white play-doh.
– Probably C4, no worries it’s stable stuff.
– What is this white powder? Smells mind-altering. Leo says.
– Oh, don’t smell that, that’s probably cocaine. It is a mind-altering drug and it creates an addiction. You guys can smell its effect through the bags?

Her people nod.

– Mama, we got any hermetic container, or Ziploc bags?
– Let me check. What for?
– To put those cocaine bags in before they affect them.
– What?
– It’s in the stuff the keepers found. They can smell it through the bags.

Aleksa arrives with a box of large freezer Ziploc bags.

– Don’t put your prints on that stuff. She says.
– I know, I’ve seen enough police shows.

Putting her hand inside one bag, she picks up the small cocaine bags and puts them inside a bigger one and close the hermetic seal.

– Can you still smell it? She asks.
– No. They answer.
– Good.
– Yupiter, you can’t carry that stuff to your meeting, you’ll be arrested. Aleksa says pointing to the table.
– Yeah, I’ll call Lieutenant Adams.

She picks up the blocks of C4 and puts them in another bag and seals it.

– This smells like blood. Caine says, pointing to a dangerous looking knife.

She puts the knife into another bag.

After that there are some jewels boxes. She goes to the kitchen and grabs her pink cleaning gloves
and puts them on. She comes back and opens the boxes. Earrings, necklaces and bracelets sparkle in front of her eyes. She closes the boxes back and puts them in a bag. The rest of it are small papers that she puts in a last bag and then she puts the bags on a side table.

Taking her phone out she calls Lieutenant Adams

[You’ve got Adams]
– Good morning Lieutenant.
[Ms. Jones, are you calling because you can’t make it to your appointment?]
– What? No. My cleanup crew found some items that you guys missed. I would like to give them to you, but almost all of them are illegal to carry with me. I’d rather not be taken for a terrorist or a mobster again.

Lieutenant Adams laugh.

[I understand Ms. Jones. I’ll come over with Officer Granger. We should be there in thirty.]
– Perfect, see you then.
[Bye.]
– Bye.

She hangs up right when there is a ring at the door.

– I’ll get it, claims Nino.

Nino opens the door and faces Seiza and a group of guards.

– Good morning Lady Nino. She says.
– Good morning, Miss Seiza.

Nino steps away from the door and Seiza, four Royal guards and three Skyjackers enter the house. The last one closes the door and everyone turns off their anonymizers.

– Jupe, Caine, it’s for you. Nino calls quite informally.

They pop into the lobby which is packed with large soldiers and a small lady’s maid.

– Good morning, Your Majesty, Seiza says.
– Good morning Miss Seiza, you brought what I asked for?
– Yes, outfit and compilation of livery. Shall we go get you ready?
– Go ahead, I’ll join you in a few minutes. It’s up the stairs, last door to the right.
– Of course, Your Majesty.

Seiza leaves and Nino returns to the kitchen to help Aleksa. She turns to the guards.

– If you would follow me to the living room.

Jupiter steps into the living room, next to the lobby, facing the dining room and the guards follow her.

– Perfect, now, before I start, I did not have time to memorize your names, so if you would kindly
remind me of them? She asks pointing to the four Royal guards.

Their jaw hanging for a second indicates to her that usually Queens do not care about guard’s names. The feline-splice with stripes – Jupiter thinks: I will have to check my sheave to remember what he is. – nods and placing his fist on his heart he says:

– Your Majesty, we are part of the Fierce Sentinels. I am Lieutenant-commander Khan Fangs. This is Lieutenant Giyne Swiftstone, Lieutenant JG Pachy and Ensign Mani Pholido. The other members of our team have been sent to your other assets. Lieutenant Devi Tasma has been ordered to something called the warehouse and Lieutenant JG Jornaith Palen to something called the apartment.
– That makes only 6, who are the other two?
– Ensigns Neuri Arcadia and Fenris Tyr are on special assignment. I was not provided with more information then that.
– Oh, I can fix that. Neuri, Fenris, please come here guys.

They cross over from the dining room and Khan has his jaw hanging.

– Your Majesty, Sir. They say.
– Ensigns. Your Majesty, I do not understand, they are not personal guards.
– That is true. But they are having a Lycantant specific matter that only commander Wise can help them with. Jupiter informs him.

Commander Fangs looks at his two ensigns and notices how calm they are.

– I understand now, thank you for their lives, Your Majesty.

Jupiter winces. Of course, any other royal would simply have let them die rather then inconvenience themselves with the presence of two royal guards.

– All right, first I would like to welcome you all to Earth. Tristan, Falco and Vespa have been here before, but this information is for them too, you are not to use my title in public while on Earth. Only a few people know about that. You may address me as Ms. Jones or Ma’am in public and you are always to use your anonymizers unless told otherwise. If you have questions regarding Earth culture or technologies, you may ask them if it is appropriate. There are no stupid questions. I may not always know the answer, but I usually can find it. That is all. Now if you will excuse me.

She steps forward and they split to let her pass. She stops in front of Caine.

– The others are not leaving before they had breakfast.
– As you wish, Your Majesty.

She smirks with what must be a huge puff of cinnamon heart and hurry up the stairs.

When she comes back down with Seiza on her heels, she is wearing a dark lavender skirt with a light lavender blouse. Her hair is pinned up and she is wearing lightning bolts earrings. Caine nods discreetly and she winks at him.

Veel has joined Leo, Neuri and Fenris in the dining room. Kalie is waiting in the living room and the other Sentinels and Skybreakers are nowhere to be seen. Seiza joins Kalie in the living room.

Aleksa and Nino come into the dining room with a platter of blinis and a pile of plates and forks.

Neuri and Fenris are shocked to be served by the duchesses but quickly realize that they want to be treated as ordinary people when on Earth. They eat breakfast exchanging about small stuff like how time, temperature and weather are noted on Earth. Aleksa talks about Russia and finally Nino asks
about Fusion.

– How did it go with Fusion last night?
– Pretty well I’d say. I don’t believe he will be asking me out anymore.

Nino snorts.

– He was never good enough for you.
– Oh, I know that aunt Nino.

She squeezes Caine’s hand, under the table.

There is a ring at the door.
Caine smells the air.

– It is Lieutenant Adams and Officer Granger.
– Oh, I’ll get it. Jupiter says.

She goes to the door and opens it. In time to see a human looking Ensign Pholido, the pango-splice, step away from the porch stairs.

– Hello again. Come on in.

They enter and once the door is closed Caine goes to welcome them.

– Good morning Lieutenant and officer.
– Please, call us Martin and Sam, Adams says.
– Then you may call me Caine, he says offering his hand in the handshake gesture he learned was customary.

They shake hands and when he turns to head back to the dining room Martin and Sam are still shocked by his wings.

– Come on in. The items are in the dining room.

They enter the dining room and Leo, Veel, Neuri and Fenris stand.

– You remember Lieutenant-commander Leo Felis? This is Lieutenant Veel Gulo and these are ensigns Neuri Arcadia and Fenris Tyr.

Good morning, Martin Adams says.

– Good morning, Leo returns. Your Majesty, it is time for us to go.
– Of course, you are all dismissed.

Leo, Veel, Kalie and Seiza leave.

Jupiter walks to the side tables while they leave and grabs the bags.

– Here are the items, I believe there is C4 and cocaine and there are some jewels, a knife Caine said
smells like blood and some papers. Jupiter says, handing him the bags.
– That is more then what we found. Where were these found? Martin says.
– I do not know. I’ll ask my clean-up crew.

Pressing her bracelet again.

[Your Benevolent Mother, this one honored by your communication]
– Good day Shrill. I need to know where the mob related items were found in my house.
[One moment, Your Benevolent Mother, this one will ask Twitchy]
There is a pause filled with clicking sounds.
[He said the items were found in the floor of the blue bedroom.]
– Thank you Shrill.

She presses her bracelet and faces Martin.

– They found them in the floor of the blue bedroom, he said.
– What blue bedroom?
– I don’t know. I did not visit the full house yet. Mama? She calls.
– Yes? Aleksa says coming in the dining room.
– Where is the blue bedroom?
– Oh, yeah, that. The keepers found secret room in basement…

Lieutenant Adams eyes go wide.

– Could you show us?
– Of course, not sure I want to know what went on in there.

They go down to the basement. In a closet, there is a system asking for a password in Cyrillic.

– I do not know the password, the keepers opened the door. Aleksa says.
– I’ll call somebody to open it. Says Lieutenant Adams.
– Wait, Jupiter says.

She presses on something on the panel and it indicates “подруга”.

– “Friend” The same hint as when I was young, the old password should still work.

On the panel she enters Юпитер, Jupiter in Cyrillic, and the concrete foundation wall rotates and there is a secret room there, decorated for a little girl.

– Why is the password your name, Jupiter? Asks Aleksa.

Lieutenant Martin Adams seems really interested by the answer.

– Oh, I know this room. Nothing bad happened in there. Yulia and I played here years ago. She said she had to go there if people came for her dad. She chose my name for a password because I was her best friend and because she wanted to be sure I could remember it so she would not be stuck alone in there. You can’t unlock the door from within. Jupiter says.
She enters the room and smiles.

– We played a lot with the panel. Making sure it worked every time. She was so scared to be stuck in there alone for a long time if people came for her dad. She used to hide things in here. She never showed me where, said it was her stash. Might be what the keepers found.

Caine enters the room and stops standing still. He takes a deep breath and smiles. There is a familiar scent in the room, it reaches up to his brain, he smelled it on their stool before, it’s Jupiter, but at a new purity, purity of youth.

– What is it, Caine? Jupiter asks.
– There is something of yours in here somewhere. Something from when you were a child, I smelled the same scent on the stool, but here it is really strong, not a trace like on the stool. It’s so pure, as if it is a part of you.
Jupiter smiles. Could it be? She asks herself.

– Can you tell where she hid it?
– Yes, your scent is coming from under the floor, by the bed.

While Neuri and Fenris guard the door, they walk to the bed and move the carpet aside. They can clearly see there is a trap in the floor, but nothing to pull it open.

– There must be a panel somewhere. Nino says.
– Right, but where? She mutters.

She stands up and loose her balance while doing so. Caine catches her but bumps the bed while doing so.

– Hum, that is strange, the bed is fixed, it did not move at all and you bumped it hard.

She crouches back down and lifts the bed skirt and there in the bed frame there is another panel in Cyrillic.

– Unfortunately, I do not know this one. Jupiter says.
– Maybe you do? What did she call it? Lieutenant Adams says.
– Her stash? It could not be that simple.
– Well she was a child. What is stash in Russian? He asks.
– Kopit'.
– Try it.

Jupiter inputs копить, but the panel shows an error message and displays “мама”.

– Mama. She answers. Oh, her mother’s name… what was it again…

She turns to her mother.

– Mama, do you remember?
– She went by Natalie, but it can’t be that, that is not Russian.
– True, arg… I have it on the tip of my tongue, too much English, it’s clouding my Russian. Tell me something in Russian, anyone, it’ll come back to me.
– Ya tebya lyublyu, Caine says.
Jupiter smiles.

– Aside from that, she retorts in Russian.
– Did he say that in Russian? Aleka asks in Russian.

Caine looks down and nods slightly.

– Yes, I taught it to him. It was important to me.
– I understand, I did the same with Max years ago. She says smiling.

Aleksa has a strange look in her eyes, one Jupiter has only seen in pictures. Nino notices it too and she knows what is happening. After all these years, Aleksa’s heart is finally healed and she can remember how much she loved Max without hurting.

– As I recall, he told you he loved you many times a day, and every time you had that look on your face. Nino teases Aleksa.
– What look? Aleksa says, half-lost in thoughts.
– The same blasted one you have right now. Nino inputs.

Aleksa snaps out of her remembering and slaps Nino on the upper back.

– Stubborn! She says.
– Head strong! Nino retorts.

The sisters start to laugh and hug each other. Jupiter smiles.

– Got it! Natalka!

She inputs "Наталка" and the floor opens up.

– There, your scent come from that package. Caine says.

Lieutenant Adams had put on some gloves and he takes an envelope out. What he finds inside surprises him.

– She kept it! Jupiter exclaims.

Jupiter is so happy, if she was alone she might have jumped up and down a little.

A twelve inches long braid comes out of the envelope.

– I remember this, Aleksa says.
– I still have hers in my shoe box. We exchanged braids when we both got short haircuts. She explains for the others.

She turns to Caine holding her braid.

– You were right, it is a part of me or was a part of me.

Caine has a longing look on his face. Jupiter takes the braid and puts it back in the envelope and hands it over to Caine with a nod and a wink, saying:

– Hold on to that for me.

Caine inhales sharply and grabs the package reverently.

In the floor they find water bottles, wrapped food, a doll, a bag of clothes for a 9-years-old, a
– It’s her survival, get-away stash, Jupiter murmurs.

Jupiter picks up a book and opens it, it’s Yulia’s personal journal. She flips through the pages and goes to the last entries. It’s written in Cyrillic, with spelling mistakes with some English words. It brings tears to her eyes. Caine’s sensitive nose picks up the scent of salt and the sadness Jupiter feels.

– What is it, Jupiter? He asks.
– Her last entries in her journal. She says.
– “Dear Yupiter, I hope you find this one day. I wanted to join you at the park today but papa sent me to my bunker. Really sent me, he looked scared. Now I’m scared too. He gave me stuff to hide in my bunker. I put them with my stash. Jupiter, will you come find me after two days, like we said?” Next one is: “Yupiter, I’m sorry I can’t see you again. Papa said we are leaving in the morning, I don’t know why. I managed to sneak in my bunker to write you one last time. I can’t take anything with me. If you find this, take care of Kara for me. BFF Yulia.”

Jupiter smirks and picks up the doll and hold her against her heart.

– She is Kara. She is the last thing her mother gave her before she died.

She gets up from the floor.

– There is nothing for the police in here. Only memories of a little girl.

She looks at her mother.

– I should return all of this to Yulia.

Aleksa nods. They all leave the bunker and Jupiter closes the door and locks it back. She is still holding the doll and Caine the envelope with the braid.

**Operation Bunny Rescue**

Upstairs she takes her phone out and calls the number Yulia had given her at Mr. Miller’s office but she only gets a pre-recorded message. “To join me call me at double pie.” She hangs up, annoyed.

– She says to call at double pie… You know a pie number you?

Nino shrugs but Aleksa starts to quote, in Russian:

– 20 digits of number Pi. She says stoic.
– Mama, you are a genius!
– No, but good mathematician, yes.

Jupiter nods, opens the calculator app on her phone and calculates the double of the ten first digits of Pi and calls the number 628-318-5603.

[Allo!] Says a woman in Russian
– Allo, is Yulia available? Jupiter asks.
[Who is asking?] Asks the woman.
– Yupiter Jones.
[Ah! Yes, one moment.] Says the woman.

A short moment later, Yulia picks up the phone.
[Yupiter?] She asks.
– Da!
[Hi, what can I do for you?]
– Hey, I found stuff that belongs to you in the house.
[Like what?]
– Your stash.
[My stash? You remembered the password for my bunker?]
– Of course, I could never forget it.

A garbled noise makes Caine turn to Jupiter and touch his nose. Jupiter presses the mute button on her phone.

– What?
– I can’t tell much over that comm device, but something is wrong.
Jupiter nods and unmutes her phone.

– I found someone I am sure you missed over the years.
[No!? It can’t be!] Yulia exclaims.
– Yes.
[Kara! You found Kara?]
– Yes.
[I’ve been trying for years to remember what happened to her!]
– Now you know. I actually have her right here in my hands.
[Oh, Jupe, you have no idea what this means to me.]
– Oh, I think I do, you remember what happened to my father, right?
[Right, of course. Well, I have to run to the corner store, I’ll call you later about Kara.]

A light flashes through Jupiter’s eyes.

– Okay, see ya.
[Bye.]

She rushes out of the dining room and climbs the stairs and goes to her bedroom. Caine and her mother hurry after her.

– Mom, where’s my shoe box?
– Under the bed.
Jupiter places Kara on the bed, kneels and finds the box. She opens it and empties the content on her bed. Rummaging through the content, she picks up an envelope, identical to the one found in Yulia’s stash, opens it and take out a long blond braid.

She turns to Caine and hand him the braid.

– We have to find her, she is in danger.

Caine takes the braid and inhales the scent deeply, registering every little detail.

– How do you know? Aleksa asks.
– She said she had to run to the corner store.
– And?
– It was our secret code phrase for help.

Aleksa nods.

– Nino! She calls.

They hear loud rushing foot steps and Nino comes in running into the bedroom.

– What?
– Operation Bunny Rescue, find out where she is.
– Blasted Curse. She says.

In an instant Nino loses her fun demeanor and seems to grow a few inches. She storms out of the room saying “I’m on it.”

Jupiter and Caine are confused.

– Mom, what is going on? Asks Jupiter.
– Nino has sources, she will find out where Yulia is, and then they can go get her. She is out of shape for that part.
– But how?

Aleksa looks into the distance.

– She was KGB.
– Aunt Nino? KGB? Wait is that how you came to the US?

Aleksa nods.

– What is the KGB? Caine asks.
– Secret police under the previous Russian regime. Answers Jupiter.

Aleksa nods.

– Barinov new, made her swear on Mother Russia to rescue Yulia if anything happened to her.
– Any other secrets I should know about?
– Not at the moment.

Caine is amazed by the exchange, Nino is much more then she seems. He hands the blond braid back to Jupiter and Jupiter stores is back with her other items in the rectangle cardboard box she called a shoe box.

She turns to her mother.

– Mama, can you go see Lieutenant Adams and Officer Granger out for me? Tell him I’ll drop by his
office as soon as I’ve taken care of something.
– Sure, dochën’ka.

Aleksa leaves and Jupiter turns to Caine. He opens his arms and she crashes against him. He closes his arms around her and she lets out a huge sigh. He can feel and smell how much his contact helps her calm down and steady her, it makes a warmth form in his chest.

– What do you need me to do? Caine asks.
– Find her before something bad happens, she says using her Queen tone.

He steps back and salutes her.

– Yes, Your Majesty.

As he turns to leave, she stops him with her hand on his cheek.

– Wait, she says softly.

That simple word and gesture is reminiscent of the first time they kissed and when she approaches her mouth he meets her halfway and kisses her.

– For luck. She murmurs.

At the bizarre face he makes, she adds:

– It is sort of traditional on Earth to kiss the one you are with for good luck before attempting something risky or dangerous.

He smirks and kisses her again.

– I like this tradition, he says low.

Jupiter smiles.

– I’ll check with the Keepers and I’ll comm you any information I get from them or aunt Nino. Go, she tells him.

Then he turns, and leaves the room.

---Tracking---

Caine leaves the house after placing Tristan in charge of Jupiter’s personal security and taking his leave of Aleksa. “You better come back in one piece, moy syn.” Aleksa told him before he left. He smirks remembering Jupiter’s kisses. Then shaking his head, he focuses on the task at hand.

That is when he realizes he has no idea of where to start. So, he thinks.

*Where should I even start? It’s not like I have contacts on this planet. Well, that is not true, Jupiter said she would contact the Keepers, and Nino is working on it too. So, you do have contacts, it happens to be that your contacts are also your Alpha, Mate and Queen and her family. This is*
getting so confusing. Okay, finding one tersie, in danger, on one planet. I’ve found people in entire systems before, I can do one planet. But what a planet it is, there are so many tersies on this planet. And all those chemicals in the airs are clogging my senses.

He was down the street, in front of the garage, before he knew it. He walks around the garage and activates his boots. Landing on the roof he shakes his doubts away.

*I can do this, I can find this tersie, I’m the best hunter in the gyre, after all. Okay, with Jupiter I had a starting point, the clinic, but for this one? I have her scent and I’ve seen her at that lawyer’s office. Right the lawyer’s office, I can go there and try and pick up her scent.*

A few minutes later he is landing on the office building’s roof. He enters the building discreetly and goes down to the lawyer’s floor.

– May I help you? Asks the assistant.
– Hello, maybe, I was here a few days ago with my… friend… Jupiter Jones.
– Ah yes, I remember you, says the assistant with a wink.
– She misplaced an heirloom and I am helping her look for it. Would it be possible to look for it?
– Sure, what is it? The assistant asks, pulling a box of trinkets from a drawer.

Caine thinks fast.

– A silver bird on a fine chain.

She rummages through the box.

– No, nothing like that.
– Could I look in the office and conference room?
– It’s not our usual policy, but for Ms. Jones, okay, but I have to go with you.
– Thank you.

In the office he pretends to look for the necklace and discreetly smells for Yulia’s scent. He follows it to the conference room. The scent is a little different from the braid, due to the age difference, but it is still his target. In the conference room, her scent is particularly strong on one chair, and there is a chemical substance mixed with it.

The assistant notices him smelling the chair.

– What are you doing?
– What? Oh, sorry I can’t pinpoint what this smell is, I know I’ve smelled it before.

The assistant looks at him bizarrely and comes take a sniff off the chair.

– Wow, you have a good nose, it’s Extase by Nina Ricci. One of the sellers wore it when you were here.
– What?
– That’s the name of the perfume.
– Oh, thank you, that must be where I smelled it before.
– Well, I don’t see that heirloom.
– Me neither, it must be elsewhere.

They go back to the lobby and Caine can still catch the scent mixed with the perfume in the air.
– Thank you for your assistance.
– No problem. Sorry you did not find what you were looking for.

He nods and leaves the office.
Following the scent, he walks to a door which turns out to be the stairwell. And once he opens it, the air paints a picture in his mind.

Three people forcing his target into the stairwell and down the stairs. He picks up adrenaline, freight, and salt in the air. There is also something stinky from the three people who were abducting her. He does not like that scent at all.

He is almost at the bottom when his implants buzz. He taps it.

[Hey Caine, I have intel for you, if it’s not safe for you to talk, just cough once]
– I am alone at the moment, he answers.
[Okay, good. It’s good to hear your voice.]

Caine can’t not prevent his small smirk.

– What is the intel?
[Aunt Nino was able to confirm that space people had nothing to do with this. It’s another mob gang that took her. It’s a ploy for power, now that her dad can’t do much about it.]
– They were three, two male, one female, in the stairwell at the lawyer’s office. He says analyzing more layers of the scent.
[That’s where they took her from?]
– Yes, the scent is strong in here.
[Okay, I’ll tell the Keepers to start there, it will be faster then looking all over the city.]
– And I’ll keep following the scent as far s I can go.
[Okay, let me know what you find.]
– Of course, Your Majesty.

The communication cuts off. And he hurries down the last few flights of stairs.

In the lobby, the clerk looks at him and back at his newspaper.

The trail of scents turns and heads for the back of the building. Caine exists in the back alley, where the dumpsters are. It is dark and out of the way of prying eyes so he takes a good breath of air with both nose and mouth. He closes his eyes and analyzes all traces in the air. He can smell garbage, oil, chemicals from vehicles and there is that perfume again. It is very strong, almost overwhelming, he follows his nose to the third dumpster. The chain has been broken and the cover is busted. He opens it and moving a few trash bags out of the way he finds the source of the scent. It’s a brown bag made of tanned animal skin, Caine recognizes it as the bag Yulia was carrying with her. He opens it and finds that the scent comes from a broken glass container. The interior of the bag and its content are soaked with the perfume. He removes the glass shards and drops them in the dumpster and checks out the content of the bag. Wallet, comm, keys and other personal items are inside. The identification cards in the wallet confirm that this is Yulia’s bag.

As he is preparing to leave, another scent catches his nose and he looks into the dumpster again,
confused. Something else smells like his target in the dumpster. It is not strong enough to be a body or even a body part but it still smells like her. He places the bag on the ground and starts to move more trash bags out of the way. That is when he sees the rectangle paper carrying… Bag? Container? That Yulia had with her too. He picks it out of the dumpster and collects the bag from the ground.

As for the scent, he can not track if further this way, as they took a vehicle.

He decides to call Jupiter to let her know what he found.

[Hey, what’s new?]
– I found her personal items.
[Like what?]
– There is her rectangle paper carrying container.
[Her what?] Jupiter exclaims.
– The rectangle container she took paper out of.
[Oh, that is called a briefcase. What else?]
– A bag, with her wallet, comm, keys and stuff I don’t know the name for.
[So you have her briefcase and her purse? Wait her comm? Oh, you mean her phone?]
– Yes.
[Crap, that mean they can redirect phone calls. Which means they were prepared for this.]
– And they took a vehicle in the alley behind the building. It cut the scent. I can’t continue following it from here.
[It’s okay, thanks, I’ll let the Keepers know and they will have her location soon. Come pick me up.]

That demand makes his inside twist.

– Jupiter… he says cautiously.
[What?]
– It won’t be safe.
[Oh, don’t worry, I don’t plan on going in with you.] She says with a laugh.

Caine breathes better.

[I’ll leave the fighting to you. But I have to make a show of force with these people after Yulia is safe, if I don’t want them causing more trouble. I have to establish my authority and I want to be there for Yulia.]
– I understand, I will be there shortly.

The communication cuts off and he flies back to the roof of the building and boards the Mercury.

---Rescue---

The Keepers come through and Caine picks up Jupiter, Tristan, Falco, Vespa, Neuri and Fenris at the house. In ten minutes, they reach a house in a remote location outside of Chicago.

After that, things go fast. They use the ship’ scanner to determine that there are six people inside the house. One alone in a room, with someone guarding it. Caine deduces that must be Yulia. Two others are in a room by the entrance and the other two are circling the house.
Knock them out, but don’t kill them unless absolutely necessary. Jupiter says, with a firm tone.

They look at her, surprised but nod.

They land in a field close to the house, keeping the stealth shield activated and everyone but Jupiter and Vespa exit the ship.

Neuri and Fenris walk, while Caine, Tristan and Falco fly. Jupiter can see Caine drop down on one of the guards and she can imagine Tristan doing the same on the other side of the house. Suddenly someone yells and Jupiter hears a gun shot. Her hand shakes slightly, but she clenches her fists and steadies herself.

After he knocked out his guard, Caine hears the second one yell. Tristan must not have been fast enough. The first gun shot comes from the inside of the house and rushes to the other side of the house. The guard is unconscious but Tristan is holding his hand over a large red stain on his side.

– Hang on.
– I’ll be ok, continue the mission.

Caine looks at him for a second and turns back towards the house.

While he was checking on Tristan, Neuri and Fenris managed to enter the house and knock out a female guard. Caine recognizes her scent when he enters the house, with Falco right behind him. The four of them split inside the house to catch the two remaining guards. Following his nose, Caine catches one crouched behind the kitchen island. He knocks him out with a fist in the jaw and another at the back of the head.

– Secured. Falco calls from the other side of the house.
– Secured, he says too.

They gather by the front door.

– Tie them all up, I have to check on Tristan.
– Yes, sir, says Falco.

He hurries to the side of the house. Tristan is pale but still breathing. He picks him up and flies to the Mercury as fast as he can.

When Jupiter sees Tristan pale as a ghost with a red stain spreading on his side she worries. Vespa hurries with a golden spray can. Her stomach twists, but this is life or death, and loosing him, would be bad for the unit.

– Is the bullet still in there?

They look at her, confused.

– Bullet? Vespa asks.
– Metal projectile, Earth weapons use metal projectile. You have to take it out if it’s still in there.

Caine nods, understanding. He opens up Tristan’s shirt.
Is there an exit wound? She asks.

Caine turns Tristan to see his back.

– Yes.
– Ok, then the bullet went through, seal him up.

Vespa sprays the RegeneX unto the wounds. Jupiter is once again amazed and disgusted at the same time. Amazed at how fast it heals, disgusted by what it is made of.

Tristan sits slowly and tries to stand.

– Woah, slow down, you lost quite a lot of blood, Jupiter tells him.
– What kind of weapon was that?
– A gun, I can’t tell the specific model.
– I’ve been shot before, it never hurt this bad.
– Tersie weapon, metal projectile, Caine surmises.

Tristan nods, slowly.

– You’ll be off duty for the next day or so, see what Dr. comb says. I want to be sure there is no more internal damage or bleeding. Caine arrange for him to be picked up.

Caine nods, Tristan and Vespa are shocked. One again their Queen treats them as equals and not as disposable tools. They should be used to it by now, but you don’t get rid of years of conditioning in a few days.

Caine makes the call after what he and Jupiter leave the ship for the house. Vespa staying with Tristan until his replacement arrives.

They walk to the house and Jupiter take on her Queen demeanor. When she enters, Caine stays a step behind as is required by protocol. Some guards have regained consciousness but Jupiter ignores them and climbs the stairs.

She knocks on the only door made of metal.

– Yulia, are you in there?
– Yupiter, is that you?
– Yes, do you have any idea where the key is?
– Their boss took it with him.

Caine shows her his iriser.
She nods.

– Yulia, we are going to get you out of there. I need you to move away from the door and close your eyes.
– What?
– Just trust me on this okay?
– Okay.

There is a few seconds of silence.
– I’m ready! Yulia calls.

Jupiter signals Caine and he activates the iriser. They go through the opening and they enter into a small bedroom. Yulia is in the corner crouched with her eyes closed and her hand on her ears. She walks to her and takes her hands in her.

– Just keep your eye close.

Yulia stands.

– Do you have anything in here to bring with you?
– No, they threw my things away.
– Yeah, I know, Caine found your purse and briefcase.

They are out of the room and Caine deactivated the iriser.

– How?
– Your perfume container was broken, it smelled a lot. Caine says.
– My what?

Jupiter smirks.

– You can open your eyes now. She tells her, then adds, he means your bottle of perfume.

Yulia nods and opens her eyes. She looks around and notices the door still closed and locked.

– How?
– You don’t want to know.

Yulia looks at Jupiter and realises why that sounds so strange, it’s the tone of voice she used. The same one her dad used when commanding his underlings. She swallows.

– What is going on, Jupe?

Jupiter looks at her friend and for a moment she reverts to her old fun self.

– Nothing illegal, Yul! But what your dad was into is a walk in the park compared to what I have to deal with.
– What do you mean?
– With great powers come great responsibilities.
– What does Spiderman have to do with any of this?

Jupiter smirks.

– Oh, Yul! You’d be surprised. Let’s just say that a lot of people’s lives are riding on me.
– Jupe, be serious!
– I am, she says, using her Queenly tone.

She turns around, facing the stairs and Yulia is in total shock.
She goes down and Queenly walks to the living room where all the mobsters have regained consciousness by now.

She stops in the middle of the room and faces the mobsters. Caine is behind her to the left, Neuri and Fenris are by the door and Falco watches that they do not untie themselves. Yulia steps in after Jupiter and the mobsters gasp.
Jupiter waits a long moment, looking at every one of the mobsters from head to toe and when they stay to sweat she speaks.

– Hello. My name is Jupiter Jones. You abducted my friend. I have come for her.

She says that on the same tone as Inigo Montoya’s “You killed my father” lines from Princess Bride. The mobsters look at her and glance at Yulia and her guards. One is feeling bold and retorts.

– Our boss will get her back, and you won’t find her next time.

She looks down at the mobster and states:

– There is nowhere on Earth that you could hide from me and my people.

The mobster snorts.

– You are already down a man; your little team here can’t do much to us. The other will be here soon.
– These are not all my people but I see you will need a demonstration…

She pauses.

– Commander?
– Ms. Jones?
– ETA on your team?
– Outside waiting on your signal.

Jupiter smirks.

– Your captain with them?
– Yes.
– And status on your lieutenant?
– All good, the doc cleared him, Ms. Silver sends her thanks.
– Perfect.

She kept her eyes on the mobsters and saw them flinch and her smirks turns into a cold smile.

– Captain, come in. She calls.

The front door opens and the Skybreakers enter the house and join her. They line the room and Stinger stops by Jupiter.

– Your…

Jupiter raises a hand to stop him, she looks him in the eye and slightly shakes her head. Stinger nods.

– Captain, I never was in danger.
– I understand, Ms. Jones.
– Very well, take your place.

Stinger steps behind Jupiter and beside Caine. Yulia is in total shock in the corner, her dad never had that much authority.

– I need you all to answer a few questions.
– Yes Ma’am, all her guards say.
– Who do you work for?
– You Ma’am.
– Who do you all owe your life too?
– You Ma’am.
– Who do your families owe their lives too?
– You, Ma’am.
– If I asked anything from you, would you do it?
– Yes Ma’am.
– Even if it was to kill someone?
– Yes Ma’am.
– Good!

She pauses for a few seconds.

– Commander, what is your specialty?

The mobsters gasp.

– And how did we meet?
– I was hired to kill you, Ms. Jones.

Yulia lets out a Russian curse.

– Have you ever failed a contract?
– Never before, never after.
– Then why am I still alive?
– I saved you.
– Why?
– Because I finally found someone deserving of my loyalty.

Jupiter nods and smirks.

– Thank you, Commander. Captain, what happened to the man who abducted my family and threatened to kill them, and me?
– He is dead.
– And the man who injured my mother?
– You sent the Commander after him.
– Thank you, Captain.

She pauses and addresses the mobsters.

– Now that I have your attention, I will let you on a little secret.

She steps towards them, Caine and Stinger step with her.

– The only reason you are alive is because dead man tells no tales.

She kicks the foot of the mobster who had dared talk back to her.

– What is you name?

The guy flinches but answers.
– Vitomir.
– Well, Vitomir, I want you to give your boss a message from me. Can you do that?

The guy nods.

– Tell your boss that no one abducts or hurts people I care about and gets away with it and that there is no where on Earth he could hide from me and my people. If he respects that rule, he will not find me on his path, otherwise he will regret it immensely… for a few seconds.

Vitomir nods and Jupiter turns around and walks out of the house. Everyone follows her out and take position around her and Yulia. She walks toward the field where they landed with the Mercury and about halfway there, she relaxes.

– Holy crap, that was intense, but it gets easier every time.
– Jupe, says Yulia.
– Yeah?
– What the hell is going on, who are you, and where are we going?
– Yul, I would need hours to explain everything, and you don’t need to know the whole truth. I can tell you that I am someone more important then you could imagine and that these are some of my guards. This is Captain Stinger Apini, my chief of security and you’ve met Commander Caine Wise. As for where we are going I’d say to my house for starters.

She stops.

– Stinger, thanks for showing up.
– I would have to be dead not to show up, Jupiter.

Jupiter smiles and nods.

– Right. It must be shift change with all that? Who’s staying with me?
– Almost, Aves, Castor Ezin and Pavonia are the next shift.
– Four?
– Caine is off-duty for this shift. What he does with his free time is up to him.

Jupiter lowers her head and smirks.

– Right, okay, we might as well change right now; the others need a break after all that.
– Of course.

Stinger give a hand signal and the guards shuffle positions.
She starts walking again and when she is by the ship she addresses Yulia.

– Yul, do you trust me?
– Of course, Jupe, but I must admit I am somewhat scared.
– I understand, but you don’t have to be scared. I simply need you to close your eyes again.
– Okay, Jupe.

Jupiter takes Yulia by the hands and guides her into the Mercury. Caine follows with Neuri and Fenris as are Aves, castor, Ezin and Pavonia.
The other go up to the cruiser hovering above the Mercury.

Once they are seated inside the ship, Jupiter sends a text to her mother to let her know everything is fine and that they are on their way. After that she holds Yulia’s hand and answers some of her questions. The ones she can without revealing the whole space-Queen and owning the Earth and half the universe thing.
The trip to the house is short and Aves drops everyone in the alley behind the garage before parking on top of it.

– You can open your eyes, she says after Aves has join them.

Yulia opens her eyes and blinks a few times, adjusting to the light. They step out of the alley and Yulia recognizes her surroundings.

– Wait, Mr. Pavlovich’s garage? How did we get here so fast?
– That is something else that is best if you don’t know.

Yulia looks sideway at Jupiter and shrugs.

---Back at the house---

They walk to the house and Khan discreetly nods at her from his post. A shadow on the roof let her know that there is someone guarding from up there too. Stepping up the stairs the front door opens and Aleksa walks out.

– Stalin’s balls, it’s about time! She exclaims in Russian.
– Sorry mom, didn’t you get my text?
– What text?
– I sent you a text saying everyone was fine and we were on our way. Maybe I had no cell service? The house was pretty out of the way.

Aleksa shrugs.

– Most important is you are all safe.

She hugs Jupiter, then Yulia and briefly nods at Caine.

– Moy syn, she says.
– Aleksa, he says ducking his head.

Yulia looks from Aleksa to Caine to Jupiter.

– Jupe? Did you forget to tell me something? Yulia says.
– Let’s go inside first.

Inside the house Nino welcomes them, she has returned to her fun demeanor, nothing seems to be left of the KGB agent persona.

– Aunt Nino. You remember Yulia, right?
– Of course.
– Ms. Bolotnikov, it is nice to see you again. Yulia says.
– Same, Nino says.
Aleksa disappears into the dining room and comes back with Yulia’s purse and briefcase.

– These are yours. I cleaned them. She says to Yulia.
– Thank you, Mrs. Jones. Yulia says.

She takes her purse and briefcase and hugs Aleksa.

– I only cleaned them. He found them, she says pointing to Caine.

Yulia looks into Caine’s eyes.

– Thank you, she says softly but sincerely.

Caine nods, still not used to being thanked for anything.
Jupiter gestures to the living room.

– Please sit Yul, you are safe here. I just have to do something quick.
– Okay.

Yulia sits on the sofa.


She heads upstairs to her bedroom and Caine follows her. Once they are alone she about-turn and hugs him with all her strength. Without thinking about it, Caine envelops her with his arms and wings and holds her tight too.
She looks up at him and he kisses her.

– Moya sud’ba, that is exactly what I needed. She murmurs.

Caine smiles.

– I smelt that, he murmurs.

She puts her forehead on his shoulder and inhale his scent deeply.

– Thank you.

He nods and smirks, it is always pleasing when she thanks him. She steps back and goes to the bed where she picks up Yulia’s doll.

– What did you do with my braid? She asks Caine.

Looking down he takes the envelope out of his shirt.

– You had it on you this whole time?
– It’s a part of you. He simply says.
– Oh, moya sud’ba, I have to give it back to her, you know that, right? She says, taking the envelope.

He nods but Jupiter can clearly see in his eyes that he hoped to keep it. She puts Kara back on the bed and takes her braid out of the envelope.
Caine looks at what Jupiter does with curiosity and a little bit of anxiety and confusion.

The elastic band are worn out by the years so she takes two new ones in her elastic bands box to change them. Delicately she removes the top one and replaces it. After that she removes the bottom elastic band and she undoes the braid. The hair has been braided for so long that it keeps its shape. She pinches a few hairs out of each strand and places them on the bed. After that she redoes the braid, ties it up and places it back in the envelope.

What she does next surprises Caine even more. She picks up a pair of scissors and cuts a few strands of her hair which she mixes with the hair she took out of the braid and she wraps them all around a metal ring tying them along the way with thread. When she is done she places the ring of hair in his hand and a kiss on his cheek.

— This is for you, this way you can keep a part of me with you, always.

She was not expecting this reaction but he drops down to his knees and whimpers. Jupiter is confused, she hoped for a kiss and a thank you, not for her tall, strong and handsome man to whimper on the floor. She kneels in front of him because she suspects there must be some cultural cue she is not understanding, a reason for why he would react this way.

— Caine, what is it? I don’t understand what has you so out of sorts like that. She says softly.

He looks up at her and his eyes are filled with tears.

— This is the highest symbol of trust any person can give to another one in the ‘verse. And for a Queen to give it to a runt splice…
— What? A few strands of hair?

He looks at her intensively. Maybe the gesture was not what he first thought? He looks at the ring of hair and reverently he offers it back to Jupiter.

— This is your gene-print.

The significance of the gesture takes a whole new shape in Jupiter’s mind. There is nothing more sacred then gene-print in the universe. Her gene-print is the whole reason why she has all this power and everything that goes with it.

— I trust you with everything that I am, Caine. She says, pushing his hand holding the ring against his heart and holding it there.

He whimpers again so she adds.

— You are a part of me, Caine. Ti p’ougi.
— Ya tebya lyublyu, Jupiter.

They stand back up and hug each other.

A shriek from downstairs interrupts their sweet moment.

— Crap… what now? Jupiter mutters.

Jupiter picks up Kara and her braid while Caine listens.

— That is your friend. Oh shoot, someone turned their anonymizer off… Caine says.
Jupiter hangs her head.

– Crap. She repeats, storming out of the room.

She rushes downstairs with Caine on her heels and finds Yulia hyperventilating on the sofa with Nino trying to calm her down. As soon as she is in the living room Khan Fangs kneels and starts apologizing, adding to Yulia’s confusion and freight by using her title.

– Your Majesty, I apologize, I was unaware…
– Stop. Jupiter says, tersely.

The freight in Khan Fangs eyes is so intense that she remembers just how much power she has, especially over splices. It adds surprise to the freight on Yulia’s face.

– Aunt Nino, take him to the kitchen and have him help with lunch, will you? She says with a gentler tone.

Nino smirks and gesture to Khan to follow her. He follows with shoulders low and if he had a tail it would be between his legs.

– Everyone, leave us, she says to the other guards.

Once she is alone with Yulia she sits beside her, offering her Kara and the envelope with her braid.

– Yul, I know things seems strange right now.

Yulia takes her long-lost doll and hugs her tight.

– But before I tell you anything, I have to ask… Do you really want to know? Because the truth is as amazing as it is scary.

Yulia looks at Jupiter.

– Who are you, really?

Jupiter looks down, take a deep breath and steadies herself and when she looks back up the look in he eyes is intense and serious.

– I am Jupiter Jones of Earth, daughter of Maximillian Jones and Aleksa Bolotnikov, Queen and First Prime of House Abrasax and House Bolotnikov-Jones, signified recurrence of her Majesty Seraphi Abrasax, previous Queen and First Prime of House Abrasax. I am the most powerful Queen in the Universe and the Earth belongs to me. She says using her Queenly tone.


Jupiter smirks.

– Space-queen. She says with her normal tone of voice.
– Space, this can’t be, Yulia murmurs.

Jupiter looks at her friend with compassion.
– It was hard for me too to wrap my head around when I learned about it all. I’ve known the truth for almost two weeks now, and I’ve had so much to deal with.
– What is a recurrence?
– Genetic reincarnation. I have the exact same DNA as Seraphi Abrasax. For that society, I am Seraphi Abrasax reborn and everything that was hers now belongs to me.
– And the one I saw, the one with fur and stripes, what is he?
– He is a genomengineered human, they are called splices. They are made from human DNA cut with animal DNA.
– Made?! Yulia says with an incredulous tone.
– Yes, that is part of the scary part of this all. Splices are considered tools in the Universe to be disposed of on a whim.
– Disposed off, you don’t mean…?
– Yes, sold, thrown away or killed.
– You are not going to…?
– Of course not, Yul, who do you take me for? Khan was scarred because he does not know me yet. My royal guards only arrived last night.

Yulia looks down.

– Sorry, Jupe, but power corrupts, I’ve seen it.
– And absolute power corrupts absolutely, I know. But as I told you earlier, with great power comes great responsibilities. Just know I was about to sacrifice myself and my family to save the Earth and I would have done it. This should tell what I am doing with my powers.
– Sacrifice?
– That is a long story, in the critical moment Caine saved us all from Seraphi’s crazy son who wanted the Earth back after I inherited it.
– About him, why does you mom calls him moy syn?

Jupiter gives her a blinding smile.

– We can not reveal that to most people for many reasons. That is why I am telling you this in Russian. In his culture, you could say we are married.
– No!? Really!? Yulia exclaims, exited, continuing in Russian.
– It is even deeper then that. You see, he is a splice, a lycantant. Lycans are something like a wolf. Splices get instincts and abilities from their animal DNA. Lycantants have a biological bond with their pack and one with their mate. These bonds are for life, he did not have a pack or a mate before me.
– Wait, let me get this straight, what are you exactly?
– I am his Queen, his Alpha, his pack, and his mate and he is my guard, my Alpha, my mate and my destiny.
– Wow, that sure beats being a single mom!
– What? Yul! I did not know that! The father does not want to be there for the both of you?
– Worse, I don’t even know how to contact him, I only have his first name, she says shamefully.
– One-night stand?
– More of a week-end, but yeah. He was amazing and all, but when I woke up on the Monday morning he was no where to be found.
– And you are sure it’s that guy?
– Yes. I haven’t been with anyone for months after daddy had his… Her voice breaks.

Jupiter hugs her friend.

– Yul, tell me, where and when did you spend that week-end?
– Why?
– So, I can find out who he is.
– What? How?
– The same way I found you. I own the planet, I can find anyone and anything I want.

Yulia lets out a sniffle.

– The Travelodge on E Harrison street, near Buckingham Fountain. Two months ago, week-end of the 6th it was so romantic.
– And his name?
– Will.

She stands and presses on her bracelet.

[Your Benevolent Mother, what can this one do for you?]
– Hi, to which one am I talking?
[This one is Squeaky]
– Oh, hello again. I need you to find someone for me.
[It would be an honor.]  
– Here is what I know. He spent some time with Yulia Petrovich two months ago. The week-end of the 6th of June. He had disappeared on the Monday morning. It was at the Travelodge on E Harrison street, near Buckingham Fountain and he said his name was Will.
[This will take a moment.]
– It’s okay, send someone to the house with the data when you have it.
[Yes, Your Benevolent Mother.]

She presses her bracelet again.

– That is all you have to do? Yulia asks.
– The Keepers are very good at what they do.
– Keepers?
– An alien race keeping the population of Tersie planets, safe from many threats.
– Tersie?
– Third type of population in the ’verse. Primaries are the royals, the ones with power, secondaries are humans.
– Humans? There are humans out there?
– Yes, we actually come from a planet called Orous. You could say that Earth and other Tersie planets are colonies. After the tersies there are the splices and then the androids. I’m not sure where non-humans enter. I’m still learning myself.
– Androids?
– Yeah.
– Wow, Jupe, if I had not seen that guy, I would think you are crazy.

Jupiter snorts and looks at her friend.

– I would think that too. Are you ready to see more?
– I think so. Yulia says.
– Skybreakers, join me. She calls.
A few minutes later Caine, Aves, Castor, Ezin and Pavonia are all in the living room. They form a single line in the living room.

Jupiter stands and Yulia stands with her.

– These are part of my personal guards. You saw almost everyone of them earlier. They are special military, you could compare that to the Navy seals, if the seals could fly.
– Fly?
– Yes, just wait. The military is called the Legion and they are Skyjackers. Their specific unit is called the Skybreakers. They are the best unit of Skyjackers in the universe.

She addresses her Skybreakers.

– Guys, anonymizers off.

They execute themselves and Yulia gasps at what she sees.

– Wings, Jupiter adds.

They turn to the side and let their wings out, and turn back to face Jupiter and Yulia.

– How is this possible? Yulia asks.
– The wings are military implants, everything else you see is how they were created.

Yulia takes in what she sees, Caine’s pointed ears and fangs, Aves’s feathers, Castor’s buck brown teeth, Ezin’s mechanics and Pavonia’s feathery antennas.

– Is there anything you want to ask? Jupiter asks Yulia.
– I’m not even sure where to start, I’m just overwhelmed right now.
– It’s okay.
– How many types of splices are there?
– I do not know, I think I’ve seen about thirty to forty, so far but I am sure there are more, Jupiter answers.

Yulia steps in front of Caine and offers him her hand. Caine takes it and they shake hands.

– It is nice to meet the real you. Jupiter told me a lot about you.
– I know.
– He understands Russian and hears from very far away, Jupiter points out.
– Special ability? Yulia asks looking back at Jupiter.

Jupiter nods.

– Thank you for everything you do for Jupiter.
– Pozhaluysta. Caine answers.

Lunch is ready, Aleksa’s voice calls from the kitchen.
Inigo Montoya's lines: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JGp7Meg42U
After lunch, she has to deal with Khan Fangs. She sits in the living room and asks Caine to bring him to her. As soon as he enters the living room he gets to his knees and starts apologizing and begging. She can not tolerate to see a sentient being beg her for his life, it tears at her heart.

– Stop. She says.

The splice stops but his body is trembling and his hands are shaking, he is genuinely afraid.

– Please, sit, she says indicating a chair.

Khan Fangs slowly stands and sits on the chair, shocked.

– Better. She says.

She takes a deep breath, and counts to ten in her head.

– First, let me tell you that your life is not in jeopardy here.

The shock painted on his face tears another hole in Jupiter’s heart. He’s new, he does not know me, she tells herself.

– I do not know whom you have worked for before but I am not like other royals. All life is sacred and termination is not something I order lightly.

The relief that washes over his face is almost too much to bear for Jupiter.

– Now, please tell me what happened from your point of view.

Khan nods, still shocked.

– Lieutenant Pachy had relieved me from my post outside and I turned off my anonymizer after I entered the house, as I had done before, unaware that your guest was unaware of your status and existence of life outside of this planet. When she saw me, she panicked and the duchess came to her side until you got here.

– That is what I had gathered. Now, although it was an honest mistake brought on by lack of communication, I cannot let it slide.

– I understand, Your Majesty. I am prepared to receive any punishment you deem appropriate.
In her mind that formulation sounds like flogging or other corporeal punishment. She winces internally and stands.

– Lieutenant-commander Khan Fangs, you will clean the toilets of the military deck of my royal clipper twice a day for the next 20-days.

Caine, who was standing in the corner of the living room for the exchange, smirks at that punishment.

– Majesty? Khan says incredulous.
– Do you deem your punishment unfair or inappropriate, lieutenant-commander? Because I can add days to your punishment if you feel it is too mild.

Khan kneels.

– No, Your Majesty, I will accomplish my punishment as you ordered.
– Good, you’re dismissed. Commander Wise, please inform commander Wamsley.
– Right away, Your Majesty. Caine says.

Jupiter leaves the living room and returns to the dining room where Yulia, her mother and her aunt are having a conversation about furniture.

– Hey Jupe! Your mom and aunt were trying to agree on how to furnish their apartment. Yulia says.

Jupiter smiles.

– That’s great, a few days ago we were living in cousin Vassily’s basement. It’s a nice change.
– True.
– Okay, not that I don’t enjoy your company Yulia, but I have a few errands and appointments to get too. You are welcome to stay here, you can visit your old bunker, there is a lot in your stash you might want to go through. I only took Kara and my braid out, I could not put them back in there.
– I tried to get in before I sold you the house, I could not remember the password.
– My name to get in and your mom’s name for the stash. She says in Russian.
– Oh, how could I have forgotten that?
– It’s been a few years. Jupiter answers.
– Right.

They both laugh a good hearty laugh until they have tears in their eyes.

– Oh, Yul, I missed you over the years!
– Same here, Jupe.

The two women embrace each other.

After she asks her mother and aunt:

– Mom, Nino, I’m going shopping to the mall after I meet with Lieutenant Adams, want to come along?
– Yes, we need many things for both here and the apartment. Aleksa says.
– And Earth clothes. Nino points out.
– Great. We leave in five.
When they leave, almost everyone leaves with them. The only ones staying at the house are Yulia, Pachy and Mani Pholido.

Ezin pilots the Mercury and drops Jupiter and Caine in the alley behind the 15th district. She had called Martin when she was en-route and he is waiting for her in the lobby.

– Ms. Jones, Caine! He says greeting them. I hope you were able to take care of what you had to take care of?
– Yes, thank you.
– If you would come with me, we can get started on that statement.
– Of course, lead the way.

Martin Adams leads them through the precinct to his office. Along the way they cross many officers from the task force.
An officer stops her on her way.
– Ms. Jones, Ms. Jones, please wait. The officer says.

Jupiter stops and faces the female officer.
– Yes?
– Ms. Jones, I am officer Zoey Price, I wanted to thank you personally. I do not know and do not care to know how you did it, but you gave my husband and me the greatest joy we could have. Because of you, I was able to start my injections early enough to keep our baby this time. Thank you.

Jupiter smiles, she has no idea what to say in return. She takes Zoey’s hands in hers and embraces her.
– It was the least I could do, she murmurs.

They continue on their way and Adams stops at someone else’s desk.
– You remember officer Jack Morrison?
– Yes, of course. How is the foot? Jupiter asks.

The officer rolls his chair back and shows his cast.
– Better, it will heal perfectly, thanks to you. They told me I would have required surgery if I had walked on it more.
– Glad I could help, take care.

After that they go to Adams office.
– Mr. Wise, if you would kindly wait outside.

Caine looks at Jupiter. She nods at him.
– Of course.
Jupiter and Martin Adams enter his office and all the items found at her house are on a table in sealed evidences bags. Another officer is there to take her statement.

– If you would kindly sit, the officer says.

Jupiter sits on the indicated chair.

– Please state your name.
– Jupiter Jones.
– Jupiter? Asks the officer.
– My father was an astronomer.

The officer nods.

– Are you a legal citizen?
– Yes.
– Were you born in the United States of America?
– No.
– Country of origin?
– None.
– What?! The officer exclaims.
– I was born in a cargo container on a cargo ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

The officer looks at her for a long moment, then clearing his throat he continues.

– Country of origin of your parents?
– Father from England, mother from Russia.
– What can you tell me about the items on the table.
– Some I have never seen before and some were found by my cleaning crew in my new house and I reported them to Lieutenant Adams this morning. He collected them at my house as I did not want to carry them here by myself.
– Could you indicate to me which ones?
– This block of white play-doh looking stuff that I suspect is C4, if TV shows are to be believed. These bags of white powder, that I thought looked like cocaine, again according to TV shows. This rather dangerous looking knife, these jewels boxes and these papers.
– Did you touch these items with your bare hands in any way?
– No. I used Ziplock bags over my hands and also cleaning gloves to put everything in new Ziplock bags so they would not be contaminated.

The officer writes down her statement and hands her the pad.

– Please sign this if it is accurate.

Jupiter takes the pad and reads through it then signs it and gives it back to the officer.

– Thank you, Ms. Jones, that is all.

Lieutenant Adams accompany them back to the lobby.

– Thank for coming in, Your– Ms. Jones.
Jupiter smirks.
– My pleasure, Lieutenant. If you need anything else, do not hesitate to call. Except tomorrow.
– You have to leave again?
– Not that far away. It’s my birthday tomorrow.
– Oh, happy birthday then!
– Thank you, would you like to come to the celebration or are you working tomorrow?
– Oh, I would very much like to come, where is it?

Jupiter smirks again.
– You could not get there by yourself, just be at my house for… wait I don’t even know at what time we are leaving, let me check.

She takes her phone out and pretends to call someone and presses on her bracelet at the same time.

[Yes, Your Majesty?]
– Kiza, at what time are we leaving tomorrow?
[With the jetlag we have to leave at 10am so we can install everything and start at 8am local time.]
– Okay thanks, Lieutenant Adams will be joining us.
[Very well, Your Majesty. Anything else I can do for you?]
– I’ll need the sheave with my speech and the box I left on my desk for tomorrow morning.
[What box?]
– The box.
[Oh, that box! Yes, of course. I’ll ask my dad to grab them both.]
– Okay, thanks.

She cuts the communication and pretends to close the call on her phone.

– Okay, be at my house for 10am tomorrow.
– I will, thank you Ms. Jones.

They shake hands and Jupiter and Caine leave the precinct.

Shopping

After that they go to a shopping mall and everyone goes with her this time.

Aleksa and Nino decide to start with furniture and appliances for the house and their apartment and Jupiter with a computer so they split. Fangs and Swiftstone go with Aleksa and Nino; Caine, Neuri and Fenris with Jupiter and the others are on patrol.

Jupiter enters in an electronics shop and she browses the available laptops. She wants something portable so she can easily take it with her between the house, the apartment and the ship, and eventually her alcazaar or other places she might have to stay in the future.

A clerk comes to her group.

– Hello, may I help you? He asks.
– Hello, maybe. I’m looking for a laptop that I can use off grid for long periods of time.
– Okay and what kind of usage are planning on doing?
– Usage? Oh, writing and reading texts and when I’m on the grid, surfing and reading e-mails.
– No games?
– No, oh but watching movies and TV shows, so bigger than 15 inches.
– I see, you might want to consider a PowerPack for when you are off grid.
– What’s that?
– It like an external battery that you use to recharge your electronics.
– Oh, that is a great idea, it would charge my phone too?
– Yes.

With the help of the clerk, Jupiter chooses a laptop, a mouse, an external hard drive for backups and a laptop case to carry everything. The store does not have powerpack in stock, so she orders one of Amazon and she pays for her purchases.

– Thank you for your help, have a nice day. She says to the clerk.
– You too, the clerk replies.

The clerk put her purchases in two large sturdy bag and Neuri and Fenris each picked one.

– Oh, thanks guys. Jupiter genuinely says.

She meets with her mother and aunt in a furniture store.

– Hey, mama, Nino. You guys chose anything yet?
– Yes, we both pick our bedroom sets, for the house and the apartment.
– That’s great, what did you choose?
– I’m sorry, I am already helping them, maybe you should see to other customers, says a woman.
– What?

The woman faces Jupiter.

– Oh, I am sorry, I thought you were my colleague.
– Happens.
– Are you with Mrs. Jones and Ms. Bolotnikov?
– Actually, they are with me, I’m the one paying. Jupiter retorts.
– Then how may I be of service? The sale woman asks.
– Let’s see, I have a house and fours apartments to furnish so I would grab a pad or something to take notes if I were you.

The woman is shocked and stoked at the same time.

– I’ll be right back, she says.

When the woman returns, they start shopping. Follows two hours of furniture choosing in which they choose bedroom sets, living room sets, office furniture, large dining sets with benches so skyjackers can sit, appliances, and other knick knacks like lamps. Jupiter also picks furniture for the guards’ apartment and the office apartment including six single beds with night stands and chest of drawers, two dinning room sets, six desks with chairs and a conference table with chairs.

When they move to the mattresses section of the store Jupiter calls in everyone that is with her, including everyone that is on patrol. The sale woman looks at all those tall strong men unsure of
what to think.

– Okay guys, I want you all to try on mattresses and come to a consensus on which one you want for at the apartment and at the house.

When they stay in place, looking totally flabbergasted, she adds:

– What?
– They are not used to someone caring about their comfort. Caine says in Russian.
– Right... Guys, I can’t choose what is best for you all, my body does not have the same needs as you. And I’d rather have people who sleep well working for me. Lack of sleep makes one less attentive.

They nod and make approving sounds.

– Go!

That was enough to send them all trying mattresses. Aleksa and Nino also go and try mattresses. Caine stays by Jupiter’s side.

– You too, she says to him in Russian.
– I will sleep on anything as long as it is by your side. He says.
– I would still like to know what you prefer. She says.
– All right. He acknowledges.

And he goes and tries on mattresses. Jupiter does the same. Aleksa and Nino are the first ones done but they only have to choose for themselves. Jupiter has narrowed her choices to three different ones but she asks Caine to try them on and she tries on his favorite ones before she chooses.

– What do you think? She asks him after he’s tried them on.
– I like your second one the other two are too hard, it’s uncomfortable with the wings.
– Oh, see why I asked, I did not even think about that. I like your third one, the other two are too soft for me.
– That is actually my favorite one.
– Perfect.

They have to wait another thirty minutes before the Skybreakers and the Sentinels agree on one mattress and after that she sits with the sale woman and they review all the furniture to make sure nothing is missing. Jupiter has to call the bank to authorize the payment and after that she arranges to have the delivery for in three days.

Once they are out of the store the Skybreakers return on patrol and they continue on to a clothes store but Aleksa stops at a jewelry store.

– Come in with me dochen’ka, she tells Jupiter.
– Okay, mama.

Inside the store Aleksa takes something out of her purse.

– How can I help you today? Says the lady at the counter.
– I want to resize this. Says Aleksa.

The lady takes the ring Aleksa is showing her.
– That is a beautiful ring, for what finger do you want it resized? says the lady.
– That will depend on my daughter, Aleksa answers.
– Mama! No! That is your ring. Jupiter says.
– I know dochen’ka, but I don’t have heart to wear it again. Your father was good man, you should wear it. This way you will remember our love is always with you.

Aleksa hugs Jupiter.

– Okay, mama.

The lady measures the ring size and Jupiter’s finger sizes.

– At the moment it is a size 6.5, the same as your pointers, or you could have it resized to a 6 to fit on your ring finger. Do you want to wear it on one of those? She asks Jupiter.

Jupiter clears her throat.

– The pointer would be best, Jupiter answers.
– Then it is the perfect size already. Would you like to have it cleaned?
– How long does that take?
– About 15 minutes, we have a shop right here.
– Okay, sure, we’ll wait.

In the background Nino has been murmuring to Caine about rings and Earth symbols, to help him chose a promise ring for Jupiter. That was actually the real reason Aleksa stopped at the jewelry store. Passing on her ring to Jupiter was the method she chose.

In this fashion Nino told Caine about the different stones associated with each month of the year and that the stone for the month of August is the peridot.

Stepping forward Caine murmurs something to Jupiter that Nino does not hear but she notices the glance he does at the rings.

– Sure, you are off duty. Jupiter tells Caine.

He nods and exit the store.

Nino steps outside.

– You are leaving? She asks Caine.
– No, only pretending, told her I had something to do. I think I saw what I want, but I want to surprise her.
– Okay, we’ll take her for clothes after that.
– I’ll join you there.
– I know you will.

She pats his cheek.
He ducks his head and leaves.
Nino lets out a sigh and goes back in the store.

Fifteen minutes later They are leaving the store and Jupiter has the ring on her pointer finger, and head to a clothing store.

Caine enters the jewelry store and the sale women lets out, winking:
– So that was all a ploy to get her fingers sized?

Caine smirks.

– Yes and no.
– So, what did you want, engagement ring?
– No, a promise ring.
– A promise ring? You love her way more then that, I could see it in your eyes every time you glanced at her. Don’t you believe in marriage?
– I do, but it is complicated.
– Well, whatever it is, her mother must approve of you or she never would have put on this show just to get her fingers sized.
– I saved their lives, it helps.

The lady has an impressed look on her face.

– I see, what did you have in mind?

Caine points out to a ring in the display.

– That one with the wing and the heart.
– Yes, that is a nice one, with the infinity symbol. But that is a size 8, too big for her. Let me see what else I have.

The lady goes out back and comes back with an array of rings.

– This is a very popular ring. Did you want a particular stone for it?
– It is her birthday tomorrow.
– Oh, a Leo then, I can see why she caught your eye. Let’s see, yes, I have one peridot in size 6 left.

She shows him the ring.

– That is perfect. He says.
– Did you want to have it engraved?
– I don’t suppose you can write in Russian?
– Not here, we would have to send it to the head office and that would take a few days.

Caine nods.

– So, what is she to you? Woman of your dreams? Goddess of your soul? Queen of your heart?

At the last one he ducks his head and looks away.

– Wow, Queen of you heart, that is rare to see, most men go with woman of their dreams.
– I could never have dreamt of a woman like her.
– You really are unique. Do you want “Queen of my heart” engraved inside the ring?

Caine smiles.

– “Forever Queen of my heart”

The lady smiles.

– Perfect, I’ll be right back.
The lady comes back 10 minutes later with the ring.

– Here you go.

Caine takes the ring and looks at the engraving.

– It's perfect.
– I'll put it in a box for you.

Caine gives the ring back to the lady. She places it in a ring box and he pays for it.

– Thank you, he says.

He exits the shop and puts the box in his pocket with a smile on his face. After that he follows his nose and catches up with Jupiter.

When he gets there, they already have loads of clothes picked out and are getting ready to pay for them.

– Ah Caine, good, we are ready to go back to the house.
– All right.

**Back at the house**

Jupiter heads straight for the kitchen where she makes a pot of coffee.

– You okay, Jupe? Asks Nino, following her.
– Yeah, fine, just need coffee.
– Oh, I would have done that for you.
– Nino, you are my aunt, not my servant. I can make my own damn coffee. She snaps at her aunt.
– Yes, I can see why you need that coffee.
– Sorry, aunt Nino, I should not have snapped.

Nino pats her on the shoulder.

– You understand, it helps me stay me to do things for myself.
– Yes.

Caine pops in the kitchen with her shopping bags.

– Where do you want these, Jupiter?
– On the dining table is fine.

He nods and leaves the kitchen.

– We got any scissors? She asks her aunt.
– Second drawer, she answers, exiting the kitchen.

Five minutes later Jupiter exits the kitchen with a cup of coffee and the asked for scissors and attacks the packaging of her new electronics. She was configuring her new laptop when her mother and aunt
pop in and ask her what she wants for dinner.

– Aren’t you two tired? Let’s order some pizza or something.
– Pizza, really? Asks Aleksa.
– Hey, I’m still me.
– Okay, okay, how many pizzas?
– Let’s see, there’s me, you two, Caine, Neuri and Fenris, the Skybreakers, that’s four, but Ezin does not need food, so three, Khan, Pachy, Swiftstone does not need food, and the other one, gosh I forgot his name.
– Ensign Mani Pholido, provides Caine.
– Yeah, him oh and Yulia. So, that makes 13 people. So maybe 6 X-large, but you know what, I’ve got it, you two go and relax or something.
– Okay, Jupe, says Nino, pulling Aleksa out of the dining room.

Jupiter takes her phone and places an order for 6 X-large pizzas, two meat lover, two veggie and 2 all-dressed. And goes back to her laptop.

– Oh, crap, I don’t have any Internet here… she exclaims.
– Maybe someone has an unsecured Wi-Fi around here? Yulia says popping into the dining room.
– No, I’ve checked that often in the past, oh but wait, I might be close enough to cousin Vassily’s. She turns on her Wi-Fi and lets out:
– Yes!

She smiles and runs up to her bedroom to pick up the livery sheave and comes back down. She turns on the sheave and Yulia lets out a gasp.

– Oh, sorry, that is space tech. They call them sheave, some kind of space-tablet, I’m not sure what they all do, I’ve seen quite a few different ones.

Yulia nods.

– What are you looking at?
– Royal liveries. I have to decide on a uniform for my people and I wanted to know what was done so I would design something appropriate.
– Cool.

The first one on the sheave is Balem’s. Jupiter shivers at the black and gold with red design and quickly switches to the next one. It is Kalique’s. The blue, green and bronze color scheme with all the dangling discs make her feel better but somewhat awkward at the same time. A 14,004 gene-daughter who wants to connect with her is uncomfortable to think about. She skips the third one almost as quickly as the first one, silver and black with dragons.

– What’s up with you Jupe? You act like you’ve seen a ghost. Says Yulia.
– Almost. These are the livery of my gene-children…
– Your what?
– Gene-children. Seraphi Abrasax’s children. The first one was Balem, he tried to kill me and my family to get the Earth back. The second one is Kalique, I’m not really sure what she wants, but at least it is not my death. The third one, Titus, is the one who sent Caine to kill me, when that failed, he proposed to me…
– Yuck, that’s disgusting.
– Yeah, you can say that again.
– Okay, so you won’t go with those color I’m guessing, so what else is there?

She switches through the files and the one common theme she can find is the use of a metallic color
like gold and a dark color with a bright one. Besides that, anything goes.

– So, what do you think, Yul?
– I think bronze would be better then gold.
– I agree. Have you ever watched Star Trek, Yul?
– Are you kidding me? I’m a Trekkie through and through.
– I was thinking of doing department colors.
– Oh, yes, but not the full suit right, like later ones when it’s only the shoulders?
– Actually, a piping on one shoulder only for guards and ship crew.
– Ship?
– Oh, yeah, I have space ships. She says with a smile.

The ring at the door interrupts them.

– I’ll get it, Jupiter calls.

She opens the door, with Caine on her heels.

– Hi Tommy!
– Hey Jupe, you ordered 6 X-large pizzas? The delivery guy asks.
– Yes.
– Here you go, wait that’s not your place?
– It is now, bought it a few days ago.

She takes the pizzas and hands them over to Caine.

– Could you put these on the table and call in everyone, please?

He nods and carries his load to the table while Jupiter pays for the pizzas.

– That’s way cool, Jupe.
– Yeah, thanks again, Tommy, see you around.
– Bye, Jupe.

She closes the door and enters the kitchen. At the look on Caine’s face she says:

– Tommy and me went to high school together.

Caine nods a thank you and Jupiter clears the table, placing her laptop, sheave and knick knacks on the side table.

– Oh Jupe, I forgot to tell you that I’m vegetarian. Yulia points out.
– Oh, that’s okay, I was not sure what they all ate so I got 2 meat lovers, 2 all-dressed and 2 veggies only.

Yulia smiles. Jupiter goes to the kitchen to grabs some plates and some paper towels and she comes back to the dining room.

Once everyone is there, she opens the boxes.

– Okay, these are called pizza, they can have different toppings. What we have here is meat lover, all-dressed or veggies. You grab a plate and a slice of pizza and you eat it like this.
She shows them how to eat pizza.

– Now it’s your turn.

They split in three groups, those spliced with carnivorous animals gravitate towards the meat lover pizzas. Castor, Yulia, Mani and Pachy go for the veggies ones and the others go for the all-dressed. Everyone mingles and chit chat while eating pizza. Jupiter listens. Khan asks Caine how he managed to become a skyjacker. Aleksa answers one of Yulia’s numerous questions, Nino asks Aves just how good his vision his. And she decides that she likes this, her people mingling.

– Jupe?

She did not realise that her mind was drifting away and she shakes her head to focus.

– What? She answers her friend.
– What is it you did not tell me about? You mom told me to ask you when I asked her what the Earth was for.

Jupiter looks down and when she looks back up, Yulia sees the steel in her soul.

– Are you sure you want to know that?
– You are scaring me, Jupe! Is it that bad?
– I’ll let you be the judge of that…

Jupiter follows with explanations about RegeneX and how it is used for extending life, healing, splicing and giving the androids their sentience.

– The stuff seems amazing, what is the problem.
– The problem is that RegeneX is made from… humans.
– Wait, what? No! That can’t… You mean to say that we…
– Yes, Earth and other Tersie planets are farms, and the humans on these planets are livestock.

Yulia runs out of the dining room and out of the house into the backyard. Jupiter follows after her friend. She finds her throwing up in a bush. She walks to her side and holds her hair until she is done.

– I understand why you asked me if I really wanted to know. Eto bezumiye! I won’t even eat meat, and they…
– Yeah, I know.
– You won’t let it happen, will you?
– Of course not, the first thing I did after ascending to Queen is ban harvesting of all my Tersie planets, including Earth. That is a reason why Balem tried to kill me, beside being insane, Earth was the next planet scheduled for harvesting. It would have made him a lot of money.
– Harvesting… Is that what they call it?
– Yes, Jupiter says looking away.
– What about all the others?
– I do not know yet, it’s a rather complex situation and I’m not sure how much I can push, bend and break the rules without endangering myself. Not that I want to keep myself safe at all cost, but so many depend on me now, I have to think of them all. Already treating splices as equals and not killing them for mistakes is a radical position for a royal. I might be the most powerful Queen, but also the youngest and least equipped at the moment. If I push too fast, they could band together against me.
– I understand somewhat. That is why you said daddy stuff was a walk in the park.
– Right. Are you feeling any better?
– Yeah, I think I can go back in.
– Okay, just don’t look at my people differently then before, they did not choose to be what they are. They can not help but see only the good in RegeneX, they owe the stuff their very existence.
– Okay, I’ll try.

They go back in and Caine comes to meet them.

– Is everything okay, Jupiter?

She looks at Yulia and back at Caine.

– It will be, she says.

He nods.

– I understand, your reaction was similar.
– Yeah, but I had to control my reaction. The Hall of Title is not a good place to start throwing up.

He smirks.

– Everyone has gone back to their duties. Stinger is escorting the humans back to Orous and your mother and aunt are cleaning up the dining room.
– Okay, thanks.

They go back into the dining room and Jupiter grab her laptop and sheave.

– Want to help me design uniforms? It might help.
– Okay, Yulia answers hesitantly.
– Want to help too Caine?

Caine looks at her, unsure.

– I do not know what help I could be.
– Well, you can tell us if something would get in the way for combat and stuff. It’s not like I know a lot about it myself.
– All right.

---Livery---

She sits at the table and Yulia sits beside her. Caine grabs their stool and sits behind Jupiter. After discussing and going through a lot of ideas Jupiter settles on three main colors. Her Legion guards will be in dark grey, ships crews will be in kaki green and her retinue in navy blue. Accent will be in bronze for everyone and each department will have an associated color.

Jupiter chooses to keep the three color of Star Trek for the same departments so she will not get confused: red for command, yellow for security and blue for science and medical. Adding to that, green will be for finances, white for arts, clothing, children or anything in regards with sentients, orange will be for cleaning and moving, navy for the legal department and engineering will have a yellow-orange color.

As for the design of the uniforms, Jupiter goes for something close to the Legion uniform for her
guards and ship crew, only adding a piping on the non-opening shirt shoulder for the department, switching the belts and holster to a bronze color and adding lightning bolt pins vertically on the side of the collar to indicate rank. Again, for the rank indicator, she keeps it close to Star Trek: 1 bronze pin for ensign, 1 bronze and one black for lieutenant junior grade, 2 bronze for Lieutenant, 2 bronze and one black for lieutenant commander, 3 bronze for commander and 4 bronze for captain. Generals and admirals will get a five-pointed star.

To add to it all for formal events, they will have a cape held into place with four buttons depicting her lightning bolt. Except for the Skybreakers, since wings and capes do not mix well.

Where things get interesting is with her retinue’s livery. For them she goes with the Greco-Roman theme. Men will sport a short-sleeve tunic – full length togas would be too much – with a bronze rounded neck, a bronze stripe near the end of the sleeves and pants in the navy blue indicating they are retinue. They will wear a sash and a belt to indicate their department. The sash, in the department color, will be pined to one shoulder with a bronze medallion sporting her lightning bolt. One end will hang in the back and the front end will be tucked inside the large fabric belt. The belt will have three stripes, the top and bottom ones in the department’s color and the middle one in bronze. The look will be completed with black shoes.

For the women, they will wear navy sleeveless dresses with a bronze trimmed square neck. The dress will also have a bronze trim about a foot from the bottom of the dress and will be paired with a sash and a belt too. The women’s sash will also be in the department’s color and pinned to a shoulder with the same medallions. Women’s sashes will be wider then the men’s and both ends will be trimmed in bronze. The back end will hang free like the men’s but the front end will hang lower then the belt which will only be like a bronze trim. Their look will be completed with knee high black boots.

Jupiter closes her laptop after saving all her ideas and designs and sighs.

– Okay, done.

She gets up and goes to the kitchen for a glass of water and notices the time.

– Crap, it’s almost nine already. She exclaims.
– What is the problem with that? Yulia asks.
– I still wake up at 4:45.
– Oh.
– Yeah, I hear the alarm in my head.
– Right. Okay, well I’ll call a cab and head home to check on my dad.
– A cab? Don’t be silly. I can have you dropped off where ever you want.
– Really?
– Of course.
– That would be great then.

Jupiter turns to Caine. Caine nods and taps his implant.

– Her Majesty needs an escort for her friend, to get her home safely… Perfect. He says.

He taps his implant again.
Menura is on her way back from patrol. She will get her home. He tells Jupiter.
– Great, wait Menura?

Caine smirks.
– You missed the shift change after diner.
– Right, okay.

She turns back to her friend.

– Are you busy tomorrow?
– Don’t think so, why?
– It’s my birthday.
– What? Why did you not mention anything before?
– Well you had an eventful day… and it’s a celebration with my space people.
– Oh, I get it.
– Yeah well, now you know about them, so, want to come?
– Sounds fun, where is it?
– I’m not quite sure, my majordomo organized everything, but I know you can’t get there by yourself.
– Why is that?
– It’s on some uninhabited island.
– Oh, so no one will see them?
– You got it.
– Okay, then at what time should I be here?
– We leave at 10.
– Okay, I’ll be here.

Menura enters by the backdoor and greets Jupiter, Caine and Yulia.
Yulia picks up her purse, opens up her briefcase and places Kara and Jupiter’s braid inside it with some other items she chose from her stash. After that she hugs Jupiter.

– Thank you for everything, she says.
– It’s the least I could do.
– See you tomorrow.
– Bye.

Yulia leaves with Menura and Jupiter stifles a yawn.

– Okay, unless something requires my attention right away, I’m going to bed.
– Actually, Caine says.
– What?
– Razo and Ibis are waiting with that package you asked to see unofficially.
– What and no one told me?
– You were busy.
– Right, for the future, unless I ask not to be disturbed, I want to be informed immediately of stuff like that.
– All right.
– Where are they?
– At the warehouse.
– Okay, get Neuri and Fenris and let’s go.
At the warehouse

They take the Diana to get to the warehouse and Jupiter reads a report from Stinger on their way.

She does not learn anything new from the report as Stinger was not able to gather much information, splicers keeping their work very confidential.
She sighs.

– What is it? Asks Caine from the pilot chair.
– There is no new information in Stinger’s report. I don’t like lacking information.
– Maybe we can help? Neuri says.
– How?
– Well, we do see the other litters from time to time, when we are with the companions. We sometimes know more about them then the splicers and companions.
– Really? Can you tell me if the others in your litters or in other litters also had emotions? Because I’m trying to ascertain just how many lycantant based on Caine’s gene-print they made.
– My pack mates all had some level of emotions, Fenris says.
– Same for me, says Neuri.
– Do you know what happened to the rest of your litter Neuri?
– No, nothing after they were sold to the Legion.
– And did anyone else survive the culling?
– No one but me.

They all can smell the pain Jupiter’s feels in her heart.

– I am so sorry for your loss’s guys. I hate that you had to go through all that.

They look at her shocked.

– Any other litter out there that have emotions that you know of?
– None at the same time as my litter, says Neuri.
– I’ve heard Saanion mention to our companion that we were her first try with our line so she has not made others before us, I’m not sure after. Says Fenris.

Jupiter winces at the word “line”. Every term to refer to splices reminds her that they are treated as tools and property.

– Thank you she says low. Then taking the sheave with Stinger’s report, she makes note of what she learned. Linking the information between the three lycantants she notes that Caine is 20 years old, Neuri is 14 and Fenris is 6.

Caine lands the Diana on the warehouse’s roof and joins Jupiter.

– What are you calculating Jupiter? he asks.
– A timeline. I’m trying to see if something might have started that splicing with your gene-print.

He nods and sits beside her.

– Okay, so your 20, Neuri is 14 and Fenris is 6. You were sold to the Legion when you were almost one. How old were you when you became a skyjacker?
– Six.
– So… wait, 6? So, you’ve been a skyjacker for 14 years?
Caine nods.

— Well that might be it… Neuri is 14 and you’ve been a skyjacker for 14 years. Maybe your splicer wanted to recreate a lycantant that can make it to skyjackers. Or maybe even a pack-bonded skyjacker unit.

Caine can see the logic in that statement.

— What about Fenris?
— I’m guessing Saanion stumbled upon your line after Kenda died. You told me she died six years ago and he is 6.
— That could be.
— Okay, are you all ready to see her again?

After they all agree, they leave the ship and step through the roof door.

— Showtime, she murmurs.

Then she queenly steps down the stairs with her pack following her.

At the bottom of the stair Caine lets out a small howl and a bird sound answers him.

— Over there, Your Majesty, Caine says, pointing Jupiter to the right corner.

She nods once and follows the direction until she reaches a door.
She stops at the door and Caine opens it and enters the room first.

— It is safe for you to come in Your Majesty. He calls.

Jupiter enters with Neuri and Fenris on her heels.

— Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, Queen and first prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones. Says Caine.

The warehouse is not furnished yet, but they managed to find two chairs and a small red headed woman is seated between Razo and Ibis. A free chair is waiting for her in front of the woman.

Jupiter adopts her Queenly attitude and sits on the chair as if it was her throne.

— Your Majesty, this is Saanion Tursin, as requested, says Razo.

Jupiter nods.

— Perfect, this should not take too long, take a break, we’ll call for you when I am done here.

Razo and Ibis nod and leave the room.

— Your Majesty, may I know what this is about? I was in the middle of a very important project.
— Ms. Tursin, I’m sorry to interrupt your work, but I would not trust what we have to talk about even to a secure channel. You are here because you were involved in making them.

Saanion nods.
– Have you found a defect in their engineering?
– What?
– That is usually why someone wants to meet secretly with a splicer.
– I did find something special with them, but that is in no way a defect. Don’t you know who they are?
– Not by sight, you must understand I’ve supervised and created thousands of lycantants in the last thirty years. Although these do not look like typical lycantants.
– They are not… maybe if I introduce them to you. This is Commander Caine Wise of the *Skybreakers*, and Ensigns Neuri Arcadia and Fenris Tyr of the *Sentinels*.

Saanion face goes pale.

– I do remember Caine Wise, he is the only lycantant runt that I have seen in my career.

Jupiter nods.

– And the ensigns, do you remember them?
– I do remember the Tyr line, it was one of my first work after my mentor died, I terminated that production after they all turned out so small and pale. The Arcadia line does not bring any memories.
– The Arcadia line was made by your mentor.
– Ah she must have terminated that production too, since he is also small and pale.

Jupiter looks at the three lycantants, if she had not seen images of typical lycantants she would never have guessed that they were pale and small in comparison.

– There is a very good reason for the Arcadia and Tyr line to have turned this way.

Saanion interest is peeked by that statement.

– How would you know?
– Simple tersie logic. There were a few details that made me run their gene-print against Commander Wise’s. If they were born splices, he would be their father. Half of their gene-print comes from Commander Wise and 37% of their gene-print is identical.
– What? How can this be? We never create splices in this manner.
– I do not know that. I suspect your mentor was trying to recreate lycantant that could become skyjackers, since the Arcadia line was made at the time Commander Wise became a skyjacker.

Saanion nods.

– I will have to check my data on the Tyr line… I do not understand how this could be.
– Ms. Tursin, you may check your data, and I would very much like to have a report on that actually, and the Arcadia line too, but I must insist that you never make another line of lycantant based on commander Wise.

She says that using her commanding tone and Saanion flinches in her chair.

– Majesty, may I know why?

Jupiter nods.

– Ms. Tursin, it is very simple. What should an Omega, a culling survivor and the sole survivor of a pack-bonded unit have that they do not have?

Saanion observes the three lycantants.
– How are they not shaking? She asks.
– Let’s see. Mr. Wise, who is your Alpha?

Caine smirks.

– You are, Your Majesty.

Saanion complexion is as chalk.

– Ensigns, who are your Alphas?
– You and the commander, says Neuri.
– The commander and you, for me, says Fenris.

Jupiter nods.

– I see you understand the implication of this. She says to Saanion.

Saanion slowly nods and regains some colors.

– You are a pack, they are all bonded to you…
– Caine is bonded to me, yes, but the Ensigns are bonded to us, as a pair of Alphas.
– But Omegas can’t bond.
– That may be true, but Caine is actually not an Omega, he is an Alpha-Beta hybrid.
– I’ve only heard rumors of those… As this been verified? She asks.
– Actually, yes.

Saanion is shocked.

– Now do you understand why I brought you here to discuss this?
– Yes, Majesty. I would not want this on any channel either.
– Good, now, do you understand why I don’t want new lycantants based on Caine’s gene-print?
– Yes…
– Perfect. Once you are back at your facilities, I want you to compile a full report on this. I need to know if other lines have been made with Caine’s gene-print. Also, I need to know what happened to the Arcadia pack-bonded unit or any other survivor of any line based on Caine.
– I understand…
– I do require one last thing.
– What is it?
– Do not discuss this with anyone and compile the information by yourself.
– Of course, I would lose my splicing license if word of this came out.
– I am glad we understand each other. She says with a steely voice.

Jupiter signals to Caine and he contacts Razo and tells her to come back.

After Razo and Ibis have returned, Jupiter stands and walks to the door, before exiting she adds:

– You have one standard 10-days week to provide me with that report. When it is ready, contact Miss Kiza Apini, my majordomo, she will arrange for it to be picked up.

She exits with her pack on her heels, goes back home and directly to bed.

Chapter End Notes
Ring: https://d2k7oup5fi4mcj.cloudfront.net/media/product/1/_/1_148.jpg

Eto bezumiye! = That is madness
Birthday

Chapter Summary

Promises
Kiza's secret
Jupiter's birthday

Chapter Notes

***I posted two chapters, read chapter 27 first***

I just had to bring some French into my story eventually. French translation at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Pre-Olympics

Jupiter wakes up at 4:45am surrounded by her pack. Neuri and Fenris are in full pack-bonding again and Caine is keeping watch. Jupiter props her head up with her hand and smiles at him.

– Good morning, she murmurs.
– Good morning, he returns.
– How long have they been like this?
– Almost two hours.
– And how are you doing?
– I don’t need kozha if it’s what you want to know.
– Okay, but I was referring to last night, seeing your companion again. Are you okay?
– Yes, it was strange, but I’m all right.
– Okay.

She yawns.

– Anything requires my attention right now or can I sleep some more?
– Your comm has been buzzing.

She looks at her comm bracelet but catches that he means her phone.

– Phone, Caine. She says picking up her phone.
– Phone, he repeats.

She turns on the screen to see she has a few text messages and she smiles reading them.

– Birthday wishes. Jupiter answers.
– What are those? Caine asks.
Jupiter was holding her phone above her head and she drops it on herself. Picking it back up, she turns on her side and props her head up to see if Caine is serious.

– Seriously? She asks incredulous.

Jupiter smirks, that is such a cute look on him.

– Very well… Birthday wishes is when you wish happy birthday or other good stuff like health, happiness, love to someone on their birthday.
– Like the toast?
– Sort of.
– Okay.

Jupiter drops back on her pillow and puts her phone back on the nightstand.

– Happy birthday, Your Majesty.
– Thank you, moya sud’ba.

She snuggles in her pillow, closes her eyes and falls back asleep while Caine keeps watch.

Once he hears her breathing and heart beat being slow and steady, Caine pulls out the small box he has been keeping hidden since he bought that ring at the jeweler. He delicately opens it and looks at the ring. It is so perfect for Jupiter. He stares at it for a long moment then he pulls it out and reads the engraving, thankful for the written translation package Jupiter insisted they all receive. “Forever Queen of my heart”. He puts it back in the box and hides it again.

Two hours later when Jupiter wakes up with a knock at her door, she is alone in her bed, Neuri and Fenris are by the door and she does not see Caine in the room.

– Come in, she answers.

The door opens and Aleksa and Nino enter her bedroom with breakfast on a platter.

– S dnem rozhdeniya Jupiter. They say.
– Thank you.

And to her total shock and joy they start to sing:

Pust' begut neuklyuzhe
Peshekhody po luzham,
A voda — po asfal’tu rekoy.
I ne yasno prokhozhim
V etot den' nepogozhiy,
Pochemu ya veselyy takoy.

YA igrayu na garmoshke
U prokhozhih na vidu...
K sozhalen'yu, den' rozhden'ya
Tol'ko raz v godu.
Priletit vdrug volshebnik
V golubom vertolete
I besplatno pokazhet kino.
S dnem rozhden'ya pozdravit
I, naverno, ostavit
Mne v podarok pyat'sot «eskimo».

YA igrayu na garmoshke
U prokhozhikh na vidu...
K sozhalen'yu, den' rozhden'ya
Toľko raz v godu.

K sozhalen'yu, den' rozhden'ya
Toľko raz v godu.

Caine comes out of the bathroom while they sing and is totally confused by the song and even more confused by Jupiter’s reaction.

– Jupiter? He lets out after the song.

The three Russian women take one look at him and collapse laughing.
Aleksa and Nino place kisses on Jupiter’s hair and leave the room still laughing.
It takes a few more seconds for Jupiter to stop laughing.

– Sorry, I was not laughing at you, but at how ridiculously Russian Pesenka krokodila Geny is. Non-Russians from this planet can’t quite understand why it is our birthday song… I would certainly not expect anyone from up there to understand either.

She shakes her head.

– I don’t… what do pedestrians and puddles have to do with birthdays?

She smirks.

– Okay, I’ll try and explain, but first have you eaten? Because there is enough for you too here, she says indicating the food her mother and aunt brought.
– Not yet.
– Okay, sit with me then, she says patting the bed beside her.

She takes her cup of coffee and after inhaling the smell she takes a large gulp and sighs.

– I’ll have to get a stash of coffee before my next trip out there, grula might be a nice substitute, but it is not coffee.

Caine takes a syrnik and starts to eat it.

– How are you both this morning? She asks Neuri and Fenris.
– Stable, more stable then I’ve been in years, says Fenris.

Jupiter nods.

– I’m not sure how it should feel, but my mind is so much clearer, it is easier to think and focus. Provides Neuri.
– Then things are going well.

They nod.

– Did you get any breakfast yet?
– No, we were waiting on commander Wise.
– Okay, he’s here now, go eat some food.
– Yes, Your Majesty. They say, and leave the bedroom.

She takes another gulp of coffee, eats a syrniki and drinks some more coffee. She puts her cup down, takes a deep breath and gets to it.

– Okay, about the song…
– Yes?
– You first have to understand that Russians are very pessimistic in general. That is reflected in our art, music, books and everything else too.
– You are not a pessimist, Caine points out.
– Because I am only half Russian, and I grew up here, not there. But anyway, for the song, it’s about people not understanding why you are happy on a dark, gloomy and rainy day. But the reason you are happy is because it is your birthday. And the reason it’s a shame your birthday is only once a year is because you want to be happy more then one day a year.
– I don’t understand, why can’t you be happy more then once a year?

Jupiter shrugs with an apologizing look on her face.

– I can, the song is only a generalization.

The look on Caine’s face is still on of incomprehension.

– It’s okay moya sud’ba. I don’t expect you to understand everything about me, in the same way I will never fully understand everything about you.
– Cultural differences, he says nodding.
– Exactly.

They finish eating and Jupiter grabs some yoga clothes out of her dresser and goes to the window to close the curtain. After seeing the nice and brightly sun outside she says.

– Wow, such a nice day, I think I will do my yoga outside this morning, want to join me, or are you on duty this morning?
– My shift actually ended with breakfast but I do not think yoga is for me.
– If you say so, anyway you will have many opportunities today to exercise.

She proceeds to change into her yoga clothes.

– Who is on duty right now?
– Leo, Veel, Menura and Kalie and the Cosmic Sentinels.
– That’s the team with the two bee-splices, right?
– Yes, lieutenant Bizzie Stripe and Ensign Blitz Needle.
– Right, I have so many names to remember.

She sighs.
Caine walks to her and puts his arms around her.
– I’m okay. Today, I’m happy, and nothing from down here or up there can change that.
– Happy birthday, Jupiter.
– Oh, thank you, moya sud’ba.
– Ya tebya lyublyu.
– Ti p’ougi.

Their mouths join for a kiss and after that she grabs her yoga mat and heads for the backyard. Caine follows her.

In the backyard she sets up her mat and starts her routine while Caine sits on a chair. After a few minutes she notices that her neighbor is looking over the fence.

– Good morning, Mrs. Ivanov. She says loud enough to be heard by her neighbor.
– Good day, Jupiter, are you house-sitting now?
– No, this is my house now.
– What? How could you afford a house?
– A lawyer found out I had an unclaimed inheritance from my father’s uncle. Mama, Nino and me also have legal papers now.
– Oh, good for you and how are your mother and aunt?
– Great, they are inside.
– Good, good. Listen, I’ve seen a lot of people come in and out of your house, I hope you are not in the same line of work as the previous owner.

Jupiter snorts and almost loses her balance going in a downward dog position. Caine stood up quickly but he sits back slowly when Jupiter regains her balance. Mrs. Ivanov notices with her sharp gaze.

– You mean you hope I’m not working for the mob? Jupiter returns.

Mrs. Ivanov lowers her gaze.

– Don’t worry. I have absolutely nothing to do with the mob. You might see a lot of people come and go, but my work is all legal. It’s simply that my offices are not ready yet, so I work from home.
– Oh, I see. I hope I did not intrude.
– No, not at all.

Mrs. Ivanov looks at Caine and looks back at Jupiter.

– Who’s the quiet one?

Jupiter looks around to see who is there and she sees only Caine.

– Oh sorry. Mrs. Ivanov, this is Caine Wise. Caine, Mrs. Ivanov, my fourth-grade teacher and now neighbor.

Caine stands and walks to the fence and offers his hand to the woman.

– Nice to meet you, he says.
– Likewise. I’ve never heard the name Caine before, where is it from?

Caine is stumped by the question so Jupiter provides an answer.

– No where in particular, it’s simply an eccentric name, just like me, no one else is named Jupiter.
– Then you are not Russian?
– No.

Mrs. Ivanov has a trained eye after teaching for 35 years and she noticed the way Caine looks at Jupiter and how alert and fast he is.

– Jupiter, can I talk to you in private?
– In a moment, she says, starting on her final pose.

After rolling her mat she walks to the fence.

– What is it? She asks low.
– That man, he works for you? She asks in Russian.
– Yes, why?
– He looks dangerous. What does he do?

Jupiter lets out a small laugh.

– That is part of his job, to look dangerous. He is part of my security department.

Mrs. Ivanov nods.

– You might want to be careful with him, he has feelings for you.

Jupiter has a big grin.

– I know.

Caine steps behind Jupiter.

– Jupiter, Kiza has arrived. He says.
– Okay. If you’ll excuse me Mrs. Ivanov, I have to go. It was nice talking with you.
– Good day Jupiter.
– Thank you, you too!

She returns inside the house with her mat and Caine and they face a very excited Kiza.

– Happy birthday Jupiter!
– Thanks, Kiza! Is everything ready?
– You bet! Everything will be delivered to the warehouse and from there we will go to the island.
– Perfect!
– Seiza will bring your outfit in the cruiser and here is what you asked for.

Kiza hands her a sheave and the box.

– Great, thanks. Make yourself at home, I’ll be back in a few, got to go clean up.
– Take your time, we still have an hour before we have to leave. Kiza says with a wink.

Jupiter winks back and she climbs the stairs with a bounce in her steps.
Up the stairs she notices that Caine did not follow her.
– You coming? She murmurs.

She continues on her way to the bedroom and a few seconds later Caine joins her.

– You requested my presence, Your Majesty?
– Yes.
– What can I do for you?

They arrive at the bedroom door, where Veel is standing guard.

– Good morning Veel. Your commander and I need to discuss things privately for a moment. Please go downstairs.
– Aye, Your Majesty.

Jupiter enters her bedroom and after Caine enters, she locks the door, puts her mat and the sheave down and turns to Caine.

– Anyone close enough to hear us?

Caine listens to the sounds and noises in and outside the house.

– No. What do we have to discuss?

She walks to the bed and starts to make it, holding the box under one arm. She is nervous and exited about this. She is almost certain he will accept it, if the whole episode with the hair is any indication, but it does not stop the butterflies from having a party in her stomach.

Caine can smell the turmoil going on inside Jupiter. This time he knows he is the reason for it and he wonders if he did something wrong. He starts by reviewing all that has happened since she woke up for the first time this morning but he can not find anything that would have upset her. Besides, did she not say nothing would change that she is happy today?

He sees that Jupiter is done making the bed.

– Have I done something wrong?
– You smell nervous and preoccupied.
– Oh… No.

Crap, I better do this quick, she thinks.

She faces Caine, takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly.

– I’m not sure how it’s done out there, so I’ll do this in my own way, she starts with. Her voice is shaking a little. She is holding the box in her left hand and with her right she takes his hand in hers.

– Caine Wise, my love, ti p’ougi. Moya sud’ba, ya tebya lyublyu. I love you more then I can express with words. I can say it in three languages and it still doesn’t seem like enough.

Caine sways on his feet and he hangs on tight to her hand like an anchor, the scent cascading off of Jupiter is intoxicating. A maelstrom of feelings and images twirl inside his mind. He is not sure what Jupiter is getting too, but now he knows for sure he did not do anything wrong and that she is not
upset. He smells and feels it is quite the opposite.

– Since we met, you saved me time and time again. You saved me from death and despair. You flew in a hurricane the size of this planet for me. You are my companion star, keeping me steady and away from blackholes.

Caine smirks at the image and at the memories of the event of the past two weeks.

– I know without the shadow of a doubt that we are destined for each other. I used to think that my compass was broken, always falling for men that did not fall for me, but my compass was leading me right to you. Everything in my life has been leading me to you.

Caine begins to clue in on what Jupiter is getting to. Her words and her scent are unmistakable.

– Caine Wise – she offers him the box – will you accept this as a promise of what is to come?

Slowly, Caine takes the box and Jupiter lifts the cover. What he sees astounds him. On a red velvety padding lay the perfect arm-cuff for him, he is simply starstruck by every detail, every thought Jupiter put into this design.

After a brief moment that feels like an eternity, he lifts it out of the box and puts it around his forearm and answers her question.

– I will.

Jupiter kisses him and begins to tie the straps of the gauntlet arm-cuff. Caine notices the writing under the metal plate, but it is not something he can read.

– What is this? He asks pointing to the writing.
– Moya sud’ba in Cyrillic.

Jupiter looks up from tying the gauntlet and Caine has tears in his eyes. She cradles his cheek with her palm.

– Jupiter, he lets our airlessly.

Their mouth joins in another kiss.

– I have something for you too, he says.

Jupiter takes the now empty box and places it on the bed.

– You bought me a birthday gift?
– Not exactly.

Caine’s hand goes to his pocket and he fiddles with the box. Suddenly he feels woozy and shaky and he understands what he smelt from Jupiter before she steadied herself and offered him the arm-cuff. That is exactly how he feels right now.

– Your Majesty, Jupiter, my pack, mate and Queen, before you I was a broken-up splice who did not even know what love is. With you I have found everything I did not even know I was looking for. You made my heart, my body and my mind whole.

He takes the box out and drops to one knee.

– Jupiter Jones, ya tebya lyublyu. Will you accept this as my promise, he says opening the box.
Jupiter can’t believe it, once again this tells her that they are meant for one another. The design of the ring is perfect.

– Yes, of course, yes. She says, tearing up herself.

She takes his hand holding the box in hers and makes him stand up. He takes the ring out of its box and Jupiter offers him her left hand as a reflex. Caine takes her hand in his.

– I promise that one day I will get you a ring to put on the proper finger, but for now this one will have to do.

He takes her right hand in his and after showing her the engraving inside the ring, he slides it on her ring finger.

– You are and will forever be the Queen of my heart.
– Oh, Caine, she sighs.

Downstairs Kiza has gone into the kitchen to greet Aleksa and Nino.

– Good day Lady Aleksa and Lady Nino.
– Hello Kiza, you don’t have to Lady us here, you are family.
– Okay, then. How are you today Aleksa and Nino?
– Today, we are making sure Jupiter is happy for whole day.
– Oh, I think she is. I’ve asked Seiza to prepare proper outfits for the both of you for the celebration. Which reminds me, you will have to choose some retinue for yourselves. Seiza is happy to help you both for the time being, but your position requires that you have at least a few servants.
– Servants! Nino exclaims.
– I apologize, Nino, it is what we are called in our society. I know you do not see us as slaves and servants.
– I hope so, says Aleksa. A few days ago, we were servants down here.
– Yes, I know that. What term would you like to use for the people in your retinue?
– Employees.
– Very well. I can look into appropriate candidates to fill your retinue for the both of you if you would like.
– Sure, says Aleksa.

Nino nods.

– I suppose you will not want to have specially made splices to fill your retinue?

Aleksa and Nino look at each other and back at Kiza with total disgust painted on their faces.

– That can be done? Nino says very low.
– It is royalty’s way to ensure loyalty. Replies Kiza.
– Do you understand what “No way in hell” means?

Kiza snorts.

– Yes, I’ve lived on Earth long enough to learn many expressions.
– Then you have your answer.
– Good. Are born splices acceptable to you and will you be using the same pay scale as Jupiter?
– Born splices, you mean like you, not made in labs? Asks Aleksa.
They nod and Kiza takes note on her sheave.

– Now I know that buying people is not something that you agree with, but it is how things work out there. Where do you stand on families? Are your employees allowed to have families? Bring them with them?
– Family is everything. Says Aleksa.
– Of course, they can have families. Adds Nino.
– Do for us like Jupiter did for you, no family splitting.
– It is what I thought you would say, but I have to ask to make it official.

She turns her sheave around.

– If you could seal this, I will be able to begin filling your retinue.

They pull up their sleeves and seal the sheave.

– Perfect, thank you both.

– Now is there anything we can do for you? Aleksa asks.
– Actually, I would like a cup of coffee, we have a long day ahead and I have a lot to do.
– How do you take it?
– Black will do, unless you have maple syrup?
– Maple syrup? In coffee?
– Yes, I got the habit when I was posted in Canada.

Aleksa pours a cup of coffee and Nino rummages through the fridge.

– They put maple syrup in their coffee in Canada?
– Yes, at least my neighbor did. He did put maple syrup over almost anything too. I’m not sure if that was because he is Canadian or he worked at a sugar shack.
Kiza’s eyes have turned yellow speaking of her neighbor. Aleksa puts the cup down in front of her and Nino has found a bottle of maple syrup in the back corner of the fridge and she gives it to her.

Pouring down the syrup in her coffee Kiza has tears in her eyes.

– He was more then a neighbor to you. Points out Nino.
– Yes, but he wanted to get married and have children. I could not have that, not as Marshal, knowing what he was for and knowing it could all be ripped away from me. And how could I have explained baby-bee to him? So, I let him go and told him I was being transferred. I haven’t spoken to him in almost two years.
– Wait, don’t splices mate for life? Nino asks.
– Not all of them, she says with a shaky voice.
– And bee-splices? Asks Aleksa.
– Yes, she lets out, tears rolling down her cheeks.
– You poor girl, you must be in so much pain. Why did you not tell Jupiter? Continues Aleksa.
– Marshals are not supposed to involve themselves with the tersies they guard.
— But you are not Marshal now. And she would understand. You must know that by now?

Kiza nods and Aleksa hugs her as a daughter.

— Now, drink your coffee and tomorrow we will talk to Jupiter about this.

— Talk to me about what? Says a cleaned up and dressed in jeans and tank top Jupiter entering the kitchen.
— Doch’en’ka, I don’t want you upset today. Says Aleksa.

Caine steps into the kitchen behind Jupiter. He heard every word of the conversation Kiza had with Aleksa and Nino. The hurt he smells from his sister hurts him too. He goes to Kiza and puts his hand on her shoulder.

— I heard everything, she can take it, tell her.

Kiza takes a deep breath and drinks some coffee before she can summons the courage to tell Jupiter about her mate.

— Three Earth years ago, I was posted in a small town in Canada where I fell in love with my neighbor. He worked at the local sugar shack, hence the maple syrup in my coffee. We were in a relationship for a little more then a year even if that is not permitted. When he proposed to me, I told him I could not marry him and transferred to the Chicago area. I could not tell him about splices and life in space. How could I have had baby-bees without him knowing what I am.

Jupiter listens to Kiza story with an open mind and by the end she is fairly certain of what to do, she only has two questions.

— Did you mate-bond with him?

The sobs Kiza has are answer enough for her.

— Does your dad know?
— No, she says sobbing and shaking her head.

— I see, what is his name?
— François Laroche, Kiza says.
— What language is that?
— French.
— Oh, a French-Canadian… guess I will need some translation.
— Oh, he speaks English too, many Quebeckers are bilinguals, they learn it in school.
— Oh, great. Let’s see first what we can find out about him.

She goes to the dining room and they follow her. She sits at the table with her laptop and turns it on.

Caine is not sure what Jupiter is doing but Kiza seems to understand.
She connects to her Facebook account.

— Oh wow, I haven’t been on Facebook since this all started.
She quickly checks her profile, there are many birthday messages from today. Fusion tagged her in a picture of her dancing with Caine at the nightclub and some random messages shares. She likes the pictures and the birthday messages and then clicking in the search bar she asks:

– All right, how do you spell his name?

Kiza spells his name, but they get stumped at the c cedilla.

– I have no idea how to do that on an American keyboard. Keyboards are a little bit different in Quebec. Says Kiza.
– I guess it must be like Russian keyboards.
– Not quite as drastic, French and English have the same alphabet, not Russian.
– Right.

After a quick Internet search, Jupiter finds the code for a ç, “Alt + 135”, and she can continue typing the name.

– Okay, now tell me if anyone of those is your mate. She says when the list of François Laroche appears.

Jupiter scrolls through the list and she comes face to face with a picture of Kiza with a man.

– Erm, I’m guessing it’s this one? She says.
– Yes, this was the day he proposed. It was the most amazing day and I so wish I could have said yes.

She clicks on the profile.

– Okay, let’s see what we can find. I can’t see a lot since we are not friends. Okay, the relationship status says “It’s complicated”. And he is from Saint-Isidore, is that correct?
– Yes. Kiza answers.
– Let’s looks at his pictures. I can only see his profile pictures and cover photos.

She scrolls through the cover photos, but they are only nature pictures. But the profile pictures are another story. Every picture has a date and timestamp and has some text that Jupiter can not read, except a few words here and there. The first one is about two years ago and the most recent one is only a few days ago. So, he still thinks about her. She stands.

– Here sit Kiza, I don’t understand French, but these seems to be messages for you.

Kiza sits and scrolls over two years of profile pictures and tears roll down her cheeks as she reads.

Jupiter has an arm around Caine’s waist and she murmurs low:

– I can only imagine her pain.
– I smell it, it hurts.

She places her head on his shoulder.

After a few minutes Kiza covers her face with her hands and sobs.

– Kiza? Jupiter says.
She goes beside her and sits on another chair.

– Are you okay, what did he say?
– At first, he was begging me to come back, saying I could tell him anything. That we could work through what ever it was that stopped me from saying yes. Have I read that two years ago, I would have gone back to him in a heart beat. Last year he started to say that he was trying to move on, remembering only the good. And that last picture, it was on our anniversary, saying that he could not move on, that what ever he tried, it did not work. He still loves me and misses me even more then the first day I left. He said that he would wait for me, as long as it took.

Kiza speaks with sobs, Jupiter hugs her and signals to her mother to get her a tissue by pinching on and off her thumb and index finger close to her nose.

Aleksa leaves and comes back with a box of Kleenex and offers some to Kiza.

– Thanks, she says.

She wipes her eyes and loudly blow her nose.

– Kiza, what do you want to do?
– Right now? Fly to Quebec and tell him I never stopped loving him and that I will marry him, but I have work to do.

Jupiter nods.

– You said he speaks English right, well enough to have a conversation?
– I think so, we usually spoke French, why?
– Do you have his number?
– If he did not change it, yes.
– Oh, something tells me he did not, hoping you would call.

She pulls out her phone.

– What is his number?
– 450-555-8734

Jupiter inputs the number, but she gets a message telling her the number is out of the country and to input the country number. She does a quick check and adds a 1 before the number to call into Canada.

[Allô!] Says a man’s voice.
– Hello, is this Mr. Laroche, Mr. François Laroche? Jupiter asks, trying to pronounce the name without butchering it too much.
[What ever you are selling I’m not interested] says the man.
– Oh, I’m not a telemarketer, sir.
[Then what is this about?]?
– My name is Jupiter Jones and I’m the new boss of a long-lost friend of yours, does the name Kiza Apini mean…
[Kiza? You know Kiza? Do you know where she is? Is she okay? Why are you calling for her?] He interrupts.

Jupiter smirks, that is the voice of a desperate man, longing for his long-lost love.
Yes, I know her. As I said, I am her new boss and I am actually standing right beside her at the moment. We are in Chicago, she is okay but shaken after reading all your messages on Facebook that she had never seen.

There is no reply from François. Only silence, but Jupiter can imagine he is in shock.

Are you still there? She asks.

[Yeah, just unsure if this is real, I’ve imagined something like this too many times.]

I can imagine you did. Listen, I know why she could not say yes when you proposed to her and why she ran away. There are some things she was not at liberty to tell you, but her situation has changed and I know she regrets this more then anything else.

[She could tell you but not me?] He sounds hurt.

I have to fix that quickly, Jupiter thinks.

Actually, I am the reason she is now allowed to tell you everything.

[I don’t understand.]

It’s hard to explain over the phone. You kinda have to see it to believe it.

[Oh, I get it, you found my profile on Facebook and you think you can get money from me. I suppose you want me to send you money so she can buy a plane ticket? Sorry to disappoint you, but I have no money to give.]

No, I don’t want any money. It’s not a scam. I really am calling for Kiza.

Kiza gestures to Jupiter to give her the phone.

She is ready to talk to you now, I’ll pass the phone over to her.

Jupiter hands her phone to Kiza.

François?

[Kiza? C’est vraiment toi mon cœur?]

Oui, mon amour.

[Kiza, ma chérie, dis-le-moi, j’ai besoin de l’entendre.]

François, mon amour, quand toutes les étoiles du firmament seront éteintes, je t’aimerai encore.

[Oh, Kiza, ma chérie, c’est vraiment toi! Et quand il n’y aura plus d’eau sur Terre, je t’aimerai encore.]

Kiza shivers and tears roll down her cheeks.

Mon amour… her voice breaks and she hands the phone back to Jupiter.

Mr. Laroche? It’s Jupiter Jones again.

[What happened to Kiza?]

I believe she is too overwhelmed.

[I am not doing too well either.]

I can imagine. Tell me, if we were to come over tomorrow, would that be okay?

[I’d say tomorrow can not come fast enough.]

Jupiter lets out a small approving laugh.

Very well, at what time will you be available?

[For Kiza? Anytime! I will call in sick, I would not be able to work anyway.]

Okay, we will see you tomorrow. I suppose you haven’t moved like you haven’t changed your
number?
[I actually moved out of my parent’s place, but I am in the same town, I’ll text you the address.]
– Okay, I’ll text you about an hour before we get there.
[Perfect. Before we hang up, I only have one question.]
– What is that?
[Why? Why are you doing this?]  
– You will understand better tomorrow, but let’s just says it’s kinda my job to fix people’s lives.
[Thank you]
– See you tomorrow Mr. Laroche.
[Bye.]

Jupiter hangs up and looks at Kiza. Her majordomo has red puffy eyes and salt trails down her cheeks, but her smile is shining.

– Thank you, Jupiter.

Jupiter hugs her.

– Anytime. She tells her.

She lets her go and Kiza turns to Caine, Aleksa and Nino.

– And thank you to the three of you too.

– All right, Miss Kiza, I believe it will be time to go soon.

Kiza shakes her head to concentrate on the present day.

– Yes, you are right.
– Then let’s get ready.

Jupiter packs up her laptop and goes to her bedroom to pick up her keys and wallet.

When she comes back down, Yulia and Lieutenant Adams are greeting each other in the lobby.

– Spasibo!

– Happy birthday Ms. Jones.
– Thank you, Lieutenant.

Now that everyone is here, let’s go.

Since no one is to stay behind, Jupiter locks the doors and the group heads down the street to Mr. Pavlovich’s garage.

Once they are all settled in, Leo takes off and a few seconds later they land on top of the warehouse. Yulia and Lieutenant Adams are quite shocked.

– I’ll be on the Janus, Jupiter announces after they landed.
– Oh, right, the cruiser. I meant to name it for a while now, from now on it will be the JJ-F-Σ-9 – Janus. After the roman god of beginnings, transitions and endings.
– Okay, I’ll take care of that, Kiza says.
– Good and on the trip to the Island, we need to talk to your family.

Kiza nods.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

They leave the Mercury and head over to the Janus.

– What was the ship we were on? Yulia asks.
– The Mercury, after the gods of travelers. It’s a cutter or a shuttle if you prefer.
– Got anymore ships? Asks Martin.
– Yes, there is the Diana, Caine’s ship, after the Goddess of the hunt and the moon, it’s a planet jumper. Like a super shuttle.
– You mean a runabout?
– I guess that could be a good comparison. And I have the Maximillian Jones, after my father. It is my main ship, it’s a clipper.
– How big is that? Yulia asks.
– I’m not quite sure. It’s plenty big that the Janus, the Mercury and the Diana are not the only ships in it’s bay, but I have not named the others yet.
– What else do you have?
– I’m not sure yet, my heads of department are preparing preliminary reports on my assets.
– Wow, Jupe, you must have you head spinning. Yulia says.
– From time to time.

She guides them to a seating area inside the Janus.

– Make yourselves comfortable. We have to get dressed. Jupiter says pointing to her mother and aunt.

Once the baker and caterer have brought the food and cake to the warehouse, her people load the cruiser and Vespa pilots the ship all the way to the Island. The trip takes about 30 minutes. Plenty of time for Jupiter and her space family to discuss the new-found family member. In a private cabin on the ship Jupiter, accompanied by her mother, her aunt and Caine greet the Apini.

– Please come in, it’s no place for ceremony, this is family business not Queen business.

They all sit and Jupiter breaks the ice, addressing Stinger, Honey-Bee and Seiza.

– This morning, we learned something important about Kiza that I feel is of the upmost importance that you know about.

Kiza lowers her head and looks away.

– Kiza? Did you hide something from me?

She nods a little.

– What is it? Stinger asks.

His tone is assertive and Jupiter winces. She was about to interject but Caine beats her.
Sting, she hurts, she would have told you before, but she hurts too much.

Stinger looks at his daughter and all his righteousness vanish at the hurts he sees painted on her face.

– Kiza, do you want to say it yourself or do you want me to say it for you? Jupiter gently asks.
– I’ll do it, she murmurs.

It is the first words she has spoken and everyone can hear the unshed tears in her voice.

– Okay.

Kiza takes a deep breath.

– Dad, mom, Seiza, for 2½ years I’ve been mate-bonded to an Earthling.
– His name is François Laroche, he was my neighbor in Canada. He does not know what I am, I could not tell him. About two years ago, he asked me to marry him. I told him that I could not and I ran away to the Chicago area. I have not seen him since and I’ve carried this pain alone.
– Oh sweetheart, have you had an ovarium yet? says Honey-Bee.
– One. Kiza says looking at her mother.

Honey-Bee eyes turn yellow.

– What’s that? Jupiter asks.

Stinger, Honey-Bee and Seize freeze and seem incapable of explaining what it is. Kiza looks at Jupiter.

– Bee-splices pon farr, about every two years. She says.
– Oh! Jupiter lets out, nodding once.

– You must have suffered my baby-bee. Stinger says.
– Yes, dad, but it was nothing compared to the pain in my heart.

Honey-Bee takes one of Stingers hand and one of Kiza’s in hers.

– Yes, sweetheart, we know this pain too well.

They stand and hug each other, Seiza joins them.

When they sit back, Kiza nods at Jupiter and Jupiter nods back.

– I’ll continue from here, Jupiter says.

They all look at her.

– I learned about François before going to the warehouse and I could not do nothing about it so I looked for him on the Internet and I found him.
– Internet? Asks Honey-Bee.
– We found out that he left Kiza plenty of messages over the last two years, begging her to come back at first, then after some time saying he was trying to move on and the most recent ones are
about not being able to move on. That he still loves her and misses her. Explains Jupiter.

The Apini all have yellow eyes.

– After that, Kiza only wanted to bolt out and join him so I contacted him over the phone and arranged to meet him tomorrow. Kiza managed to tell him a few words, it convinced him I really was calling for her. I sincerely hope that his love for Kiza is really deep enough to accept her as she is and that we can trust him with the truth. Either way, Kiza needs your love and support to go through this. We are here for her and you, but this is bee-splices business and you understand better then anyone else what she is going through.

Jupiter stands and signal to Caine, her mother and aunt to follow her.

– We will leave you some privacy. Jupiter says.

Stinger stands.

– Jupiter, wait. He says.

He steps to her and hugs her.

– Thank you, he murmurs.
– Anything for family. She returns.

They exit the cabin and when Jupiter turns to check on them, they are doing a bee-dance around Kiza. They leave them at peace and join Yulia and Martin in the other cabin.

– Hey, you two getting to know each other? she says entering.

She faces a cold wall between the two of them.

– Oh crap, what now?
– How could you do this Jupe? Yulia exclaims.
– Who’s my dad? And what does he do? She says pointing at Martin.
– Oh right…

She turns to Martin.

– Martin, please don’t ask Yulia questions about her father’s work. She is not involved with the mob.
– How can you be so sure of that? He asks her.
– Caine is never wrong. She says.

Martin looks at Caine who nods.

– Very well. He says. Miss Petrovich, please forgive my suspicious nature and my line of questioning, it is a side effect of my line of work.

Yulia offer he hand to Martin.

– You can call me Yulia.
– And you can call me Martin, he answers, shaking her hand.

– Good, says Jupiter crashing in a chair. If you’ll forgive me, I have to work on my speech.
She takes her sheave out of one of those invisible pockets and tweaks her speech.

**Olympics**

They disembark at a small unnamed Island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean where the keepers have done a wonderful job a recreating a track and field stadium.

Kiza leads them and Jupiter is greeted by a Keeper. Yulia gasps and Aleksa murmurs in her ear.

– Your Benevolent Mother, this one is pleased to meet you. We hope that the design has your approval. It says.
– What is your name? Jupiter asks the Keeper.
– This one is designated Croaker.
– Well, Croaker, this looks fantastique. Congratulations to you and your team.
– You are most gracious, Your Benevolent Mother.

Jupiter nods and they continue on their way.

– “Benevolent Mother”? Asks Yulia.

Kiza brings them to a cabin. Many Keepers and humans and splices from the Maximillian Jones line up the way to see a glimpse of her. She feels like a superstar with her fans.

– Your Majesty, this cabin is for you, their ladyship and your guests. Captain Apini has gone to the Maximillian Jones with the Janus to pick up everyone for the celebration and Commander Wise is performing the security checks. I will inform you when we are ready to start. Kiza says formally.
– Very well, Miss Kiza, you may proceed.

About an hour later, Kiza knocks at the cabin door.

– Everything is ready, Your Majesty.

Jupiter steps out of the cabin and there are birthday decorations all along the way to the stadium. She was about to walk there when a floating carriage is brought.

– Your Majesty, Kiza says.

The carriage is surrounded by the *Skybreakers* and Caine is by the door. Jupiter steps to it and Caine offers her his hand to help her climb in.

– Your Majesty, he says, using the tone he knows she likes.

She knows he did that to let her know he is there for her and for a moment, she thinks only of him, knowing that he would smell that. She has the joy of seeing his ears pink a little, then she takes his offered hand to climb in the carriage.

– Thank you, Commander. She says.

After her, Aleksa and Nino climb into the carriage and sit on her sides and Yulia and Martin sit in front of her. When the carriage goes forward, half the *Skybreakers* take to the air and fly in intricate patterns.
They enter the stadium under the acclamations of her people and they wave at the crowd. When the carriage stops, the airborne Skybreakers land in sync and Caine helps them out of the carriage.

Kiza guides them to a dais where her throne and her mother and aunt’s have been replicated. Two chairs have been added for Yulia and Martin on one side. They take place and Kiza offers her a white handkerchief.

– Let it fly in the wind right before the first race. She tells her.

Jupiter winks at Kiza and declares.

– Showtime!

Kiza nods and presses on a holo control on the side of the dais. A chime is heard and her people get really quiet.

– Her Majesty, Jupiter Jones, Queen and First Prime of House Abrasax and House Bolotnikov-Jones.

Cheers are heard as Jupiter steps to the front of the dais. She does a Queen on England wave then slices the air horizontally in front of her and they quiet down.

– I would like to welcome everyone to this celebration of my Earth birthday. Today, I am 23 Earth years old. It is an Earth tradition to celebrate one’s birthday with food, cake, gifts and activities. Now the food is prepared, the cake is ready and I do not expect any of you to have gifts for me as your presence is gift enough. The only thing that remains is activities. We will have a sporting event that we call the Olympics. For these first Olympics of the year 0 of Jupiter there will be races and precision shooting competition.

She pauses.

– Before we start, let me make one thing perfectly clear. No one is to be punished, penalized or terminated afterward. This is for fun and entertainment only, it is not training or skill assessment. Your only real competition is yourself. There will be rewards for the winners and runner ups, but you alone can know if you really did your best.

Jupiter hands over her sheave to Kiza. She looks at the sheave and nods.

Kiza speaks:

– Now listen to the rules set forth by Her Majesty:

1) This is a friendly competition, it is not permitted to voluntarily harm another or prevent them from completing their own race, but you may help or encourage each other.
2) There is no obligation of participation, you may choose to be a competitor, a spectator or a helper.
3) You can participate in none, one, a few or all of the races and competition, it is up to you.
4) There will be three groups for the races: males, females and Skyjackers, and two groups for the shooting competitions: skyjackers and non-skyjackers. This to ensure the competition is fair for all.
5) The gravity surfing races and flying races will be for Skyjackers only.
6) Each race will start with a signal, starting before the signal will restart the race and anyone starting twice before the signal will be disqualified for that race.
7) There is not enough room for everyone to run at the same time so there will be qualification races,
the best in qualification will advance to the quarter-finales, then semi-finals and then the finale.
8) For the shooting competition, everyone will have to use Earth style competition weapons and targets, making them fair for all.
9) You may not use any kind of technology to assist you in a way that would give you an unfair advantage.
10) Performance enhancing substances are not permitted.

To sign up for a race or competition, please head to the registration booths at the entrance of the stadium.

Kiza cuts the sound system.

Right away the Skybreakers head for the registration booths, Caine is actually the first one in line, but no one else seems to be interested.

– Caine come and see me after you are signed up. Jupiter says in the air.

Yulia hears her and says startled:

– He will hear you all the way over there?
– Yeah.
– Wow, that’s amazing.
– I know, it makes it hard to understand how they can be considered like tools up there, when here they would be superheroes.
– Yeah, tools to be made, bought and sold, terminated or thrown away at the whim of their owner. Every splice that you can see out there belongs to me in some sort of way.
– How can you tolerate that?
– Oh, I get sick to my stomach each time I have to buy someone that’s for sure. I alleviate my guilt by asking them first if they want me to buy them, and I pay them all on the same pay scale, as though they are pure humans. I have to work with the system to give them as much freedom as is possible for now, until I can change laws. I can’t do everything at once.
– I guess so. I am glad to not be in your shoes. Says Martin.
– You and me both, Yulia says.
– Jupiter does lots of good within the system. Aleksa points out.
– Right, she bought the families of her personal guards and then transferred them to each one. Now they can not be parted again. Some of them had not seen each other for years. Nino explains.
– And when she buys splices, she buys entire families, so they do not get split apart, and does the same, she gives all family members to the highest-ranking member of the family. It is the closest we can get to freedom, Kiza adds.
– I understand, Martin says.

Caine lands on the dais.

– You asked to see me, Your Majesty?
– Yes, no one is registering besides you guys. I think the others might be scared even if I said that this was strictly for fun. Think you can get Neuri and Fenris to register and maybe Khan? They know me the most besides you guys. It might get the others to register. Otherwise there won’t be much racing.
– As you wish, Your Majesty, he says.

Jupiter smiles and Caine flies away.

Yulia lets out a giggle.
– Okay, that was so Princess Bride, Yulia says.
– I know right? I will have to show him the movie.

They chat a little more about the place of splices in the ‘verse and then Jupiter glances at the registration booths. There is a small crowd registering for the races.

– Great, he did it, now we have enough people.

After that everything falls into place quickly. The registered racers are sent to changing booth to put on proper garments and Jupiter releases the handkerchief when the first group is ready for their race. Admiral Kiran Toly is guiding everyone, Kiza announces the races, Dr. Comb is there in case of accidents, Lowe Felis is the one giving the start signals for each race and Dopha Jewel is the one verifying and noting who the winners are.

There are a few hiccups during the first few races but after that everyone understands how things are done and things run smoothly. It is with no surprise that Jupiter notices that the winners are mainly splices and once again she vows to do everything she can, so that these incredible people are set free.

After the regular races, Kiza signals that they will take a one-hour break for lunch time, that food will be served on the beach and that the shooting competition and the Skyjacker races will be held in the afternoon.

The floating carriage is brought for Jupiter but she shakes her head.

– I’ll walk. She says.

The Skybreakers immediately fall into position around her and the duchesses instead of the carriage and they walk out of the stadium with Kiza as a guide.

At the beach there is a long table filled with Russian dishes, an honor table for her, her mother and aunt with throne-like chairs and many tables spread over the beach for everyone to sit.

– What’s the rules for this? Jupiter asks in Russian.
– You are the first one to be served, then the duchesses, then humans and after that splices and we only start to eat after you did and stop when you do. If you eat too fast, the last ones sometimes don’t even have time to be served.
– What? That is so not right!

Kiza nods.

– Okay let’s see. No one will be served, we’ll do this buffet style, everyone gets his or her own food. I’ll go first, then my mom and aunt, that’s okay, but after that it will be pregnant women and children with their parents and after that everyone else can go, regardless of their genes. And people can go for seconds once everyone has had a first plate.

Aleksa makes an approving noise.

– Okay.

Kiza takes a sheave out and does something to it that scans her features and projects them in the air, above her head. The crowd quiets down.
– Her Majesty sets forth this order for this meal. No one is to be served. Everyone will serve
themselves. After She and the duchesses have served themselves, pregnant women and children with
their parents will serve themselves after which everyone else will be allowed to serve themselves as
one people, there are to be no humans and splice segregation. Finally, once everyone has had a first
plate, anyone can go back for more.

The gasps heard tell her that she has once again shocked her people and she walks forward grinning.

She takes a plate, fills it with food and heads to her table where she places her plate and goes to the
drinks table and gets a large glass of lemonade. After that she sits and starts to eat, slowly, chatting
with her mother and aunt, so that everyone has time to serve themselves and eat at least one plate.
When everyone is seated, she is barely to half her plate.

After a few more minutes, Caine steps behind her in his proper guard position.

– Ate enough? She asks him.
– Yes.
– Good.

She finishes her plate and places her fork down and all of her people stop eating.

– Oh, they were not done, right. Anyone still hungry? She asks Caine.
– Not hungry, per say, but some would certainly eat more.

She nods, stands and goes to the buffet with her plate and fills it with berries and returns to her table.
She sits and eats some blueberries, strawberries and raspberries, slowly, one at a time.

– Tell me when everyone as eaten enough, she tells Caine.

After half a plate of fruits, Caine tells her they are done. She takes her glass, finishes her lemonade
and heads for the shore.
Caine steps in behind her and they walk on the beach for a moment, until Kiza contacts her that it is
time for the competition to resume.

They go back to the stadium and it is time for the shooting competition, but nothing goes right. Every
competitor has a few practices run to get used to the weapons but no one seems to understand how to
use the Earth weapons.

– Wow, that is terrible. What is so complicated about our weapons? It’s simple as point and shoot.
Jupiter says.
– Ms. Jones, I might be of use, I am a certified sharpshooter. Points out Martin Adams.
– Oh, good. Yes please, go and teach them or check if the weapons are defectives, because this is not
good.

Martin leaves the dais and heads over to the shooting area.

– Kiza, announce that they will receive a demonstration from Lieutenant Martin Adams, certified
sharpshooter. Jupiter says.

Kiza nods and presses on the chime holo control. The crowd goes quiet.
– Since the Earth weapons seem to be confusing to the competitors, Her Majesty has arranged for a demonstration of the Earth style weapons by her guest Lieutenant Martin Adams, certified sharpshooter. The competition will resume after the demonstration.

When Martin gets there, Caine greets him.

– Lieutenant, what kind of tracking system is in these weapons? They never go to the targets.
– Tracking system? Okay, wow… I believe you all need a crash course on mechanical weapons.

He proceeds to explain to the competitors how projectile weapons work and that the only tracking system they have is their hand-eye coordination. After that he takes a pistol, takes the bullets out, checks the gun, puts the bullets back in and shoots at the targets. The targets are rectangle boxes with five holes that are black and turn white when the shot was successful. He gets into position and fires the pistol. At 10 meters he gets the five targets. After that he tries on the 25 meters targets and gets the five again.

Then he gets a rifle, checks it over and goes to the 25 meters rifle targets and gets the five again and the same with the 50 meters.

The crowd cheers. He waves at them, gives the competitors more advices before he leaves and returns to sit by Jupiter.

– What was the problem? Jupiter asks him.
– They are used to guns with tracking system. That is what they were expecting.

Jupiter shakes her head.

– Oh…

She looks at the results of the new practice round and things are better, but not excellent.

– I wonder how they would do at paintball, she says.

Martin chuckles.

– That would be a real disaster, paintball guns are so unreliable.

They all laugh at the idea.

The competition resumes and the results are improving with each shooter. When it is the turn for the Skybreakers, their results are the best, Aves and Falco getting first and second position and Caine being third, but no one is as good as Martin Adams.

It only leaves the Skyjacker races and they are the ones Jupiter was the most excited about. All the competitors sit to watch the best unit of skyjackers compete. The Skybreakers compete in their uniforms since the uniforms are part of the equipment necessary to surf and fly risk free, since technology could fail. They gather in front of the dais to salute and kneel before their Queen.

Jupiter has flashbacks of the movie Gladiator, she is not comfortable with the images that it brings in her mind but she pushes them away and stands like the Queen that she is and gestures for them to
Kiza announces the races and Jupiter squirms on her throne, trying not to cheer like a teenage school girl. They start with the gravity surfing races. For the 100 meters, Leo, Pavonia and Kalie are the winners, Caine arriving in fourth place. For the 800 meters, Caine is again in fourth place, behind, Veel, Menura and Stinger.

Nino murmurs something in Jupiter’s ear and Jupiter’s eye go wide.

She looks at Caine’s demeanor attentively and tells her aunt.

– I agree.

The 1500 meters race is about to start, so she has to hurry up. She speaks in Russian to the air.

– Moya sud’ba, you are trying too hard to impress me, it’s hurting your performance. I already know how amazing you are, do this for yourself, not for me.

She watches as his demeanor changes with her words. He straightens up and he nods looking in her direction.

The race starts and Caine gets first place with Aves and Leo as runner up.

For the flying races Caine gets first place for all three with the avian splices coming in second third and fourth position.

After comes the medals ceremonies. Jupiter, Aleksa and Nino step down the dais to award the medals to the winners when Kiza announces them. It goes well and she sees how proud the winners are, especially Caine with his five medals. It makes her happy to be able to congratulate her people for their success.

After awarding the medals Kiza has the cake brought in the middle of the stadium. In a very Russian theme, it is made of three domes of the St. Basil Cathedral. The blue and white with vertical stripes, the yellow and green with the twisting stripes and the red and white with horizontal zigzagging stripes.

– Wow, that is amazing, Jupiter says, stunned.
– That is all the baker’s idea. I only asked for a Russian themed cake. Says Kiza.
– It’s almost a shame to cut it, it’s a real work of art.

Kiza nods.

– Your Majesty, if you would do the first cut, Kiza says gesturing to a knife on the table.
– Very well.

Jupiter walks to the cake but before she can make the first cut the children start to sing accompanied by Kiza, Honey-Bee, Webe, Feliz and Mirna:

Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday, Your Majesty,
Happy birthday to you.

Jupiter smiles.
– Thank you.

She makes the first cut then hands the knife to Chef Plume. Everybody cheers. Plume cuts a piece of cake and give it to Jupiter on a plate after which she and Tergum Polaire, the sous-chef, start to cut the cakes in portions.

Jupiter takes a bite of cake.
– Wow that is good, I think it’s the best cake I’ve ever had, what is it? She asks Kiza.
– Berries and chocolate. I am glad you like it.
– Will they stop eating if I am done?
– Not for cake, it is not an official meal.
– Good, I’m going outside, I need a break.

On that she turns around and heads for the door.

Post-Olympics

Once outside she finds a tree on the beach and she sits on the sand with her back against the tree. She eats her piece of cake looking at the waves and puts the plate on the sand afterwards. Her head rolls back and she sighs. She is not sure who is watching over her right now, she did not even look, she is simply too tired ant the view is amazing. She is not sure how long she sits there for but at one point the sun starts to set. She is filled with contentment looking at the sun meet the water on the horizon.

– That is what you smell like.

Caine’s voice startles her.
– Caine! Have you been standing there all along?
– Yes.
– You could have said something earlier.
– You seemed to need the quiet.
– Yeah, I did. Will you sit with me?

For only answer there is a thump beside her.

– Anyone close enough to see us?
– Only Leo.

She shifts closer to him and lay her head on his shoulder.

– That was the best birthday ever. Did you have fun?
– I did.
– Good.

The temperature has gone down by a few degrees with the sun setting and Jupiter is getting cold,
Caine can feel it. When he feels her shiver, he spreads his wings and wraps one around her. Her immediate snuggling puts a warmth in his heart. Her hand plays in his feathers and he can not help his own shiver.

– Jupiter, he murmurs.
– I know, she answers.

She stands and turns around to see that half the stadium is already gone.

– They are quick, she says.
– You have been sitting out here for nearly two hours, Caine says, standing.
– Wow, okay.

She starts walking in the direction of the stadium and contacts Kiza.

[Yes, Your Majesty?]
– Kiza, we’ll keep the cabin for the night, have someone drop a ship and some essentials here for us.
[Already done. The Diana is on the beach behind the cabin and it is fully stocked.]
– How?
[I expected you would when I saw him wearing it. Enjoy your night.]
– Thanks, Kiza. And try to get some sleep.

When they get near where the stadium was Aleksa, Nino, Yulia and Martin meet with them. They say their goodbyes and after that Jupiter and Caine go to the cabin while Aleksa and Nino go to the Maximillian Jones and Yulia and Martin go back to Chicago.

After everyone has left and they are completely alone on the island Jupiter takes two large blankets from the cabin and goes back to the beach. She lays a blanket down and sits on it, padding the spot beside her.

– Sit with me.

Caine sits and wonders what Jupiter is doing when she lays down on the blanket and pulls the second one over her.

– They are beautiful, aren’t they?
– The stars.

Caine looks up at the unknown sky map, he never considered the stars to be beautiful before, only points of reference to navigate by and reminders of the battles he fought in, but Jupiter’s love for them must be rubbing on him because he finds himself remembering that he loved the night sky on Sodroria where he was created and he says:

– Yes, they are.
– Do you have a favorite star?
– Zagriea, he says without even thinking.
– What’s special about that star?
– It’s the star from where I was created.
– Oh, your home star? Where is it? She asks pointing to the sky.

Caine lays down on his back to look carefully at the sky.

– I can not find it from here but you’ve seen it already, it is the star around which Jeymia orbits.
– What?
– The Zagriea system is home to many splicing facilities.
– Oh… Tell me about it, tell me about your home system.
– There are four planets orbiting Zagriea. The first one, Ulara, is nothing more than a small rock like the first one in this system. The second one is Beistea, a small gas planet with icy rings and twelve moons. The third planet is Jeymia and the fourth planet is Sodroria. There is an asteroid belt between Beistea and Jeymia. Kenda Pooran Lycantant splicing facilities are on Sodroria.
– And what is Sodroria like?
– I do not remember much about it, I was there so long ago, but I do remember the green forests in which we were tested for tracking.
– You’ve never gone back?
– It never occurred to me, and in the Legion, you go where you are sent.
– Right, she says, then pauses.

After a moment she adds:

– If you ever feel the need to see it again, you let me know.

The warmth from earlier returns to his heart and he turns to his side to kiss Jupiter. After that the only stars they see are in each other’s eyes and they reach a point where they move beyond the stars until they fall back down to Earth and go inside the cabin to get some sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Russian birthday song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAG2cCGbQi0&t=

Translation for the French part:

Allô = Hello

– François?
[“Kiza? It’s really you my heart?”]
– Yes, my love.
[“Kiza, my darling, tell me, I need to hear it.”]
– François, my love, when all the stars in the sky will have burn out, I will still love you.
[“Oh, Kiza, my darling, it’s really you! And when there will be no more water on earth, I will still love you.”]

Kiza shivers and tears roll down her cheeks.

– My love… her voice breaks and she hands the phone back to Jupiter.
Day 1

Chapter Summary

All Jupiter wants today is to roll into a ball under a blanket and watch a girl movie, but that is not what is going to happen.

Chapter Notes

Happy new year!

Sorry it's been a while since I updated, but this is a very long chapter.

Oh, wow, I've broken the 200k words and I'm not halfway done with all I want to write.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jupiter and Caine

Caine was in the Diana preparing some food for him and Jupiter when he heard her wake up. Her morning stretching with accompanying sounds makes him smile and he looks down at his arm-cuff around his right forearm. What an adventure! He thinks. He is so happy right now.

He finishes with breakfast and was on his way back to the cabin when he hears her curse so he hurries up to the cabin, opens the door and asks:

– Jupiter, is everything okay?

Then he gets a whiff of a new scent from Jupiter, the soft rain is hard and warm, the coffee has lumps of white clots in it, the sunset is burning hot and she smells like blood.

– Crap, out! She snaps from within the bathroom.

Caine puts the breakfast by the door and exits the cabin confused.

In the bathroom Jupiter is cursing in her head.

Crap, I did not need this today. This is so embarrassing. I'm sure he smelled it. Crap, crap, crap. She takes a clean washcloth, folds it and puts it in her underwear, because of course there is nothing for periods on a deserted island. Oh, crap. Then she has an ironic snort. At least I know for sure that his implant works, otherwise I would really be in a load of crap. I don’t need an actual litter in nine months.

She takes a deep breath and exits the bathroom feeling a little better but that feeling last for a mere second because when her eyes set on the breakfast by the door, she feels guilty and tears up. Caine had never had to prepare food for her before and he cut heart shapes in the food and even found
some flowers and put them on the platter.

– Holy crap, now you really messed thing up, Jupe. She tells herself out loud.

Cursing in her head, she opens the cabin door, exits and looks around but she does not see Caine anywhere. *Crap, what have I done?* She circles the cabin thinking he might have gone inside the Diana and she finally sees him, standing by the water, staring at the cabin, holding his arm-cuff in his hands.

She freezes in place for a moment, he looks so hurt, his shoulders are low and his wings are trailing on the sand with the water touching them with each wave. *Now look at what you've done, go fix it,* she tells herself to mentally kick herself in the butt. She starts walking again and the closer she gets, the more he looks hurt, when she stops, she can clearly see his eyes are red and filled with unshed tears. *Damn hormones! Damn Bolotnikov temper!*

Caine watches as Jupiter walks towards him and he braces himself. *That’s it, it’s the end,* he thinks. As Jupiter is getting closer, he smells guilt coming off her in waves, it hits him in the stomach and he wants to apologize to her for what ever he did but the acrid scent is so powerful that he can’t even speak. When she stops, he offers her his arm-cuff but she does not take it. She looks up at him, eyes filled with tears, and suddenly drops to her knees.

– I’m so sorry Caine, I should not have snapped at you like this, can you forgive me? She says.

For a moment her actions feel so wrong in his mind, a Queen should not kneel for a splice but then he understands that this is not the Queen, only the woman, his Jupiter, and she is apologizing to him. Maybe I didn’t do anything wrong? His heart sings for a moment, because it does not feel like the end anymore, but then he can’t bear that his mate is feeling so guilty that she would kneel and he drops to his knees too.

– I don’t understand what is going on, but yes, I forgive you, I will always forgive you. He tells her.

She has a sob and he gathers her to his chest and holds her tight. He feels so relived right now even if he does not understand what has happened. It takes a few moments but Jupiter stops sobbing and she snuggles in his shoulder and sighs. He lets his hand brush her hair and breaths in her scent, which confuses him.

Jupiter takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. She is always a mess on the first day of her period but others should not have to suffer for it, especially not people she loves. Sitting back, she sees that Caine is holding his arm-cuff. She delicately brushes her finger on the Jupiter design.

– Why did you take it off? She asks.
– I thought…
– You thought what? She asks when he does not continue.

She looks him in the eyes and realizes just how much she hurt him.

– Oh! No! Never my love. *Moya sud’ba,* I would never send you away, not even if I lived to be a million years.

She cups his cheek and then takes the arm-cuff to slide it back on his forearm and ties it back. After which she puts her arms around his neck and kisses him. When she lets go, she sits back on the sand.
bringing her knees to her chest and pats the spot beside her.

Caine sits by her side still utterly confused about what happened but happy at the same time. And now that he is close to her and not totally freaking out, he can smell that her mental balance is affected by something and she still smells like blood but does not smell hurt.

– I’d better explain, she starts with.

Caine waits.

– It’s something normal but private that we usually don’t like other people to know about. Or rather we don’t like other people to know when it’s happening.

A sharp pain stabs her in her lower stomach and she lets out a small grunt while pressing her knees closer to her chest.

– Are you hurt? Caine asks.
– No, I’m fine, or I’ll be fine, it’s just part of life.

She rubs her lower back, stretches her legs and brings them back to her chest.

– Do I smell like blood? She asks him.
– Yes, but I don’t understand why.
– It’s what I thought. Gosh this is embarrassing.

She looks away and back to him.

– I’m not sure if you know about this, since Lycantant are not supposed to mate… How much do you know about human female reproduction cycle?

Then it clicks in his mind, tersies don’t have the health implant and women live with the reproduction cycle and the cleansing smells like blood.

– Oh, he says lowering his head.
– Yep. What they mustn’t have taught you is that it can hurt like hell and that the hormonal change wrecks havoc on your mental state.

She arcs her back and rubs at it again.

– With everything that’s happened I lost track of my cycle and I was annoyed at myself because I have nothing to deal with this here. I’m really sorry I snapped at you, this has nothing to do with you.

The last shreds of doubt vanish from his mind and are replaced by worry for his mate.

– Is there anything I can do?
– About this? Not really, it’s part of life. I found a temporary fix and I’ll just have to make a stop to buy some essentials.
– I meant for you.

She stands.

– Take me inside to eat that beautiful breakfast you prepared.

Caine stands, smiles and ducks his head then takes her in his arms.
– This might make it easier.

He marches on to the cabin and she puts her head on his chest.

– Day one is always the worst for me, I should be back to myself tomorrow.
– How long does your cleansing last? He asks.
– Cleansing? Oh, you mean my period? About four days.

He opens the cabin door and puts her down.

– Do you want splices that can smell blood to be off close guarding duty until then?
– What? Oh, no, I’m sure I can count on their discretion.

He nods.

She sits at the small table and Caine brings the breakfast and sits in front of her. He can still smell the spikes of pain she gets and the blood but she gives him a blinding smile and she smells happy too.

After breakfast they go to the Diana where Seiza left an outfit for the day in which she changes.
After that they depart from the island and stop at a store, she calls Wal-Mart, on the west coast.

– Here nobody would even blink if you turned off your anonymizer. She tells him.
– What?
– A lot of strange people shop at Wal-Mart.

They enter the store and Jupiter pulls a caddy and starts shopping.

She picks up tampons and pads, a hot-water bottle, a bottle of Tylenol, a box of chocolate and peppermint tea, pays for them and stops at the public bathroom.
When she comes out, she does not smell like blood anymore. Which leads to another embarrassing conversation, about hygienic protection, when they are back on the Diana.

They dock at the Maximillian Jones and Kiza greets them.

– Good morning, Jupiter, Caine, spent a good night?
– Good night, yes, good morning, that is relative. How are things?

Kiza looks at Jupiter, then Caine, then Jupiter and Caine again. Caine shakes his head so, she does not press the subject.

– Let’s see… She clears her throat and looks at her sheave.
– The cargo bay transformation into a boutique has been completed. Leona did a very good job.
Also, she and Prey Harpa are overjoyed with the mothering beds and the Red-Tails and the Albert are grateful for the bunkbeds. I had your laptop case and the items you bought for their ladyship sent to your formal office. Kiran Toly and Truly Percadium have asked for a meeting, Squeaky is waiting for you at your house in Chicago and my parents haven’t left their quarters, my father is actually late for his shift.
– That is not like Sting, is he sick? Asks Caine.
– According to the ship’s monitoring he is perfectly healthy.
– What do you think is going on with him? Jupiter asks her.
– I can’t be sure, but it might have something to do with me.
– You think your situation brought back memories?
– Yeah, he has his Queen-Bee, but the wounds are too fresh.
– Did you just Babylon 5 me?
– Oh, sorry, I’ve been up all night, could not sleep and you peeked my interest.
– Well, I guess I don’t have to ask you how you are then…

A mist of tears comes to Kiza’s eyes. Jupiter pulls her in her arms.
– Oh, please don’t cry, you’ll make me cry too.

Kiza buzz in her arms.
– Oh, what is going on with you? She asks.

Jupiter takes the shopping bag Caine was holding and gives it to Kiza.
– That. She says and proceeds to rub her back.

Kiza opens the bag and nods.
– Right, okay. I’ll plan accordingly. Lots of chocolate?
– No, that box is enough, more then that I get sick. Oh, and no grula, caffeine makes it worse. Just hot water, with a spoon. I have a box of peppermint tea in there.
– Got it, I’ll inform Seiza about the hot water. Anything else?
– For this? No, I don’t have the luxury of rolling in a ball in a corner under a blanket today. Just don’t take anything personal if I snap, my temper is on edge.
– I understand very well, I stopped using the regulating function of the health implant when I was with François…

Her voice chokes and she clears it.
– All right, then what do you want to start with?
– Let’s start with Stinger.
– Do you want me to go get him? Caine asks.
– Hell no. She replies too fast, too strongly.

Caine flinches but by now he understands that it’s the hormonal imbalance talking and that she is not mad at him.
– God, sorry Caine, she adds.

She takes a deep breath and counts to ten out loud in Russian:
– *Odin, dva, tri, chetry', pyat', shest', sem', vosem', devyat', desyat*.'

Kiza gives Caine an understanding look.
– Okay, let’s go to my office, I need to sit and think about this, otherwise heads will fly.

They start to walk and Kiza says:
– Maybe a cup of hot water right away?
– Oh, yes on that.
Kiza contacts Seiza right away and asks for a cup of hot water for Jupiter.

In her office, she does not sit at her desk, instead she curls up on a sofa, arms around her knees.

Caine is feeling a little useless at the moment. He does not know what he can do to help, he can’t defend Jupiter from this and her pain seems to be increasing.

Kiza recognizes the look on Caine’s face, she saw it a few times on François’. Helplessness.

– Don’t worry, it gets worse before it gets better, but it will get better. She tells him.

He can relate to that, it’s the same thing with the pack-bonding.

– Jupiter, is there anything I can do?

She looks at him with a sad smile and looks into her shopping bag to get the hot water bottle out.

– Fill this with hot water? Unless there is some space heat-pads I can use?

Caine has a bright smile, he sits by her side and activates something on his glove.

– What about this? He asks.

Jupiter touches the glove and it is hot. She takes his hand and places it on her lower back. Her head rolls back and she lets out a sigh.

– Oh, that feels good.

Caine smiles to Kiza and Kiza nods to him. Finally, something he can do!

The door chimes and Kiza opens it for Seiza. She brings in the cup of hot water and places it on the table by Jupiter. After that Kiza talks to her by the door and she leaves. Jupiter takes the peppermint tea box out of the bag and drops a tea bag in the cup. When the tea is ready, she uses it to swallow a Tylenol. And then puts her head on Caine’s shoulder.

– Okay, here is what I want to do. First put Stinger and Honey-Bee off duty for the first shift. Then I don’t want to see anyone but you two for the next thirty minutes, until the Tylenol kicks in. No need to freak everyone on the ship. After that I’ll meet Kiran and Truly and I also want to meet Prey Harpa. I guess after that I’ll have to go to my house to meet Squeaky. That should be enough for the morning. After lunch we’ll go find out just how much we can tell your mate.

**Stinger and Honey-Bee**

Elsewhere on the Maximillian Jones, Stinger can’t get himself to leave his bed this morning. Honey-Bee is still asleep in his arms and he does not want to leave her side. Learning about Kiza’s mate yesterday had stirred up a lot of memories and emotions not long forgotten. He does understand why he never saw Kiza’s pain, she has a very good teacher in himself. He hid his pain for 18 years, she had the time to learn every trick in the book.

When Honey-Bee asked her about the Ovarium, a dagger pierced his heart. He had not thought
about that, but Honey-Bee must have gone through about 8 or 9 Ovariums alone and he hurts inside thinking about it.

He was stuck in these thoughts when Honey-Bee stirs in his arms.

He snuggles against her burying his face in her hair and caressing her shoulder.

Honey-Bee snuggles back and sigh.
– Good morning, Love.
– Good morning, my Queen.
– This is nice, Love, but aren’t you supposed to be on duty? She asks him.
– Yes, but right now, I don’t care. He says with his voice shaking.

Honey-Bee turns around to see his face and emits a low concerned buzz.
– Oh, Love, what is it?
– Thinking about Kiza and you, my Queen. Going through Ovariums alone. I can’t imagine how you did it, you are so brave.
– Oh, I had too, I had Seiza to take care of and, as Kiza said, the pain in my heart was way worse, and I have you back now.
– When was your last one? He asks.

She kisses him, and start a buzzing sound that makes Stinger turn a dark shade of crimson.
– Almost two years ago, I will enjoy the next one, she says really low in his ear.

Which makes him buzz and for a moment they both forget he is supposed to be on duty.

Later when they manage to get out of bed, he contacts Aves who he was supposed to replace.

[Good morning, sir. Is everything okay?] Aves asks.
– Yes, fine, I’m sorry I’m late, I will be there shortly.
[Late? I thought you were off duty until second shift?]
– What?
[It is what I have been told by Miss Kiza.]
– Oh, she did not inform me.
[As I understand the order came from Her Majesty.]
– I see, thank you.

He cuts the communication and looks at his wife.
– Jupiter took me off duty for the first shift. He says.

Honey-Bee was looking at her schedule on her sheave and she shows it to Stinger.
– Seems I am off too, by order of Her Majesty.

– I don’t know why she did it, but I won’t complain, he says gathering her in his arms.
– Oh, Love, she says snuggling against him.
Kiran and Truly

Back in Jupiter’s formal office, Jupiter is feeling much better physically with the help of Tylenol, peppermint tea and Caine’s hot glove rubbing against her lower back. She still wishes she could snuggle under a blanket for the day, but she has responsibilities and people to take care of.

– Okay, that’s as good as I’ll get today. Let’s get on with it. Kiza, send for Kiran and Truly. She says straightening up.
– Of course. Do you need anything else?
– A blanket and girl movie?
– Oh, I feel you, I’ll try and fix something for you.
– Thanks.

Kiza leaves the office and Jupiter stands and stretches her back in all directions and lets out a grunt.
– Thanks for the heat, it really helped. She tells Caine.

He shuts down the heat on his glove, stands and moves a strand of hair from her face.
– Anytime.

She hugs him, then picks up her shopping bag and brings it to hide it behind her desk, at which she sits and she installs her laptop.

– May I ask something? Caine asks stepping to his guard position.
– What is Tylenol?

Jupiter smirks and pulls the bottle out of the bag and hands it to Caine.
– Mild anti-pain medication.

Caine nods.
– Dr. Comb could have given you something for the pain.
– Oh, I did not even think about that, I know this works well for me but I’ll go and see her if I need it.

Caine gives her the bottle back and she stores it in her bag.

While she waits for Kiran and Truly, she connects her phone to her laptop and transfers her stories, opens them and spellchecks them. It’s much nicer typing with a real keyboard. With her mood today, she also gets inspiration for another version of their story and she writes an outline of it while she waits, a version in which there is an unplanned pregnancy. The chime at the door interrupts her.
– Come in!

The door opens and Kiran and Truly enter, they seem nervous as they walk to her desk.
– Good day, Your Majesty. Kiran says.

Jupiter bites her tongue to prevent her snapping, and then greets them.

– Good day, to you two too. What can I do for you?
– Your Majesty, as you know Truly and I have a son together.

Jupiter nods, wondering what they want to get too.

– And although I am now recognized as his father, I have no rights to him legally.

He pauses and Truly continues.

– Your Majesty, we humbly ask for your authorization to get married.

At first, Jupiter's brain refuses to process what is being asked of her and then she gets really angry at space society. If two humans with a common child need her permission to get married, what does that mean for the splices she owns? And then she remembers what Kiza and Stinger told her when relating their story. *Crap, I can decide if a couple can keep a child or not and I’ll be the owner of the children if the female splice belongs to me.* She remembers some lessons on slavery from high school and shivers, for all she knows she can arrange marriages and force people to have children too.

Under her desk, she uses a trick she learned a while back and plants her finger nails in her forearm to prevent her from snapping and answers the request.

– Of course, you can have my permission. I would not reunite people then turn around and prevent them from being together.
– Thank you, Your Majesty.
– My pleasure. Anything else?
– Erm, after a wedding, a couple usually gets two days of free time.
– Two days?

This time Jupiter snaps, a little. Kiran and Truly wince.

– If that is too much, we could do with one day. Kiran says.

She stands quickly, her temper boiling beneath the surface, and a sharp pain in her midsection makes her sit back down slowly, her hands closed in fists. She takes a deep breath and slowly opens her hands and places them flat on her desk.

– You misunderstand me, on Earth it is traditional for a wedded couple to go on one to two weeks trip called a honeymoon. I find the concept of having only two days unacceptable.

That brings out a smile from all present parties.

– Max, tell Buzz I need to see him right away.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

– While we wait for him and since I did not have time to learn every laws and rules yet, I need to know one thing. Why do you need my authorization?
– Anyone working for a royal in a high enough position requires permission. Since our lives reflect on your reputation.
– I see… I don’t agree with it, but I understand.
The door chimes.

– Come in! She calls.
– You asked to see me, Jupiter? Says Buzz.
– Yes Buzz, do join us.

Buzz sits on a chair.

– What can I do for you? He asks.
– I have a new rule to add to the list.

He takes his sheave out.

– I’m listening.
– Couples getting married will receive a standard week of 10 days off work, extendable to 15 days after a year of full-time work.

Buzz writes it down.

– Very well. Anything else?
– I’m not sure, does an authorization to get married need to be official?
– Yes, but that would be done by an advocate.
– Which I don’t have yet, great… Thank you Buzz, your dismissed.

Hiven Buzz leaves her office and she sighs.

– Okay, I’ll have to check with my household manager on when I am getting advocates. For now, you have my verbal authorization and I’ll get you a sealed authorization as soon as possible.
– Thank you, Your Majesty. Kiran says.

She nods and says:

– Dismiss.

They leave her office and she puts her head on her folded arms on her desk.

Immediately Caine changes from the bodyguard to the concerned mate and kneels by her side. Her scent does not indicate more discomfort or pain and she does not smell upset.

– Jupiter? He asks softly.

She turns her head and looks at him with a soft smile on her lips.

– I’m okay, just resting and thinking a little. Mind heating my lower back again?

Caine smirks, activates his glove and rubs her back.

She sighs and closes her eyes.

Personnel and livery

– Max, I need to see Erminea and Prey. She says.
– Yes, your Majesty.
She continues to rest until the door chimes.

Caine stands and deactivates his glove.

– Come in!
– Good day, Your Majesty, Erminea and Prey say entering the office.
– Good day, come and sit both of you, she says gesturing to the chairs.

– What can we do for you, Your Majesty? Erminea asks sitting down.
– Madam Erminea, do you have an update on the lawyers and other personnel I still require?
– Oh, yes, I do. First, if you could seal this, for the acquisition and hiring of the family members of your royal guards.

She hands a sheave to Jupiter.

Jupiter takes the sheave and reads through it:

Istona Wasmsley, human, Ottilie’s wife;
Romi Fangs, Tigron-splice, Khan’s mate;
Caprice Elwood, Coation-splice, Buck’s mate;
Ursa Ursinus, Bours-splice, Billie’s mate;
Ebony Skye, Vampi-splice, Onyx’s sister;
Stiletto Mouche, Fly-splice, Cyclor’s mate;
Kareema Palen, human, Jornaith’s wife;
Laszlo Farnala, human, Jacbane’s wife;
Javanica Pholido, Pango-splice, Mani’s mate.

It’s a short list compared to the list of royal guards. Jupiter seals it and gives it back to Erminea.

– Next, I have looked into the personnel you had in other locations and found some to fill your retinue. They have been vetted by captain Apini. This is a transfer sheave.
Erminea gives her another sheave.

There are two names on the sheave:

Rotram Tra, human, physical therapist assistant;
Janianne Ricli, human, doctor.

Jupiter seals it and gives it back.

– And the request for advocates at the Commonwealth Ministry went through. They are sending you two Intergalactic advocates, Jill a business advocate and Bob a personal advocate.
– Bob? The same one I used at the Hall of Title?
– That I can not say.

She offers her the third sheave.

Jupiter seals it and gives it back.

– I will see with your new people what they want to do before looking into more personnel.
– Perfect. Thank you Madam Erminea. Prey, following the incident in the shopping district, I’ve been working on my livery. Now, I’ve had Mr. Wise’s help for the security and ship’s crew livery, but I would like to go over my design with you and get your perspective.
She opens her file on the laptop and turns it around for them to see.
– I’ve never seen a device like that, what is it? Asks Prey.
– It is called a laptop, it comes from Earth. Now here is what I was thinking.

For the next hour, she explains her design to Erminea and Prey. They both agreed with the design for
the ship’s crew and security personnel. The changes were so slight that Prey did not have to actually
make the uniforms, the parameters would simply have to be updated in the uniform’s dispensers.

When they got to the retinue’s livery, they were both enthusiastic and appreciative of the simple yet
refine design. The only modifications made were for the formal occasion where the sash would be
longer and larger in the back, going to the ankles, like the guard’s capes and for the females that
would prefer to wear pants, a tunic version of the dress was designed.

– How long will it take to get everything ready? Jupiter asks.
– The final design can be sent to your alcazaars and other properties and they will take care of their
part. For your people here, I’d say up to two weeks. It would be faster if I was not alone to do this.
– Yes, that is logical. Do you know anyone who could work with you?
– My old team would do the job.
– Where are they now?
– I am uncertain, when you bought me, my old owner had put us up for sale. If no one bought them,
they are probably still on the market.

Jupiter takes a deep breath to keep calm.

– Prey, make a list for Erminea. Erminea, check their status, and their family’s status. Make it a
priority. If they pass security, have them brought here for an interview.
– Interview? Asks Erminea.
– Yes, I don’t buy people without their consent. Well I did buy you guys without asking, but it was
to reunite you with your families.
– I understand, it will be done.
– Good, dismissed.

**Jupiter and Caine**

After they have left, Jupiter orders another cup of hot water and watches random videos on
YouTube. She does not understand how she gets an Internet connection in orbit, but she won’t
complain.

When the door chimes, Caine gets her cup of hot water from Seiza and brings it to her.
– Thanks, Caine. She says when he puts the cup on her desk.

She rummages in her bag and takes a bag of peppermint tea.
– What are you researching? Caine asks looking at the screen.
– Huh? Nothing, just relaxing.

She uses the ‘fresher room while her tea infuses after which she curls up on a sofa with her laptop,
her cup of tea and her box of chocolate.
– Come and sit with me, I’ll show you some of the stuff Earthlings do for fun.
– Do we have time for this? He asks sitting sideways on the sofa with his wings over the armrest.
– No idea, but if I don’t take breaks, I won’t last the day without falling apart.
– Okay. Come here.

Jupiter cuddles against him and he puts his arm around her.

They spend half an hour watching videos of extreme sports which have Caine really impressed by what some tersie can do without being engineered.

– Okay, that’s enough. I could do this all day, but we have to get going. Jupiter says after a last video.

---At the House---

Half an hour later, she is sitting in the living room at her house and Squeaky gives her a sheave.

– Your Benevolent Mother, greets Squeaky.
– What have you found?
– The human was not easy to find. His current designation is William Johnson.
– He has more then one name?
– All details are in report.
– Okay, let me read that.

She turns on the sheave and tears start rolling on her cheeks when she reads the report and then her sorrow turns to fury.

– Your Majesty? Caine asks, smelling the tornado in her scent.
– One moment. She says with a finger in the air.

She takes a deep breath and counts to ten.

– Squeaky, I need a team of keepers at the warehouse in 30 minutes.
– Yes, Benevolent Mother. It says and disappears.
– Commander, I need the Janus with all the Skybreakers and the Sentinels, plus Dr. Comb at the warehouse in 30 minutes.
– Yes, Your Majesty, Caine replies.

Then she picks out her phone and calls Lieutenant Adams.

[You’ve got Adams.]
– Lieutenant, it’s Jupiter Jones.
[What can I do for you Ms. Jones?]
– I think it’s more what I can do for you. Are you missing a William Johnson?
[How do you know that? No wait, stupid question. Where is he?] Jupiter snort a laugh.
– I’d rather not say over the phone. Meet me where we first met in half an hour.
[I’ll be there.]
– Bring Granger but make sure Carter does not find out.
[Got it. See you in 30.]
– Bye.

Jupiter hangs up and looks at Caine.

– The gang that took Yulia have Will in their main compound, I’ll explain everything at the warehouse.
– I understand, Your Majesty.

Caine makes the call to Stinger then reports back to Jupiter which he finds in the kitchen, boiling water for a cup of peppermint tea. All the cupboards doors are open and she is holding a bottle of Tylenol in her hand. He can smell that powerful thunder in her scent but also that her pain has returned and that she needs comfort. He turns the heat on his glove and rubs her lower back.

She sighs and leans into the warmth.

– Gosh, that feels good, but someone might see. She says.
– I would hear them before they could get here, he murmurs in her ear.
– Right, okay…

She turns around.

– Can I get a hug then? She asks.

He smirks and surrounds her with his arms, leaving the warm glove on her lower back.

– Thanks, she says against his chest.

For only answer he squeezes her slightly and she sighs.

After that she makes her cup of tea and swallows a Tylenol.

---At the warehouse---

Jupiter was reviewing her “troops” on board the Janus when Martin Adams and Sam Granger arrived at the warehouse. They were cleared by security and brought to her.

– Ms. Jones. What is all this? Asks Martin.
– Ah, Lieutenant, Officer, perfect, welcome, she says shaking their hands. This is a mission briefing.

She turns to face her people, she had time to prepare what she wanted to say.

– Skybreakers and Sentinels, I have called upon you for a rescue mission. You all have met my friend Yulia Petrovich yesterday and some of you were involved in her rescue the day before. She is my oldest friend and very dear to me. The person you have to rescue is William Johnson, the father of her unborn child.

She hears a gasp from Sam Granger and she presses on the sheave she was holding and a 3D holographic image of Will appears in the air.

– He is an undercover police officer and his cover was blown about two months ago. The gang he was investigating is the same one that had abducted my friend and they are holding him in their main
compound. I also received information that he has and is being tortured for information as such he might be in a fragile state, drugged or not totally lucid so be aware of that when you find him. Also, this gang might be made of Earthlings but they are not less dangerous then gangs from the contraband ring and their weapons can cause a lot of damage as Lieutenant Laing can attest. That is why I am authorizing the use of all technologies for this mission.

She pauses, looking at everyone of them.

– You are not expandable and I want to see each and everyone of you back, alive and well. The keepers will take care of any witnesses.

She turns to Stinger.

– Captain Apini they’re all yours.
– You all heard Her Majesty. Get your gear in order and be ready for drop off in 20. Go.

They all leave except Stinger, Caine, Wamsley, Adams and Granger.

– Any other instruction Your Majesty? Are we to disable only again? Caine asks.

Jupiter shakes her head.

– You guys do what you have to do so that everyone of you come back in one piece. If possible, try to keep the enemy casualty to a minimum, but you have the authorization to shoot to kill.
– Understood. Caine answers, smelling how much it costs her to authorize lethal action.
– Anything else?
– Actually, Ms. Jones, Officer Granger starts. I do not know if you know this but Will is my brother-in-law.
– Yes, I knew, the Keepers are very thorough. It’s why asked Martin to bring you with him. I’m sure it will make for some awkward family dinners later on, but let’s just focus on saving him right now.

Granger nods.

– And where are we going? Martin asks.
– Carter & Carter.

Lieutenant Adams swears and Jupiter nods.

– Exactly. She says.

---At Carter & Carter---

They get to the Carter & Carter industrial building and Stinger scans the location with the ship.

– I’m counting at least 50 people at the location. Hard to tell which ones are foes, no one has any kind of implants. Says Stinger.
– Neat technology. The layout might help determine how many are hostiles. Martin Adams points out.

Stinger brings out another layer of information on the display.

– I would appreciate your input, Lieutenant, I’m not familiar with every Earth technology. Stinger says.
– Of course. Martin says looking at the display. I don’t see anything too fancy. They don’t seem to have any automated defense system. This looks like the monitoring room and they seem to have cameras at every door. My guess would be that they rely on their man power rather than fancy technology. I can’t tell from this what kind of weapons they have.
– Thank you, Lieutenant. We should take care of the surveillance system first.
– I can do that, Caine says.
– Iriser, it creates an opening in any surface. Caine says showing his iriser.
– Wow, anything it can’t work on?
– On Earth? Nothing. There are some anti-iriser protection field, but those are illegal to own for anyone but royals.
– So, anyone with one of those can enter anywhere they please?
– They could, but it’s illegal for anyone but legionnaire to carry them. Although I am sure the contraband ring has obtained some.
– Contraband ring? Granger asks.
– Black market, Jupiter explains.

Granger nods and they continue with the planning.

10 minutes later, Aves and Leo return in their new uniforms. Jupiter had no idea the uniform dispenser had already been updated. It pleases her.

– Sirs, you should go change, we will guard Her Majesty. Aves says.
– What’s this? Stinger asks.
– Her Majesty’s new uniforms, sir. He answers.

Stingers looks at the uniforms, they are basically the same, except for a few details. Just enough to transform them into royal livery, but nothing that would get in the way of their duty. He nods at Jupiter and he, Caine and Wamsley go change.

At the appointed time, they all return fully equipped. Jupiter has the small pleasure of seeing them all in their new uniforms. The changes are subtle, but they work. Now she can easily spot the medics in the lot with the fine blue piping on the shoulder and Stinger has the red piping of command. The bronze touch also adds class.

After last moment instructions, Stinger gives the signal and the Sentinels and Skybreakers leave for the portal room.

Jupiter stands by the door and nods at her people as they go. Caine is the last one to leave and right before he exits, he gives her a gun.

– Here take this, just in case something goes wrong. He says.
– Wait. She says, placing a hand on his bicep.

He smirks and lowers his head to kiss her.

– For luck, he says.

She smiles.
– Now go.
Jupiter is left with Stinger, Adams and Granger. She puts the gun in the small of her back and goes to watch the monitor. Stinger activates the comm so they will hear how things are going.

The *Sentinels* portal down, surrounding the industrial building marked Carter & Carter, keeping out of the field of vision of the cameras and the *Skybreakers* fly out. Caine lands at the back of the building.

– I’m in place, going in, wait for my signal. He says.

He activates his iriser and enters the building. The mobster monitoring the activities is so shocked by him entering through the wall that he does not even react. He knocks him out with a punch and ties him up. Then he proceeds to unplug the monitoring machines, he has learned a few things about Earth technologies being with Jupiter.

– Go, he calls.

The *Cosmic Sentinels* blow up the front door and enter through there, the *Shadow* go through a side door and the *Fierce* go through a loading door at the back. Caine joins the *Skybreakers* and they enter through the roof. With their surprise multi fronted attack, they easily have the upper hand and the mobsters are taken by surprise. They tried to defend themselves, but they thought they were so safe inside that most of them were not even armed. In fact, the *Cosmic Sentinels* were the only ones fired at and Lieutenant Buck Elwood was the only one hit, grazed on the shoulder by a deflected bullet.

After making sure they were clear, they gather all the mobsters in a big room in the middle of the building.

– We’re clear, Sir. He says.

[Status?] Stinger asks him.

– Easier then expected, minor casualties, no fatalities. He replies.

He can imagine the relief Jupiter feels.

[Found him yet?]

– Not yet, the others are looking.

– Sir, over here, Castor calls.

He leaves the *Sentinels* in charge of guarding the mobsters and gets to the room where Castor is.

– Sir, I don’t think we can move him, Castor tells him.

Caine takes a peek into the room and immediately calls for Kalie.

– Sir? She asks once there.

– Can we move him? He asks her.

– Nuts and bolts, what have they done to him? She exclaims, going to his side.

She performs a quick examination and her faces goes very still.
– I’d call for Dr. Comb, quickly.

He nods.

– Sir, we need Dr. Comb, we can’t move him.
[Is it safe for Her Majesty?]
– Yes, no danger.
[On our way.]

Stinger, Adams, Granger, Jupiter and Dr. Comb get inside and to the room, directed by Caine. Caine nods at Jupiter and she nods back with relief in her scent.

– Beeswax, what did they do to him? Dr. Comb says.

She scans him and shakes her head.

– That is not good, ma’am, he has a severe brain contusion, all his fingers have been broken, his nails torn, he lost a lot of blood and I’ve never seen this kind of trauma, what did they do to him, drill holes in him? I’m not sure I can save his legs. Not with alternative treatments at least. She points out.
– What does this mean? Asks Sam Granger.
– That the only way to be sure to save his legs is to use RegeneX, which is the name for the… Jupiter starts and pauses.
– The what?
– The serum made from humans.
– Oh…

She turns to Dr. Comb.

– Start alternative treatments doctor. We will decide about the RegeneX when and if it comes to that.

She turns back to Sam, who’s face is somewhere between green and white.

– I can see you understand the implication of what might have to be done to save his legs. Now, he is your family, you know him, and how he would live with or without his legs and what might have to be done to save his legs. Think about it, you have some time.

She takes out her phone and calls Yulia.

[Jupe! Your party was so fun yesterday!] Yulia answers.
– Hi Yulia, thanks. I’m calling about Will.
[You found him?]
– Yes, he has been held prisoner by the same people who had abducted you.

A loud glass breaking noise is her only answer.

– Listen, he’s in bad shape. He was tortured.
[Can you fix him?] She murmurs.
– Yes, but…
[Really?]
– Maybe, to save his legs.
[I need to see him.]
– I’ll send someone to pick you up.
[Okay, if you don’t mind, I’ll hang up right now.]
– Sure, don’t break all the dishes.

She hangs up.

– Stinger, send someone for Yulia. Martin, you should stay with Sam.

She takes a deep breath lets it out slowly and takes her Queen of the Earth demeanor.

– Caine, let’s go see those mobsters.

She steps out of the room and Caine takes her hand and squeezes it. She takes his gun from her back and gives it back to him. After which he guides her to where the mobsters are assembled.

She steps into the large room where they are all tied up sitting on the floor. She smirks as she recognizes a few from two days ago.

– Hello, my name is Jupiter Jones. I’ve come for my friend’s boyfriend.

She kicks Vitomir’s feet and he turns pale.

– Mr. Vitomir, did you give your boss my message?
– I did.
– Good. Where is he?
– Please, I can’t tell you.
– Commander? She asks.

She was only asking Caine if he was telling the truth, but Vitomir starts to beg, remembering their previous encounter and what is Caine’s specialty.

– Please, please, I swear, I can’t tell you, please.

She looks at Caine who nods and she makes a stop gesture to Vitomir.

– Anyone here can tell me where your boss is?

Grunting and frighten sounds are her answer.

– No? Well, I guess I will have to find that information for myself.

She turns around and goes back to Will’s room. His condition has improved already.

– How is he doctor?
– Better, we might just save his legs without RegeneX. All the holes are in muscles and bones, not nerves. The cuts and bruises sealing treatment seem to be doing the job. All other injuries are being treated and he will make it.
– Good, he has a baby on the way.

Dr. Comb nods and continues her treatment.

When Yulia arrives, Menura shows her in and she turns green.

– Yul, he will be okay. Dr. Comb thinks she even can save his legs without RegeneX. Jupiter tells
her, hugging her.

Yulia hugs her tight.

– You should sit, Yul, this will still take some time.

Yulia nods and sits on a chair by Sam.

– Oh, by the way, Yul, this is Officer Sam Granger, Will’s brother-in-law.

Yulia greets him, shocked.

– I think I need information. She says.

Jupiter hands her the report sheave from the keepers.

– Here this is all I know.

Yulia takes the sheave and reads it.

– Wow, could I have gotten it more opposite to my dad then that? An undercover police officer part of an anti-mob taskforce. Gosh, Jupe, was our time together just a way to get intel?

She places her shaking hands on her lower belly, feeling very down.

– I don’t know Yul. I hope not.
– I don’t think it was, Will has not been with anyone since he lost his girlfriend in a car accident two years ago. My wife and I tried to get him to go out a few times and he always refused. Also, we were not investigating you and your father. Sam points out.

Yulia lets go a shaky breath and closes her eyes.

– Thanks, she breaths out.

Jupiter contacts Squeaky to get a report from the Keepers. Only a handful of passersby had to be blanked and they fixed the building’s exterior so nothing can be suspected.

– Ma’am, this is as much as I can go without RegeneX, Dr. Comb says.
– And, how is he?
– He should be able to walk, and maybe even run with physical therapy.
– He is no stranger to that, it took him eight months to be able to walk again after the accident. Sam points out.
– Oh, then all this damage is not only from the torture? I’m amazed he could walk, Dr. Comb says.
– He could walk for hours, Yulia says, remembering their walks together.
– Impressive. I can wake him up when you are ready.

Jupiter nods and pulls Stinger and Caine with her so he sees Martin, Sam and Yulia first.

Will wakes up a little bit disconcerted. He recognizes the room he has been seeing for he does not know how long, but his torturers are no where to be seen. Instead he faces his boss, brother-in-law and the woman who’s smile kept his spirit up in the midst of his torture. He sees also other people behind them but he is too groggy to focus more then that.
He tries to speak, but his mouth is too dry. Jupiter notices his face and she sneaks to a sink in the corner and brings him back a glass of water. Sam helps him to sit and he takes the glass.

– Sir, Sam, he says after drinking some water.

He also looks at Yulia and he has a reaching forward motion with his hand but he feels so weak that he can’t reach. Yulia reaches forward and grabs his hand, a small smile floats on his lips.

– Real, I’ve imagined you like this so may time, he murmurs, squeezing her hand.

Yulia smiles.

– I’m here, you’re going to be fine.

He closes his eyes and sighs.

– How long, sir? He asks.
– A little over two months.

He opens wide eyes and looks at Sam.

– Damn, my sister must be going crazy.
– You could say that, but things will be good now, you lucky monkey.

Will does not understand and it shows on his face.

– How do you feel? Martin asks him.

He moves his fingers and his legs, astonished.

– How am I healed?
– Perhaps I can explain, Jupiter says from behind.

Everyone splits to let her pass.

– Hello, Mr. Johnson, I’m Jupiter Jones.
– I’ve heard that name, Carter wanted to know if I knew you. He says.
– I suspected as much. Would you know where he hides? We did not capture him with the rest of his gang.
– Did you find the girls? Will asks.
– The one he smuggles from Russia.
– Human trafficking? Jupiter asks.

At Will’s nod, Jupiter blows a fuse, internally, but Caine smells it.

– Where does he keep them? She asks with steel in her tone.
– Under the mechanical room, there is a trap in the floor. He might be in there with them.

She turns to Caine and murmurs “unregistered”, then speaking up she adds.

– Take the others and find them, and you bring him to me, alive if possible.
– Yes, Your Majesty. He says and leaves the room.
– Majesty? Will asks.

Jupiter nods.
– Yes, let me explain.

Jupiter proceeds to explain to him about who she is and how she can own the Earth and how she, Martin and Sam met.

– And now, the reason you are healed is because Dr. Comb Buzz healed you up as much as she could using advance space technologies.

Dr. Comb nods and Will goes still when he notices her antennas.

– Dr. Comb is a splice. Human DNA cut with animal or insect DNA. She is a Bee-splice, as is my chief of security, Captain Stinger Apini.

Stinger deactivates his anonymizer and Will gasps.

– That still freaks me out, Martin says.
– I’ve seen stranger but yeah, I get your feeling, Jupiter says.
– I think I’ve heard enough for now. Will says closing his eyes.
– Actually, you are missing the reason why I asked my people to find and rescue you.

He opens back his eyes.

– I did not even know you were on Sam and Martin’s team until I got a report on you earlier today. You see Yulia is my childhood best friend and after I learned something, I simply had to find you for her. But she has to be the one to tell you about that.

She turns to her friend, who is still holding Will’s hand.

– Udachi, she murmurs.
– Spasibo, Yulia murmurs back.

They leave them alone in the room and head back to the large room where all the mobsters are still tied up. Stinger reactivates his anonymizer and Dr. Comb returns to the Janus.

---In the central room---

She is greeted by Commander Wamsley when she enters the room.

– Ma’am.
– Are they behaving? She asks.
– Yes, he answers.
– Good.

She spots a chair on the side of the room.

And gestures to Singer.

Stingers gets the chair and brings it in the middle of the room to face the mobsters. Not long after that, the Skybreakers return with one man and a group of young women, some young enough to be barely out of childhood.

They gather the women in a corner and then Caine brings the man to face her.
– Report commander. She says.
– Ma’am, we found 12 young women hidden in a secret room under the mechanical room. This man was hidden with them and I heard him say, in Russian, that if they said anything their families back in Russia would be hurt. Caine says.
– Thank you, commander, very good work, as always. She says.

Caine nods, his ears pinking a little.

She takes her steely glare and addresses the mob boss.

– Mr. Carter, kneel. She says.

Carter has a surprised look but stays put.

– Commander, she says.

Caine makes him kneel. She nods.

– Good. I am Jupiter Jones. I thought I sent you a clear message two days ago but I can see you are hard of hearing, unless the messenger was unclear?

Vitomir is white as chalk and Carter swallows hard.

– I got your message loud and clear.
– Then I suppose it was an oversight that you kept Mr. Johnson in your tender care? She says ironically.
– That bastard? He is not worth a rescue, he should be dead in a few hours at best. Carter spats.

That was a huge mistake on his part.

– I can see that you will need a demonstration of how powerful I am. She says, coldly.

Carter swallows again, realizing that she is not someone to be toyed with.

– Lieutenant Adams and officer Granger, she calls.

Carter flinches as his boss and colleague step in beside Jupiter.

– Sir, Carter says.
– Do not Sir me you two time faced bastard. Martin says.

Jupiter smirks.

– Lieutenant, who told us where Mr. Carter was hiding?
– Sergeant Johnson.
– And, how is he?
– He is awake and alert and he will make a full recovery, according to your personal doctor.

Carter’s hands start to shake and Jupiter’s eyes narrow.

– That can’t be, he says.
– Oh, I assure you, it is. I spoke to him myself. She retorts.
– That can’t be, he says again, almost yelling.

Jupiter snorts.
– Lieutenant, do you have enough legal proof to arrest them?
– I can do so for the gangsterism, and abduction of a police officer, but I will have to call in Homeland security for the human trafficking.
– Okay, but I suppose you need probable cause to enter, to make it all legal.
– Yes.
– Okay, what about a call from Will?
– Yes, that would be perfect.

Jupiter nods.

– I’ll fix something up, oh and you should know, they won’t remember any of this, so you can get all the credit.

He nods.

– Vespa?

The wasp-splice steps forward.

– Ma’am?
– Bring them back to the warehouse and call me once they are there.
– Yes Ma’am.

The three of them leave.

– Commander, tie him up and put him with the others. She says pointing to Carter. And then find out who was the last person to go into Will’s room.
– Oh, that is easy, it’s that one, he says, pointing to Vitomir.

Caine ties up Carter and drops him down amongst the other mobsters.

– I see, get me his phone.

Caine does so and follows Jupiter back to Will’s room.

---In Will’s room---

As soon as they are alone, Yulia tries to tell Will everything she has to tell him.

– Will, what Jupiter meant when she said she learned something is that…
– Wait, he interrupts her. I want to tell you something first.

Yulia looks at him.

– I’ve dreamt of you so often over the last two months. The memory of you kept me going while they were torturing me. I’ve fooled myself so many times that you would walk right in, and now you are here, you are real and all I really want is hold you in my arms and kiss you.

He sits up and turns his legs over the side of the bed and stands, or at least he tries to. Yulia catches him before he falls and helps him sit back.

– The doctor was not sure if she could save your legs, she said you would need physical therapy.
– I’ve been through that before.
Slowly he stands again keeping a hand on the bed and the other one on Yulia’s shoulder.

– I don’t know what she did, but I think I am only weak from being bedridden for so long, there is no pain at all. It was so painful to stand before. He says.

He sits back on the bed.

– I should explain. He adds.
– Sam told us about the accident, I’m sorry.
– Don’t be. This time I only have my legs to heal, not my heart, at least, I hope.

Yulia smiles and puts her arms around his neck.

– There is another reason why you will want to walk again but first... She murmurs.

She kisses him tenderly at first and then with some desperation, hope and all the emotions of the last two months bubbling inside of her. His arms go around her and he brings her so close to him that there is no space between them. When she lets go and take a step back to look at him, he lets out a sigh.

– Better then I remembered, he murmurs.
– I was so disappointed when I woke up and you had disappeared. I stayed in the room for the whole morning hoping you would come back.
– I did not leave you, they abducted me as I was going to get us breakfast.
– Yes, I know that now. I’ve been so stressed, no knowing how to reach you.

She starts pacing in the room.

– What? What is it?

She steadies herself and faces him.

– The reason you will want to walk again, why Jupiter asked her people to find you… What I told her is that… I’m… I’m pregnant.

At his shocked face, she adds.

– You’re the father.

Slowly a surprised smile makes its way to Will’s mouth and then he takes her hand and pulls her in his arms and hugs her.

– Oh, Yulia, you must have been so angry.

Only then does Yulia let go of her tear ducts and sobs in his shoulder. He strokes her hair and holds her close. After a last sob, she sniffs and wipes her eyes.

– Sorry, it’s been a hard few months for me. First my father had an accident, then you disappeared after one magical week-end, and I found out I was pregnant. Then I got power of attorney over my father following his accident and had to go through his life while dealing with my own life. Then three days ago I got abducted by Carter’s gang.
– What! Why?

She looks down.

– Because I’ve been digging through my father’s work.
– How did you escape?
– Jupiter. Jupiter and her people rescued me and I learned about space stuff two days ago. I told her about you and she told me she could find you for me and she did. And after I got here and learning who you really are, I was scared that our week-end together was only a ploy to gather intel on my father, but seems to not be the case now.

The longer he is awake, the clearer his brain gets and he notices how many times Yulia mentions her father.

– Yulia, who is your father? He asks looking her in the eyes.

She looks down, steadies herself and looks him back in the eyes.

– Barinov Petrovich.

Will freezes in place, uncertain of how he feels about this. The father of the woman he fell for, and who is pregnant with their child, is a mob boss and that is exactly the kind of men he works at putting behind bars. And what does that mean for Yulia, is she a mobster too?

– Why don’t you say anything? Yulia asks.
– Because my brain and my heart are in conflict and I don’t want to say something I would regret.

Yulia nods and sits on the bed beside him. It’s easier to talk about that if she is not looking at him.

– I think I’ve been in that state ever since I was old enough to understand who my father was.
– Was?
– Brain damage, he is nothing but a ghost of himself now, he needs help for basic everyday life and can barely speak, let alone organize anything complex. It’s so strange being glad he can’t hurt anyone anymore but sad because he is still my father. And at the same time, I’m glad he can’t face a trial because of his mental state, but angry he won’t have to pay for all that he did.
– I can understand that. I don’t mean to interrogate you but…
– You want to know if I worked for him?

He nods.

– No, as bad as he was, he loved me and never wanted that life for me. I actually obtained my masters degree in communication in May, but my father had his accident days later so I did not have time to find an actual job.

– I can help with that, Jupiter says popping in the room.

Caine enters after her.

– What do you mean?
– Well, since I am somewhat living a double life, I need an Earth based XO. Someone to oversee the projects I want to start on Earth and such. And I’d like it to be someone from Earth that I can trust and who knows about space stuff.

At the look on Yulia’s face Jupiter adds:

– Just think about it.

Yulia nods.
Jupiter pulls up a chair and sits by the bed.

– How are you Will? May I call you Will?

He nods.

– I’m… I don’t know… overwhelmed?
– Yeah, I know the feeling. Give it a few days, it’s hard having your life turned upside-down, but it seems to be what I do best so far.

Caine can not prevent his small approving laugh and Jupiter gives him a tender look.

A buzz from her comm bracelet distracts her. It’s Vespa telling her they are at the warehouse.

– Listen, Martin and Sam have gone back to the city so they can come back with your team for your official rescue and arrest Carter’s gang. They just need a valid reason to storm the place and that’s you.

She offers him Vitomir’s phone.

– Here, you managed to take one of the mobster’s phone and you’ll call your boss to tell them where you are.

Will takes the phone and turns it on, dials Martin Adam’s number and he answers.

– Sir, it’s Will, listen, I don’t know how much time I have before they find out I managed to steal a phone. Help, held prisoner, at Carter & Carter. Listen, found out who the new mob boss is, it’s Carter sir. Oh, someone is coming, got to go, hurry sir.

Then he hangs up and start to laugh.

– Never thought I would make a fake distress call, and to my own boss, he says.
– Yeah, that’s funny now, but an hour ago, it would have been real, so it’s not a full-on lie.

Yulia squeezes his hand and he nods.

– What now?
– Now you wait. I’ll have all the mobster’s memories blanked so they won’t remember us being here and Martin and your team can get all the credits for your rescue and the arrests. And we have to go before the taskforce gets here.

Will and Yulia have a shocked face.

– Yeah, I know it sounds MIB, but that technology really exists. Yulia?

Yulia nods, turns to Will and kisses him one last time before she has to go.

– Martin has my contact info, when you are settled in, have him contact me and I’ll get Yulia back to you. Jupiter tells him.

They say their goodbyes and have a last kiss.

---End of rescue---
In the hallway Jupiter calls Squeaky and he materializes in front of her.

– Your Benevolent Mother? It says.
– Ha, good, can you implant memories when you blank someone?
– Yes, Your Benevolent Mother.
– Perfect, when the tersie taskforce team arrives, I want all the tersies in the big central room and the taskforce to be blanked. The mobsters and the group of women must not remember us being here. What I want them all to remember is the taskforce storming in, arresting the mobsters and saving the women. Do not blank the man in this room or Lieutenant Adams and Officer Granger. Do you understand?
– Yes, Your Benevolent Mother. That is simple. Only need modifying memories for ones already here, remember tersies instead of guards. And tersies must remember they did what guards did. Memory change, easy. No blanking of Will Johnson, Martin Adams and Sam Granger.

It emits a rolling sounds and Jupiter nods.

– Perfect.

They all return to the Janus except the Cosmic Sentinels. They keep an eye on the mobsters, making sure they do not escape until the taskforce gets there.

Everything happens like she planned and she returns to her house with Yulia, Caine and her guards, the others return to the Maximillian Jones. About an hour later she gets a call from Martin’s number, who turns out to be Will, for Yulia. Yulia asks where he is at and quickly leaves to join him at the hospital, where she also meets Abigail Granger, his sister and Sam’s wife.

**Jupiter and Caine**

After all that, Jupiter feels like rolling in a corner with a blanket and cry. Instead, she returns to the Maximillian Jones, stops by her office to grab her shopping bag and then goes straight to her quarters where she curls up on a roman style chaise in her bedroom and starts eating chocolates and thinking. *Why is everything always so… so… intense. He could not have been sipping on a drink on the beach or something?* After five pieces, she takes a deep breath – *Well, nowhere it said that my great destiny would be easy, so take a hold of yourself Jupe!* – and lets it out with a slow sigh.

All along Caine has been keeping her quiet company. He finds it hard to smell all her inner turmoil, but if she does not want to talk about it, he is not about to force her. He reminds himself that she said she will be back to herself tomorrow and bites his tongue. When she sits and eats chocolate, he can smell her turmoil settling and he wonders how chocolate can do that, but he says nothing.

Jupiter looks up and sees the worry in Caine’s posture. His jaw is clenched and he is fiddling with the Jupiter engraving on his arm-cuff. She takes another deep breath to finish calming herself, sits up and pads the spot beside her to invite him to sit with her.

– Sit with me? She asks.

He smirks and sits with her, on the part of the chaise with no back rest and when she snuggles against him, he puts his arm around her. And there, cradled against him, her turmoil vanishes completely and for a moment she is simply peaceful. He relishes in her scent, breathing it in by ducking his head into her hair. He smiles into her hair, basking in all the nuances of her scent and all
the joy and happiness she brings him. Jupiter sighs against him and he holds her tighter.

– Thank you, she murmurs.
– What for? He asks, surprised.
– Nothing specific. Being here, being you.

He kisses the top of her head as a reply. They stay like that for a few minutes after which Jupiter feels stable and she gets up and stretches her back.

– Okay, I’m good now.

Caine stands and brings her back in his arms.

– Yes, you are. He murmurs.

She smiles and brings him down into a sweet kiss before untangling herself and giving instructions to Max.

– Max, I want lunch in 40 minutes in my private dining room for myself, Caine and all the Apini, inform them.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

She turns to Caine.

– Do you have to report to Stinger or something?
– My next report is due tomorrow morning.
– Okay, I want to go see my mother and Nino and while I’m there I’d like you to check on the boys, your sons(?) Neuri and Fenris, gosh I don’t know how to refer to them, see how they are doing.

He smirks and looks down.

– As you wish. Usually Alphas refers to the rest of the pack as Betas.
– Yeah, no, that would sound weird to me, besides they are genetically your sons, not your siblings like in a usual pack. I think I’ll stick with “the boys” for now.

**Aleksa and Nino**

Caine drops her off at the duchess’s suite after making a detour by her office to pick up their gifts.

She greets Khan Fangs at the door and after Nino calls to come in he opens the door for her.

– Pick me up in 20 minutes. She tells Caine.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

She goes in and he heads for the barracks.

– *Yupiter, dochen’ka!* Aleksa says when she sees her.
– Hello *mama*, Nino. Sorry, I’m only here for a short visit, I know we barely get to see each other these days, but I promise I’ll try to have more time soon.
– It’s okay, *dachen’ka*, your life is quite busy now. You have lots of responsibilities.
– Don’t I know it.

She sits on a floating sofa, very inelegantly.
– What’s going on? Nino asks.
– It’s been one of those morning. She sighs.
– Want to talk about it?

She nods.

The two women sit with her.

– My day started with a huge misunderstanding with Caine.
– It was all my fault. I got my period this morning, while still on the island, and I was annoyed at myself for having no protection with me. And I snapped at him. I hurt him so bad he thought I was sending him away or something.
– Oh, bad day one?
– Yeah, had to apologize to him and explain what was going on. It was so embarrassing, but at least he had some knowledge about that, so it did not turn into a biology class.

Nino snickers.

– After that I learned that my people need my authorization to get married, it so medieval. Admiral Toly and Truly Percadium were almost shaking asking my permission and they were afraid to mention the 2-day leave a couple gets. I’ve been trying really hard not to snap or breakdown all morning but that made me really angry. I called Buzz and changed that rule, now they all have a standard week of 10 days off and after a year working for me, they get 15 days.
– You good girl, Aleksa says.
– Finally, I had to save Yulia’s boyfriend from the same mobster gang that had taken her. He turned out to be an undercover officer and Officer Granger’s brother-in-law. He was in really bad shape when we found him. Oh, and the gang leader was officer Carter, from Martin’s taskforce.
– Talk about a small world.
– Right? The good thing is I was able to see all my guards in their new uniforms. They look very good. Anyway, I came to give your these.

She offers each a box but they look stumped at the content.

– *Mama*, that’s a tool to change your nails color.
– Oh, I have to try that right now. She runs to the ‘fresher room with the tool.
– Nino, that is a book-sheave on the planets and the stars and their meaning. Sounded like space astrology. Thought you would like that. Maybe you can find if there are space prophecies for my life?
– I’ll get on that right away.
– You don’t have to do it right away, I just thought you would like the book.
– I do, Jupe.

Aleksa comes back with all of her nails different colors.

– *Yupiter*, this thing is fantastic. Aleksa says, showing her hands.
– I’m glad you like it, mama. What have you two been up too this morning?
– We’ve been reading code and conduct guide. It’s quite intense.
– Yeah, I know, haven’t had the time to finish reading mine yet.
– Is it just me or all the possible sanctions monetary?
– For Entitled, they seem to be. You should see the royal ways and means commission… I don’t think even the Tsars had that much power and my power is the power of all the other Queens combined. I can’t wrap my head around it.
– *Dochen’ka*, we are here for you.
– I know *mama* and I really appreciate it.

**Neuri, Fenris and blast from the future**

In the barracks, Caine greets commander Wamsley and asks to see Neuri and Fenris.

– They are in the training center, he tells him.

Caine nods and heads to the center. As soon as he enters, he realizes that he has been missing on the training and team building exercises being with Jupiter all the time. It’s not that he minds it, but he is still a *Skybreaker* too, the best one besides Stinger, he should train with them, he should be training them.

– Sir, Leo greets him.
– How is training? Caine asks.
– It could be better, if Her Majesty could spare you.

He nods.

– Soon, Leo, she is still getting her footing.
– Yes, it is a lot to adjust to, but she has already made great strides.
– Yes, she sent me to check on our pack.
– Ah, yes, I’ve been keeping an eye out for them, they seem stable for now.
– Good, thanks Leo.

He takes a few steps and catches a tint of coffee mixed with the musky tone of the lycantant sweat. *They already start to smell like her.* He follows the scent until he finds his sons engaged into hand to hand combat training. He observes them for a moment, they are fast and their way of fighting reminds him of his own. They are quickly done and come to face him afterwards.

– Sir. They say. Standing to attention.
– At ease, betas, I’m only here to see how you are doing.

Neuri and Fenris relax and smile.

– Quite fine sir, it is good to feel like myself again, Fenris says.
– I feel like a new splice, Neuri provides.

Caine nods.

– Yes, I do know what that feels like, Caine says.
– Sir, I do not know how this is all possible. The odds are simply… Fenris starts, but does not finish his thought.
– I’ve asked myself the same thing when this all started… you know what I am right?

They nod.

– Well, you should know that my existence simply started the day of her birth.

Their jaw hangs open for a moment.

– It can’t be, it’s a myth, it can’t be, Fenris murmurs.
Fenris looks around before answering.

– Not here sir, this is for Lycantants only, well Her too.

Caine nods and they leave the training center and go to pick Jupiter up at the suite.

– Hey guys, Jupiter says when she sees them.

Then she asks Fenris:

– What’s with the look?

Fenris looks around and says:

– Not here.

Well that sounds ominous, she thinks.

Caine murmurs in her ear.

– Very well, she says and heads for her quarters.

They go to the lounge and after they settle in Jupiter asks again.

– What’s going on?
– Your Majesty. Fenris says.

Jupiter stops him by raising a hand.

– Please stop being so formal, Caine said this is Lycantant business, not Queen business.
– Of course, Alpha.

Jupiter winces slightly, but lets it slide, if it is what he is comfortable calling her, she won’t protest.

– They would not know this but there is a pre-mission story told amongst pack-bonded Lycantants. Fenris says pointing to Caine and Neuri.

Jupiter nods.

– The story is passed secretly from one Alpha to another after a pack has left the splicing facilities. And it is told by the Alpha to its betas before a mission. For our pack it always boosted morale, since we all had emotions, I am not quite sure what is does to other packs, but I’ve heard other Alphas recite it to their pack when we had multiple packs missions. As our Alpha you should know it. I used to believe it was just a myth but…

Fenris stops and looks at Caine with amazement.

– My previous Alpha always said it was a prophecy and I think I believe it now.
– Why is that?
– Caine told us he started to exist the day of your birth.
– And that is significant?
Fenris nods.

– Let me recite the story, it will become clear.

He steadies himself and starts the story with quiet tones:

– It is said that lycantants have not always been this way. That once we were like other splices and humans, we had females, mated and had children. If you were to search deep within yourself you would know that this is true, you would find the buried instincts. But do not attempt it, the few who have done it, have come out forever changed, forever longing for what they could not find, could not have. Wait and bite your time for in the future, a new kind of Lycantant will appear. One that will be like we were. His life will begin at the birth of a new star, one so bright she will outshine every other star. He will be rejected and scorned by us for his difference until he becomes the best of us and finds the star that he was willed into existence for. He will save her from fire and darkness and she will be his salvation. He will be elevated by her side and together, they will bring forth a new age for the lycantants, they will return to us what has been taken away.

After Fenris is done telling the story, the four of them stares at each other in stunned silence.

Fenris gets his amazed look again looking at Caine, Neuri looks like he wants to kiss their feet and Caine seems in disbelief but he has half a smile on his face.

Jupiter takes a moment to think before she speaks.

– Thank you Fenris, you’ve given me quite a lot to think about. If that story is really about us, why would I be called a star?

– I do not know, but the story predates modern Orousian. Fenris says.

Jupiter nods and stands.

– Wait here. She says to the three of them.

She exits and crosses to her private office.

– Max, is there an ancient Lycantant prophecy on these sheaves?

– That specific information is not in my database, but the 11th and 12th sheave on the fifth row are called “Prophecies”, Your Majesty.

Jupiter takes the first of the two sheave and turns it on, it is holoimage after holoimage of old documents, written on old parchment, stones and such, all in languages she can not read. She puts it down and turns on the second one. This one is text and she flips through the different pages of text, only to realize that the first sheave is synced with it and shows the original text when she is on the English one.

– Handy, she murmurs.

With the search function, she quickly finds what she was looking for, the original prophecy about her and Caine and Lycantants. As she suspected “star” was not the proper translation, in ancient Orousian star and queen were the same word: Seraphi. A proper translation should have been “His life will begin at the birth of a new Seraphi, one so powerful she will overpower every other queen”.

She sighs.

She looks at the holoimage of the original document and freezes for a moment. It looks like her own
handwriting, if she knew how to write in ancient Orousian. There is also something written in small characters at the bottom of the document, in Cyrillic! And it is really her handwriting. There is nothing in the translated version, so no one has been able to understand this part of the text. It says “Jupiter, believe in yourself. Keep your step-sons with you today and beware of Laroche’s neighbors.” And it is signed: Ю Д. Her Cyrillic initials.

She puts her hand to her mouth in total shock. She can’t believe what she is thinking. But somehow in the future she sent a prophecy into the distant past with a message for her near present, knowing she would find it today. She wonders if she should tell anyone, she does not want to have secrets from Caine, but that is so loaded. She turns off the sheaves.

– Max, add Neuri and Fenris to the diner in my private dining room.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

She left the doors of her office and the lounge open and she says into the air:

– Caine, Neuri, Fenris, into my office.

When they get to her office, Caine is so shocked by the shock in her scent.

– What is it, Jupiter? He asks concerned.
– Sit, she says.

They all sit, really curious and concerned.

– I found the original text of the prophecy. What Fenris said was mostly accurate, but in ancient Orousian star and queen were both the same word: Seraphi. A proper translation should be: “His life will begin at the birth of a new Seraphi, one so powerful she will overpower every other queen. He will be rejected and scorned by us for his difference until he becomes the best of us and finds the queen that he was willed into existence for.”
– How can you be so sure about this? Caine asks. Scenting her certainty.
– Because of this.

She turns on the sheave with the original text and points to the Cyrillic text at the bottom of it.

– What is that? Neuri asks.
– Cyrillic, in my own handwriting.

Caine is looking at her with wide eyes.

– How can this be?
– I have no idea, but somehow in the future I will learn ancient Orousian and send this prophecy into the past, with a message in Cyrillic for today.
– What’s the message? Caine says dubious.
– “Jupiter, believe in yourself. Keep your step-sons with you today and beware of Laroche’s neighbors.” And it is signed with my Cyrillic initials: Ю Д.

Caine stands and walks to a side of the office, turned away.

– Guys, give us some privacy, go back to the lounge. She Tells Neuri and Fenris.
They leave and close the door on their way out.

Jupiter stands and walks to Caine, placing a hand on his upper back.

– Caine?

He does not answer.

– I know it’s intense and crazy, but I did not want to keep this from you, I don’t want there to be secrets between us.

His shoulders slump and he turns around.

– Sorry, he says low.
– What for?
– I… don’t know.
– I’m not doing to well with this either. She says, slipping her arms around his waist. What am I saying, I’m totally freaking out inside! I, I, sent that message from the future into the past.

He closes his arms around her and they simply hold on to each other to keep from being pulled apart.

– What’s the linked file? He asks seeing the Ю Д blinking on the holoimage.
– What?
– You don’t see that?
– See what?

He lets go of her and tap on the Ю Д floating in the air and a hidden file materializes in the air. A letter in Cyrillic.

Jupiter skims the letter.

– Oh God, no…
– What?
– It’s my last letter to myself… and to you.

She takes the sheave and sits cross-legged on a sofa and after Caine sits in front of her on a backless chair she starts to read in Russian.

“Jupiter, this is the last time that I write to myself, but I won’t have to send this letter into the past, it will get to you, in the future. I’ve switched place with Seraphi 20 years ago, after Balem attempted to kill her, or rather killed her but thinks she survived, but it is actually me. She was murdered, before she could secure our future, because she refused to continue taking RegeneX, she really did have a change of heart. So, I switched place with her so I could finish what she started for us. Hopefully you will have a better start in all this then I did and those close to me.

Jupiter, you should inherit all that was Seraphi, instead of only the Earth like I did. It was hard to navigate the Entitled world with only one planet I was not willing to harvest. Inheriting so many things must feel overwhelming, but I’ve tried to keep everything organized for you. I’ve added to the sheaves in our office, so you would have more information for what we want to do. I also placed investments on Earth, so you should have Earth money for our family. Please be indulgent for Vladie, he is really trying the best he can, he hasn’t told anybody, but he has a benign brain tumor making him take impulsive decisions. Hopefully, you should have enough money to send him to a good neurosurgeon. Unless you want to take him to space.”

Jupiter pauses and looks at Caine. He nods and she takes her phone out. She has another 5 text
messages from Vladie asking for money.

She dials his number.

[Jupe, I’m glad you called, listen, I really need some money.]
– Hi Vladie, yes and I know why.
[It’s not what you think.]
– No, it’s what I know. Listen, get your appointments with the best surgeon, I’ll be there and I’ll pay the bill. Oh, and you really should tell the family.
[How?]
– Don’t ask, I don’t want to lie to you.
[Thank you, Jupe.]  
– Anytime.

She hangs up with tears in her eyes, clears her throat and continues with the letter.

“Caine, oh, god… Knowing you might receive this message… Let me start with: I love you, I love you, I always have and I always will. Caine, I’ve missed you for so many millennia, you have no idea how hard it was to live without you. But hopefully your Jupiter won’t have to go through that, hopefully I’ve made enough changes that you won’t die before I’m even 60.”

Jupiter has trouble reading this part of the letter without crying, she is actually sobbing while reading and wiping her eyes every few words, having to restart a few times.

“You see my sweet love, in my timeline, you were court-martialed, clipped and striped of your wings and sent to the deadlands for the murder of an Entitled. We found out, a long time after, that it had all been a manipulation, a decade after I got you a pardon and you got your wings back, but, my love, you suffered a lot of injuries in the deadlands, and it all caught back to you. Your death was a tragedy for all our people and you were mourned across systems. I remember it like it was yesterday and it’s been 53 millennia. Oh, my sweet love, I do hope I succeeded. I’m sorry for whatever punishment Stinger saw fit to inflict you for oversleeping that day, but it was sure less severe then the deadlands.”

Jupiter has to pause. She puts down the sheave, straddles Caine’s laps and hugs him. His arms surround her and both of them shake with the emotions.

– Your Majesty, lunch is served in your dining room. Max voices says.
– Max, let the Apini know I will be late, I have something to finish. She says with her voice raw from crying.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

She sits back on the sofa and Caine speaks.

– The only time I overslept was five years ago. Stinger and I were scratching our heads over how I could have over slept when I usually barely managed to sleep. I cleaned his boots and his gun for two weeks because of it.

He gets to his knees, takes her hands in his and say:

– Thank you.
– I haven’t done anything. She says.
– She has, and she is you, and I know that you would too.
– Yes, I would, and apparently even invent a time traveling machine to do it.
Caine smirks and kiss her hands before sitting back on his chair.

“At the same time, saving you meant saving Stinger from being clipped and stripped too. You see as the good commander that he is, he took part of your blame and they struck him so low that he was the Aegis Marshal on Earth. I’ve always been grateful to him for that, or, my sweet love, they would simply have put you down like a feral animal and we would have never met. I got him a pardon and his wings back too, of course. Please, tell the Old man what I did for him, my love? He has been such a friend for me for almost 10 millennia.

Jupiter, in my timeline, Caine had been taken from the deadland by Titus to retrieve me in exchange for pardons for him and Stinger. But after saving me at the clinic we were attacked and our transport exploded in the sky, so he took me to Stinger. We were attacked by bounty hunters and two of them, Razo and Ibis, took me to Kalique instead of killing me for Balem.”

– Nice to know they are decent in every timeline. Jupiter says.

“Kalique is a little weird, but she will never wish you harm. She will rather more play dress up with you and parade you around like a trophy. Keep your wits about you and you will be fine. Caine found me there and the Aegis got to us. Captain Diomika Tsing is a pearl. Keep in good relations with her.

After that Caine was the only one to come with me at the Hall of Titles, I’m sorry I could not shorten the time you spent at the Hall of Titles, bureaucracy does not go faster even for a time traveling Queen.”

– Too bad, Jupiter mutters.

“Now, I won’t tell you all that happened next in the details, but know that Stinger is a sweetheart who would do anything for his family. Kiza had a bug, which should also be fixed, and he did something he regretted till his last breath for the money for the recode. In a way, we are alike him and me, I almost sacrificed the Earth for our family. I don’t think I managed to change that for you, but I made sure the zeros on Captain Tsing’s ship were reinforced, just as a precaution, Caine got to me on Jupiter the first time around, I wanted to make sure he succeeded again. Also, about Stinger, in my timeline, his wife had committed suicide, I hope that what I did saved her life. Find her for him?”

– I don’t think we should tell Stinger about that part. Jupiter says.

Caine nods.

– It would break his heart. He says.

Jupiter nods back.

“Jupiter, never ever trust Titus about anything. He threw Caine out and airlock – Jupiter gasps – and almost made a, oh, gosh, what’s the name of that old movie, Caine loved to quote it to me... The “As you wish” one, I’m sure you’ll know what I mean. Caine saved me, again, with the help of Stinger. I hope you won’t fall for it if he proposes to you like he did to me. Oh, and I’m sorry for all your bad dates, I had to prepare you for Titus, I was so naive when... no, enough about him.”

Jupiter has flashback of all her dates and grins in understanding.

“I’ve written you many letters after I invented this time portal device, I do not know if you will receive them all. Those I sent to before our time might have a better chance to get to you, I’m not quite sure about those sent after our recurrence. I don’t know what the changes in the timeline will
do to those. But please do not try and change time again unless something has gone horribly wrong. It took me 10 millennia to work out the kinks on this device, do not waste all that time on this if I’ve managed to fix things.

Oh, I’m sure you are wondering how I have lived so long and to answer your question, no I have never broken my promise to myself about RegeneX. For millions of years they have operated on changing decaying cells with new ones instead of changing the genes expiration date which create the decaying cells. Look for a sheave named Ambrosia, it is something on which Seraphi was working and that I completed for my 10th year as Queen. It slows the aging process to about a year for every millennium. It does not heal wounds but for that check the sheave named Asclepius. I think this should help with your main concerns.

And please do not forget to enjoy your life.

Юпитер Джонс Мудрый

P.S.: It is strange to know I am about to be killed by Balem in my old age, while he died trying to kill me when I was so, so young, but I can not stay alive past this point or it would have severe repercussions in all timelines.”

Jupiter and Caine look at each other for a moment.

– I don’t think I will have to invent that time portal device, everything she mentioned is fixed, Jupiter says after closing the sheave.

Caine nods.

– I never expected that you doing the right thing without no one knowing would go to this extreme.
– Neither did I.

She stands and walks around her desk, placing the sheave on it and selects a few of the first sheaves of the first shelf. She quickly finds the Ambrosia and the Asclepius ones and sets them aside before placing the others back.

She walks back to him and he takes her hand in his and looks at her with wonder in his eyes.

– Thank you for my life, my pardon and my wings, Your Majesty.

She cups his cheek with her free hand and murmurs:

– I love you, I always have and I always will, across every timeline.

They kiss and hug each other a few times and then she says:

– Okay, we’re late for lunch.

He smirks and nods.

They exit the office, collect Neuri and Fenris from the lounge and go to the private dining room.

– Sorry I’m late, we have to be in Canada in an hour, she says entering the room and pressing send to the text to François Laroche.
Then stops in her path and runs a hand on one of the new chairs.

– Kiza! These are perfect! Jupiter exclaims.
– I am glad you approve, they are called curule and romans used them also as thrones. Kiza says.

Jupiter smiles and goes to the only curule with a back and sits on it.

– Caine, she says gesturing to the seat to her right.

Caine sits and squeezes her hand. A single gasp has everyone turning to Honey-Bee and then to the direction in which she is looking, to their joined hands.

Jupiter smiles, she decided to enjoy her life as the other Jupiter had told her to do, and choses to tease Stinger.

– Stinger?
– Jupiter?
– Traditionally, married couple don’t keep secrets from each other.

Stinger frowns.

– It is part of my job to keep secrets, Jupiter.
– Well, I am glad to know you can keep my secrets even from your wife. She says with a smile.

Stinger understand she was simply teasing and he smiles back.

– I suppose I should clear out everyone’s status in here so everyone knows where they stand. It gets complicated when you find new family members very few days.

She takes a deep breath and starts with Caine.

– Okay, Honey-Bee, since you are the only one who does not know, Caine is not only my favorite personal guard, he is my pack and my mate. The only other people to know about this are my mother, my aunt and Leo. For now, we keep it that way, for both our safety.

Honey-Bee nods.

– Good. Now it gets a little more complicated. Neuri and Fenris, you’ve met Stinger and Kiza, the other Apini are Honey-Bee, Stinger’s wife, and Seiza. They are the family of Caine’s heart and as so they are all family to me.

The two nod their understanding.

– And now to complete the puzzle, we found out a few days ago that Neuri and Fenris, although from other litters, both bonded to Caine and me as their Alphas, it makes us a pack, which is still something my human tersie brain is getting use to. On that front, others know they bonded to Caine, but we are keeping me secret in that situation too, at least for now. To add to it, we also found out that they are actually Caine’s gene-sons but family is not something Lycantant usually have outside of their litter so it is something we have to keep secret too. In the grand scheme of things, it makes them my step-sons, Kiza and Seiza’s nephews and Stinger and Honey-Bee’s grand-sons. They are also my mother’s step-grand-sons and my aunt step-grand-nephews. And although I could, I won’t add my extended family and my gene-children into the lot at the moment, because that would give everyone a headache.
After that everyone seems dazed so she picks up her fork and they follow in silence.

– Stinger, about the trip to Canada, I received a warning that we should be wary of François Laroche’s neighbors.
– In what way?
– I’m no quite sure, it said “Beware of Laroche’s neighbors”.
– I will have to check to source on that.
– I’m sure I’m reliable.
– What?
– I’ll show you after lunch, I’m still freaking out about it.
– I must say that does not inspire my confidence.
– You’ll see.

– Kiza, what can you tell us about your mate besides that he is French-Canadian and that he loves maple syrup?
– Well, first don’t call him French-Canadian, he won’t like that. Quebec is a non-independent nation within Canada, their traditions and cultures are different. The proper term is either Québécois or Quebecker.
– Is it like the Scottish not wanting to be called English?
– Yeah similar, how do you know about that?
– Duh, I’m a Jones, well except when I’m mad, then I’m a Bolotnikov. I could not get to know my dad, but I still tried to learn about his culture.

Kiza nods.

– Right, sorry.
– It’s okay. So what else can you tell us?
– Well, he’s funny and sweet. He brought me flowers almost once a week. He has a crooked smile and deep brown eyes. He was finishing his studies in computer engineering when I left. We would go for long walks in the forest and did not freak out over my bees.
– You had hives there too?
– I probably still do.
– Erm, I’d better be careful if I don’t want to do show and tell for the whole town.
– True, and I’d suggest using the anonymizer on the uniforms too. Unless you want to pass for a group of sci-fi fans or something.
– I don’t think it’s Comicon season.

Kiza snorts, Jupiter laughs. The others stare blankly.

– Ok, I put you on charge of that Kiza, make it so.
– Aye, aye, captain. She retorts.

And both start to laugh almost uncontrollably again.

After sobering up, she stands and Caine and Stinger follow after her.

– Meet at the Mercury in 15. She says before exiting.

She goes to her office, sits at her desk and gesture for Caine and Stinger to sit.
– Stinger, read this, she says handing him the sheave with the translated prophecy, which she took the time to correct earlier so it would say Seraphi and Queen instead of star.

Stinger reads it and gives it back to her.

– It sounds like you but I don’t see the relevance.
– It is a prophecy told secretly between pack-bonded Lycantant, passed down from Alpha to Alpha. Fenris told it to us earlier and this is a holoimage of the original, it is 8 millennia old according to the data, she says turning on the second sheave.
– That looks like ancient Orousian.
– It is, but this – she enlarges the bottom part of the image – is not.
– I can’t read that.
– No one can out here beside me, my mother and my aunt. It’s Cyrillic, the Russian alphabet. It’s a message from Jupiter Jones, to Jupiter Jones, in my own handwriting.
– I’m not sure I follow.
– Somehow, in the future, a version of myself wrote and sent this prophecy into the distant past, with a message for today, knowing I would read it today.
– Time-travel?
– Apparently, I did so in another timeline.

He shakes his head.

– What does it say?
– “Jupiter, believe in yourself. Keep your step-sons with you today and beware of Laroche’s neighbors.” And it is signed with my Cyrillic initials: Ю Д.

She gives him a moment to recover.

– Now, I know she made changes to the timeline, but I do believe a warning from myself to myself is reliable.

Stinger nods and notice the linked file too.

– And that? He asks.
– You two really have better eye sight then I do, she says low.

She taps to open the file.

– It her last letter, to Caine and me. She tells us all that she tried to change or fix with her time travel.
– Like what?
– Apparently in her timeline I, she, we inherited only the Earth, so she switched place with Seraphi after Balem killed her and made sure we would inherit all of her assets instead. She wrote this letter right before going to see Balem to be murdered. That is so weird to think about, the murdered Seraphi in this timeline, is actually my future self who travel to the past.

Jupiter shakes her head.

– I wonder, maybe Balem knew? Maybe that’s why he said I should have stayed dead? She thinks out loud.

Both men follow her train of thought. Jupiter shivers and adds.

– Guess we will never know. There is something Jupiter wanted you to know, Stinger.

Just thinking about it, Jupiter tears up. Caine reaches over the desk and squeezes her hand.
– Let me tell him, like she asked. He says.

She nods and he turns to Stinger.

– Sting, remember the only time I overslept?
– Yeah, why?
– It was her doing. I don’t know how, but she did it so I would not be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Apparently, in her timeline, I was framed for the murder of an Entitled and you took part of the blame so I would not be terminated. We were both clipped and stripped, I was sent to the deadlands and you were the Earth Marshal for the Aegis.
– Clipped and stripped, Stinger murmurs, stunned.
– Yeah, and the deadlands.

Caine winces.

– In that timeline, Jupiter got us both pardons and our wings back.

Both men shift their shoulders as to make sure they still have their wings. Stinger looks at Jupiter with golden eyes and she nods, understanding his silent thank you.

– Anything else? He says.
– In that timeline, I died of complications from my deadlands injuries, before Jupiter was even 60. Caine adds.

Stinger winces.

– That is so young, even for a single lifetime.

Caine nods.

Jupiter skims the letter again.

– She says you have been a very good friend to her for almost 10 millennia and she always was grateful that you took the blame for Caine.

Stinger nods, even more shocked. Jupiter is hoping he won’t notice she is holding things back.

Jupiter stands.

– Take a moment, I’ll go freshen up and be right back.

Stinger looks at Caine, his eyes are yellow and Caine braces himself.

– What isn’t she telling me? Stinger asks.
– Sting, it’s best if you don’t know. Caine says, almost pleading.
– What? He repeats seriously.

Caine ducks his head a moment and when he looks back at Stinger he says:

– She did not give many details, Sting, but as I understand it, all that you have right now, you owe it to both Jupiter: your job, your wings, your wife, your healthy daughters. And please don’t ask me for the details.
Okay. Stinger simply answers after looking him over.

Jupiter gets back a moment later.

– Things making more sense now? She asks entering her office.

Stinger stands, walks to her, spreading his wings and kneels.

– Thank you for everything, Your Majesty. He says.

She crouches, takes his hands and pulls him up.

– Stinger, you should know one thing.
– What is it?
– I prefer hugs.

And she pulls him into a hug. In the background Caine is smiling.

– Besides, I’d like to thank her too. She says afterwards.

Kiza and François

They join the Apini, Neuri, Fenris and Leo at the Mercury. The three Apini women are wearing some basic clothes that can pass on Earth and Neuri, Fenris and Leo look like they are wearing jeans, sneakers and random t-shirts beside looking humans. Kiza gives Caine and Stinger what looks like mini-sheaves, the size of a thumb drive. They scan them with their gloves and implement the data and Jupiter lets out a small whistle at seeing Caine with black jeans and a tight black shirt that would never fit his wings. The way he looks at her, make her believe his ears must be a nice shade of red under the anonymizer effect. Stinger is sporting black sturdy pants and a black button up shirt with rolled up sleeves.

– Nice job Kiza.

She checks the time, they have 15 minutes left to be on time so she boards the ship and they get on their way.

– Kiza, any good spot to land the Mercury in that town? She asks on the way there.
– Depends, what’s his address?

Jupiter takes her phone out and shows the text to Kiza.

– Ah, he is renting one of the few apartments in the town. Behind the school should be fine, no one goes to school in the summer and it is walkable distance.
– Okay, good, go show your dad where to go.
– Sure.

Jupiter closes her eyes for the next five minutes, until they land.

When they exit the ship, Jupiter realises just how small the town really is.

– Oh, wow, this is quaint. I don’t think we should all go together, even looking like humans we would get too much attention.
Kiza snorts.
– That’s for sure. My black and blond hair was getting weird looks when I got here.
– Okay then, Caine and I will go get him. You all stay here.
– You’ll find your way?

She shows her phone.
– Of course.

They walk around the school and unto the street. It is such a small town that there is not even sidewalks and shops are in houses. Jupiter hooks her arms around Caine’s and walks ahead as if this was a pleasure walk.
– I don’t know what kind of trouble his neighbors are, but probably not the life threatening one, Jupiter murmurs.
– It would be surprising. Caine says low.

They are at their destination before they can say more and Jupiter rings the door bell.

A young man, maybe 5’10” with brown eyes open the door. He looks nervous and his apartment smells like cleaning products. He obviously did a deep clean expecting Kiza.
– Oui? He says.
– François Laroche? Jupiter says.

He nods.
– I’m Jupiter Jones. We spoke on the phone yesterday.

He gives a nervous smile.
– Kiza is not with you?
– She is nearby. This is Caine, he is like a brother to Kiza.

The two men shake hands. Caine is glad Jupiter taught him the gesture.
– Is there a place we could talk with a few less neighbors? Jupiter asks.
– Oh, er, sure. This place is really not sound-proof. I’m not quite sure where though. There is her old house, I still have the key, but I haven’t had the time to clean it for her yet.
– Dust and grime don’t bother me. Jupiter says, remembering her old job.
– Okay, let me get my keys.

He goes back in and comes back out with his keys, phone and wallet in hand and locks his door.
– My car or your car? He asks.
– Let’s take your car, Kiza has our vehicle.

Caine smirks and ducks his head. That’s one way to call a spaceship.
– Okay, but it’s not fancy, he says pointing to a car in the parking lot.
– Oh, I see what you mean.
His car is an old two doors with barely enough leg room at the back for a child of small woman. She gets in and sit in the middle, where she has a tiny bit more space and reclines the back rest for Caine so he has room for his wings.

In the car, she taps her bracelet and pretends to call on her phone. She tells Kiza to join them at her old house and hangs up.

– So, what is she, some kind of spy? François asks on the way there.
– Good question, wrong idea. Better not to talk about it while you are driving. Jupiter says.

They get to Kiza’s house fast and just like the one on the outskirt of Chicago, it is surrounded by beehives.

They park and get out of the car. Jupiter stretches her legs and sighs. François walks around the house to the backyard and shows them the beehives.

– I took care of her beehives since she left. Can you believe I’ve never been stung by her bees? François says.
– Yes, I can. Jupiter answers over the humming of all the bees coming towards her.

She waves in the air and talks to the bees.

– Nice to meet you too. Huh? Yes, I will. You can go back to work now.

The bees left as fast as they had arrived.

François says something in French that neither Jupiter or Caine understand, but from the other corner of the house comes Kiza’s voice, saying something in French too and François slaps a hand to his mouth and follows the voice.

Jupiter and Caine follow behind him and when they reach him, he is twirling with Kiza in his arms.

– I have a good feeling about this, Jupiter murmurs to Caine.
– My nose tells me the same thing. He says back.

After a few minutes Jupiter clears her throat and they look at her sheepishly.

– I apologize, Your Majesty, Kiza says.

François frowns, Jupiter smiles.

– No need for that, Kiza, but would you mind letting us in? Or do we flash out the tech?

Kiza snorts.

– Oh, sorry, of course, sure, but don’t expect much. Kiza says walking to the back door and unlocking it.

They walk to the door but Caine steps in front of her.

– One moment, Your Majesty. He says with his caring tone.

She nods and he taps his implant calling the others in. François tenses up at the six other people appearing out of thin air. Kiza says something to François in French and he seems to relax.

Caine and Leo go in first to perform a security check and come back out.
– It is safe, Your Majesty, he says.

They all go in and Kiza guides them to the living room. The house is dusty, but all the furniture has been covered by white sheets. Kiza places a hand on François arm and squeezes it before uncovering an armchair.

– Your Majesty, she says gesturing to the chair.
– Okay, but stop with the formalities, all of you.

François seems unsure of what to think, or rather trying not to think.

Sofas and chairs are uncovered and everyone settles in. Stinger, Caine and Leo remain standing behind her.

Kiza is nervous and it shows, well no one is quite comfortable at the moment.

François says something to Kiza and she nods in Jupiter’s direction.

– What’s with the bees and the Majesty? He asks.
Jupiter smirks, it echoes how this all started with her too.

– Mr. Laroche, Jupiter starts.
– Please, François, Mr. Laroche is my father. He interrupts.

Her people wince, but Jupiter makes no fuss about having being interrupted.

– François, first of all, I would like to say that what we have to reveal to you will turn your life upside-down, I’ve known the truth for only two weeks myself and I’m still working on making things work. I’ll try and be as tactful as I can, but this is shocking, and I don’t want to scare you.
– Okay, he says with an unsteady voice.
– Do you like superheroes, François?
– Like most guys, what does this have to do with Kiza?
– Bear with me, it will soon become clear. You must know the classic like Spiderman or Wolverine?

He nods.

– Would you say that even if one can shoot webs and climbs walls and the other has blades coming out of his knuckles and can beat the crap out of a boatload of enemies, they are still humans?
– Badass way too cool humans, yeah.

Jupiter nods and looks around at her people and she notices ghost of smiles on Stinger, Kiza and Caine.

– On our way here, you asked me what Kiza is.

A frown appears on François’ face which turns into a strangely excited grin.

Jupiter grins back and utters:

– Anonymizer off.
The next thing she sees is an overly excited François standing, looking around, uttering words she does not understand. Seeing things are going well, she adds:

– Wings.

Caine, Stinger and Leo unfold their wings and François crashes back down on his chair.

Jupiter gives him time to recover and says the now classic sentence:

– It can be hard for tersies like us, to learn that the Earth is not the only inhabited planet in the ‘verse.

François looks around and locks eyes with Kiza. Her eyes turn yellow and he takes her hand as to ground himself. After a moment, Kiza’s eyes turns back blue and they nod at each other.

Kiza looks at Stinger, Honey-Bee and Seiza and she can see tears in their eyes.

– Aliens? He asks.
– Yes and no, it’s more complicated then that. Let me start at the beginning and tell you exactly how it is out there. Human civilization is billions of years old and spans galaxies. I’ve seen some incredible stuff and also learned some ugly truth too. Now space society is not a democracy like what we are used to, it is a caste system and what decides where you are in that system is your DNA. The top caste is called the Entitled and the top of the Entitled are the royal. These people own properties in the way you can own a house or a car here on Earth, but out there, their properties are entire planets, ships the size of cities, giant industries and I don’t even know what else yet. The richest of them all was named Seraphi Abrasax. She died quite some time ago, but she willed all of her possessions, including the Earth, to her future recurrence. A recurrence is when the exact same DNA reappears in a new individual.

She pauses for a moment.

– Allow me to present myself fully. As of two weeks ago I am Jupiter Jones, daughter of Maximillian Jones and Aleksa Bolotnikov, Queen and first prime of House Abrasax and House Bolotnikov-Jones, signified recurrence of Her Majesty Seraphi Abrasax, Queen of the Earth… and half the Universe.
– What? Is the only thing he can manage to say.
– Yeah, I know, it’s crazy, I have a hard time wrapping my head around it myself.
– Should I bow or something?

Jupiter snorts.

– Don’t worry about that, two weeks ago I was an illegal immigrant, cleaning toilets for the rich people in Chicago. Besides Kiza is family to me. Which reminds me, I should do the presentations. We have Stinger Apini, my chief of security and Kiza’s father. Honey-Bee, Kiza’s mother and Seiza, her sister. These are her blood family. You’ve met Caine Wise, he is many things to me, including personal guard and boyfriend, that is a secret even in space, and he is like a brother to Kiza and a son to Stinger. Leo here is one of Stinger and Caine’s teammate and Neuri and Fenris here are royal guards and well, that’s complicated to explain, you could say Caine’s sons and my step-son, and that is also a secret up there too.

François stands and offers his hand in a hand shake to everyone, starting with Stinger. He takes it and gives a firm handshake. Both men are sizing each other. Stinger’s eyes flash yellow for a moment and the next he is grinning at the young man his daughter chose.

He sits back after shaking hands and Jupiter continues.
– Now, where was I, oh yes, the castes. The second caste is made of pure humans but born on planets knowing about the ‘verse. Citizen of the ‘verse you could say. The third caste are humans of planets like Earth, there are several planets like Earth, filled with humans not knowing about the ‘verse.
– Why don’t they make first contact? François asks, perplexed.
– That is a complex subject, I’ll come back to it. The fourth caste is made of genomengineered humans. They are called splices because they are made of human DNA spliced with animals or insect DNA to create task specific beings. Some splices are quite obvious and other are subtler, like for Kiza. To answer your question, she is a bee-splice.

He looks at her in amazement and Kiza blushes slightly.

– It is part of the reason why she could not say yes to you, two years ago. For the next part you have to understand just how splices are seen in space. Although to you and I they are amazing, in space society they are considered like tools or slaves, to be manufactured, bought, sold, traded, killed or thrown away at their owner’s whim.

François is green, he squeezes Kiza’s hand, almost trembling.

– I know what you are thinking. Jupiter says.
– Who? He asks, as though he wants to commandeer a ship and find who ever owns her to make sure she is safe.
– Her father, Jupiter says, pointing to Stinger.

François looks at Stinger with relief in his eyes, Stinger’s eyes turn yellow for a brief moment and François nods and looks back at Jupiter.

– All my people are safe, she tells him, I can provide details later if you need them.

If his eyes could turn yellow, they would.

– Even amongst splices, they are not all equal. You see splices comes in two categories, bred splice, those made in labs and engineered for specific purposes, and born splices, like Kiza and her sister Seiza. Born splices are lower then bred splices, because they are not design for a task, so they have to work at the lowest of jobs, those no one else wants them for. That is why Kiza was on Earth in the first place, she was the Earth Marshal for the Aegis.
– What’s that?
– That brings me to another structure of space society. Law enforcement. There are two forces out there to maintain the order of things. The Legion is like the space army. My guards are Legionnaire and Stinger, Caine and Leo here are Skyjackers, the Legion Elite, amongst other things they get those wings implants. The other law enforcement force is the Aegis, they are like cops.
– Oh, okay, but… Why would there be space cops on Earth?
– That is the ugliest truth, from our perspective. It has to do with the purpose of the Earth in a very large industry. As you must imagine, they have technologies we don’t have here and the thing that gives the most power and money to people is a product called RegeneX. With that product, the Royals or those rich enough can regenerate their bodies over and over again and live for millennia. My predecessor was almost 91 millennia when she was murdered. That product is also used in the medical field, to insta heal most injuries, if the person is valuable enough.

Jupiter shivers and Caine puts his hand on her shoulder to offer her support.

– It is also an essential part of the splicing process and used to make sentient androids. It sounds like a miracle at first glance, right?
François nods.

– The problem is with what it is made of. The main ingredient in RegeneX is humans. Specifically, Tersie humans from planets like Earth. I’ve learned that there are thousand of planets like the Earth, set up by these families and their goal is to grow the human population beyond the capacity of the planet to sustain them and then to harvest them, slaughter them and transform them into RegeneX. And that is why they don’t make first contact, we are cattle to these people and they place Marshals on tersie planets to monitor the population, like shepherds watching over their flocks.

François lets out a string of words that have Kiza blanching and although Jupiter does not understand them, she knows they are curses.

– That is… I don’t have the words. He finally says in English.
– I understand that feeling all too well. The first thing I did after claiming my title was forbid harvesting on all my tersie planets. All that brings me to the last part of why Kiza could not say yes. As Earth Marshal, she was not even supposed to get involved with the Earth population. Falling in love with you was a risk in a larger sense then the fear of a broken heart and marrying you was a sure way for her to be terminated, and I’m not talking about being fired from her job.

François hugs Kiza as he realises just how risky it was for her to be involved with him and murmurs in her ear.

Jupiter gives them a moment and she squeezes Caine’s hand still resting on her shoulder.

A few bees had entered the house and a few come and circle her which reminds her.

– Oh, yes you asked about the bees. Bees are aliens, they were created by Seraphi and they can recognize royalty. That is why they recognize me and I somehow can understand them and they understand me. They actually had a message for you. They wanted me to thank you for them, for taking care of them.

– I think that’s about it for now. Do you have any questions? Do you need a moment to think?

He nods and closes his eyes and reopens them after a moment.

– I only have one question. He says slipping to one knee facing Kiza.

Jupiter grins, excitedly while he gets out a small box from his pocket. Kiza’s eyes turn yellow.

– Kiza, ma chérie, c’est deux années sans toi ont été une vraie torture. J’ai tout essayé et je ne peux cesser de t’aimer. Même de tout ce que je viens d’apprendre, rien ne peut m’empêcher de t’aimer. Ce que tu es te rends juste plus merveilleuse encore à mes yeux. Être aimé de toi est la seule chose que je désire. Quand il n’y aura plus d’eau sur Terre, je t’aimerai encore. Kiza, ma chérie, mon cœur, veux-tu m’épouser?

Saying so he opens the box and presents the ring to Kiza. Kiza has tears running down her cheeks but her eyes and her mouth are smiling. She starts nodding and throws herself against him her arms going around his neck.

– Oui, je voulais tellement te dire oui il y a deux ans mon chéri. Je suis à toi. Quand toutes les étoiles seront éteintes je t’aimerai encore. She says kissing him all over his face.

They kiss and he takes the ring and puts it around her finger. They hug and kiss again before he
settles back beside her.

– Well, I’d say I’ve changed lives again, Jupiter says.

Kiza snorts and nods.

– Yeah, that’s what you do best.
– All right, now show it, Jupiter says, gesturing for her to show the ring.

Kiza puts her hand forward and Jupiter admires the ring.

– It was my grand-mother’s, François says.

Jupiter smiles.

– Okay, not that you two lovebirds aren’t fun to be around, but I think that now that I’ve done my part, it’s time for us to leave, she says standing.
– Oh, okay, Kiza says standing, with a sad voice.
– Not you Kiza! I’m sure the two of you have a lot to talk about. And there are some things he should learn from you anyway. As a matter of fact, as of right now you are off duty, by royal order. And since tomorrow is furniture day, take the day off.

Kiza hugs Jupiter and murmurs “Thank you, Your Majesty”.

– Anytime, Jupiter returns.

She steps back and turns to Stinger.
– Captain Apini.
– Majesty?
– You have 15 minutes to be simply Kiza’s dad and do whatever a bee-splice dad wants to do when his baby-bee just got engaged to be married. Us non-bee-splice will be in the Mercury.

His eyes flash yellow and he nods.

– Thank you, Your Majesty.

She turns back to François.

– François, it was a pleasure meeting you. I’m sorry for turning your world upside-down but it was somewhat unavoidable. I could not let Kiza suffer. Keep in mind that you are now one of a handful of people to know about some very big secrets, down here and up there too.
– I will remember that, and thank you, not only for bringing love back into my life, but on behalf of every human on Earth, thank you for saving our lives, Your Majesty.

That brings tears into her eyes and she blinks them away.

– You have no idea how much that means to me, she says.

She manages to leave and return to the Mercury with Caine, Fenris, Neuri and Leo. She sits on a chair, closes her eyes and sighs. The thanks from François really did mean a lot to her. Caine comes and sit by her side and slowly, gently, he slides his hot gloved hand on her lower back and she lets out another sigh.

When the Apini joins them, they have a serene look about them and Jupiter is happy about that.
They come to her and kneel. Stinger speaks for his family.

– Your Majesty, thank you for my daughter’s life and happiness. He says.
– I wouldn’t have it any other way. Jupiter says. And what did I tell you I prefer to kneeling?

Stinger smiles slightly.

– Okay. He says standing.

Honey-Bee and Seiza do the same. Jupiter stands too and they hug and Jupiter murmurs in Stinger’s ear.

– I will always do everything I can for family, across every timeline.

End of day

They return to the Maximillian for dinner where Jupiter eats with her mother, her aunt and Caine in their suite. Jupiter is quiet thinking about this crazy day when Aleksa brings her back to the moment.

– Doch’ka, why are you sad?
– Huh? I’m not sad mama, but a lot has happened today. There is something I would like to show you after dinner.
– Okay, you know you can tell us everything.
– I know mama.

After dinner, they go to her private office and Jupiter shows them the prophecy in ancient Orousian.

– This is an image of an 8 millennia old prophecy.

Jupiter knows Aleksa and Nino notice the Cyrillic when her mother lets out a “Stalin’s balls!”.

– How can this be? She asks in Russian.
– Somehow, a version of myself sent this into the past from the future.
– They have time machine? Nino says.
– Apparently, she did.
– Stalin’s balls, what next? Aleksa says.
– This! She says, tapping her Russian initials.

The letter materializes and she lets them read it.

At one point they look at each other and at her.

– Vladie. They say.
– Already called him, told him to get the best surgeon and that I would pay.
– Good girl. They both say.
– And that he really should tell the family. She adds.

Nino snorts and they go back to reading the letter.

They stop at another moment, tears in their eyes.

– Caine knows, I’ve read him the whole letter, Jupiter says at their silent question.
They nod, wipe their eyes and read the rest of the letter.

– Jupiter, I don’t know what to say.
– I do, Jupiter says walking around her desk.
– Mama, Nino, I can’t thank her, but I can thank you for raising me so well the first time around too, that I would do all of this. Thank you.

After that they go down to her house, because the new furniture will be arriving in the morning. Jupiter finally gets to watch a girl movie, her blanket being one of Caine’s wing and in the middle of the night, the reason for the warning to keep her step-sons with her becomes clear as they get a new touch-hunger bonding phase and they once again join Jupiter and Caine in bed to sleep it off.

Chapter End Notes

French translation:

Oui = Yes

Kiza, ma chérie, c’est deux années sans toi ont été une vraie torture. J’ai tout essayé et je ne peux cesser de t’aimer. Même de tout ce que je viens d’apprendre, rien ne peut m’empêcher de t’aimer. Ce que tu es te rends juste plus merveilleuse encore à mes yeux. Être aimé de toi est la seule chose que je désire. Quand il n’y aura plus d’eau sur Terre, je t’aimerai encore. Kiza, ma chérie, mon cœur, veux-tu m’épouser?

Kiza, my darling, these two years without you have been a real torture. I've tried everything and I can't stop loving you. Nothing of what I have just learned about can stop me from loving you. What you are only make you more wonderful to me. Being loved by you is the only thing I desire. When there will be no more water on Earth, I will still love you. Kiza, my darling, my heart, will you marry me?

Yes, I so wanted to say yes two years ago, my darling. I am yours. When all the stars will have burned out, I will still love you.
Furniture day

Chapter Notes

This chapter was a fight, I was stuck on the family diner for over a month so I diverted to other stories, but I finally managed to slay it.

Yoga pack bonding

When Jupiter wakes up the next morning, at 4:45am, surrounded by her pack, she feels like herself again. Actually, she feels hyper, lots of energy and like she could conquer the universe before breakfast. That is day 2 in a nutshell. She checks on Neuri and Fenris, placing her hands on each one, and there is no trembling in their muscles, they look like they are simply asleep, so she gets out of bed, grabs some yoga clothes and goes to the bathroom.

When she comes out, she starts a yoga routine, relishing the fact that she as space in her bedroom to do so. She feels happy.

Everything is so silent in the house, that she hears the slight noise of the bed sheet as her lycantants wake up. She stays focus on the routine as she is keeping her balance in a natarajasana, or Lord of the Dance (she never believed in the philosophy behind yoga, but connecting with the cosmic energies with this pose seems appropriate) but she is acutely aware when they start staring at her. Keeping her focus, she smiles slightly.

– You can join me you know, she murmurs, knowing they would hear.
– Is that an order? Fenris asks.
– What? No, simple invitation. I can’t expect you to pick up on this millennia-old practice and I suppose you must prefer your exercise to be more active.

She hears a grunt and after a fraction of a pause, she adds:

– I don’t suppose lycans need to be focused, quiet and stealthy when hunting their prey.

She can’t resist teasing them, and to her surprise, well not really, this reversed psychology works, and 5 seconds later Neuri and Fenris are standing beside her and Neuri mumbles an “actually”.

She looks up and meets Caine’s amused gazed. He’s used basic tactics like that before and don’t falls for them.

– Very well, but you must be barefoot. She says pointing to their feet.

They look down at her feet then theirs and proceed to remove their space-socks, they were polite enough not to sleep with their legion boots on.

– Good. Now, try not to fall over and wake everyone.

She guides them into a few beginners poses to see how they are doing. They are not bad, they lack some flexibility, but have good core and balance. She steers clear of the downward dog position though, not wanting to feel awkward.
— Okay, let’s see how you are with some more difficult poses.

They totally lack the flexibility for the bow and the camel poses, after all they are built like tanks, all muscle and Jupiter tries very hard not to laugh at their attempts.

— Well, they sure did not have flexibility in mind for Lycantant, she says after their last failed attempt. Why don’t you try this instead?

She goes with more balance poses then flexibility ones and completely gobsmack them by doing the crow for half a minute and then going into a full headstand. She stays in the position for a full minute, before naturally coming down in the child position, purposefully skipping over her usual downward dog.

Caine is looking on as Jupiter impresses their betas with her physical abilities. It is good for an Alpha to show some physical strength and it’s not like Jupiter could beat them in hand to hand combat, not that anyone of them would even dare take a swing at her, but to show she is physically strong in her own way is sure to reinforce their bond, on a more conscious level then the instinctual one. He smirks when the two of them fail to replicate some weird contortions but then she shows her caring by moving on to poses their build can accommodate. That caring will also reinforce their bond. And he is himself impressed again by her inner strength. It is not the first time he’d seen her holding her whole body upside-down like that, but raising her whole body from the previous position up into the air is sure to demand a lot of control, mental and physical.

Neuri and Fenris are actually too shocked to even attempt the positions before she stands back up and says:

— Your turn.

Neuri and Fenris look at each other before attempting the first position. Jupiter guides them but they seem hesitant to lift their feet and be in the balancing crow position.

— Caine, could you come over here? She asks.

Caine leaves the comfort of the bed and for a moment Jupiter’s eyes linger on his shirtless torso as he walks around the bed and joins them.

— Want to help me help them? She asks.
— How?
— It’s hard to balance the crow alone the first few times. I’ve fallen on my face too many times attempting it alone. Hold him at the shoulders to ensure he does not topple over until he is secure in his position. She says placing him in front of Fenris.

She, herself, goes by Neuri’s side.

— Okay, guys, slow and steady, we will catch you if you should fall.

They get into position and sure enough the simple presence of hands under their shoulders is enough for them to get into position and be secure in it with they lycantant genes. They only needed to know someone had their back, or in this case, front.

— Good job! Think you can get into the headstand? Jupiter asks.

Two grunts of answer later they both start extending into headstand and Jupiter and Caine stay by their side until they are secure in the new position too.
They get back down and Jupiter shows them the child position again and they finish with the simple tree pose.

– Great job, guys.
– Thank you, Alpha, they say with a warmth that was not there before.

She smiles, getting used to the title, it is still a little weird for her tersie brain, but a lot less then the “Benevolent Mother” from the keepers.

– You’re welcome.

She goes to her dresser and gets some clothes for the day, jeans and a plum tank-top while they pick up their stuff.

Neuri and Fenris murmur to Caine.

– That stuff is not easy, sir, she is so strong, Neuri says.
– Worthy to be an Alpha, Fenris says.

Neuri nods.

– Yes, I know. You two go on ahead, Caine tells them.
– Yes, sir. They say and leave the room.

After they are alone, Caine walks to Jupiter and she holds out her arms to gather him into a hug.

– Good morning, she says.

He holds her close and breathes her scent in. She smells happy and proud.

– Jupiter, do you have any idea what you just did? He asks with amazement showing on his face.
– Showed some yoga moves to your sons?

He smiles, he has to. She really has no idea. She did all this naturally. He thinks.

– You are amazing as an Alpha, he murmurs.
– Huh? What did I do? She asks, puzzled.
– Jupiter, you just demonstrated to your betas how strong you are, that you care for their well being, you challenged them, encouraged them to surpass hurdles, showed them that you have their back and recognized their success. You included me as your equal and none of it was a planned strategy. Before their pack-bond was based on instinct, something they could not control, and they accepted you partly because of me, but now, now they know you are a real Alpha, their Alpha.

He, himself, feels his pack-bond toward her being stronger then before. Well, not only his pack-bond.

Understanding dawns on her.

– I don’t quite know what to say after all that. This Lycantant Alpha stuff has more layers then I thought. She murmurs.

He puts his foreheads to hers.

– You are amazing, he says again.

She smiles and closes her eyes and hears Caine breathing her in. She lets him take in his fill and then
opens her eyes, angles her torso away from him to look him in the eye and asks:

– Anything else an Alpha is supposed to be or do?
– Take care of conflicts and lead and send into battle, that got taken care of yesterday. He says seriously.
– Okay, anything else you can think of telling me?
– They started to smell like you.
– Oh, I forgot about that. Will that create risks for them?
– No, pack-bonding to a non-lycantant is not an unsanctioned ability, it's rare but not unheard of.
– Okay then, while everything is quiet and there is no crisis, I'll go take a luxurious hot shower with real running water.

He looks down.

– What?
– I have to go report in to Stinger.
– Okay. Why do you look worried about that?
– I have to go up to the ship.
– And why is that a problem? Have there been threats?
– Then what is it?
– I won't go if, Your Majesty want’s me by her side. He says formally.
– Huh? Caine, I don't expect you to be with me 24/7 you know.

Caine is confused.

– 24/7? He asks.
– Oh, I suppose it would be 25/10 up there? Every hour of every day of the week?

He nods in understanding.

– You don’t? He says.
– Of course not. Why would I? Yes, I love you and love having you by my side, but you have your duties and I have mine. Part of your job is to protect me, and you are my favorite guard of the bunch, but you are not alone to do that now. She says serious.
– Okay, he says, smiling.
– And My Majesty won’t be happy if she learns her commander has been skipping on his duties to be by her side. She adds playfully.

He looks down at that.

– Oh, really? She says on an inquisitive tone, placing one hand on her hip.
– Not on purpose, Stinger left me out of the schedule, he says, still looking down.

Ah yes, she remembers, *Stinger told me he would schedule Caine in for close guarding duty because of the mate-bonding*. She lifts his chin with her hand to meet his gaze and then trails her finger from his temple to his chin.

– I remember why. Are you ready to go back to full duty? She asks kindly.

He ducks his head into the crook of her neck and inhale deeply. Half of him wants to say no and stay with her always and half of him wants to say yes and do what he is built to do. He lifts his head and answer.
– If I could I would stay with you always, but I should go back to duty to make sure your protection is ensured, he says staring in mid air.

Jupiter knows him well enough now that she understands the meaning behind his carefully worded answer and his good soldier look.

– You know, you can simply say you miss it, I won’t get offended.

He looks at her with what amounts to the look of a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

He was about to protest, but she puts a finger on his lips and then trails them down on the side of his face again.

– You forget how much I know you and how much I’ve learned, moya sud’ba. No one can fulfill every need of another one, not even the toilet cleaning maid turned queen that I am. You’re a Lycantant, my love, the best soldier in the ‘verse. As Stinger told me, the perfect hunting machine. And unless you want to play a giant game of hide and seek across the ‘verse, you need outlets for your skills or you’ll become restless.

Caine is amazed by her once more. He does not have words for what he feels so he kisses her, hoping she would understand. She melts into him and he finally finds the words he was looking for.

– I don’t deserve you, he murmurs.

To which she puts her arms around his neck and pulls him down into another kiss.

– Don’t need to, I chose you.

After a few other kisses, Caine leaves for the ship. Jupiter enters the bathroom, and picks up pink rubber gloves, a sponge and the toilet brush and gives the bathroom a thorough clean before taking her well-deserved hot shower.

### Breakfast

When she gets down for breakfast, she finds Neuri and Fenris eating with Aleksa and Nino. Both women look up when she walks in and study her thoroughly.

– Caine left early, shoved a container of syrniki in his hands. Aleksa says.
– You don’t look upset, what were you doing up there? Nino asks.
– Cleaned the bathroom and took a shower. Why would I be upset? Jupiter answers sitting down and grabbing syrniki and toasts from the platter on the table.
– Last time he left, Aleksa starts.
– Not the same thing, Jupiter interrupts. He just gone up to report for full duty.

Neuri and Fenris interest peeks up at that.

– Including training us? Fenris asks.

Jupiter looks at her betas who look frankly excited.

– I suppose so, why?
– They say he is the best there is. He’s a legend. I bet he could even beat a team of Sargorns all by himself.
– That he can, saw it with my own eyes. Jupiter says low.

Her betas look at her intensively, as if to determine if she is telling the truth.

– Really? When?
– When he saved me from Balem. He drove through a hurricane the size of the Earth in a zero to get to me and then fought his way through a team of twelve Sargorns to save me and my family. He had to finish the leader in hand to hand combat.
– Hand to hand with a Sargorn, Neuri says, flabbergasted.
– I did not see it as I was busy beating up Balem with a pipe, but it must have been a hard fight judging from the injuries he suffered. One of his shoulder was bitten to shreds.

Jupiter falls silent after that, remembering the events surrounding her ascension and the ones she did not go through because of the other Jupiter. She is particularly grateful to not have fallen prey to Titus’s charms and almost been turned in a princess bride.

After a moment of silence, Aleksa speaks to Jupiter.

– Vassily called, wanted to know if we going to family diner tonight. Said Vladie had something to tell the family.
– Oh, yes, of course we’ll go.
– He wants you to bring “the boyfriend”.
– At 6?
– Yes.
– Okay, I’ll ask him.

Aleksa’s diversion does not work. Jupiter false silent after again.

– Jupiter, what is it? Aleksa asks.
– Huh? Nothing, thinking about something. I’ll go to the apartment today, for furniture delivery.
Want to come along to set up your apartment or will it be Nino? Someone has to stay here for the rest of the furniture.

Aleksa and Nino look at each other.

– I’ll go with you dochen’ka, Aleksa says.

Jupiter nods.

– Nino, you know how I like things. I paid for the furniture assembly, you should have no trouble.
– What about the old furniture? Nino asks.
– Call cousin Zeno, he is sure to have people looking for some. But I want to keep my old dresser.

Nino nods and Jupiter goes up to her bedroom.

The two sisters look at each other again and Nino shrugs.

In her bedroom, Jupiter takes the message sheave from inside her laptop case and writes down a message to Stinger for security and transport for her and her mother to the apartment and kept security at the house for her aunt. And she lets him know about the family diner at Vassily that night.
She signs it Queen Jupiter.

Her next message is to Caine, about the family diner at 6 that night. “Caine, there is a family diner at
the Bolotnikov tonight at 6:00pm. Cousin Vassily asked that I invite you. Let me know if your duties permit and if your want to come. Love you.” That one she signs Jupe.

She sends another one to Kiza, that one about Seraphi. “Kiza, when you are back on duty, and not before, find out where Seraphi is buried or what ever Entitled do with their dead.” Jupiter.

That takes care of the space stuff for the moment, so she takes her laptop, phone and essentials for the day and heads for the dining room.

Caine

Up upon the Maximillian Jones, Caine has finished writing his official report for Stinger while eating Aleksa’s syrnikis in his small room attached to Jupiter’s, no! their, bedroom. It still feels like novelty to him, that this luxurious Entitled bedroom is his bedroom too. He is so used to having only a bunk space, he does not even know what to put in it, when Jupiter asked for what he wanted, he only requested Skyjacker equipment and a few grooming essentials.

He gets up and picks up his boots from his own personal charging platform and puts them on. He is not sure he will ever get used to that.

– Max, is captain Apini in his office?
– Yes, commander Wise.

He was about to leave their bedroom when he receives Jupiter’s message. His implant plays it in her voice and he is once more amazed that she would ask both if he could but also if he wanted to go and not simply tell him to be at the Bolotnikov for diner.

A ghost of a smile on his lips, he walks out and heads for the barracks. Entering the area, he can clearly hear Stinger mumbling about puling too many double shifts.

He knocks on the doorframe before entering Stinger’s office.

– Come in, Stinger says looking up.
– Good day, sir. Commander Wise reporting in for full duty, sir. Caine says handing his report.
– Don’t start being formal with me, pup. You eat yet? He asks pointing to a platter of food.
– Yes, Lady Aleksa would not let me leave without a container of her syrnikis.

Stinger smirks.

– So, your good to come back to full duties? Her Majesty wont mind?
– Better then ever, and Her Majesty insist. She said she would not be happy if I skipped on my duties to be with her.
– Good, I’ve had enough of these double shifts.
– Yeah, heard you when I came unto the deck. He says with glitter in his eyes.
– Knew you would. Stinger snorts back.
– Seems Jupiter was faster then you in pushing me back to my duties.

Stinger nods.

– How is Her Majesty this morning?
– Impressive, he replies, smiling.
– How so?
– She showed all qualities of a true Alpha with our betas.
Stinger raises and eyebrow at Caine.

Caine tells Stinger about the yoga and how she made them do some, making it a challenge and how impressed they were when she stayed upside-down on her hands for a full tick.

– I don’t think they were expecting a Queen to be able to do that. Entitled are not known for exercising.
– Entitled exercising? Some don’t even walk anywhere, Stinger snorts.
– Yet Jupiter does yoga almost everyday.

Stinger nods.

– Okay then, this is your last day of only close guarding duty. Enjoy it, I’ll put you back on the schedule for training, regular guard duty and desk work starting tomorrow.
– Yes, sir.
– You can start by going back down there. She asked for transport and security to the apartment for her and her mother.
– Yes, sir.

**Bolotnikovs**

While she waits for the transport, Jupiter decides to check her Facebook account. Besides some more birthday and delayed birthday messages, she comes face to face with the picture of her and Caine dancing at the Parallel Vortex that Fusion had posted. She saves it to her desktop, set it as her background picture and even puts it as background on her cell phone too. After all, she is still Jupe, the 23 years old Earthling and she likes having the picture of her boyfriend within easy reach. Of course, on the picture he looks human, but it’s the only picture she has, and she is not about to ask him for a selfie, at least not yet. Maybe on Halloween? When he can go out pretending he is wearing a costume and she can take a picture of him looking like himself.

She also installs a few programs including her music account and let the files sync. *I'll have to get my personal files from Vassily's computer*, she thinks.

A knock on the door has her looking up. If it was the transport, they would not have knocked. She goes to the door and looks through the window. It’s her cousin Mikka, she looks around to make sure no one could frighten her, but no one is around, and opens the door.

– Hey Mikka.
– Jupe, dad sent me to tell you he insists you bring “the boyfriend” tonight.
– Tell him, I don’t know if he’s working tonight or not and that I will let him know as soon as I have his answer.
– Okay, see you tonight.
– Bye.

Mikka turns around and hops downs the stairs.

Jupiter closes the door after nodding at the guard walking away and spotting the one across the street. Their uniforms are a little bit too noticeable. She will have to message Kiza about uniform anonymizing mini sheaves thingy like she did for the trip to see her mate. She turns around to do just that and comes face to face with Caine and a startled noise comes out of her mouth.
– God Caine, make some noise next time. She says with her hand on her fast beating heart.
– I apologize, Your Majesty.
– It’s okay, moya sud’ba. You got my message?
– Yes, I will be there.
– Okay, good. You on or off duty right now?
– On. I am your transport and security.
– Okay, let me just send a message and call my cousin before I forget about it and then I’ll get my mother.

She sends the message to Kiza about the uniform anonymizer and calls Vassily about the diner.

– Mama? She calls.

Aleksa’s voice comes from upstairs.

– What?
– Our ride is here.
– Be right there!

– Why are your mother and aunt worried about you? Caine asks, hearing the sister’s conversation.
– What?
– They are saying you were acting too quiet at breakfast.

Jupiter rolls her head back and lets out a frustrated grunt.

– They worry too much. I’m fine. The conversation at breakfast with our boys made me think of the other me and I wondered what had been done with her body after she died. Sent a message to Kiza about it. Had this crazy idea of maybe visiting my own grave and say thank you.
– That is not crazy, we all owe her a lot.
– Yes, we do, thanks to her I won’t lose you.

He looks down and she puts her hand on his arm and smiles at him once he looks back up.

Aleksa and Nino are now talking loud enough for even Jupiter to hear it. She sighs.

– I’ll go take care of this, do not be alarmed if you hear some shouting.

He looks at her wide-eyed as she turns around and heads upstairs.

She knocks on her mother’s room door.

– Yes?
– Mama, it’s me. Jupiter says in her native Russian.

The door flies open and the sisters pull her in.

– Dochden’ka, tell me what is wrong. Aleksa says authoritatively.
– Nothing is wrong, mama. She answers back.
– Yes, something is wrong, you were quiet, you are never quiet, Nino says.
– No, I was never quiet before. I’m not only Jupe now. I can’t just go on and blabber without thinking. Jupiter retorts exasperated.
But you went all quiet, like when “I won’t say his name” dumped you by text. Points out Aleksa.

Arg, mom. What you imagined I got a “Dear John” message or something? From Caine?!

Aleksa nods.

Gosh, mom. No, no “Dear John” message, no broken heart, no risk of that ever happening. Caine is not Brandon, mom. If there is one thing you really don’t need to worry about is Caine breaking my heart and leaving me. I really was just thinking at breakfast.

About what? Nino asks.

About the other me and visiting her grave, or what ever they do with their dead. Now if you are both done being worried about me when I am more then fine, mom, Caine is waiting for us downstairs.

She turns around and leaves the room and goes back down stairs to a 20-yards-good-soldier-staring-in-mid-air Caine.

Sorry about that, she says shrugging.

When Caine only returns a silent nod, Jupiter realizes just how tense he is and how still he is holding himself.

Caine? She says concerned.

She sees his wings tremble and, somehow, she knows he is heading for a blackhole and she walks right to him and enfolds him in her arms, holding on tight. It’s like hugging a brick wall at first but after a moment his arms come around her and he is holding on to her the same way she held on to him previously.

I’m here moya sud’ba. She murmurs.

That has the expected result, she can feel him nuzzling in her hair and breathing in her scent and the tension drains out of him.

Aleksa follows after Jupiter and witnesses their interaction. She notices the effect Jupiter has on Caine and has to reassess once again her filters. I have to stop judging space people by Earth rules. That boy is never going to hurt her, she is his heart. She tells herself.

She clears her throat and Jupiter raises one finger for her to wait a moment.

Better? She asks low.

He nods slightly.

Okay, we’ll talk when alone at the apartment. She says taking a step back and cupping his cheek.

He nods again and she turns to her mother.

Ready to go? She asks her mother.

Yes.

Great.
She goes to the dining room to pick up her stuff and Aleksa follows her.

– Yupiter?
– What, mama?
– I’m sorry, I assumed things and applied wrong variables to the situation.

Jupiter turns and hugs her mother.

– It’s okay, mama.

She gathers the rest of her things and they depart for the apartment. The Shadow Sentinels are on duty, split between the house the apartment and the warehouse and Caine, Veel, Falco and Pavonia are her guard escort.

**Apartment**

Caine pilots the Mercury and lands on top of the Gocachi apartment complex. It is a tight fit, but it works. After that they use the elevator of a nearby building to go down to street level so they can enter through the front door and inform the guard and doorman about the large furniture delivery and then go up to the top floor.

On the landing Jupiter hands out a key to Aleksa and speaks in Russian.

– Mama, I need some alone time with Caine. Can you go check your apartment and think about how you want to decorate it, paint, flooring and such? We can make changes to the layout, fixtures and everything too.
– Okay, my Yupiter, Aleksa answers.

Aleksa enters the 3rd apartment on the floor, that she is going to share with Nino. Billie Ursinus and Cyclor Mouche of the Shadow Sentinels go with her. Jupiter opens the first apartment for the other guards, the 4th being the one she intends to keep for an office space and finally she opens her own apartment, walks in, drops her things on the kitchen island, the only surface available in the apartment, and looks at Caine as he performs a security check of the apartment.

Caine has been on edge ever since Jupiter spoke of broken heart. He does not understand how someone could do that to her, when she is the most amazing person he has ever met, even without being his Alpha, mate and Queen.

– Want to talk? Jupiter asks.

She always asks. It still amazes him.

– Yeah.

She sits on the floor, resting her back against the kitchen island, as there are no chairs and she extends her hand to invite him to join her.

He sits on the floor, beside her, knees bent, inner elbows on them and holding his left wrist with his right hand.

– Jupiter, he breathes out.
She reaches out and places her hand on his arm-cuff.

– I’m here. Want to tell me what blackhole had you in such a state? She asks

He looks down for a moment, organizing his thoughts.

– What you said to your mother, I don’t understand, how could he… break your heart?
– It’s an expression, not my physical heart, the emotional heart. When the person you love does not love you anymore, we say it breaks your heart, because of the emotional pain it causes.
– I understood that part, but how could he do that, to… to you?
– Oh, *moya sud’ba*, are you angry he broke my heart or upset I had my heart broken?

He looks down and she squeezes his arm for him to look back at her.

– Both? I think.
– I can see why *she* called you her sweet love. It’s so sweet that you are upset on my behalf *moya sud’ba*.

She puts her head on his shoulder and he ducks his nose in her hair.

– Brandon is not worth getting upset over, my love, not anymore anyway.

She raises her left hand and plays in his hair.

– He is a coward, not even worth a scary visit from you. He didn’t deserve the love I poured on him, but I understood that much later. He broke up with me after 10 months, by fear of commitment. He did not even have the courage to face me to tell me, sent me a text message and blocked my number.

Jupiter senses Caine tense up again.

– Hey, it’s okay, I’m okay, *moya sud’ba*. That was three years ago, and my heart is healed now, I know because I can love you.

A shiver runs down his spine and without thinking about it he grabs her in his arms bridal style and stands.

– I’m so lucky your broken heart could love me, he murmurs, holding her tight.
– I’m the lucky one, to have found you, *moya sud’ba*, just as the stars predicted.

Caine keeps her in his arms for a moment and breathes her scent in. Jupiter snuggles against his chest, reciprocating the gesture, his scent being stronger around his neck, and lets out a sigh.

– You okay now? She asks after another moment.
– Yeah, he says, slowly placing her on her feet.
– Good.

She puts her hands behind his head and pulls him into a slow kiss after which she murmurs against his lips:

– *Ti p’ougi*.
– *Ya tebya lyublyu*, he says with a smirks and glitter in his eyes.
– Stop looking at me like that. I can’t think straight when you do that.
– All right, Your Majesty, he says almost grinning.

She shakes her head to control the shiver going down her back.
Careful, two can play at that game, she challenges him.

She looks at him with a wicked smile and thinks only of him, releasing cinnamon heart scent into the apartment. The way his eyes go wide and darken tells her she got him good and her smile grows bigger.

They lose the next few minutes holding on to each other and kissing like there is no tomorrow and only let go of each other when Jupiter’s phone rings.

– Hello?
[Ms. Jones, this is Henry Clark in the lobby. Your delivery is here.]
– Oh, thank you, let them come up.
[Understood.]

She hangs up.

– Time to work.
– All right, he says, activating his anonymizer.

She takes her things and puts them in the closet of the 2nd bedroom, which will be her office, puts her phone in her pocket and grabs her keys before exiting the apartment and knocking on her mother’s door.

Billie Ursinus opens the door.

– Your Majesty, he says.
– Lieutenant, she greets, glad for the rank marking on the uniforms.

She pops her head inside the apartment and calls:

– Mama?
– Yes?
– Delivery is here.
– Oh, great, there is not even a chair in here.
– Same in mine.

They exit and go wait by the elevator for the first load with Knuckles Voidgust who is on duty at the elevator. On the way, Jupiter unlocks the fourth apartment too.

“Ding” the elevator chimes. The door opens and four men exit with two sofas.

– Hi, delivery for Jupiter Jones? Says one of the delivery men.
– Yes, that’s me. Jupiter says.
– Okay, there is quite a few things, if someone could tell us where to put them?
– Of course. These two sofas go in this apartment, one on each side of the fireplace. She says knocking on the first apartment door and going in.

And she faces three pairs of wings and splices features.

– Ma… ’am. They say.
– The delivery men are here.

She has never seen them activate their anonymizer as fast as that before, it is a good thing because the delivery men step in right after that.
They place the sofas along the walls and the elevator chimes again and more men come out with more sofas.

– *Mama*, I believe these are yours?
– Ah yes, this way, please, Aleksa says walking to her door.

The first four men go back down with the elevator and a few minutes later, new men arrive with her sofas. She shows them the way to her own apartment and has the sofa placed facing the fireplace. Next up are bar stools and dining chairs and benches. It takes three loads but the three stools, one bench and four dining chairs per apartment get delivered and placed followed by the four dining tables.

The next items are the twin sized beds and mattresses, dressers, nightstands for the guards’ apartment.

– Ah yes, these all go in this apartment, two of each per bedroom. Jupiter informs them.

The nightstands and dressers are all pre-assembled but the beds require assembly and a team of four come up with the delivery men to assemble them. A new batch of delivery men come up with Aleksa and Nino’s bedroom sets and Aleksa takes charge of those. The furniture is placed in the bedrooms and the assembling team will get to these after they are done with the guards’ beds. Aleksa and Nino chose Queen sized bed, for the luxury of having room for it.

The last bedroom set to come up is hers. King sized bed, two nightstands, two dressers, a vanity with a chair and a chaise lounge with no arm-rest. They also bring up three large rugs and four runner rugs. The large rugs go in her, her mother and her aunt’s bedrooms and the runners are rolled out in each apartment entrance.

By the time they get ready to bring the office furniture up, it is lunch time and Jupiter orders some Thai take-out for her people. When it gets there, everyone takes a break, including the large group of delivery and assembling men who go out to lunch, and Jupiter and her people gather in her apartment.

– This does not look like food I have seen before, Your Majesty, Caine points out.
– It’s Thai food, it’s Asian, it originally comes from the other side of the planet.
– Asian?
– Oh, right...

She takes out her phone.

– Hey google, show me a map of the continents.

She selects an image and shows it to Caine.

– For many different reasons we separate the Earth in different regions. Asia is the blue on this map. Right now, we are in North America, the dark green region. Thailand, where Thai food comes from is an Asian country.

Caine nods.

– Where is Thailand? She asks her phone.
– Here is a map of Thailand. Her phone answers.

She selects one of the maps and shows it to Caine.
Caine gives a short nod and Jupiter puts her phone away before grabbing her chopsticks.

Only to realize her people are trying really hard but only her and her mother manage to use chopsticks. She smirks.

– You can use the forks guys, chopsticks take some getting used to.

The lunch goes without problems, and they are done by the time the delivery men return.

They bring the conference table first and Jupiter has them install it in the master bedroom of the office apartment, with it’s twelve chairs. Next come the L shape desks and chairs for the other two bedrooms, two per bedroom. Then a large L shape desk with a rounded corner for inside the living space and a rounded reception desk placed right by the entry door and two more office chairs.

She gets a phone call from Yulia call in mid-afternoon. Ready to discuss working for her, Jupiter is glad and asks her to come to her house the next morning around 9 to hash out the details.

The last pieces of furniture they bring up are: two desks and chairs for Aleksa and Nino, which go into their third bedroom and an executive desk and chair for Jupiter, which goes in her second bedroom.

Lastly, they bring up the appliances: four fridges, four ovens, three washing machines and three dryers. There is no washing machine and dryer for the office and she did not buy dishwashers as they were included in the apartments.

She profusely thanks the delivery and assembly men and, after they leave, she joins her mother and they go around each apartment making lists of what is still to be done and what has to be purchased.

The only layout change Aleksa wants is to remove the door going from the office into the Jack-and-Jill bathroom to make it a private bathroom for Nino and remove the closet doors in the third bedroom and change it into a large bookcase/shelving unit.

The flooring is also great in every apartment, you can’t go wrong with hardwood and ceramic floors, but the paint in atrocious. Aleksa wants a light purple for her bedroom and en-suite, a warm tan for the office, a light grey for the living and dining area and Nino mentioned she wants her bedroom to be a light mossy green with a white bathroom. Their water closet is to be a light blue. The office will be painted in a light tan with light grey for the bathrooms and the guards’ apartment will be done in an array of warm yellows. For her own apartment she chose two blues for the living area and her bedroom, light blue for three walls and an accent wall in navy, lilac and cream for her office and cream for the third bedroom that she will make into her gym. Also, the two bathrooms and the water closet will be in white.

That is the list for the Keepers to do, which Jupiter communicates to them. The other list is all the small things it takes to fill the apartments, from clothes hangers to dishes and small appliances, to entertainment and exercises equipment, to office supplies and equipment, to towels and bed sheets, oh and food, lots of food. It is still quite a lot, and she is not quite sure she knows everything that it takes.

By the time they are done, there has been a guard change and it is almost time to go to family diner.
They go back to the house where Jupiter and Aleksa go around the house with Nino, to look at the new furniture and ask how it went.

– Everything went fine and Zeno was happy for the furniture. He got his guys here in under an hour after I called him. They cleared everything we did not want to keep. Nino says.
– Good, everything looks fine. Any problem with the delivery?
– Not one.
– Perfect, then let’s go to diner and pretend we know nothing about the rest of the ‘verse.

Nino snorts.

– Hard to do when we bring an alien with us.

Jupiter smirks.

– Genomgineered human, aunt Nino. Caine is not a Sargorn, although Sargorns are originally from Earth, so not aliens either.
– Jupe! You know what I mean.
– Yeah, I know, don’t worry.

All the guards on duty stay at the house except for Caine, of course. He activates his anonymizer and they head out the door.

Vassily’s place is only three doors down on the other side of the road.

– Moy syn, Vassily will probably ask questions about uniform, Aleksa says, one house down.

Caine stops in his tracks and activates his uniform anonymizer.

– Is this better? He asks.

He is wearing the black jeans and t-shirt from the trip to Quebec.

Jupiter smirks.

– Stalin’s balls, what else can these do?
– Plenty, but we don’t have the time right now.
– Of course, of course.

**Family diner**

They get to Vassily’s house and before they can knock on the door, Vladie opens the door and pulls Jupiter inside, hugging her. Caine catches himself in time not to overreact. This is her family, they will not hurt her.

– Jupe! He murmurs.
– Hey, okay, enough Vladie. What’s that for? Jupiter says untangling herself.
– I’m just relieved someone knows. He says low.
– Are you are going to tell the family? Because if you don’t I will. She speaks quietly too.
– Yes, after diner, I need you to keep me up to it.
– That I can do.
– And, erm, thanks Jupe.
– You’re family Vladie, that’s enough for me.
She squeezes his shoulder, and he steps quietly to the couch so no one notices.

They step in the living room and Jupiter knocks on the door frame and speaks louder than normal to signify their presence:

– Hi everyone!
– Hey Jupe! Vladie says from the couch, playing at a video game.

Vassily, Irina and Lyudmila arrives from different directions and welcome them, they move to the living room and Moltka and Mikka come barreling down the stairs. Moltka gives her a hug and joins Vladie on the sofa.

– Jupe! Aleksa, Nino! And the boyfriend, Mikka greets them.
– You know he’s got a name right? It’s Caine Wise. Jupiter points out.
– Yeah, yeah, I know. Don’t you remember what you told us after him?

Jupiter remembers. She was so heartbroken she made them swear never to refer to any boyfriend by his name. She glances at her mother and her aunt with a wicked smile then squeezes Caine’s arm lightly before facing the other Bolotnikovs.

– I remember. Brandon was a jerk who did not deserve the love I gave him. He got scared and ran. Jupiter says.
– That’s because you’re too smart and men don’t like smart women. Vassily points out.
– Vassily is right, Lyudmila says.
– No, jerks don’t like smart women, real men love smart women. Jupiter says.
– Real man like my Max and moy syn. Aleksa says placing a hand on Caine’s shoulder.

Vassily’s jaw hangs open.

– Moy syn? Irina asks.
– He is family. Aleksa says.

Caine feels a warmth in his chest at Aleksa defending Jupiter and him. Vassily stares at Caine for a moment and Caine holds his gaze.

– You love our Jupiter? He asks.

Now that his brain is fixed, he knows that love is not a strong enough word to describe what he feels for Jupiter. She is his everything but he does not know how to explain it in terms they would understand.

– More then words can say. He answers.

He is thanked by a puff of cinnamon heart from Jupiter.

Vassily nods and offers his hand to Caine in a handshake. At the same time Vladie looks up from his game.

– Damn Jupe! You move fast. When’s the wedding? He asks as a joke.
– Damn buddy, how did you ensnare her this fast?

Caine smirks and remembers the rescue at the clinic and the following twelve hours. Waking up rested, having no nightmares and Jupiter, then simple tersie, waking up and pointing his gun at him. He had been so impressed and it seems so long ago already.
Actually she ensnared me when she pointed my own gun at me without hesitation right after waking up, I just didn’t know it yet. Caine says.
– You’re the one who left it there for me, Jupiter says with a teasing tone.
– I thought it would make you feel better.
– You’re lucky she didn’t shoot you on sight. Vladie snorts, shooting his enemy in his game.
– It’s a good thing I don’t shoot people in the back. She snorts at Vladie.
– So romantic, Mikka says ironically.

Jupiter chuckles.

– Life is not a rom-com Mikka. Anyway, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll go get my personal files from the computer downstairs so I don’t forget and I’ll be right back.
– Need help in the kitchen? Nino asks Irina.
– Sure.

The two women and Lyudmila head out to the kitchen as Jupiter heads to the staircase.

– Oh, Jupiter, will you bring something up for Caine to sit on when you come back up? Irina says to Jupiter as she passes her on her way to the kitchen.
– Sure, okay.

– Moya sud’ba, coming with me? She murmurs.

Caine starts to follow her when Moltka says:

– You can stay upstairs with us Caine, we won’t bite.

And Jupiter collapses laughing under the dumbfounded gaze of her family.

– Moltka, sorry it’s not something I can explain, but it has nothing to do with you, she says still laughing.

She heads downstairs and Caine goes with her.

--- Upstairs ---

As soon as the door to the basement closes on Jupiter, Vassily grabs Aleksa and pulls her outside in the backyard and closes the door. Nino has gone to the kitchen with Irina and Lyudmila and Mikka perches herself on the sofa to nag Vladie as he continues to play his game.

– What do you know about this boy?
– Vassily, cousin, you not her father. Nino and me know all we need to know about him. He is perfect for her.
– Why are they moving so fast? She is not pregnant is she?
– Not pregnant, they love each other very much.
– You sure he is not taking advantage of her then? With all her money, she has to be more careful of boys.
– Not for me to tell you his story, but no he not in it for money.
– What about his family, they after her money?
– No, not after her money either, met them. Good people. If you want know something else, ask them yourself. I go help Irina.
On that she turns around and goes back inside.

---Downstairs---

In the basement, Jupiter turns on the computer and sits on the chair while it boots. She points out to
the basement stool in the corner.

– If you want to sit. This should not take too long.

Caine brings the stool close to Jupiter and sits on it.

– Can I ask something?
– Huh? Yeah sure, you don’t have to ask permission you know.

Caine ducks his head a moment.

The computer is on and she starts to click on folders until she accesses a password protected folder
hidden under a false name.

– Why did your cousin said they would not bite? Is biting a common human practice on Earth?

Jupiter chuckles and shakes her head.

– Sorry, sorry. No, biting is not an Earthling custom. Well at least not in North America, I don’t
know every cultures around the planet to say it is not a custom somewhere else with certainty, there
are so many people on Earth and even quite a few primitive tribes too, not sure what they do…

She inserts a thumb drive in the USB port and starts a transfers of her personal files while talking.

– Gosh, here I go, on and on again, sorry. In this context, it’s an expression. “I won’t bite.” is used to
say something like “I am not mean, you don’t have to be afraid, I will not hurt you.” It made me
laugh because, well, you do bite...

She rolls her chair to his stool and puts her hands behind his neck.

– But the meaning is quite different and I really like it.

She pulls him down and kisses him, to which he responds gladly. After a moment, she returns to the
computer and checks she has not forgotten anything.

– Jupiter, I was wondering…
– What? She asks when he does not continue.
– How did you know to bite me back?
– Huh?

She turns to face him again.

– I… I don’t really know. I can’t say it was instinct, but maybe intuition? It felt like I simply had to
do it.
– Yeah?
– Yeah.
She rolls her chair back to him.

– It’s the same for how I can read you so easily. How I know when something is bothering you. As if I have always known you. I don’t have to think and analyze, I simply know.

She brushes her fingers on his brand, hidden by the anonymizer.

– Because you are mine, you have always been and will always be mine.

He leans into the touch of her fingers on his brand and when she pulls him into another kiss he forgets about everything else for a moment.

– That’s what you call personal files?

Mikka’s question startles them both.

– Mikka! Jupiter exclaims chuckling.

– Dinner is ready, Jupe. Mikka says from the bottom of the stairs.

– Okay, be right there. Jupiter answers.

– Right, Mikka retorts, hurrying up the stairs.

Jupiter pulls back from Caine, grabs her thumb drive and then the stool.

– Your Majesty, I can carry that. Caine says trying to get the stool from her.

– I know you can, but you are a guest in this house and cousin Vassily would be upset if I let a guest carry his own chair. Just go with it.

He agrees reluctantly and they climb the stairs.

---Diner---

The women place the dishes on the table and Jupiter places the stool for Caine at the corner of the table, between her usual place and her mother’s at the head of the table. Moving Aleksa a little to the left so he has enough room.

– Jupiter, you brought that old stool? You could have brought up a more comfortable chair. Irina says.

Jupiter shrugs.

– It is okay Ma’am, I prefer stools to chairs. Caine says, defending his Queen’s choice, knowing she chose it so he would have room for his wings.

– A polite one who sticks by her, that’s a change, Irina snorts.

– Big surprise. Vassily adds.

They sit and start filling theirs and each other’s plates. For a moment the only conversations are exchanges about “Do you want some cucumber salad?” “Mikka, can you give me a scoop of the beef Stroganov?” “Do you want more carrots?” until everyone’s plate is full. Jupiter makes sure Caine’s plate is filled to the brim, telling him about some of the traditional Russian dishes along the way. Aleksa and Nino notice and help along the way.

- Moy syn, you tasted my latke the other day, but Lyudmila’s are best I have ever had.” Aleksa tells
Caine.

Lyudmila hears the compliment.

– You cooked for him, my dear? She asks Aleksa.
– Nino, Jupiter and I cooked for him and the Apini. He helped, is not bad with grater. Aleksa says.
– Who is the Apini? Vassily asks.
– His family. Jupiter says.
– But your name is Wise, Mikka points out.
– True, they are not my biological family. Caine replies.

Everyone look at each other before looking back at Caine and Jupiter.

– Where is your family then? Moltka asks.
– I... don’t have one. Caine says.
– What happened? Moltka asks with a child’s innocence.

Caine looks down. Aleksa and Jupiter automatically place a hand on his arms in support.

Jupiter had thought about how to explain the situation and had settled on a classic orphan moved from foster family to foster family. It was close enough to the truth.

– It’s not something he likes to remember Moltka. He was orphaned when he was very young. He was in the foster system and he moved around a lot growing up and the people were not always nice to him. Until he was put with the Apinis. They took him in and really made him part of their family. Jupiter explains.

Caine does not understand everything Jupiter says, but he gathers she found a tersie situation to explain his “family”.

– Oh, sorry dude. Vladie says.
– It’s the past. I don’t like to dwell on it.
– That smart. Vassily says.

Conversations continues and Vassily says “Vladie” on a conspiratorial tone. Vladie gets up and goes to the next room. Caine is concern for a moment, but everyone’s smells is of excitement and anticipation, so he relaxes.

– Caine, Jupiter said you security guard for powerful woman? Vassily asks.
– Yes.
– Who is she?
– I am not at liberty to reveal her identity. It would be a breach of trust.
– Humph, I hope that does not put target on our Jupiter?

Nino, Aleksa and Jupiter chuckle.

– No cousin, his job does not put a target on my back. Jupiter says.

Quite the opposite, she thinks.

– Good. Look, Jupiter, I know we did not always see eye to eye on many things, but humm... well...
– Huh?
– For you my dear, Lyudmila says pointing to Vladie.

Vladie places a weirdly shaped package, wrapped in newspaper beside her.
– Hey you guys, was that for my birthday?
– It’s a thank you, Vladie told us what you wanted the money for, Nino says.

Jupiter looks at Vladie.

– You didn’t?

Vladie shrugs.

– No! Jupiter says standing, excited.

Nino laugh softly.

– Are you serious? She asks, starting to unwrap a golden telescope.
– Oh my god… Oh my god!

Jupiter looks at her family with a large smile.

– Thank you!

Aleksa stands.

– Your father was good man and I’ve loved him very much. And you should have this. Aleksa says.

She hugs Jupiter and kisses her in the hair.

Lyudmila claps her hands with a smile.

– Can we take it up to the roof? Moltka asks.
– Hum, I think Vladie has something to say to the family before that.

Vladie look away and back at Jupiter.

– Okay, he sighs.

Jupiter nods at him.

- I know I have taken bad decisions recently. And you might think I’m a looser…
– You just need to get smart, Vassily interrupts.

Vladie looks away again.

– Cousin, there is something that will explain why Vladie has been acting erratic, Jupiter says to Vassily.

Jupiter walks to Vladie and place a hand on his shoulder.

– You can say it, she tells him.
– Dad, mom, I did not want to worry you… I thought it would be best you thought I was a looser, then worry about me and we didn’t have the money. But Jupiter told me she will pay for it.

Irina’s mother instinct clicks in and she opens wide eyes.

– What is it Vladie? She asks.
– I have a… brain tumor.

The family is stunned.
- It's not cancer, he adds quickly.
- But it interferes with the capacity to take good decisions. Jupiter says.

The family erupts in a maelstrom of questions, concerns, tears and hugs. It take a long moment before everyone calms down. And after that comes a wave of gratefulness for Jupiter. At 9pm they manage to leave Vassily’s house and return to theirs. Jupiter carrying her telescope.

---Night---

Jupiter wishes a good night to her mother and aunt before going up to her room, with her telescope. Caine goes with her reviewing the event of the family diner and trying to analyze the interactions of Her Majesty’s family. In the room, Jupiter places the gift she received in the window and places an eye on one end. She stays there for a long moment, sighing from time to time. Caine smells Jupiter’s contentment and it fills him with a soft happiness.

- Your Majesty is happy, he says softly by her side.
- This is how my father could see the stars. He watched the stars and said the sky was full of miracles. I always thought this would be the closest I could be to him, to understand him. He is a part of me, even if I never met him. And even after going to the stars, this is still everything I thought it would be.
- What is it called?
- Telescope. She says looking up. You want a look?
- Okay.

She sets the telescope on a point.

- Here, look. This is Mercury, the first planet in the system.

Caine looks where Jupiter was looking and sees an enlarged shape of a planet.

- This is how you learn about space? He asks looking back at her.
- Well one of the ways. This is a small telescope, the strongest ones are big as buildings, there is one in space too. We’ve sent probes to planets and machines on Mars. And NASA and other space agencies listen to any types of signals they could catch coming from space too. Don’t think they can catch FTLs yet though.

He nods.

- The Keepers might have something to do with that.
- Right. I’ll check on that.

She stifles a yawn.

- Your Majesty is tired.

She smiles at him and then yawns again.

- Yeah. I’m gonna get ready for bed.

She goes to the bathroom, and when she comes back out Caine is shirtless in some sort of space pajama pants with his wings half-folded loosely against his back. She pauses for a moment, looking him over. And he must have smelled that because he turns around almost out of balance.
– Gosh you look good. She says.

He smiles and walks close to her and wraps his arms around her.

– Your Majesty is quite appealing also, he murmurs.
– Thank you.

She kisses him before untangling herself and climbing into bed.

– What’s your schedule tomorrow?

He accesses the schedule with his implant and winces.

– What is it?
– First shift on monitoring, second one on training, third on personal guards and fourth off duty.
– What’s the problem with that?
– Three shifts in a day is not the usual. Stinger and Aves must be taking time off after picking up my share of the load.
– They deserve it. You okay with that?
– Yeah.
– Okay, good. I’m thinking that tomorrow will be my last day on Earth for a while, unless somethings comes up. I have to get settled out there too. Yulia will be able to continue my setup here while I am out there. She will need someway to contact me when I am out there before I can go, though.
– A simple FTL would do the trick, but we will have to teach her how to use it.

She snuggles in the bed.

– Yeah, to me too.

Caine smirks. Most Entitled do not even bother to learn to use technology. They have servitant for that. But Jupiter is an intelligent woman who wants to know how everything works and he loves that.

He turns off the light and gets into bed with her. She places her head on his shoulder and snuggles against him. He falls asleep still wondering at how his empty life blossomed into this wonderful one.
Final day before departure

Chapter Summary

The last bits and pieces before Jupiter can go back to space. Not much action in this chapter, but Caine does go back to full duties and the Skybreakers learn some truths.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Caine wakes up before Jupiter and gets out of bed without waking her. He gets ready for the day and gets down to the kitchen, where he finds Nino preparing breakfast, after saluting Tristan at the bedroom door.

– Good morning Nino.
– Morning Caine. You good?
– Yes.
– Jupiter still sleeping?
– Yes.
– Let me guess, she looked at stars for hours?

Caine smirks and nods.

– That girl, she so much like her father. Loves the stars as much he did.
– And now she owns them.
– Crazy. You on duty right now?
– Not yet shift starts later. Have to go up to the ship.
– You have time to eat?
– Yes.
– Good, you go sit. Be right there.

Caine goes back to the dining room and sits on their stool.

Nino gets there soon with a platter of toasts and blinis and a cup of coffee for herself.

– What you think of family? She asks sitting down.
– It’s a little like a Legion unit except that rank are not as clear. Is Zeno equal or under Vassily? And where does Lyudmila stands?

Nino laughs a little.

– Family is not like military, ranks are more fluid and vary from situation to situation. And ours is more complicated, because we are many branches of family and there is the cleaning business in that too and we were illegals a few days ago.

She gets up and grabs a piece of paper and a pen.

– I try to explain.

She starts to draw a genealogy tree.
– Lyudmila is Vassily and Zeno mother and Aleksa and me aunt. Her husband and our father were brothers. Aleksa had Jupiter with Max. I have no children, but I did help raise Jupiter. So I am a little like a second mother. Zeno has no children and Vassily and Irina have Vladie, Mikka and Moltka. Parents have direct authority over children until they old enough to be independent, but level of authority lower as children grow up so they can learn be independent. So Zeno is equal to Vassily, but has no one under him and Lyudmila is above them both, but since elderly, it is Vassily and Zeno turn to take care of her. No one has authority over Aleksa and I, and only we have authority over Jupiter. That is family dynamic.

– So it’s like many teams living together?
– Yes. But add business and illegal in that. Vassily owns cleaning business and gave us job to do, so in business he had authority over all of us, and he gave us money because as illegal could not have regular job and bank account. But that over now, we not work for him anymore.
– I understand.
– And now with Jupiter being Queen, she above Aleksa and me, but we still above her here. Like you her equal in love but her above you in work. Confusing for us too.
– Yes I understand. This helps, thank you. He says pointing to the drawing.
– You welcome synok.

She leaves the table and goes back to the kitchen. She comes back out with another platter of blinis and a cup of coffee.

– You have time to bring that to Jupiter before you go?
– Yes, he says, standing.

He takes the platter and goes up the stairs. Tristan knocks on the door for him.

– Come in, says Jupiter.

Caine enters, unsurprised at finding Jupiter in a yoga pose.

– Good morning Jupiter. Your aunt sent me up with your breakfast.
– Good morning Caine. Thanks. Who’s out there?
– Tristan.
– Good morning Tristan, do come in. She says.
– Good day, Jup... iter. Tristan says stepping in the bedroom.

Jupiter chuckles.

– It’s called yoga, Tristan. You’d better get used to it, I do some almost every day. It’s good exercise in focus and self-control.
– It’s harder then it looks, Caine adds.
– Your Majesty... exercises?

She changes pose.

– You say that like it’s unusual.
– It... is.
– Entitled are not known for exercising, Caine says.
– Right. Entitled to be lazy. She snorts.

Caine places the breakfast tray on the breakfast table set in one corner, shaking his head and
– Not my style. She adds.

To add to her point she tucks in her faded Chicago Bears t-shirt and does the crow and rises in a full head stand, like she did with Neuri and Fenris, the previous day. Then she comes down in a downward dog and down into the child position before ending with the classic tree pose.

– If I wasn’t fit, I would have died on Jupiter, many times over, Tristan. Explosions and insane people don’t care about one’s status. She says rolling up her yoga mat.
– But, you have us to protect you now.
– Yes, I do, and I trust you all to protect me, but even with all your amazing skills and abilities, we never know what could happen, so I’d rather keep in shape. It could be the difference between life and death one day. Beside, it’s exhilarating and empowering to push myself further and further each time.
– That I understand, rare are the humans skilled and strong enough to become skyjackers.

Jupiter nods walking to the table.

– Yes, I’ve learned about that, it is quite an accomplishment on your part.
– Thank you, Your Majesty.
– I wanted to ask, Tristan, how are you doing? She asks sitting.
– What do you mean?
– Well, you almost died a few days ago.
– Are you assessing my ability to perform my duties, Your Majesty?

Caine smirks again. Jupiter continues to turn things upside down. At the look on his lieutenant’s face he understands that he is confused about the purpose of the Queen’s question.

– What? No, I am asking about how you are doing. Like any normal employer would do after such event. Or this something else Entitled don’t do?

Caine’s chuckle is her answer.

– You are concerned about me? Tristan asks, astonished.
– Yes, Tristan, your well-being is ultimately my responsibility. My oath was not empty words.

Now Caine is smiling, a wide grin that reaches his eyes. Understanding dawns on Tristan’s face.

– I am fully healed, Jupiter.
– Good, and how is it going with Miss Silver?

Tristan reaches for his forearm and an unmistakable smile appears on his face.

– Very well, thanks to you, Jupiter.
– Good. Have you eaten breakfast yet?
– No, my shift is not over yet.
– Go down to the kitchen then, I’m sure my aunt made enough blinis for everyone. You won’t leave on an empty stomach. Dismiss.

At Tristan’s shocked face Caine says:

– It’s okay, it’s an Earthling custom. I will take over until you get back.

Tristan leaves the room and closes the door.
– When in Rome… Jupiter murmurs shaking her head.  

Jupiter smirks and goes grab her phone.

– I need to get you one of these. She says shaking her phone. Actually I should get one for everyone that comes down to Earth.

She adds it in her notes and then searches for the “When in Rome” saying while eating her breakfast.

– “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”, often shortened to “When in Rome...” is a proverb and means that it is advisable to follow the conventions of the area in which you are residing or visiting.
– Ah, yes, follow the customs to fit in.
– Exactly.

She gestures to the second chair for him to sit and he flaps his wings as an answer. She nods back and mentally notes to get a backless chair for him to sit on.

– You’ve mentioned Rome before, you said... he fiddles with his implant, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”.
– Ah, yes, that is another saying. Rome is a city, the capital of Italy, but 2000 years ago it was the capital of the Roman empire.
– Roman, like your name?
– Yes, like my name, and Titus’s father, the names of our planets, named after Roman gods. The roman empire still influence a lot of modern day life, even if it fell long ago. Scientists still use Latin to name things, even if its a dead language that very few speak nowadays. Animals, plants, even constellations have Latin names.

She searches for the saying on her phone.

– “Rome wasn't built in a day” is an adage attesting to the need for time to create great things. Oh, wow, that is an old French saying, around 1190. That is what... 825 years old? Wow.

Then she looks at Caine and shrugs.

– Old by Earth standard, at least.

Caine smirks.

– Things change every few months or years on Earth so things that last for centuries are rather rare.
– Yes, things tend to remain the same for long periods of time in the ‘verse.
– Probably because the rulers are so old and stuck in their ways. As we say here, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.”

Then she claps her hand on her mouth realizing just how awkward it sounds to say that to Caine.

– Oh, that sounds... urg... awful... Is that offensive to you?

Caine looks at her and shakes his head. That is so Jupiter, blurtling something out and then be worried she hurt his feelings.

– I am not a dog, Jupiter.
– I know, I know, but still, part of you is lycan, wolf-like, canine, and, urg... I don’t want to... I’m still learning, I don’t know, what is acceptable, like I don’t know if something would be considered offensive or not, and I... I’m an Entitled and I know I can say whatever I want technically, but, it
feels awkward, I just don’t know... I don’t want to hurt you or anyone else, without knowing it... and I’m gonna stop talking now before I feel even worse then I do right now. Jupiter says, gesturing a lot, rubbing her forehead, shaking it and shrugging.

Caine can’t help but feel amazed by Jupiter, again. Everything she says, everything shes does strengthen the feelings he has for her. He walks to her side and stretches out his hand to invite her to stand. She willingly stands and he gathers her in his arms and stretching his wings he enfolds her and kisses her.

– Thank you for caring, Your Majesty.

She sighs and places her head on his chest.

– You are not offended then? She murmurs.
– Not at all, Jupiter.
– Promise to tell me if I say something offensive.
– I promise.

She smiles against his chest, pulls back and rises on her toes to kiss him.

A knock on the door cuts off the moment. Caine folds his wings and Jupiter sits back at the table before letting the person in.

– Stinger! Jupiter says.
– Sir, Caine says.
– Good day, Your Majesty, Caine.
– Are you here on official business? Jupiter asks.
– I am replacing Caine for the day.

She nods.

– Then I suppose it’s shift change?

Stinger looks at Caine before answering.

– Yes.

She looks at the time 6:55 am.

– Very well.

She stands and goes back to Caine, drapes her arms around his neck and kisses him.

– Good day at work, see you tonight, moya sud’ba.
– Ya tebya lyublyu.
– Ti p’ougi.

Jupiter
Jupiter sits back to finish eating her breakfast after Caine leaves.

– Want to sit? Jupiter asks Stinger.
– I would but...

Stinger looks at the chair and makes a strange face.

Jupiter snorts.

– Just flip it, Stinger.
– Thank you, Jupiter. He says flipping the chair and straddling it.
– Tell me Stinger, you put yourself on personal guard duty on purpose didn’t you?
– I thought it would make things easier for him to know that I am here.
– Thank you, it did.
– How can you tell?
– The tension in his jaw dissipated.
– How? I’ve known him for years and I still have trouble reading him.
– I actually don’t know. I look at him and I just can tell.

Stinger nods, a little in awe of Jupiter, in 14 years he never could read Caine this easily and Jupiter can do it naturally and it’s been about two Earth weeks. He really was made for her, he thinks.

– Anything to report this morning? She asks.
– Nothing official. There have been no threats or suspicious activities reported.
– Just the way I like it.
– Same for me, but it is still early.
– Yeah, I attract trouble it seems.
– Trouble, maybe, but you attract good people too.
– Thanks Stinger. How are you and the family?
– Still adjusting to the shock of learning about Kiza’s mate and getting to know each other. We have missed so much of each others.
– I can imagine what it would be like. Is there anything I can do to help?
– You have done so much already, Jupiter. Without you, we would not even be together. It just takes time.
– Of course, but if there is anything, don’t be afraid to ask.
– There is one thing, but it’s quite personal, he says rubbing his neck.

Jupiter knows that gesture clearly by now.

– What is it? She asks.
– Honey-Bee...

He stops, catching himself. This is not something one’s spoke of out of their kind, even less to the Queen, regardless of her upbringing.

– Stinger, you can tell me anything, we are family. She says when he does not continue.

He looks down. Yes, she considers us family, maybe she will understand. She keeps surprising me. Caine is one lucky runt. He thinks. He takes a steadying breath.

– Her last ovarium was almost two years ago. He says looking away.

Jupiter thinks fast. Kiza said that the ovarium was the bee-splice pon Farr. Thanks to Star Trek, she can visualize what it must be like and imagine he must want to be with her when it happens.
– And you would like what? Time off when the next one occurs? She asks, smiling.

Stinger looks back at Jupiter and her smile calms down the worry at the back of his head. She does not seem fazed or disgusted by that.

– Yes, he says, nodding once.
– Well, I can’t have her go through that alone when she can have you.
– You are too kind, Jupiter, but you don’t even know what it is.
– Well, Kiza said it’s the bee-splice pon Farr. That is explication enough for me.
– How can it be enough?
– Star Trek.

She types on her phone and reads the result.

– Pon Farr is part of the reproductive cycles of the Vulcans in Star Trek. Every seven years, Vulcan become aroused. They undergo a blood fever, become violent, and finally die unless they mate with someone with whom they are emphatically bonded or engage in a ritual battle known as kal-if-fee. Is that what the ovarium is?

He looks away again.

– We don’t talk about it with others.
– Yeah, that also is like the Vulcans. I know you keep stuff like that to your own splice, but it would be helpful if I had some knowledge.

He is still looking away.

– Stinger!

He looks back at her.

– I don’t need full on details and I swear I will not speak of it to anyone else, not even Caine, if you don’t want me to.
– Caine knows. Told him once, when I got drunk to dull the pain.

She nods.

– It is similar to what your read but only females go through it, about every two years, and only once mated and they can not die from it, but it is very painful without the mate.
– I understand. How much time will you need?
– A day or two, depending.
– Perfect. When it happens, send Caine a message, he’ll take over for you.
– Simple as that?
– Yeah.
– Thank you, Your Majesty.
– My pleasure, dismiss.

Stinger leaves the room with a small head bow and she selects clothes and gets ready for the day.

Caine
Caine leaves the house with mixed feelings. He is excited to return to full duty but with a hole in his chest feeling at leaving Jupiter’s side. It only feels tolerable because he knows he will be with her later. He also suspects that Stinger took personal guard duty shifts to ease his unease and he is grateful. He gets to the garage with Tristan, Falco and Vespa, where they go up the roof and board the Mercury. Vespa takes the pilot seat and flies up to Jupiter’s main ship.

Up on the Maximillian Jones, they split and he goes to Stinger’s office where he check the schedule and reads the reports of the last few days. The report from the splicer is not in yet and intelligence has not found any threats. The medical report on Tristan is clear on the severity of the bullet wound he suffered while rescuing Yulia, without immediate treatment he would have died within minutes. He takes a mental note to check up on Earth weapons and armour to be more informed about the subject.

Scents followed by a knock on the doorframe tells him his Skybreakers teammates are here to see him. He can smell unease from a few of them.

– Come in. He says raising his head.

Aves, Leo, Tristan, Falco, Vespa, Castor, Ezin and Pavonia enter the small office. Stinger, Veel, Menura and Kalie being on personal guard duty.

– Sir, Aves says.
– Is there a problem?
– Not exactly, I’m not quite sure how to say this... Aves says.
– Try being straightforward.
– We’ve noticed things that don’t quite add up.
– About what?
– You and Her Majesty.
– Ah.

He looks at Leo.

– I have not disobeyed Her Majesty’s order, Leo says.

Caine nods and taps his implant to contact Jupiter directly.

[Hi, you okay?]
– Yes, I’m doing fine, but I have the Skybreakers in Stinger’s office asking about us. He says in Russian.
[All of them?]
– Besides those guarding you, yes.
[Well, seems you get your share of unexpected too. I did not think we could hide this from them for long, they are always around.]
– What can I tell them? He asks.
[We should tell them the truth, if you trust them with it.]
– I do.
[Okay, but if you tell them, you will have to repeat the process with those down here. No?]
– They can join in via comm.
[Very well, then tell them that you are mine, in all sense of the word. I’ll tell the others to comm in.]

A one-sided grin appears on his face.

– All right.
[Don’t hesitate to call me if you need me.]
– That is always.
[I love you too, see you tonight.]
– Ya tebya lyublyu.

She blows him a kiss.

He taps his implant again, his grin reaches both sides of his mouth now. The Skybreakers all have dumbfounded looks on their faces, except Leo.

– Her Majesty authorized me to tell you the whole truth but we are waiting for the others to comm in so I don’t have to repeat myself.

A few minutes later Stinger, Veel, Menura, Kalie and even Jupiter materialize in the room.

– Majesty, Sir, the Skybreakers say.
– As you were, Jupiter says.
– At ease, Stinger says.
– Your Majesty, I haven’t said a word, Leo says quickly.
– Jupiter. And I know Leo. That’s fine.

Leo relaxes.

Caine and Jupiter look at each other for a short moment.

– I trust you. She says.

He nods and turns back to his teammates.

– What have you noticed? Caine asks.

They look at each other and then Aves breaks the ice.

– I’ve never seen you this calm, he says.
– Some of us noticed that you smell like Her Majesty, Castor says.
– There was no bed for you in her room and it looked as though it was your room too. Tristan says.
– Her Majesty worries about your safety. Ezin says.

He nods.

– Well, that is all true and there is a somewhat complicated explanation. Stinger and Leo more or less know about the reasons for this, but they were both under order from Jupiter to not speak of it to anyone. What you are about to learn is of the upmost secrecy and you can not reveal it to anyone. Beside Leo, only people Her Majesty considers family know about this.

He pauses for a moment.

– Let’s start with the shakes and the scent. Yes, I do not shake anymore, thanks to Jupiter, and it is for the same reason that I smell like her and part of the reason I could not kill her back at the beginning of all this, although that was not conscious but instinct at that point. She is my Alpha.
– Sir? Aves says.
– I won’t get into specific details as most of it is for Lycantant only, but usually Lycantant pack-bond after they get out of the gestator and Betas smell like the Alpha as an indicator. You all know that as a runt I did not bond with my pack, but after rescuing Jupiter, my biology started to bond with hers rapidly and as such the pack-bonding fixed my biology as it is supposed to do and I do not shake anymore. It explains part of why she worries about my well-being. She is my Alpha, and I am her Beta. We are pack-bonded. That bond is permanent and was always supposed to happen.

– I do not understand. Kalie says.

– Let me continue. Both our lives were meant to meet and intertwine. It was our destiny. You’ve all seen the brand my splicer gave me, which means nothing more then the mark of being less then humans to us, but it means something for Earthlings.

He turns to Jupiter and she nods to him, understanding that he wants her to say it.

– The first part of the brand is the international symbol for Jupiter. I have used that symbol for years to represent me, it is even part of my official Earth signature, like my sigil in space. The second part being the Jupiter symbol reversed means that that person is equal and opposite to Jupiter and the rectangle means together. All of it means “Jupiter and the one who is her equal and opposite, together.” And as it is branded unto Caine, it means that he is my equal and my opposite. He is mine, even before we met, he was mine.

The Skybreakers seem a little in shock.

– There is more. Jupiter calculated that my existence started in the gestator 23 Earth years ago, on the day she was born. That same day the stars predicted that she was born for a great future, which is self-explanatory, and that there would be a great man and a great love in it. I am that man, I am that love.

At the mention of love, they all seem confused. Everyone knows lycantant do not feel emotions.

– You all know that I am not a standard Lycantant, but you don’t know just how different I really am, because I’ve always had to hide parts of me, or I would have been terminated for unsanctioned abilities. If you do not want to be burdened by this secret, it is the time to leave.

Aves looks around at the other teammates and then speak.

– We have been through too much together, Caine, no one will leave. Your secrets are safe with us.

He nods, he might never had a proper pack before Jupiter, but his teammates were the closest he had, they mean a lot to him, and he decides to let some of that show on his face.

– The others of my kind are much taller and darker then I am. That is because as a runt, I was created by random cells from the other lycantants in my gestator. As such, they are not my siblings, like in other packs, but my parents. And I could not bond to the Alpha, because I have some of his Alpha genes in me and the others could not bond with me because I am also a Beta. It also means that I was not engineered, like other Lycantants, and because of this some abilities have not been blocked in me like for standard Lycantant. I’m not sure how much unsanctioned abilities I do have, but the main one is that I do have emotions.

Pavonia’s feathery antennae move in a strange pattern and she gasps.

– Pavonia?
– I’m sorry sir, I shouldn’t have scanned you without permission.
– Elaborate.
– Moth-splice can detect strong or pure emotions.
– And what can you detect?

Pavonia looks from Caine to Jupiter, and Jupiter to Caine. Jupiter can guess she worries about revealing Caine’s feelings in front of the Queen. She smiles.

- Pavonia, there is nothing you can reveal that I don’t already know about. She says.

Pavonia nods at Jupiter and her antennae redo the pattern before she speaks.

– You really do love? She asks.
– Yes, I can feel all the emotions, including love, the most important one of them all.
– And if I was physically here, you would detect the same love from me. Jupiter says.
– Which also explains why she worries about me and why I do sleep in her bed, as it is my bed too. I belong to her in every sense of the word. She is my Queen, my Alpha and my mate.

He raises his right arm and brushes his fingers on his arm-cuff. Their mouths gape open.

– By your faces I can see that you understand the scope of this knowledge. Jupiter says.

Stinger finally speaks up.

– You must all be careful with that knowledge. There needs only one wrong person to learn about this and all that Her Majesty is trying to build and change will come crashing down. Caine would be terminated, we would be recalled by the legion, split-up and most probably sold off. And Her Majesty would be without protection.
– What does that change in our duties? Asks Veel.
– Beside having a large secret to protect? Nothing. Caine being my mate does not give him more authority then he already has and I will not be more indulgent with him then with anyone else when it comes to his duties.
– May we know who knows about this? Aves asks.

Jupiter nods.

– My mother, my aunt, the Apini, all of you now and Caine’s sons.
– His sons? A few Skybreakers ask.
– That is a complicated story too, Caine says.
– And another secret you should know about. You don’t need to know how we found out but, Caine’s splicer and her apprentice were not above board with their splicing practice.
– They made splices using my gene-print. Neuri Arcadia and Fenris Tyr of the Fierce Sentinels are my gene-sons and there could be more.
– And the part of them that they got from Caine made them have emotions and pack-bond to the both of us, we are their Alphas, they are our Betas.
– Nuts and bolts, Kalie exclaims.
– Mouldy log, Castor murmurs.
– Yeah, it’s complicated.

She shrugs.

– I need you all to do one thing for me.
– Majesty, they say.

She looks down to collect herself and when she looks up she has switched to her Queen demeanour.

– If you see any one of them shaking or trembling, you have to inform me immediately, no matter where I am or what I am doing. Use the code name staya, I will know what it means. And you have
to make sure they reach me, or they could die. Is that understood?

Stinger and Caine understand the word staya, pack in Russian, and they nod.

– Yes, Your Majesty, they answer.
– Good. Skybreakers, you are not allowed to not speak of any of this to anyone without prior authorization.
– Majesty, they say, with their fist going to their chest.
– Good, I must go now, Skybreakers, moya sud’ba. She says before dematerializing.

Stinger, Veel, Menura and Kalie dematerialize after her.

The Skybreakers left in the office, besides Leo, are all stunned.

– Anything else you want to know about? Caine asks.
– I think we need time to absorb all this, Aves says.
– All right, back to your duties then. I have work to do.

They all leave the office and Caine reaches inside his uniform and pull out the ring of hair Jupiter had given him so he could have a piece of her with him always. He brings it to his nose, inhale her scent and lets out a sigh. You would have told him a few weeks ago that he would have a pack and a mate that he would never have believed it even less that his mate would be a Queen.

**On Earth**

Jupiter disconnects the comm disc from behind her ear and hands it back to Kiza. They are in her bedroom, which was the most private room for this kind of discussion.

- You guys okay? She asks the Skybreakers.
– It is a lot to process, Stinger tells his team.
– Yes, Ma’am, Sir. Veel says.
– We will be okay, Menura says.
– I’ve updated my parameters, Kalie says.

– Good, then dismiss. Kiza, let’s go to my office. Jupiter says picking up her laptop.

Jupiter exits her room, and goes to a small room she has taken as an office in this house.

She settles at the desk the gesture to Kiza to sit.

– First of, good morning, how are you doing?
– As good as expected, being with François once more was more then I could dream of.
– He seems like a very nice guy. Not everyone would accept being in a relationship with an “alien”. He really does love you. I hope that you will be happy together.
– Thank you Jupiter, it’s just...
– What?
– Well... It’s hard to be together when he lives in Canada, and I live here and in space.
– Right. Do you want to leave your job and move to Canada?
– Leave my job? No! But I want to be with François too.
– Okay, and how do you propose we do that?
– Could he maybe work for you? He is good with computers and network.
– You want me to offer him a job?

Kiza looks away before answering.

– Yes?
– That’s a great idea, I will need someone to take care of the computers for the office and he did not react badly to the truth.
– That’s putting it mildly, he spent half the day asking me about everything there is out there. He wants to learn about space computers.
– Typical geek, Jupiter says half-laughing.
– Yes, Kiza agrees.
– Okay, see with the Keepers for a work permit for François in the US and when Yulia gets here I’ll ask her to work out an Earth job contract for him and herself.

Kiza notes that on her sheave.

– Did you received my messages?
– Yes, I’ll work on a few uniform anonymizing data package today as for Seraphi’s burial, I will take care of that today too.
– Okay good. Have a black suit and tie in the anonymizing package, so they can get their pictures taken for ID cards for the apartment.
– Going for the secret service look?
– Seems appropriate.
– True. Anything else?
– Yes, a few. First about my space life. This will be my last day on Earth, it is time I get back out there. So I need someplace to go, an Alcazar, or some other property, that I own.
– Okay, Erminea must have a preliminary list, I will check with her and find something appropriate.
– Also, Yulia will need a way to contact me when I am out there. Caine suggested an FTL, and someone has to teach her how to use it.
– Yes, that would be the simplest way. I’ll have one brought down from the ship with the next shift change and I can show her how to use it.
– Okay, great. Now about my Earth-life. I have been thinking and I realized that I have no idea how I do have power, water and gas in all my properties.
– Oh, yes, I arranged that with the Keepers. You should receive all your bills and information at the apartment.
– Okay, good. I will need Internet at all my properties too.
– That could be François’ first task.
– That and purchasing and installing an entire office of computers, printers, and other necessary technology.
– Oh, he eats that for breakfast, Kiza says, smiling.
– Great. Anything on the agenda for today?
– Not until tonight where your greet the next group of people.
– Good. Then I will go to the DMV get my driver’s licence. Oh and I need to buy a car too.
– You want to buy a car?
– I can’t just show up places by the roof all the time, and I need at least one Earth ID with picture.
– I understand. What are you going to get?
– I don’t know... something with room for my guard detail? I always wanted a mini, but I don’t think it would be compatible.
– No kidding. Try to picture Caine trying to fit into a mini...

Both laugh at the image.
– Yeah, bad idea. Kiza says.
– Four doors for sure. Or maybe I should simply buy a limousine?
– That might be a good idea.
– Okay, I’ll put Yulia on that too then. Anything else?
– Not that I can think of.
– Okay, then I’m gonna start shopping for the apartment.
– Did you want to go shopping?
– Oh, no, I meant Internet shopping, but maybe this afternoon if there is time after the DMV. And I should drop by and see how Katherine is doing too.
– Ah, yes, I’ll inform my dad.
– Okay, dismiss.

The first thing Jupiter does is go through her entire Amazon wish list and buys her most wanted items. The astronomy book she eyed for months, the only Pink Floyd album missing from her collection, a high quality globe and a high quality music player. The other items, she can remove them now, she can afford or owns better quality than that already. She smiles and starts going over every departments adding items here and there to her shopping cart, or rather carts, because she is on multiple shopping sites at the same time.

Amongst the items she adds are some small kitchen appliances, yoga equipment, a punching bag and gloves, books, electronics and the entire collection of her favourite TV shows and movies. She could ask the Keepers for all that she wants but she enjoys being able to choose what she wants herself.

– Your Majesty, your guest is here, says Kalie, at the door.
– Come in.
– Morning Jupe! Yulia says.
– Hey Yul.

Jupiter stand and goes and hugs her friend.

– How are you?
– I’m great, considering.
– And how is Will doing?
– Good, they sent him to a rehab centre to learn to walk again, but the treatment from your doctor really helped a lot.
– Yeah, space stuff can be amazing.
– And terrifying.
– Can’t fix everything in a day.
– So true.
– So you want the job? Jupiter asks going back to her desk and sitting down.
– I thought about it and, yes. I’m sure you will provide good work conditions and besides, who else then me could do it? Not like you can place an add for the “assistant to the Queen of the world” position.
– True, but I have to tell you, I have no idea what I am doing.
– It’s a good thing I do, well, more or less, I don’t have real experience, but I have the knowledge.
– That’s more then I do, tell me your ideas.
– You should create a company to handle the business side of your Earth life, to keep your personal life and business one separate, but keep it small, at least at first.
– Sounds good, I have another future employee too.
Yulia takes her phone out and starts a note.

– Who is it?
– François Laroche, Kiza’s fiancé. Long story short, he’s a Quebecker, the Keepers will get him a work permit for the US and he does computers and networks.
– Oh, great. No business can work without computers these days.
– Yeah.
– Any idea on a company name?
– “The Jupiter Jones’ company”? She says jokingly.

Yulia snorts.

– Jupe!
– Okay, okay, how about “Her Majesty’s office”?

Yulia rolls her eyes.

– Okay, no joking. How about “Jupiter Ascending”
– That sounds good actually.
– What about the company’s business plan? What do you want it to be for?
– How about funding projects that benefit the planet?
– Like cleaning the oceans, and finding better ways to make energy?
– Yeah, or helping end hunger, slavery, gender inequalities, etc.
– So a non-profit then?
– Yeah, it’s not like I need to make money.
– Okay, I’ll start working on that, I suppose I have to write my own work contract?
– Yeah, and for François too.
– Do we get a dental plan?
– Oh, yeah, sure, dental plan, insurance, the works. Find the best companies for everything.
– You will be the best boss ever.
– The boss also needs transportation, spaceships are fast, but I need something more Earth style too.
– And I suppose the boss won’t be going out alone?
– Exactly.
– Then I suppose a stretch car or limousine?
– Yeah, something with enough room for 6 foot tall men in the back seats.
– Okay, I’ll start on that too.
– Great, one last thing, how are you doing money wise?
– Not too well, with daddy’s accident I’ve stretched my savings a lot.
– And I’m sure you’ve got bills to pay.

She pulls out her phone and checks out average executive assistant salaries on job sites, and like with her space people, she doubles it, then writes a check and hands it to Yulia.

– Here this is your first pay, you have a lot of work to do and I don’t want you to worry about money.
– Jupe! That’s too much! Is that a month’s pay?
– No, two weeks. Double the average pay is my policy up there and it will be down here too. No one should have to worry about money. I know what that’s like.
– Thank you.
– Okay, let me close my things and you can use my computer to get started.

She completes her transactions and closes all her open accounts before turning the laptop over to Yulia.
– I’m not sure when I’ll be back, but call me if you have any problem.
– Bye.

Jupiter goes to her room and gets the papers she needs before going downstairs.

– *Mama*, I’m going out, she says by the door.

Aleksa walks in from the kitchen.

– Need help?
– Just going to get Earth ID sorted out.
– Okay *dochon’ka*, good luck.
– Thanks, can’t be worse then Orous.

Out she goes to the nearest DMV office with her personal guards. Instead of taking a ship, she takes them to the nearest station and buys monthly passes for herself and her guards. They board the next train and exist near the DMV office, to where they walk. Jupiter chose this DMV office because it is located inside a mall. She stops at an ATM to get some cash then turns around and gives it to her guards.

– Here, if you need anything while I’m in there.

Only Stinger enters the DMV with her, Kalie, Veel and Menura going on patrol.

She exits an hour later with her driver’s licence and a smile and finds Veel reading a newspaper on a bench.

– Anything interesting in the news? She asks.
– I do not know ma’am, I do not understand most of it.
– May I? She asks gesturing to the paper.
– Of course.

She takes the newspaper and reads the titles quickly.

– Humans killing each others and the planet. Gosh do I have my work cut out for me. She says handing the newspaper back to Veel.

She sighs.

– Let’s go back to the house.

**Space**

---Lunch---
Up in space, Caine is finding it harder then he imagined it would be to be away from Jupiter, it’s not that he does not know if she is safe, Stinger is keeping him updated, he knows that she went out for an ID and that she is back at the house for lunch, but his lycan genes urge him to be near his Alpha. He does his best to ignore that instinct and on shift change Aves replaces him in the security office and he goes to the mess hall for lunch himself.

He goes to the automated food dispenser not looking forward to a bland meal and he wishes he was with Jupiter because she always makes him taste delicious foods and he is stomped when the dispenser is out of order.

– You won’t get food there, sir! Says a voice.

He turns around and faces one of the Sentinels.

– Why is that, lieutenant Elwood?
– The chef turned it off. She is preparing fresh food with Earth ingredients. You have to go to the kitchen pass-through. She is trying her recipes with us before she takes them to the Queen.

He smirks.

– Do you like any of it?
– I’ve never had such amazing food, Sir.
– Thank you.

At the pass-through he is greeted by Tergum Polaire, the sous-chef.

– Good day, commander, what will it be?

Chef Plume gets to the pass-through and, not noticing Caine, sighs her frustration to Tergum.

– These recipes are so strange, I don’t understand these measures. And this one, how do you shred these vegetable called potatoes?
– You need a grater for that. Caine says, smirking.

Plume notices Caine and starts apologizing.

– Commander, I’m sorry, I was distracted. Wait, what? A grater? How?
– Her Majesty showed me. You pass the peeled potato on the grater and it makes slivers of potato.
– Thank you, and do you know what size are these cups and spoons?
– No, but I’ve seen their ladyship use very specific cups and spoons in their kitchen.
– I should have known that this would be harder then asking their ladyship for Her Majesty’s favourite recipes. Anyway, not your problem. I’ll bring you a meal right up.

She goes back to the kitchen and fills a plate with her attempts at Earth cuisine and comes back with it for him.

– Thank you.

He sits at a table and starts to eat. The food is good, but not the quality the chef will want to offer the Queen. It shows and taste that Plume is learning about this type of food. After his meal, he goes to the training room on the military deck.
---Training---

He starts by inspecting and familiarizing himself with the facility, then he trains for about 30 minutes and it somewhat alleviates the ache in his chest at missing Jupiter. It feels good to be working out because he has not trained since meeting Jupiter. He did have to fight with the Sargorns to rescue her, and there was the Olympics where he pushed himself, but he mostly has been standing still for the last two weeks and this feels really good.

After his training session, he feels centred and ready to evaluates his team and the Sentinels. He consults with Lowe Felis, the physical therapist and trainer and Leo’s twin, on the physical condition of everyone and they divide their tasks. Lowe is responsible for individual training and Caine for team and military training.

They gather everyone at the centre of the facility and Caine is in Alpha mode.

– You all know who and what I am, so I will not waste time introducing myself. I was previously occupied with guarding Her Majesty full time, but now that everyone has settled in their guarding duties, she has freed me to attend to my other duties, including your training. Mr. Felis updated me on each of your physical condition and every one is in peek condition, even lieutenant Lang, who was shot by an Earth weapon a few days ago and almost died. I will be adding a familiarization with Earth weapons to your training, to better protect everyone, as her Majesty intends to keep at least an Alcazaar on this planet. Today we will be practising defence under fire. You will all team up in groups of four. Two will be the attackers, one will pretend to be Her Majesty, the attackers will try and kill “her” while the fourth must protect “her” at all cost and attempt to eliminate the attackers if possible. Is there any question?

– When would we be alone to protect Her Majesty? Asks Myst Storm.
– Ensign, as Her Majesty says, you never know what can happen. I’ve had to rescue her by myself within days of her ascension.
– Is it true that you fought against a team of Sargorns and finished the leader in hand to hand combat to do so? Asks Pachy.
– Where did you hear that?
– Neuri and Fenris told us.

He looks at his betas.

– Her Majesty told us, Fenris says.

He smirks.

– Yes. When Balem forced her hand by kidnapping her family, I had to rescue her and her whole family from him and his Sargorns. Not an experience I wish to relive in the near future.

A few Sentinels gasp.

– Team up and get your gear. He orders.

Everyone teams up by group of four and picks up training weapons. These have no anti-matter charge in them. They only discharge a small electric buzz.
Each team goes through the exercise three times, so they each get to be the attacker, the defender and the defended. They are good in general, especially the Skybreakers, but a few Sentinels could use additional training. Lowe takes notes when he notices particular aspects that need more individual training to be as effective as the others and Caine shows them some combat techniques he has used to defend Jupiter, back at Kiza’s house and on the Jupiter’s refinery.

At the end of the afternoon, they are all tired and sweaty when they head to the barrack’s ‘freshing facilities.

Neuri and Fenris shimmy up to Caine by the uniform dispenser.

– Are you two okay? He asks.
– Yes, sir, fine. Fenris says.
– Sir, could you teach us that last move? It was really impressive. Neuri asks.
– Yes, but not right now. I have a third shift today.
– Oh, of course, sir.

Caine takes his clean uniform ans takes a spin through the cleaning cubicle before getting an update from Aves and heading to the docking bay. He feels anticipation as Jupiter is coming up to the ship.

Earth

Back at her house, Jupiter finds the house really quiet but nothing is misplaced.

– Mom, Nino? She calls.
– They went shopping, Yulia says from the kitchen.

Jupiter sighs and takes out her phone to call her mom.

[Hello?]
– Hey, mom, it’s me.
[Everything good?]
– Yes, I’m at the house, got my driver’s license.
[Oh good, we went shopping, tailed by Onyx and Marsu.]
– Yulia told me. What are you shopping for?
[We went back to boutique for clothes and now are picking towels, bed sheets and other things for apartment.]
– Okay, great. If there is anything you want to bring with you to space, pick some up too.
[We leaving soon?]
– Tomorrow, I think. I’ve been home for too long.
[Good girl. We’ll be ready]
– Thanks mom, bye.
[Bye.]

She hangs up and joins Yulia in the kitchen.

– What’s all this? Jupiter asks looking at two large platters of food. One filled with sandwiches cut in triangles and one filled with veggies and dips.
– Your mom and I made lunch before they went shopping.
– Oh, great. Are you alone?
– I think there is a guard on patrol or something, but yeah.
– Where is Kiza?
– She said something about a lunch date and that she would be back for 1pm.
– Okay, great. Let’s put that out there for everyone.

She takes the platter of sandwiches and places it on the dinning table and Yulia does the same with the veggie platter. Jupiter gets some plates and sets them on the table too.

She fixes herself a plate of food and tells Stinger and the guards to go ahead and eat before going up to her office with her plate. Yulia joins her with her own plate and they discuss details for the company until Kiza arrives.

– Kiza, come in.
– I see it did not take too much time at the DMV.
– It’s not the Commonwealth Ministry.
– True, and no one tried to kill you for your ID this time.
– Always a bonus. Jupiter says ironic, pointing to a chair.

Kiza sits.

– Anything new?
– The Keepers are working on François’ work permit and I’ve launch the data search on Seraphi’s remains disposal. I have the FTL transmitter and the uniform anonymizing data package are ready, would you like to review them?
– Huh? Oh sure.

Kiza turns a sheave on and it displays various outfits in 3D: jeans with t-shirts, jeans with long-sleeve button-up shirt, cotton pants with polo shirts and a black suit with tie.

– That seems good, give copies to the Skybreakers and Sentinels on duty.
– Okay. Would you like me to teach you how to use the FTL now?
– Yes.

Kiza pulls a device from her pocket, places it on the desk and stretches it and unfolds it a few time.

– Oh, that’s the thing Caine was using when I woke up. I was wondering what it was.

Kiza teaches Yulia and Jupiter how to use the FTL. It’s is quite easy once you get used to the holo-keyboard and it reminds the two women of textos.

– Do you require anything else? Kiza asks once Jupiter and Yulia are somewhat comfortable with the FTL device.
– Transport for a shopping trip and a visit to Katherine. Oh and a pit-stop for the ID cards for the apartment.
– I’ll arrange that right away. Kiza says standing.
– Dismiss. Yulia, you should come with me, you will need an ID card too.
– Okay.

---Shopping---
There has been a shift change on lunch time and Veel, Menura and Kalie were switched for Castor, Ezin and Pavonia. When they reach the top of the garage, a different ship waits for them.

– That’s a planet jumper but not the Diana, Jupiter says.
– No, the Diana is for Caine’s use, as you ordered. That’s your other planet jumper the Abrasax 5-Φ-8. Kiza answers.

Jupiter rolls her eyes. Another one to name, she thinks.

They get on board and while they fly Jupiter searches for a Roman name for the ship.

– Kiza, this ship will be the Apollo, after the Roman god, twin brother of Diana.
– That is clever. Apollo and Diana for the planet jumpers, noted.
– How many more ships in the Maximillian’s docking bay?
– You have a shallop, a pinnace and two wings of zeros.
– Shallop, that’s a troop transport right?
– Yes.
– And what’s a pinnace?
– It’s like a cutter, but it has a portal drive.
– The Mercury is the cutter, right?
– Yes.

She types on her phone.

– What do you think of Hercules for the shallop?
– Who’s that?
– You’ve never heard of Hercules?
– No.
– He is a Greco-Roman hero. Half-god, son of Zeus or Jupiter and a human woman. And he posses superhuman strength.
– A god-splice?
– Yeah, I guess you could say that.
– That’s perfect!
– Great, one more done, last one... let’s go with... Chiron, the greatest of Centaurs.
– Oh, I’ve heard of Centaurs. That’s the half-human half-horse one yes?
– Exactly.

– We’ve arrived, Your Majesty. Stinger says from the pilot seat.
– Thanks, Stinger. Everyone put the black suit and tie outfit.

She stands to exit the ship and they go to the shop recommended by Henry Clark for ID cards.

– How may I help you, says the young man at the reception.
– Your shop was recommended by the Gocachi complex for ID card.
– Yes, we do a lot of cards for clients of the complex.
– How does it work?
– You choose the template that you prefer, then we save the basic details in your profile and you simply send your employees here where we take their picture and completes the details of their ID and print their cards.
– Sounds easy. Can I see the templates?
– Of course.

The young man opens a leaflet on the counter.

– I like this one, clean and simple.
– Perfect, is the card only for the Gocachi complex?
– Yes.
– Okay, name for the account?
– Jupiter Ascending.
– And your name Ms.?
– Jupiter Jones.
– Jupiter? That is unusual. The man says.
– Yeah, my dad was an astronomer, it was his favorite planet.
– Oh, well, it’s... original.
– Oh, I’m lucky, he could have liked Uranus.

Yulia starts to laugh, Jupiter has said that every time someone picked on her for her name when she was young.

The young man winces awkwardly before finding his composure back and presenting Jupiter with paperwork.

Jupiter fills and signs a form and they proceed to having their picture taken and their ID cards made. She does not really need one for herself, but she has one made out anyway, and then for everyone present with her.

The design she choose is very simple, at the top it says Gocachi complex, then her company name, Jupiter Ascending, then the department for the employee, she gets CEO for herself, guards get Security, and Yulia and Kiza get Communications, the next section has the picture on the left in a blue rectangle and on the right it says the height and eye color, under that is the name of the person and the final section is for an expiration date, which she set at the standard four years, on August 31st, 2019.

Those who get cards that days are:

Jupiter Jones, CEO, 5’4”, green eyes
Stinger Apini, security, 5’11”, blue eyes.
Castor Albert, security, 5’10”, brown eyes
Ezin Lidal, security, 5’9”, grey eyes
Pavonia Saturn, security, 5’7”, grey eyes
Adnar Yinrona, security, 6’, brown eyes
Kiza Apini, communications, 5’, blue eyes.
Yulia Petrovich, communications, 5’3”, blue eyes

They leave with their ID cards and board the Apollo.

– Where do you want to go next, ma’am? Stinger asks.
– Chicago Ridge Mall. I could shop place more expensive, but I don’t have time to waste and I know where everything is in that Mall.
– Okay. He says heading to the pilot seat.

– What’s next? Jupiter asks Kiza, sitting down.
– The two wings of zeros.

Jupiter smirks.

– Don’t need to name everyone of them. What about red wing and gold wing?
– What is that from?
– Star Wars. “Red leader, this is gold leader.” Jupiter quotes.

Yulia giggles in the back.

– Thanks for the approval, Yul, Jupiter quips.
– Always, she retorts.
– All right, Kiza sighs.

Stinger has them portal down in a hidden corner, that turns out to be the dumpster area, before he lands the Apollo on the top of the mall and joins them, lowering himself down to the ground using his boots.

– You see why I also need a limo? Jupiter says to Kiza and Yulia, pointing to the dumpsters.
– Yeah, I’m working on it. Yulia says.

Kiza simply nods.

They enter the mall and Jupiter goes to Bed Bath & Beyond. The three women each take a caddy and they start in the bedroom section. With college starting soon, there are specials all around the store. She picks up pillows, bed sheets and a comforter, a few packs of clothes hangers, and some trinkets. In the bathroom section she picks up towels, a bath mat, a shower curtain, bathroom accessories and even a clothes hamper in navy. She does a hook by the kitchen section and picks up a few items that she did not order online, including some coffee, and head for the cash register.

The next stop is the little boutique they stopped at before going to space, where Christine is still tending to the shop. When she recognizes Jupiter and Kiza, she comes at them with a big smile.

– Ms. Jones! How nice to see you, I saw your mother earlier. What can I do for you today?
– I’m not sure yet.
– Okay, feel free to look around and if you need anything, let me know.
– Okay.

Jupiter turns to Kiza and Yulia.

– If you two see anything that you like, take it.

They spend the next hour picking out clothes. Yulia picks out a few item that can accommodate a future baby bump and Jupiter and Kiza have a whole array of clothes. Christine has been putting the clothes in changing cabins for the whole hour and the three women proceed to trying out clothes. Kiza shows some outfits to her dad and Jupiter can notice a wet sheen in his eyes at a certain point. Stinger is the only guard inside the store, so Jupiter asks him if he is okay.

– You give her more then I ever could… I just never could offer her nice things growing up.
– Dad! I had everything I needed. Kiza says through the cabin door, half-irritated.

Jupiter walks to him in a navy dress she was trying on, and places a hand on his arm.

– Stinger, I know you have trouble accepting this, but it is the least I can do considering what you all did and still do for me.

She pauses before adding.

– And besides she needs to look the part, jeans and backless thank tops are fine at home, but not on the job.
– I heard that, Kiza says through the door, again.
– Hey, I like that top, Jupiter retorts.
– Yeah, yeah, it’s just not as nice as this, Kiza says stepping out of the cabin in a fancy cornflower blue dress that matches her eyes and highlights her hair and pale skin.
– Gosh Kiza, you make everything look good! Jupiter says.
– What’d you think, dad?

Stinger is silent, looking at his daughter in awe for a moment. He needs time to find the right word to describe just how beautiful she looks and he finally finds it.

– Perfection. He says.
– Dad!
– Well, I guess we will be taking that dress. Jupiter says.

They finish trying out the clothes and leave after Jupiter pays for everything. They drop almost everything at the apartment, Jupiter keeps the coffee and other items she wants to take up to the ship, before going back to the house.

Aleksa and Nino are at the house too, packing up things to bring with them.

– Hey, mama. Found everything you needed?
– Yes, dochen’ka. You?
– Yes. I’ll go pack too, then I want to check up on Katherine before we leave.
– Okay. A package arrived for you, on your bed.
– Oh, thanks.

She goes to her room and opens the package. It is the PowerPack she had ordered. She packs it with her coffee, essentials and some trinkets she wants to bring with her, and at the last moment she stashes her rock collection in her bag. She also packs her laptop after Yulia transfers her work to an online cloud account she opened under Jupiter Ascending.

---Katherine Dunlevy---

Once she is done packing, she gives last moment instructions and keys to the apartments and her house to Yulia and calls Katherine.
Hey Jupiter

– Hey Katherine, how are you doing?
– Considering the doctors have no idea how I am alive and all, I would say pretty good.
– Are you still at the hospital?
– No, they released me yesterday.
– Oh great, can I stop by?
– Oh, yeah sure, but I’m at Austin’s house. He did not want me to be alone.
– I can understand that. Text me his address and I’ll be there soon.
– Okay, sure.
– See ya.
– Bye.

She hangs up. And brings her things to the front door. Where Kiza takes charges of them.

– I’ll be going up to the ship with Aleksa and Nino, I’ll make sure your things get to your quarters.
– Thank you.

Jupiter leaves with her guards and she portals down between two houses, accompanied by Castor and Ezin. Stinger will find a place to land the ship and go on patrol with Pavonia. She notices Jacbane Farnala walking down the street before she walks to the front door and knocks. Good Stinger put Katherine on the list of people to protect. She thinks.

A butler opens the door.

– Hello?
– Hi, I’m Jupiter, I’m here to see Katherine.
– Ah, yes, please come in, Ms. Dunlevy informed me. He says stepping aside.
– Thank you.
– And these are?
– My security.

His head tipping to the side is his only reaction.

– Ms. Dunlevy is in the blue living room with Mr. Davis. Right this way.

She follows the butler, trailed by Castor and Ezin, until they reach a plush living room. Austin’s house is huge, no wonder with him being the 8th richest bachelor, well, not a bachelor anymore, under 30 in America, as Katherine had said.

– Ms. Jones. The butler announces.

Before Jupiter can enter the living room, Castor steps in front of her.

– One moment, Ma’am.

Jupiter roll her eyes, but nods. She has to get use to protocol.

Castor enters the living room, and comes back out a few seconds later and gestures for Jupiter that it is safe to enter.

– Ma’am.
– Thank you, she says to both the butler and Castor.

She enters the living room with Castor and Ezin at her back and faces a very curious Katherine and confused Austin.

– Jupiter, please come in, sit. I thought you would come alone, I’m not really in a state to entertain guests.

That is to put it mildly. Katherine is black and blue everywhere Jupiter can see, she has stitches in a few places, a pair of crutches are on the side of the sofa where she sits and Jupiter can see a cast peeking out of the blanket which covers her legs.

Jupiter sits in a chair, Castor stays by the door and Ezin goes by the window.

– I can rarely be truly alone anymore. Castor and Ezin are part of my security detail.
– Security, I thought you were a maid? Austin says.
– Not anymore. She says looking Austin in the eyes.

She turns back to Katherine.

– It’s complicated and I do not want to overwhelm you more then you already are. But I want to thank you, if you had told them my name, I would probably be dead.
– That’s kinda harsh. Katherine says.
– Considering what he did, it’s the truth. Without Caine, I would be dead.
– Caine? Austin asks.
– The man with me at the hospital. He is part of my security too.
– In the hospital, you said the one who sent the dragon and the others after me wanted to get something from you. What was it?
– The most important part of an inheritance I received.
– Will he come after me again?
– Him? No, he did not survive Caine’s rescue of me, and by now the others involved know who I am. But I still have someone watching over your safety until I can be sure no one gets any bright ideas.
– What?!
– Yeah, I’m telling you so you don’t get paranoid over being followed. My security chief put you on the list of people to protect.
– Security chief? Just how many security do you have to need a security chief? Austin asks.

Jupiter shrugs.

– That is a far more interesting question then you might suspect, and the answer far more complicated then a simple number. Let’s just say I have enough for my needs.
She pauses for a moment, letting them absorb the information.
– Anyway, the people protecting you are part of a team called the Sentinels. If you ever are in trouble, call for them.
– Okay.
– Ma’am, it’s time to go. Castor says.
– Right, okay. Katherine, I’ll be out of reach for a while. Not sure how long yet. But I’ll text you Yulia Petrovich’s phone number, she is my exec. Call her if you need to reach me for something important.

She stands.

– Austin, take good care of her.
– Of course. He says standing too.
– Katherine, I’ll call you when I get back.
– Okay, Jupiter.

Austin escorts her to the front door.

– I wanted to thank you. I saw her medical file. I don’t know how you did it, but I’m sure it was not only prayers that healed her. He says by the door.
– You are welcome.

Castor opens the door and exits, she follows and Ezin comes out next.

They walk away from the house, unto the sidewalk and down three houses before Stinger picks them up with the fermionic beam.

On the Apollo, she texts Katherine and Martin Adams with the information to join her while she is “out of town” and then messages Caine that she is inbound.

They dock in her clipper and Caine steps in to greet her. Stinger and the other guards step out of the Apollo and give them a moment’s privacy.

– Jupiter, he murmurs.

She smiles and reaches a hand out to him.

He takes the few steps to reach her, places his hands around her back and her arms go around to his shoulders. He ducks his head in the crook of her neck and inhale deeply before placing his forehead against hers and saying her name again an inch from her lips.

– Jupiter.

She closes the gap and kisses him. She can feel his need for contact being filled by the way he relaxes and melts in her arms.

– I missed you too. She says.

He smiles and kisses her once more before stepping back into his guard role.

When they step out, Kiza is there to greet her, in her livery. The navy dress with bronze trims, knee-high boots and the white sash is perfect.

– Welcome back, Jupiter. Your new people have arrived and are waiting to greet you and Seiza is awaiting you in your bedroom. Kiza says.

Chapter End Notes

Russian translation:
I love you = Ya tebya lyublyu
My destiny = Moya sud’ba
Synok = son
Staya = pack
Daughter = dochen’ka

Orousian translation:

I love you = Ti p’ougi
Chapter Summary

Jupiter gets new people, and it brings some unexpected.

Chapter Notes

See translations at the end.

New people

After changing in a dress more befitting to her royal status, Jupiter goes to the reception hall and Kiza announces her. She is starting to get use to the announcement part. The Skybreakers have lined up the walls again and some Sentinels are with the newcomers. Must be those with families, she thinks. She walks up to her throne, her navy and white dress trailing behind her as she steps up, and sits down trying to keep a regal attitude. Stinger places himself in the doorframe, wings out and Caine was about to place himself at the bottom of the dais but Jupiter gestures for him come up to her.

– Your place is always by my side, she murmurs.

It makes his last shred of unease of the day vanish and he takes his place behind her left shoulder, standing tall and proud. It feels so good to be by Jupiter’s side again, the hole in his chest is gone and he can breath fully, and breath-in he does. Jupiter’s scent is like air or water, he needs it to live.

– Much better, she murmurs again.

She looks over at the people gathered in the hall, observing, noticing details and pulling her Queen persona together.

Showtime, she tells herself when she feels ready.

– Welcome. For those of you who have family members in my service, you are here because they provided me with your names when asked who they wanted here with them. The others have been transferred or sent over by the Commonwealth Ministry.

Kiza joins Buzz and Erminea at the bottom of the dais and Jupiter calls them up.

– Miss Kiza, Mr. Buzz, Madam Erminea, come forward.
– Your Majesty? Kiza asks after the stepped up the dais.
– Let’s start with the transfers of property, shall we?.
– Of course, Your Majesty. Buzz says.
Caine barely manages to keep a smile off his face as he smells Jupiter’s anticipation.

Buzz hands Jupiter the sheaves and calls Khan and Romi Fangs, Buck and Caprice Elwood, Billie and Ursa Ursinus, Onyx and her sister Ebony Skye, Cyclor and Stiletto Mouche and Mani and Javanica Pholido.

The six families walk up to the dais and kneel.

Jupiter seals the transfer sheaves and gives them back to Buzz.

He steps down the dais and announces.

– As per Her Majesty standing order, family members have been transferred to the highest ranking member of the family, at no cost.

And proceeds to gives each Sentinels the transfer sheave before going back to Jupiter’s side.

– It should be noted that in addition to that, your status has been set as unavailable, which means that you can not be bought away without your consent. Kiza says.

The stunned look and teary eyes are all the thanks that Jupiter needs, and once again, there is one splice that is literally crying. But the cries are really intense and Jupiter is getting concerned. Caine can smell the concern from his Queen and the turmoil from Romi.

– This is not relief or happiness he murmurs in her ear.

Jupiter glances at Caine, stands and steps down her dais and crouches to be leveled with Romi who is huddled on the floor.

– What is it? She asks.
– My baby, she stutters.

Khan lets out a sound that Jupiter can only equates with a roar and Caine moves her out of the way and places himself between Jupiter and Khan before he is done. Stinger is there a fraction of a second later, but Khan only collapses beside Romi and weeps with her.

Now Jupiter is confused. There is no children in their files.

Kiza arrives after them and murmurs to Jupiter, in Russian.

– She probably hid her pregnancy, tigron-splice are sold as babies, to increase fidelity to their masters.

Jupiter looks at Kiza with an angry look on her face, which soften at the apologetic look on Kiza’s.

– Stalin’s balls, she says low, shaking her head at the pain and struggle implied.

She places a hand on Caine’s upper arm and he steps to the side and then behind her, knowing that she would not be harmed.

She crouches back and grabs Romi and Khan’s hands, registering the gasps of onlookers.

– Where is your baby? She asks.
– Back there, the other nurse said she would hide her, I couldn’t smuggle her out, she says weeping.
– What did you name her?
– Sheranee.
– Wipe your eyes Romi, I will get her for you. There is no way in hell that I would be okay with a baby being separated from it’s parents.

Khan and Romi suddenly stop weeping and look at each other before looking at Jupiter. Jupiter herself has tears in her eyes and a fierce look on her face. Caine knows that scent from his Alpha, mate and Queen, there is a full blown tornado whirling beneath the surface, the sun is blazing, the coffee is boiling and her cinnamon heart is melting. He smell how her heart is crying for that family and he knows she is controlling her fury and that she will use it to turn the world upside-down, this time for the Fangs.

Jupiter stands back up, pulling them up with her and gesturing to the others to stand too.

– Buzz, she calls with authority.

Hiven Buzz comes to her side quickly.

– Majesty?
– I need a purchase contract for Sheranee Fangs and… Who exactly is hiding your daughter? She asks Romi.
– Ribbon Ball, python-splice. Romi answers.
– Got that? Jupiter asks.
– Yes.
– Good.
– Your standard stipulations? He asks.
– Of course.

Buzz completes the purchase contracts and offers the sheave to Jupiter.

– Majesty.

She reviews it, seals both contracts, and gives it back to Buzz.

– Kiza, Stinger and Buzz, you take care of that, ASAP, I don’t care how. She orders.
– ASAP? Stinger murmurs.

Jupiter rolls her eye and was about to clarify but Kiza pulls him away, saying Oejjupyp bei wyjjukdi, before Jupiter can answer and the three of them leave the reception hall and Stinger signals to Tristan and Kalie to come with him.

Jupiter takes a deep breath, counts to ten in Russian in her head squeezes Romi and Khan’s hands and goes back to her throne, followed by Caine.

– Madam Erminea, lets move on to positions in my household, shall we? She says to her household manager.
– Of course, Your Majesty. First of, you have Rotram Tra and Janianne Ricli who have transferred from other holdings.

The two of them approach the dais.

– Ms. Tra is a physical therapist assistant, she will work with Lowe Felis to free up some of his time, since he takes care of two departments and Ms. Janianne Ricli is a doctor, to work with Dr. Comb.
Erminea hands her the contract sheaves which Jupiter seals.

– Ms. Tra, Dr. Ricli, welcome to my household.
– Thank you, Your Majesty, they say.
– If I may say something? Rotram Tra adds uncertain.

Jupiter looks at her and smiles.

– Go ahead, she says, nodding.
– I prefer to be called Tram.
– Ha, of course, Ms. Tram, I can understand that.
– Thank you, Majesty.

Jupiter nods and the two women step back.

– Next you have the two intergalactic advocates sent to you by the Ministry, Erminea continues.

The two androids walk to the dais and Jupiter recognizes Bob, at least she thinks it is the same Bob, until he speaks and then she knows for sure it is the same Bob.

– Greeting, Your Majesty. It will be such a pleasure to be working with you again. I am here to assist you with the technicalities of civil laws. Says Bob.
– It is good to see you again Bob.
– Greetings, Your Majesty, I am intergalactic advocate Jill, here to assist you with the technicalities of business laws, says the other advocate.
– Greetings, she returns.

The advocates back away.

– Lastly, I have spoken with your new people and found them positions, says Erminea.
– Very well.

Erminea calls on the people and states their positions.

Istona Wamsley, Head advocate, to supervise Bob and Jill;
Romi Fangs, Nurse;
Caprice Elwood, Teacher, under Madam Apini;
Stiletto Mouche, Assistant to Fleet Admiral Toly;
Ursa Ursinus, Caretaker, to supervise the moving and cleaning crews;
Laszlo Farnala, Moving supervisor;
Javanica Pholido, Cleaning Supervisor, both under Ursa Ursinus;
Ebony Skye, Head of Science and the R&D and
Kareema Palen, Personal finance, under La Jewel.

– Well done, Erminea.
– Thank you, Your Majesty.
– Welcome to my household all, now…

She stands.

– I want to see the Fangs, Istona Wamsley and advocate Bob in my office. The others, Madam Erminea will take care of you. Dismiss.
---Baby rescue---

In the docking bay, Stinger, Kiza, Buzz, Tristan and Kalie board the Apollo.

– Where to? Stinger asks.

Buzz access the data on Romi Fangs.

– According to this, Romi Fangs used to belong to Lord Nerken of House Serket.
– An Entitled?
– Yes.
– Beeswax.
– House Serket is a minor house, dad, nothing like the Abrasax, she says. Where does he ranks in it? She asks.
– Lord Nerken is the second tertiary of House Serket, Buzz informs them.
– That is pretty low, we should not have any trouble.
– Okay, where is he? Stinger asks.
– Third arm of this galaxy, fourth planet in the system called Breganius, Buzz provides.

Stinger gets to the pilot seat and Tristan joins him in the co-pilot and navigator position. Stinger clears the undocking with commander Vang of the Maximillian Jones and once they are clear for portal, Tristan flips a few holo switches to set the coordinates.

– We are set for portal, sir, target planet Petum, system Breganius.

A golden bubble engulfs the planet jumper and they reappear outside the orbit of Petum and it’s moon Arte.

A few seconds after they portalled in, they are contacted by planet security.

– This is security post Petum VI, identify yourself.
– Security post Petum VI, this is the Apollo, captain Stinger Apini of the skyjackers speaking. Sending identity code through channel.
– Identity verified. Please state the nature of your visit.
– Miss Kiza, majordomo of Her Majesty, Queen Jupiter Jones, first prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones, is here to do business on Her Majesty’s behalf with Lord Nerken of House Serket.
– Very well, you may proceed, Petum VI out.

While Stinger was dealing with security, Kiza had contacted Lord Nerken’s majordomo.

– Lord Nerken has a small Alcazaar on the northern part of the mainland, coordinates 26 by 46, Kiza says, stepping into the cockpit.

Tristan inputs the data in the ship system and Stinger fly them there.

– House Serket only owns this system, all their Alcazaars are on this planet, she adds.

They land on a small platform beside the Alcazaar and are greeted by Lord Nerken’s majordomo, a bower-splice.

– Welcome to my Lord’s Alcazaar, I am Pria. My Lord will see you in the study.
They follow Pria inside the Alcazaar to a room filled with sheaves and grand furniture.

– *He probably chose the most luxurious room in the Alcazaar*, Kiza murmurs in Russian to her dad.

Stinger has a half-smile at his daughter before giving his full attention to the surroundings.

– My Lord, Queen Jupiter Jones’ majordomo, Miss Kiza, is here to see you, announces Pria.

Lord Nerken is a short and stout man, with waxy looking brown hair, tied in a long braid going down his back and who has not seen a RegeneX bath in quite a few decades.

– What business does the recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax has with me, he says turning around.
– Oh, welcome, welcome, I did not realize that Her Majesty’s majordomo would be this charming, he adds in a slimy honey dipped tone.

Kiza buzzes with uneasiness and Stinger’s eyes flash gold with warning.

– Lord Nerken, Her Majesty has sent us to collect some splices she acquired from you, Kiza tells.
– Anyone of them to replace you my dear? Because I would gladly make an exchange, you would do such a nice personal splice, he says taking her hand.

Kiza’s removes her hand and her eyes flash gold, dreaming of shooting him between the eyes.

Tristan noticing the turn of events steps forward.

– Everyone who has met Her Majesty would know that she is too fond of Miss Kiza to let her go, sire. He says.
– Harrumph.
– Besides, she can’t sell me, as I am only loaned to her, adds Kiza.
– I’ve never heard of a majordomo on loan.
– These are special circumstances, Lord Nerken.
– Oh well... which splice did she buy from me?

Buzz steps forward with the sheave and Lord Nerken takes it and seals it before reading it.

– One Ribbon Ball, python-splice and one Sheranee Fangs, tigron-splice.
– Never heard of a Sheranee Fangs, I had a Romi Fangs, but no Sheranee.
– I am given to understand that this splice is the baby of Romi Fangs, Buzz says.

That information makes Lord Nerken explode with anger and he throws them out of the Alcazaar.

– Out! They will be brought to your ship. Out! He almost screams.

Not willing to start an Entitled conflict, they have no choice but to leave the premises and return to the Apollo.

– Working for Jupiter, I forgot what Entitleds are really like... That guy gave me the bizz. Kiza says, shaking the feeling away.
– Yes, Her Majesty is not like the rest of them, she treats everyone like equals, Tristan says.
– He’d better keep his word or he will feel the wrath of Jupiter, when it comes to protecting her people, she is fierce, Kiza adds.
Everyone agrees with her and they settle in to wait.

Fifteen ticks later, Pria brings them a small Tigron-splice baby and two guards drop a severely beaten Python-splice on the deck of the ship and they leave without a word.

As soon as Lord Nerken’s people are out of the Apollo, Stinger closes the automated door and lifts up while Kalie rushed to the injured splice’s side.

– Nuts and bolts, sir, she is in bad shape.
– Do what you can, we will be back with Jupiter soon.
– On it sir.

Kalie works with the speed and precision of an android and patches up Ribbon Ball, using some RegeneX to do so.

– Better call in for Dr. Comb, sir. I can’t do enough for her.
– Already done. Set for portal.

---Work---

Back on the Maximillian Jones, Jupiter steps down her dais and exits the reception hall with Caine by her side, followed by the requested people and she goes to her formal office down the corridor.

– Your Majesty, you have a visitor. Says Vespa, at the door.
– Who is it?
– I apologize, Your Majesty, I did not understand his full name. Mr. Lawoch? He said something about computers?
– Oh, François Laroche. Yes, thank you. Better learn his name, he is Miss Kiza’s fiancé.

Vespa opens the door, nodding, and Jupiter steps in, followed by Caine and the others. François is sitting on one of the sofas in the corner and she discreetly signals to him to stay quiet by putting a finger to her lips. He nods in understanding.

– I will start with Mrs. Wamsley. The others can sit, she says, indicating the sofas.

Jupiter sits at her desk with Caine behind her shoulder and she gestures to a chair on which Istona Wamsley sits.

– Mrs. Wamsley, this will only take a moment.
– Please call me Istona.
– Istona, two of my people have asked my permission to get married, which I provided verbally, but I was informed that they do need an official sealed authorization to do so.
– Yes, I can prepare that. Who are they, Your Majesty? She asks taking a tiny sheave out.
– Fleet Admiral Kiran Toly the third and Commander Truly Percadium.

Istona manipulates the sheave and it beeps.

– Noted. Will that be all, Your Majesty?
– Not yet, she tells Istona. Advocate Bob, please join us, she adds looking to the corner of the room.

Bob walks to her desk, still as cheerful as ever, and sits on the available chair.
– Your Majesty?
– As you can imagine, I have a lot to learn to fulfill my role as first prime of the Houses of Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones and to take my place on the Council of Queens. I have studied the Code and Conduct guide and the Ways and Means Commission, but it is not enough. I require an overview of the current laws regarding splices.
– I can prepare a document for Your Majesty, says Bob.
– I need something more then a document on this matter, I need to understand the legal system itself.
– Oh, yes, I understand. Your Majesty did not have a Royal tutor. I can tutor Your Majesty on the current state of the Commonwealth legal system.
– Perfect, see with Miss Kiza for scheduling. Next, I want the two of you to prepare me some sheaves. I require a detailed report on the laws passed or changed by my predecessor in regards to splices, with the arguments presented to the council of Queens, even Council transcripts or recordings if available, and I want an exhaustive list of any loopholes that could be exploited to makes changes to splices laws.
– Does Your Majesty have a specific purpose in mind? Asks Istona.

Caine is holding very still behind Jupiter, he knows what she wants to do, but it is always a risk to tell new people about her goals. He opens his senses to catch on any deception from anyone in the room.

– I do. My predecessor made it so that splices could marry and were not de facto sterilized, so they can have children. As my first fresh step, I want to end the termination of splices with unsanctioned abilities and my ultimate goal on this matter is to make them free beings.

Bob appears shocked by the concept as he stills and an electric arc sparks in his visible circuits. His mouth open in a perfect circle and his head moves in jerky shakes from side to side.

Istona Wamsley is not as shocked as Bob, her husband being the commander of the Sentinels has told her a lot about his splices subordinates over the years and anyone who is working with splices on a daily basis understands that they are not a lower species, quite the opposite.

– That is quite a lengthy goal, Your Majesty, she says.
– Yes, I do know that much.
– If I may suggest?

Jupiter nods.

– It might be more effective for both this short term and your long term goal to work on abolishing the concept of sanctioned abilities altogether.
– Good point. Look into that or any other avenues you can think of.
– Very well, Your Majesty.
– Dismiss.

They rise and bow before exiting the office.

– François?

François joins her at her desk and sits on the chair vacated by Bob.

– Your Majesty, he says, smirking.

She smirks back.
– Don’t start being formal with me François, you know better then that, she says.
– Okay, Jupiter.

In the background, Caine shakes his head.

– So, tell me, what do you think of my ship?
– I haven’t seen much of it yet, but it makes me feel like I traveled into the future.
– Yeah, I know what you mean. All right, I don’t suppose you came up here only for a social visit, so what do you need?
– Hehe, no. Kiza said you had a job for me?
– Ha yes. Kiza wants me to offer you a permanent job in Chicago.
– Yes, we talked about that, it is the smart thing to do. Where is she? She was supposed to be here.
– Something came up. Caine? Can you get an update from Kiza, please?

Caine nods and contacts Kiza with his implant.

– Let’s continue while he does that. I need someone to setup and maintain a computer network over multiple locations for me, including buying the material, finding the Internet provider, setting up accounts, the works. Can you do all that?
– Yes.
– And I need to find a way to get an Internet signal when I am away from Earth.
– That would not be something I could do.
– Of course not. But you can be a consultant for my engineers and you might learn a few things about space tech along the way.
– Where do I sign up? He asks.
– Yulia Petrovich will have your work contract and I left her instructions on what I want. She is my executive assistant. I’ll have a bank account setup for IT and you’ll be able to start after you receive your work permit. Oh and you will need to go get your ID card for the Gocachi complex. Yulia can help you with that too.
She takes her phone out and texts Yulia about the bank account for Jupiter Ascending, giving access to it to François.

– Your Majesty? Caine’s voice is grim.

Jupiter is alarmed right away, she looks at the Fangs sitting on a sofa huddled together and she turns to face Caine.

– Govorite po russki, she says.
– I spoke to Kiza. They completed their task, he says in Russian as asked.
– What’s the problem, not the baby?
– No, she is fine, it’s Ribbon Ball. Her owner had her beat before they could get her. Kalie did what she can to stabilize her, but...
– It’s gonna take RegeneX?
– Da.

She sighs and presses her bracelet.

[Your Majesty?]
– Dr. Comb, Stinger will be here soon with a patient.
[He has contacted me.]
– I want her to live, what ever the cost.
[I understand.]

She presses her bracelet again, stands, joins the Fangs and sits on the sofa facing them. She can see the worry on their faces.

– Khan, Romi.
– Majesty? They say, sounding hopeful and scared at the same time.
– Your daughter is okay, she will be here soon.

The relief on their faces boost her belief in justice and equality.

– She is not so okay, but she will be. No one deserves to die for protecting a baby.

She stands.

– Come with me, you too François.

She exits her office followed by them and goes to the docking bay.

---Return---

– Portal set for Earth Earth, Tristan says.

The Apollo is engulfed in the portal bubble and they emerge outside of the Earth’s orbit.

– Apollo to Maximillian Jones, requesting permission to dock.
– Permission granted, Apollo, welcome back captain Apini.

Stinger flies the ship into the docking bay as quickly as it is safe to do.

As soon as the door opens, Dr. Comb rushes in with Dr. Ricli and Song Jade.

The two doctors take charge of Ribbon Ball and Song Jade checks on the little Sheranee.

Kalie tells Dr. Comb all that she has done and accompanies them out of the ship as they push Ribbon on a fermionic stretcher. Song Jade goes with them too after she knows the baby is okay. The others exit after that, in time to see Romi holding Ribbon’s hand and telling her to hold on as she is pushed toward the medical facilities.

– There is someone here who would like to say hello, Kiza says stepping out of the Apollo.

Khan and Romi are at Kiza’s side before she is done speaking.

– La Jade checked her over, she was not harmed, Kiza adds.

She hands Sheranee over to Romi and tears of joy fall on her cheeks as she holds her to her chest. Jupiter can hear some sort of purring as Romi rocks back and forth on her feet and she notices tears welling in Khan’s eyes.

The utter joy and satisfaction she feels at this very moment gets translated into the perfect coffee, a
gentle breeze, a wonderful sunset and a hint of cinnamon to Caine’s nose. It is the perfect moment.

Kiza had stepped out of the way and went, by François’ side.

– Ça te va bien un bébé, he says in French.
– François, soit un peu sérieux.
– Je suis sérieux.

She blushes and discreetly squeezes his hand.

– On en parlera tantôt.

He takes her hand to his mouth and drops a gentle kiss on her knuckles, her eyes turn yellow and she smiles.

Caine notices and smirks.

A moment later the Fangs walk in front of Jupiter and kneel.

– Your Majesty, there are no words to express our gratitude. Khan says.

She smiles at them.

– Please, stand, there is no need to kneel.

The couple stands but still bow their heads slightly.

– She would have been bought with Romi as is my policy if she had not been hidden, I simply corrected the oversight.

Caine murmurs something to Jupiter and she nods.

– Khan, you did not know about your daughter, did you not?
– No, Your Majesty, Lord Nerken had forbidden us to communicate after he bought her.
– Ublyudok, she says between her teeth.

Caine, Stinger and Kiza wince as the word gets translated. Jupiter counts to ten once before addressing Buzz.

– Buzz, is it ready? She asks.

Buzz was working on the transfer sheave as he now understood the way his Queen operates.

– Yes, Majesty.

He gives her a sheave and she seals it before giving it to Khan.

– Majesty, why? Khan asks after accepting and reading the transfer sheave.

Jupiter stares in the distance and unshod tears make her eyes glisten.

– I lost my father before I was even born, he was murdered, she murmurs.
She blinks a few time and looks back at the Fangs.

– I might be an Entitled in the gyre, but first and foremost I am Russian and there is nothing more important to a Russian then family.

She places a hand on Khan’s shoulder.

– I will never let a family be torn apart if I can do something about it, she says with her Queen tone.

Khan’s fist goes to his chest and he bows his head in salute and acknowledgment.

– Thank you, Your Majesty, Romi says.

She drops her hand and takes a look at the baby.

– She is beautiful, Romi. Now please, enjoy this moment... I must be going.

She turns around, exits the docking bay, shadowed only by Caine, and when they are alone, she lets out a huge sigh and wipes her eyes.

– Where to now? He asks.
– Med Bay.

---Fangs---

In the docking bay the Fangs are still in shock. Kiza, Stinger and Buzz understanding how they feel surround them.

– Is this for real? Khan asks.
– Yes, Her Majesty is a different kind of Entitled. Kiza says.
– She gave me my wife and my two baby-bee, Buzz says.
– She bought and gave me my wife I had not been able to see for 18 years and a baby-bee I did not even know I had, Stinger says.
– I don’t understand, why? Romi says.
– Because she cares for all her people, regardless of how we came to be, as simple and revolutionary as that may be, Kiza says.

She looks at her sheave and notice the change Erminea did on their quarters, moved to a family one.

– Come, let’s get you settled, we’ll stop by the ship’s boutique so you can pick up a few things for your daughter, Lord Nerken did not include any belonging when she was delivered to us.

Romi shivers at the name.

– Come, he can do nothing to you anymore.

Kiza brings the Fangs to the boutique, shadowed by François and all the others return to their duties.

– What’s all this? Romi asks eyes wide open at the abundance of clothes, toys, essentials and decor items.
– Her Majesty’s free to shop boutique. You may get anything that you need for free in here.
– That’s too much! Exclaims Romi.
– Not by Her Majesty’s standard, I have a skyjacker worthy bunk, Khan tells his mate.
– Actually, you now have been assigned to basic family quarters also.

Romi stops in place, half-way reaching to some baby clothes and turns to Kiza.

– Family quarters? She says dumbfounded.

Kiza smiles.

– Yes, no one under Her Majesty’s care sleeps on rags on the floor, even the lowest of the low has a bed and all families have quarters.

Kiza watches as Romi selects items for her daughter as if in a daze, after which she brings them to their quarters, she opens the door, and enters before them. She immediately notice the mothering bed and looking at her sheave sees that it was transferred from Prey Harpa, she makes a note of it to make sure Prey gets a new one.

– Here you are, get settled in, and as Her Majesty says, enjoy your lives changing.

The Fangs enter their quarters and Kiza leaves to join François who was waiting outside the quarters.

– Let me show you the ship, she tells her fiancé pulling him by the hand.

Once the door shuts after Kiza, the Fangs both start to cry of joy, not believing how amazing this all is. Romi places her daughter in the mothering bed and lets out a sound in between a growl and a purr. The next moment Khan is holding her in his arms and he purrs in her hair.

---Medical bay---

In Med Bay, Jupiter is greeted by Song Jade.

– Your Majesty, are you in need of medical attention?
– No, La Jade. I wanted to check the status of Miss Ball.
– Oh, of course, the doctors are still with her, I can ask for an update.
– Do so.

She sits on one of the chairs and closes her eyes while La Jade goes to get the information.

– Do you need anything, Your Majesty? Caine asks concerned, crouching in front of her.

She opens her eyes and peers into his.

– A break? She says sarcastic.

Ne nods.

– I understand.

She moves forward and places her forehead against his.
– I’ll be okay, starting to get used to the unexpected and fixing other people’s bad decisions.
– Jupiter, what do you want?
– After I’m done here, I want an unofficial report from Stinger, diner and then I want to be with you.
– All right. He says, smirking slightly.

He stands back up as he hears La Jade coming back, Dr. Comb is with her.

Jupiter stands too and they stop in front of her.

– Your Majesty, we treated Ribbon Ball according to your directives and she will make a full recovery. We gave her something to make her sleep for tonight to let her body come back from the trauma shock. But you should be able to speak with her before it take effect if you wish to do so. Comb Buzz says.
– Thank you, doctor. Yes, I would like to speak with her.

Dr. Comb guides Jupiter to Miss Ball’s room in which she enters.

– Miss Ball, Her Majesty would like to speak with you, do you feel up to it? Dr. Comb asks.
– I suppose. She says, straightening in the bed.
– Please keep it brief, Your Majesty, I will be in my office if there is anything. Dr. Comb says to Jupiter.

Dr. Comb bows her head slightly and leaves the room.

– Majesty, Ribbon Ball says with emphasis on the “s” sound.
– I must say you look so much better then when you came out of my planet jumper, how are you feeling?
– Okay, I suppose, but confused. Why am I here? Where is here?
– What do you remember?
– I was taking care of a patient and something knocked me out and I woke up here.
– I see… Well, let me introduce myself, Jupiter Jones, signified recurrence of Seraphi Abrasax, Queen and first prime of Houses Abrasax and Bolotnikov-Jones. You are aboard my clipper, the Maximillian Jones, in orbit around Earth, my home planet, because I bought you and the little Sheranee Fangs.
– Sheranee? No, I promised her mother…

Ribbon Ball tries to get out of bed, flustered but Caine holds her back down in the bed.

– It’s okay, it’s okay, she is with both her parents as we speak. Jupiter says.

Ribbon opens wide eyes and her mouth gapes open.

– How? She finally asks.
– Khan is part of my royal guards and I bought Romi for him. It is my standard order to always buy families as a whole. Sheranee was not bought with Romi because she was hidden, I fixed that as quickly as I could once I learned of her existence.
– What about me?
– I had a feeling you would not survive long with your previous owner once he learned of your involvement in hiding the little Sheranee and I was right, he had you beaten up pretty severely before delivering you to my majordomo.

The shock on Ribbon’s face is indication enough of her state of mind.

– Thank you for my life, Your Majesty, she says bowing her head.
Jupiter nods.

– Now rest, we will discuss your future tomorrow.

End of evening

---Jupiter and Caine---

She leaves the room, then med-bay and go all the way to her private quarters in silence, trailed by Caine, where she enters her lounge.

– Max, I want dinner, for Caine and me, in 30 minutes and tell Stinger I want to see him. She tells the ship’s presence.
– Right away, Your Majesty.

Then she crashes down on one of the chaise and bends her head backwards over the backrest.

– Your Majesty is tense, Caine says.
– I wonder why, she retorts jokingly.

She sits back up and goes to pull on her hair but her hand encounters the curly updo Seiza had done and not her comfy ponytail and her hand goes back down and pats the spot beside her on the chaise.

– Sit with me? She asks gently.

Caine does not wait to be asked a second time before joining Jupiter on the chaise as he needs it at the core of his being. He sits on the side of the chaise with no backrest and lets his wings relax in a semi-open position. Jupiter shuffles to be tightly pressed against his side and places her head on his chest. His arm instinctively goes around her back and he lets out a relieved sound to which Jupiter answers with a sigh coming from deep within.

They stay silent for a while, until Stinger’s throat clearing makes them look to the door.

– You asked to see me, Jupiter?
– Yes, please come in.

Stinger enters the lounge and sits in front of Jupiter.

– What can I do for you, Majesty?
– I just want a quick unofficial report on what happened.
– Ah, yes, of course. We went to the planet Petum in the Breganius system to retrieve Sheranee Fang and Ribbon Ball. We met Lord Nerken of House Serket, who owned them.
– Entitled? She interrupts.
– Yes, but nothing like you, it is a small House, they own only one system, and he is a second tertiary.
– I understand, please continue.
– At first he was cooperating, in an unpleasant kind of way… He asked Kiza if she came in exchange and if he could have her as a personal splice.
– What? What a jerk! She says indignant.
– A jerk worse then Titus, in attitude but not in wealth and power, Stinger agrees. As the only pure human with us, Tristan stepped in to clarify that you would never let go of Kiza.

I will have to talk to François about getting an arm-cuff for Kiza, Jupiter thinks.
Stinger continues.

– And after that Buzz gave him the purchase sheave which he sealed. Then when he heard who you bought he got angry and threw us out of the Alcazaar.
– Wait, what? He completed the transaction before he knew who I bought?
– Yes. Is this significant?
– Yes, I think so, but continue.
– We obeyed his order to leave, not willing to start an Entitled conflict, and 15 minutes later his majordomo brought us the baby and two guards dropped Ribbon Ball on the deck and left without a word. Kalie patched her up and we came back here as fast as possible. You know the rest.

She nods.

– Thanks Stinger. Come with me both, she says standing.

She goes to her office across the hallway, sits at her desk and picks up her Ways and Means commission and Code and conduct guide sheaves.

– Sit, sit, she tells them while searching on the sheaves.

Caine and Stinger look at each other, sharing the same curiosity, and sit on the two backless chairs.

– Gde ya eto videľ? She mumbles to herself.

She scrolls the data on the sheave and finds what she was looking for in the Code and conduct guide.

– Got it! Crap, yeah, that’s what I remembered, damn, all right, what can I do about it? She is still talking to herself.

She takes the Ways and means commission and scrolls through it.

– Right, that’s not much, but it’s a start, she sighs.
– What is it? Caine asks.
– According to statute 36D-7, when all parties involved have sealed a sheave, the transaction is complete and final, even if the sheave is not filed.
– Oh, that is why you asked me if he sealed the sheave before knowing who you bought? Stinger says.
– Yes, Ribbon was my property when he had her beat up and almost killed, not his. I can’t let that go by and do nothing about it.
– What are your options? Caine asks with a smirk.

Jupiter smirks back but shakes her head.

– I can’t send you after him, moya sud’ba, even if I wouldn't mind scaring the life out of him. He’s an Entitled, I have to work within the Ways and Means commission if I don’t want to create bigger problems, at least for now. My only valid option is filing a tax grievance for property damage. Which seems like a ridiculous punishment from my point of view.
– Well, maybe not… House Serket is small, as I said they own only one system and don’t have any significant power, a tax grievance could be a huge blow for them, Stinger says.
– Right.

She takes her message sheave and messages Istona Wamsley, her new head advocate: “Please file a tax grievance against Lord Nerken of House Serket for property damage. Damaged property is Ribbon Ball, python-splice, file number 5166353268. Contact Captain Apini and Dr. Comb for detailed reports. - Queen Jupiter Jones.”
– Okay, done. She says putting down her message sheave. Thanks Stinger. Anything else to report on?
– No, Majesty, everything else is the same.
– Very well then, you are dismissed and give my thanks to Tristan for protecting Kiza.
– Majesty? Stinger says confused.

Caine smirks.

– Something else Entitled don’t do, he tells her.
– Oh! Better get used to it, it is who I am, I will never take anything any of you do for granted.

Stinger has a one sided grin. The thought that Jupiter might change with her new position and wealth remains at the back of his mind, but it is as if every chance she gets to change, she choose to remain herself. It surprises him every time.

– Okay, so how do you wish me to proceed? He asks.
– Just tell him that I’ve said thank you for protecting Kiza.
– Simple as that?
– Yeah.
– All right, Stinger agrees, standing up.

Caine stands too.

– Sting, can I talk to you in private? He asks.

Stinger knows that when Caine calls him Sting, it’s the friend talking and not the legionnaire.

– Sure, pup.
– You two can use the lounge, Jupiter tells them.

They nod and leave the office.

– What’s up pup? Stinger asks in the lounge.
– I wanted to say…

He looks down, unsure of himself suddenly.

– What? Stinger asks when Caine falls silent.
– Thank you, for taking personal guard shifts today. It helped a lot.

Stinger smirks, Jupiter was right.

– I see you are taking some of Her Majesty’s habit.
– What?
– She also thanked me for that, this morning.
– Oh, maybe I am. Is that okay?
– Yeah, pup, in private like this it’s okay, but don’t do it in front of the others, don’t want them to think I treat you differently.

Caine nods slightly.

– I understand.
– Good, now go be with her, she needs you as much as you need her.
– Yes, sir. He says formal, before leaving the lounge and returning to her office.

He finds the office empty but his nose and ears tells him she went to the ‘fresher room adjoining her office, so he stands by the door, waiting for her to come out.

– Oh, hey, you know you can sit without me telling you to, right? You don’t have to stand by the door, she says when she exits the ‘fresher room.

Caine smirks and looks down.

– I still have to get used to that, harder to do in space then on your Earth.
– All right.
– Your Majesty, your diner is served in your private dining room, Max says.
– Hungry? She asks stepping to the door.
– Yes.
– Good, me too, let’s go eat.

They sit down for dinner, Jupiter still grateful for the curule which allows anyone to sit on them regardless of biological or synthetic appendages.

– So how was your day, beside telling the whole truth to your team? She asks as she starts to eat.
– Desk duty is not the most interesting. It’s mainly going over reports and logs, organizing schedules and managing the teams.
– Yeah, paperwork is never exciting, but it usually has to be done.
– Exactly. The training session was much more interesting. I found out that exercising helps with your absence.
– Yes, exercising makes one feel good. Something about hormones.
– After my own training, Lowe and I put everyone through evaluation and training exercise.

He relates the exercise he had them perform.

– So you want them to be as proficient as you at rescuing me.
– Doing otherwise would go against all that I am and who you are to me.

The large puff of cinnamon heart Jupiter release at that makes him a little dizzy and he looks down at his plate to focus back. Jupiter notices. She always notices.

– Let’s finish diner before moving on to desert, she says jokingly.

The glitter in Caine’s eyes let her know that he understood her meaning.

While she finishes her plate, she tells him about getting her driver’s license and the items she bought for their apartment and Caine tells her about Plume’s attempt at cooking Earth style food and testing it out on her people and that her people quite enjoyed it.

– Well, I can understand that if you usually eat the bland stuff from the dispensers.
– Asking for better is not usually well received, he says.

Jupiter nods slightly.
– Your Majesty, Max interrupts.
– Yes Max?
– Miss Kiza wishes to know if you will have further need of her this evening.
– No, tell her that she is free for the evening and that we will meet in my private office at 8am.
– Yes, Your Majesty.
– Also inform Captain Apini and their ladyship.
– Yes, Your Majesty.

After dinner, she goes down to her bedroom and changes into something more comfortable and Earth-like and undoes her hair. She goes back up, up to the garden, to which Caine follows her, relishing in her presence. The bees welcome her and after greeting them she sends them back to their hive before hooking her arm through Caine’s and strolling into the garden. They walk for a few moments until Caine stops. Jupiter takes a few more steps to look at a blue and white swirling flower.

– Your Majesty, he says with the tone he knows she likes.

It makes her heart flutter and she about-turns and throws herself into Caine’s open arms.

She takes a deep breath of his scent and lets it out on a sigh.

– God you smell good, she murmurs.

Jupiter scenting him does something to him. His left hand goes to her jaw and his mouth to hers and he kisses her as if he had not seen her in weeks. He can feel and smell her love and her desire and when she reaches to open his shirt he can feel his own desire rise. She nuzzles his chest, breathes in his scent and then takes soft bites while her hands are busy taking his shirt off. It gets stuck on one of his wings, which makes them both laugh softly before both their desires inflames them and they let go of everything else.

---Kiza and François---

Kiza leads François down the main fermionic beam to the deck below the grand deck.

– The ship is 10 decks high but we won’t go further down as the three bottom decks are for the legionnaires and security personnel. It’s where my dad works, most of the time. But this deck is where everything is.

She shows him deck 7, with it’s medical bay, mess hall and kitchen, day care and school and the diverse rec rooms.

– The rest of this deck are the offices and the facilities for the maintenance personnel.

After that they go up on level and she explains:

– Deck four to six have been combine on this side of the ship to form the grand deck with the royal facilities. It is also the only deck from which to enter the royal quarters, which are at the front of the ship.
– I can see why it is called the grand deck, It’s like a castle in here.
– Have you seen Jupiter’s throne?
– She has an actual throne?
– Yeah.

She brings him to the reception hall and shows him the throne.
– Damn, she really is a Queen.
– Not just a Queen, your Queen.
– This will take some getting use to.

They exit the reception hall.

– If Jupiter ever summons you to her private quarters, it’s the door at the end of the hall, there is an holoscanner by the door to identify yourself, and two guards in the ante-chamber to protect her, besides Caine, of course.
– Got it.

After that she brings him up to the first deck.

– The three top decks are the quarters for Jupiter’s employees. On any other ship, they would be for pure humans only, but Jupiter gave quarters to everyone, even splices.
– Where do splice usually live?

She looks away for a moment.

– We don’t, live that is. Splices, we are tools, if we are lucky we get a rag and a pillow to all sleep in the same splice room… which consist of a big empty room and hygienic slots.

That statement breaks François’ heart and he pulls her in his arms.

– Ma chérie, je ne peux imaginer…
– Oh, je suis correct, je n'ai jamais eu à vivre cela. Quand mon père est devenu un légionnaire, j’ai été placée avec les autres enfants de légionnaires, un peu comme un pensionnat, mais sur la base. On avait des lit superposés et beaucoup de plaisir. Quand papa est devenu un Skyjacker, j’ai même eu ma propre chambre. Puis rendu adulte j’ai rejoins les Aegis et j’ai été stationné sur Terre.
– Et avant cela?

Kiza tears up and looks away.

– Ma chérie, qu'est-ce qu'il y a ?
– Je devrais te raconter mon histoire… mais pas ici… she says shaking her head.
– Oké.

She takes his hand again and brings him to her personal quarters.

– Max, please check with her Majesty if she will have further need of my services. She asks entering her quarters.
– Yes, Miss Kiza.

The disembodied voice startles François. Kiza sit cross-legged on her bed and asks François to join her. He does so and looks around at the bare quarters, the size of a small bedroom before looking back at Kiza.

– Tell me that this is not it?
– It is, but I haven’t had time to fix things up yet. Beside I’ll be transferred to bigger quarters thanks to you. These are for single people.
– Miss Kiza, Her Majesty says that you are free for the evening and that you have a meeting in her office at 8 am, Max’s voice says.
Kiza nods, take a deep breath and relates the story of how her dad and her escaped from the life in the pleasure hub and how Jupiter had reunited them with her mother and a sister she did not know she had.

François keeps quiet while Kiza speaks and tells him about her beginning. To know she was destined to be a sex slave makes him angry and sad but he is also very glad that she was spared that life.

When she is done telling him her life story, he takes her in his arms and makes sure she knows he does not think less of her, and he promises himself he will thank Stinger and Honey-Bee for their sacrifice that ultimately brought him the love of his life.

Chapter End Notes

**Orousian:**
Oejjupyp bei wyjjukdi = As soon as possible

**Russian:**
Govorite po russki = Speak Russian
Da = Yes
Ubludyok = Bastard
Gde ya eto videl? = Where have I seen this?
Moya sud'ba = My destiny

**French:**
Ça te va bien un bébé. = A baby looks good on you.
François, soit un peu sérieux. = François, be serious.
Je suis sérieux. = I am serious.
On en parlera tantôt. = We will speak about that later.
Ma chérie, je ne peux imaginer… = Darling I can't imagine...
Oh, je suis correct, je n’ai jamais eu à vivre cela. Quand mon père est devenu un légionnaire, j’ai été placée avec les autres enfants de légionnaires, un peu comme un pensionnat, mais sur la base. On avait des lit superposés et beaucoup de plaisir. Quand papa est devenu un Skyjacker, j’ai même eu ma propre chambre. Puis rendu adulte j’ai re joints les Aegis et j’ai été stationné sur Terre. = Oh, I'm okay, I never had to live that. When my dad became a legionnaire, I was placed with the other legionnaire children, something like a boarding school, but on base. We had bunk beds and a lot of fun. When dad became a Skyjacker, I even had my own room. And when I was old enough I joined the Aegis and was stationed on Earth.
Et avant cela? = And before that?
Ma chérie, qu’est-ce qu’il y a ? = Darling, what is it?
Je devrais te raconter mon histoire… mais pas ici… = I should tell you my story, but not here.
Oké. = Okay.

**Latin:**
De facto = In fact/in effect
Works inspired by this one: Grim Reaper by Isabelle53, The princess and the wolf by Isabelle53

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