

Shalia 7

July 10

It's been a few days since I last recorded anything. All my free time is taken up with Anrel, which I'm sure makes plenty of sense. I want every single moment I can get with my little girl, especially since we came so close to not having this time together. Tep has to chase me out of Isolation to rest. I'm still recovering from the It's takeover and being poisoned to flush it out.

My little Anrel is hanging in there. She's still got a long way to go before her tiny little body can venture out of Isolation. Her organs, though developed ahead of schedule, are still not strong enough by far. But my pint-sized fighter is determined to stick around, and for that I am profoundly grateful.

I was recording a message to Clan Seot this morning. I still look like hell, but I wanted to show Anrel off to her prospective fathers. Betra walked in, interrupting me.

I smiled up at the Imdiko and paused my recording. "Look who is here, small fry," I cooed to Anrel who was kicking her adorable little feet in weak slow motion. "Uncle Betra is here to see his precious little niece."

"Actually, Tep sent me in here to make you leave for a little while," Betra corrected. Yet he wasted no time in bending over the hover chair I sat in to fuss over Anrel. He stroked her head, her arms, her legs. "Hello, sweetling. Hello, little heart. Just look at that pretty face."

Anrel paid no attention, as usual. She'd discovered for the hundredth time that day how tasty her fist is. All her attention was centered on stuffing it in her mouth. Betra and I said ridiculously gooey things in voices pitched high. I'm sure we looked like idiots ... especially my liaison since he's well over six feet tall and made of deliciously sculpted muscle. Seeing such a behemoth cooing and making silly faces is its own brand of sweet and goofy.

Finally my level of admittedly shaky maturity asserted itself. "I just want to finish recording a message to Clan Seot. They should see this adorable little baby. I'm dying to get their reaction to her."

Especially since Anrel is still barely big enough to fill a Kalquorian's hands. I wanted to know how my suitors will respond to seeing such a tiny, vulnerable little being. She continues to wear a sensor vest that can be hooked up to feed her intravenously with medications and nutrition. Will Clan Seot be horrified? Or will their hearts melt? It's important for me to discover how they respond to a helpless child.

I also want to do the same with my second batch of suitors, Clan Aslada. If I'm going to trust any men to be fathers to my child, they have to show me they deserve her. That they can take care and protect her. Heaven knows with my track record, she'll need strong people around. I wish I was stronger myself. Some days I feel as weak as Anrel. It's pathetic.

Betra surprised me by saying, "Don't record the message. There is a better option on its way."

"Better option?" I asked. "Like what?"

"Like speaking to your suitors in real time." He grinned. "The ship will be in range of mini-portals in less than a week."

"And I can talk to Kalquor?" I gasped. "I can talk to the clans face-to-face for real?"

The news couldn't have been better. I knew about miniature wormholes, bridges through space much too small for spacecraft to use. Yet they were perfect for instant communication, so long as you had someone on the other end of the portal that you wanted to talk to.

Betra had better news to come. "Yes, but that's not all. There are two portals, Shalia. One will allow instantaneous transmissions to Kalquor. The other goes to the rim of Earth's solar system. There is a relay station out there, which will bounce our signal to your old home world. The delay is only a few seconds if you wish to contact your dads."

I gave a little squeal of childish delight. Anrel's face screwed up at the high-pitched sound as she thought about crying. I immediately covered her face in light butterfly kisses to make up for startling her. She chirruped, yawned, and went back to sucking her fist.

Once she was settled again, I resumed my excited reaction. "How long will we be in range?" I asked.

"Three days. That should give you plenty of time to set up and have decent conversations with your candidates and fathers."

"Erase recording," I told my handheld. "I definitely want to talk to everyone in real time."

Tep's long frame stepped into the room. The ship's head doctor eyed Betra severely. "I asked you to get her out of here. She needs to take a break."

"I was working on that," my liaison said hurriedly. He scooped Anrel out of my lap, her usual spot when I sit with her. I'm regaining my strength, but my arms get shaky after a few minutes of cradling her.

"Bye, sweet baby," I said, sad as always when we are forced to part. Her eyes were closing in readiness to nap.

Tep came close to squeeze my shoulder. "Katrina is already here to sit with her. She's busy flirting with Dr. Ret at the moment."

That made some of the gloom disappear. Dr. Ret is Captain Wotref's Imdiko. Katrina has been carrying on with their clan for a few weeks now. I'm beginning to suspect it's serious.

Betra settled Anrel in her tiny incubator that someone had rigged for her. Like the full-sized medibeds, it generates its own heat and is computerized for any treatments Anrel might need. Nothing is left to chance with my baby girl.

I know she is safe and getting the best possible care at all times. It doesn't stop me from feeling like I'm abandoning her every time my hover chair is floated out of Isolation. I can't wait for the day when Anrel is strong enough for me to take to my quarters and keep at my side nonstop.