

Kade – Zenarian Series Book 2

Chapter One

As Kade stood on the balcony of his home a swell of pride filled him. He and his brothers had built the giant wooden structures high off the ground among the trees in the Great Smoky Mountains. Still, a shaft of pain tore a path through his chest as he remembered the brilliance of the capital city of Zenaria, his home world. He closed his eyes and thought back before they'd arrived on Earth. Back to a time when their dwellings were immense, shining towers that stood hundreds of feet high. Their cities were made of the sturdiest alloys. The streets paved with the smooth, indestructible rose-gold stones of the Curian Mountains. The city gleamed in shades of silver and gold when the two suns were high in the sky. It was a breathtaking sight to behold.

Much had changed since those days of wealth and luxury.

That was hundreds of years ago. Their planet was no longer home to them. The Grasheem, a vicious lizard-like race, had taken it from them. They'd had a single purpose: exterminate the planet's inhabitants and mine it for the precious black gemstone, nighsis, that was unique to Zenaria. There had been vast mountains of the radiant stone. The Grasheem needed it for fuel and they had been prepared to do whatever necessary to get it.

His father, King Arlias, had ordered his people to flee. There hadn't been any other choice. The king had been a cruel leader and he'd made many poor decisions, but that one had been the right one. He'd saved many lives by giving up their home. But Kade's heart still ached for the brilliant azure skies at sunrise and the beauty of the nighsis mountains that were visible from his bedchamber window.

It was a painful reminder when he glanced down and saw the forest floor alive with squirrels, rabbits and other Earth creatures. Pine trees stretched so high they nearly blocked out the noontday sun. There were no streets of rose-gold. No towering silver structures. The differences between his home world and Earth were vast. And the journey hadn't been easy either. Many had perished before ever seeing Earth. Still, their people thrived now. It might not have been the home they'd been born to, but together they'd built something that would sustain all the generations to come. Kade was a member of the royal family and second in line for the throne. It was his job to ensure their people lived in peace. He offered aid to his brother, King Zar, to uphold the six unbreakable laws. He took satisfaction in his role in their society, but there were times when Kade felt the weight of his title like a noose around the neck. There was only one place he could forget about his troubles.

He extended his black wings and took to the sky. He tucked his arms close and flapped his wings harder, moving faster. He grinned as he soared, the wind whipping through his feathers. It always sent electricity through his bloodstream to move high above the earth. He'd learned to fly before he could walk over four hundred Zenarian years ago.

Flying was as natural as breathing to him. He enjoyed the freedom of being high off the ground where he could forget about his title and responsibilities. A gust of wind rustled his feathers and

Kade had to tuck his arms close to his body to keep his flight steady. He'd learned how to perform barrel rolls, dives and spins from his father at a very young age. It was later that Zar had helped him to perfect those same moves while adding speed to the equation.

Kade arrived at a clearing and the town square came into view. He veered to the east. A minute later the eucilii center could be seen. It was a large square two-story structure near the center of town. Kade dipped low and landed on the sidewalk outside the nondescript building where the members of the eucilii lived and worked.

The eucilii were the males and females of their race tasked with helping those who weren't in a committed relationship find sexual release. It was the hope of all to find their ofelia, or other half. However, some went hundreds of years and the loneliness would be unbearable for his kind if not for the eucilii. Their role in society was an important one. Their beauty was unmatched. All of them had blue wings. Some were a darker navy blue, others more royal in color. Their hair matched the feathers they possessed. The female eucilii varied in height, but all of them had the curvy, hourglass figures that made a male take notice. The males were taller with an athletic build, most had shorter blue hair, but some preferred it longer. All dedicated their lives to servicing the people.

Kade was a member of the royal family, and second in line for the crown. There would always be curious stares when he or his brothers visited the center. Several commoners watched him. Kade inclined his head and smiled to set them at ease. A few greeted him with a formal bow, others with fear. Kade wasn't just a royal by blood, but a warrior. Only King Zar was deadlier than him. And while many of the females at the center were willing to give him pleasure, there was only one Kade craved.

He approached the counter and waited for the female sitting on the other side to look up and acknowledge him. Clari always had her nose in a book. Today was no exception. Kade cleared his throat. She glanced up, her eyes widened and the book fell from her hands as she quickly stood. "Sire, my apologies, I didn't see you there."

He smiled, hoping to put her at ease. "It must be a good read," he said, pointing to the paperback novel.

Clari grinned back at him. She was younger than Iris, but not by much. She'd worked at the eucilii center for at least thirty years by his estimation. The darker shade of her long hair reminded Kade of ripe blueberries. The shiny strands hung in ringlets all around her shoulders. Her almond shaped hazel eyes always sparkled with just the smallest hint of mischief.

"It's by Lilith Michaels," she explained, as she picked up the book and held it close. "All her books are filled with danger and romance. I can't get enough of them."

He chuckled. "Maybe I can borrow it when you're finished then."

She nodded vigorously. "Of course, Sire." She cleared her throat and pushed a heavy section of hair over her shoulder. "Um, were you here to visit someone?"

His thoughts went to a particular brown-eyed female with a stubborn streak a mile long. "Iris available?"

Clari winced and her gaze turned downward. "Ferras has her cleaning the floors again. It's the third time this week." Her voice lowered. "Iris is too sweet to complain, but I'm worried about her health. She has looked very tired lately."

Kade's anger boiled to the surface at the mention of Ferras, the head eucilii. To call her an evil bitch would be too kind. And she took particular pleasure in ordering Iris around like her personal slave. It needed to stop. "Go, Clari." Kade didn't bother to hide his rage. "Bring Iris to me now."

She did a quick bow. "Yes, Sire." She hurried off and Kade began to pace the length of the room. When he heard a noise, Kade turned to find Ferras standing in the doorway leading to the common area. She was tall, with flowing blue hair that hung straight down her back. She had a curvy figure that many probably found beautiful. Unfortunately she had an ugly nature.

She frowned at him. "Iris is busy, but I can find someone else to service you, Sire."

Kade balled his fists at his sides and closed the distance between them. "Either bring Iris here now or I'll go get her myself."

Her lips thinned and her chin lifted. "Your fascination with the girl is not to be tolerated. I'll bring the matter before the king if this continues."

Kade leaned close to Ferras and stared into the female's hate-filled eyes. She paled and backed up a step. Kade followed. "I don't repeat myself, Ferras."

He watched her turn on her heels and rush out of the room. A few minutes later she returned with Iris by her side. Her sight always stole the breath from his lungs. Her white slip dress had slim straps and the type of fastener that could be easily undone with a flick of the wrist. Eucilii didn't wear undergarments either. That knowledge made it especially difficult for Kade to keep his mind on the task. As Kade dragged his attention away from his libido, he noticed Ferras had her hand wrapped tightly around Iris's wrist. Iris's lips were pressed together in a thin line, the only indication of the pain the other female caused her.

Kade strode forward, then grabbed Ferras by her shoulders and physically moved her away from Iris. "If I ever see you put your hands on her again it will be the last thing you ever do."

"She needs discipline," she spat back, her tone rising with each word. "She doesn't follow orders well. Her disobedience is not to be tolerated."

A flicker of hatred shown in Ferras's gaze when she sent a frown towards Iris. Kade didn't believe for a second that Iris was disobedient, no matter what the head eucilii said. He glanced over and caught Iris rubbing her wrist. There were dark circles around her eyes and she appeared

much too pale. Clari was right, Ferras was working Iris to near exhaustion. As she turned her head to stare at Ferras, Kade caught sight of a bruise on Iris's neck. He stepped closer and gently tipped her chin upward to get a better look. There were three small marks. Like someone had grabbed her by the neck. Hard. Kade made a decision in that moment. "Iris, go collect your things and come right back." He glanced behind Ferras and saw Clari watching him, as well as several others who had gathered around, curious by the commotion. "Go with her, Clari."

"Yes, Sire," Clari obeyed as she rushed to Iris's side. "Come on, sweetie."

Kade waited until they were both out of sight before he turned his attention back to Ferras. "The first law of our society applies to all Zenarians. No female or child shall be harmed. You are relieved of your position as head eucilii. You'll stay here until I bring the matter before our king. He will decide your fate."

She sucked in a breath. "You can't do that!"

"I just did," he bit out. "Leave my presence before you anger me further."

She curled her lip and stepped closer. "You think she's some innocent little girl that you need to protect, but you know nothing!"

Fuck, how have I not seen her ugly nature sooner? "One more word out of your mouth and you'll be spending the night at the detention center."

Iris reappeared with Clari and they both froze when Ferras turned towards them. "Soon, everyone will know the truth and when they do there won't be a single individual alive who will want anything to do with you." After the cryptic warning, she stormed off.

Kade looked around the room and realized they'd drawn nearly every eucilii in the center. He searched for one in particular, relieved when he spotted her near the back of the crowd. "Retinni, come here," he softly ordered.

The slim, statuesque female stepped forward, then bowed at the waist. "How may I assist you, Sire?"

He'd always liked Retinni. She was kind and fair. She would make an excellent replacement for Ferras. If their king agreed with his decision to remove Ferras. He needed to discuss the matter with him, but in the meantime there still needed to be someone in charge. "I want you to take over for Ferras until further notice."

Her eyes widened, clearly surprised he'd chosen her. She quickly recovered and smiled. "I will not disappoint you."

He let his gaze travel the length of the room. "Does anyone have a problem with my choice?" Everyone quickly shook their heads, a few of them smiled. "Good." His attention went back to Retinni. "If you have any questions call me directly."

“Of course. Thank you for trusting me with this honor.”

Kade patted the female on the arm. “You’ll do fine, Retinni. And I’ll let you know what the king decides to do about Ferras. In the meantime, keep an eye on her. I want to be informed the minute she steps foot outside the center. Understood?”

She inclined her head. “Absolutely.” Her gaze landed on Iris, then back to him. “This was a long time coming, if you don’t mind me saying, Sire.”

Kade had to agree with her there. He looked around at the crowd. “My door is always open if any of you have something you need to discuss. If you are unhappy or if someone is mistreating you I will gladly rectify the situation. You have my word. We want all eucilii happy. Your role in our society is an important one and we will always see to your needs.”

Everyone smiled, then moved to congratulate Retinni. A few went to Iris and hugged her. Iris looked sad and lost and Kade hated it. She barely spoke a word and she wouldn’t look at him. It bothered him more than he cared to admit. Kade walked near her and took the bag she held in her hand. It was light. Too light. “Is this all you have?”

Her gaze stayed glued to the floor as she nodded. “Yes, Sire,” she murmured.

Kade sighed and slung the bag over his shoulder, then placed a palm on her low back. “Come, we can talk once we’re alone,” he said, keeping his voice low and gentle.

She didn’t budge. A few seconds went by before she raised her head and pinned him with her chocolate gaze. “Where are you taking me?”

“My home,” he answered, even as he tried not to think of the pleasure of having her there. All to himself.

Her eyes widened as she stared up at him. “Oh, is that allowed?”

He couldn’t contain the smile at her hushed question. “I’m a royal, remember?”

“Will others talk if you have a eucilii in your home? I don’t want to cause you any distress?”

Her concern for him filled him with warmth. “No one will question it, Iris. If they did I’d happily set them straight, okay?”

“Okay,” she whispered as she let him lead her out of the center. Once outside, she extended her wings and lifted into the air. The sapphire shown in the midday sun. Kade noticed several turning and staring at her. With good reason. Iris was stunning and she flew with grace and precision. He flapped his wings hard and took off after her. Kade caught up to her with ease. When she turned her head and grinned at him, it took his breath away. Iris’s smiles always blindsided him. That smile could make a male go to his knees.

Kade was careful to keep at Iris's pace as they flew towards his home. The female had no idea how deep his feelings ran. He had been drawn to Iris since the first moment he'd seen her and asked her to relieve him. She'd been sweet and shy, not like the other eucilii he'd visited in the past. Most eucilii were comfortable with their sexuality. They were experienced and knew how to offer maximum pleasure. They enjoyed their role in society. They took pride in knowing their job was an important one. But Iris had fumbled and she'd blushed. Yet, somehow the pleasure he'd received that first time with her had prompted Kade to seek her out several times after that. It had gotten to the point where he didn't want any other eucilii to relieve him. Only Iris. Yeah, he'd become obsessed with the little imp. And now he wouldn't have to share her with any other males. He'd had too many nightmares imagining her with others. Her nude body being caressed by another male's hands. It wasn't reasonable for Kade to want Iris all to himself. She was a eucilii and her job was to offer sexual relief. Period. End of story. Still, it'd enraged him to think of any other daring to touch her. Now, she would be his and his alone. Something deep inside Kade stirred to life. He had a sneaking suspicion it was his creature. There were two sides to a Zenarian. The male and the creature. All felt the pull of their creature. Kade was a predator at his core and he knew that maintaining a balance with his twin sides was imperative. He'd learned control over his predatory nature at a young age, but there were times in great stress or when he was around Iris that his control slipped. His creature craved Iris. And Kade was having a difficult time keeping that chain from snapping.

As they flew over the treetops, he glanced over at Iris and he caught her staring at him. She laughed and flapped her wings harder, then sprinted through the air ahead of him. Oh, she wanted to play, did she? Kade grinned and let his true nature as a member of the royal family shine through as he tucked his arms to his sides and stretched his wings out wide. He flapped hard a couple of times, then easily soared right past her. When his home came into view he did a nose-dive towards the ground. He glanced back in time to see Iris attempting to catch up to him. When he landed on his balcony, Kade raised his head in time to see Iris descend towards him with a slow, careful maneuver that took his breath away. As her feet touched the deck, she sucked in a breath and stumbled. Kade shot forward in time to catch her in his embrace before she could land face first. Her arms went around him and Kade knew a sense of rightness about that. He caved to the desire riding him and slipped his hand beneath her bottom and pulled her off her feet and high against his chest. Iris yelped but didn't protest as she wrapped her arms around his neck. Their gazes collided. A blush filled her cheeks and Kade had to swallow hard to keep from pressing his lips to hers. Nothing would make him happier than to take his little blue bird to his bed and make love to her the rest of the afternoon. But that had to wait until later. For now, he needed answers from Iris.

He strode through the open doors to his home and caught his pet lhargerre, Bar and Kera lounging on his couch. As the last two remaining animals of their kind, Kade had brought them with him when they'd fled Zenaria. They'd been nearly dead, but he'd nursed them back to health. His father had forbidden the two lhargerre from traveling with them. He'd even threatened to kill the mated pair if he caught them on his ship. Fortunately, Kade's mother had helped Kade by hiding them. To Kade, it was just one more example of his father's cruel nature.

Bar and Kera were larger than the size of adult wolves. The front half of their body was black and thickly-skinned similar to that of earth's alligator, while the back half resembled a snow

leopard. They had the muzzle and ears similar to a wolf though. Along with enhanced hearing and a keen sense of smell.

“You both know you are not permitted on the furniture,” he ground out. Their ears perked and their tails began to wag when they spotted Iris in his arms.

They leaped off the couch and loped across the room, their tongues hanging out and showing off their enormous canine teeth.

He watched as Iris reached out and scratched behind the ear of Bar, which earned her an extra hard thump from his tail. “I have missed you two,” she murmured as she smiled down at them.

Kade frowned. “You miss them?”

“They come to visit me sometimes when I’m at the river on the north side of the mountain.

In Kade’s mind he imagined all sorts of dangerous scenarios. First on the list was Naxon. The rogue male had drugged and kidnapped their Queen. He’d attempted to kill Zar and Callie both. But their king wasn’t so easy to kill and Naxon had been the one to die instead. Still, Naxon had supporters.

Others who wanted to take down Zar, as well as the rest of the royal family. Iris could’ve been at risk simply because she’d been in the wrong place at the wrong time. It left him chilled to the bone to think of what could’ve happened to her.

Kade crossed the room and sat her on the couch, then cupped her chin and forced her to look at him. When her pretty gaze landed on him, he said, “You shouldn’t go to the river alone. It isn’t safe. Promise you’ll bring a guard next time.”

She frowned and began to pick at the hem of her dress. Something she did whenever she was nervous, Kade realized. “But why would I need one?”

He opened his mouth to explain about Naxon and his faction of rebels but refrained. As a member of the royal family as well as the council that oversaw their community, there were certain things he couldn’t reveal to Iris. “Just promise me this, okay?”

She nodded then glanced down at the floor. Kade followed her line of sight and noticed the way she kept the left foot raised in the air. She was barefoot. Iris nearly always went without shoes. Kade remembered the way she’d stumbled upon landing on his balcony. He knelt in front of her and wrapped a hand around her calf and started to lift it up so he could inspect the bottom of it, but she sucked in a breath. He arched a brow at her. “Does it hurt?”

“Just a little sting, Sire. You should not be tending to me.”

For the first time, Kade hated the use of the formal greeting. “Kade,” he stated, as he tugged on her leg. She relented and Kade managed to lift her foot enough to see a cut along her heel. He touched it with a fingertip and she flinched.

“W-What did you say?” she asked as she gripped onto the cushion on either side of her body.

“Kade is my name, Iris. I prefer you use it.”

“I have angered you,” she softly replied as her shoulders slumped forward. “I’m sorry.”

Kade sighed. Once again, Iris reminded him of a whipped animal. Skittish and unsure. He’d get to the bottom of that soon. First things first though. He stood and pointed at her. “Stay there. I’ll be right back.” He snapped his fingers and immediately Bar and Kera moved to either side of Iris at her feet and sat. A tornado couldn’t get the pair of lhargerre away from her side now. Kade walked away but looked back to ensure she did as he ordered and caught her reaching down to pet both animals. Her soft palms smoothed up and down their backs and to his utter shock, Bar and Kera purred. He’d never heard them make that particular sound before. Then again, he’d damn well purr too if Iris stroked him. He pulled his gaze away and strode into the bathroom, then flipped on the light. The room was nearly the size of his bedchamber with a square shower big enough to fit two. A massive jacuzzi style tub was next to it. A mirror with double sinks took up much of the opposite wall. He located a tin of healing salve in a cabinet along the wall next to one of the sinks and left the bathroom.

As he crossed the room, Iris turned and their gazes locked. He could drown in Iris’s brown eyes. The color reminded him of the warm chocolate drinks Callie served sometimes. He’d come to crave those drinks.

He crouched in front of her and patted his thigh. She didn’t move to do his bidding and Kade let a smile slip when he said, “Arwen would have my head if I left you in pain.” He knew mentioning their healer would do the trick. Iris and Arwen had always been friends. Iris wouldn’t want to disappoint her. She lifted her foot and carefully placed it on his jean-covered thigh. Kade pried open the tin and dipped a finger into the herbal mixture created especially for their kind by Arwen herself. All Zenarians healed fast, but the salve sped up the process. It would also take the pain away. When he placed a pea-sized amount on the cut, Iris sucked in a breath, but didn’t cry out. Kade quickly massaged it in and watched as Iris clasped her hands into her lap. Her knuckles turned white. A few seconds went by and her fingers went slack. “Better?” he asked as he watched Iris for a sign that she was still in pain.

She nodded. “Thank you. The sting is nearly gone completely.”

“Arwen’s salves have come in handy many times with my brothers and I,” Kade admitted as he kept hold of her foot. He pulled the coffee table closer to the couch, then propped her foot on top of it. He stood and replaced the lid on the tin, then set it aside. When he moved to sit next to her, he caught the way she stiffened. She did that around him. Too often. “Relax, Iris,” he murmured. “I won’t have you fearing me.”

Her gaze widened and she placed her palm on his arm. The connection felt good. Too good, he admitted. “I don’t fear you. Never that.”

Kade put his hand over hers to keep her from backing off when he asked, “Then why do you always shy away from me? Or are you this way with everyone?”

She shrugged and her gaze landed on their hands. “It’s not everyone.”

“Just me?” That blush again. It flitted across her cheeks and Kade ached to kiss her. Every inch of her. He’d take his time about it too. Cherish every sweet curve and valley of her delicate body. “Answer me, Iris.”

“I’m very drawn to you,” she admitted in a voice so quiet Kade had to strain to hear. “When you’re near me my body responds. I know it’s wrong, but I can’t seem to stop it.”

Ah, now we’re getting somewhere, but fuck if I’m letting her feel guilty. “Why would that be wrong? We’ve spent time together at the center. You enjoyed my touch, did you not?”

She brushed a lock of hair away from her face and stared up at him. “I have found your touch very pleasurable, Sire.”

Kade cursed. “Not Sire. Not to you.”

She flinched and tried to jerk her hand away, but Kade wouldn’t let her retreat this time. He held her firm. Eventually she relented and even went so far as to entwine her fingers with his. It was a step closer in his mind. “It’s hard to remember not to call you that,” she explained. “We are all taught from birth that the royal family is to be respected. My life is all about offering aid. I’m trained to give sexual relief to any who desire it. I’m not permitted to get close to anyone who comes to the center. Our feelings are not what’s important. To be honest, I don’t know any other way.”

He could understand that, even if he hated it. Iris had been educated from the time she was eighteen that her role in their society was to serve others. And especially the royal family. That sort of teaching wouldn’t change overnight. In time she would loosen up with him. Kade was determined to break Iris out of her shell. And for the first time in his life, Kade could see that the Zenarian way had its flaws. The bruises on Iris’s neck was proof that the eucilii way needed to be fixed. But how do I change something that has been in place for thousands of years? With delicate diplomacy. Not his strong suit. The thought of her bruises brought back the memory of Ferras’s parting words. She’d indicated that Iris was hiding something. Something shameful. As he watched Iris sitting next to him, her back straight and her eyes downcast, Kade couldn’t believe that she could have a single dishonorable bone in her body.

Kade cupped Iris’s chin and tipped her head upward. “Ferras mentioned that you were hiding something. Something that would cast a negative light on you. What was she talking about, Iris?”

Her eyes filled with tears, horrifying Kade. “Please don’t make me tell you that.”

Kade made a decision in that moment. One he had no right to make. He didn’t care. This was Iris. He would do whatever it took to keep her safe.

“Anything you tell me stays between us. You can trust me, baby blue.”

Her lips curved upward. “You called me that our first time together. It felt special.”

He stroked her lower lip with his thumb. “You are special,” he quietly stated. “Never doubt that.”

“You look at me with such desire. It makes me feel things. Amazing things.” A tear trickled down her cheek. “You will look at me differently when you know the truth.”

It angered him to see that tear. His Iris should only know happiness. “I asked you to trust me. Do you not?”

She reached out and placed her palm on his chest, directly over his heart. “I do.”

“Then talk to me,” he softly demanded. “What is Ferras holding over your head?”

“I—”

A ping from his phone interrupted whatever Iris was about to tell him. He snarled and grabbed his phone off the coffee table and looked at the display. Zar, his king and brother, was requesting a meeting at once. It was likely he’d been informed of the change in leadership at the eucilii center. Zar would demand answers.

He sent off a quick reply before looking at Iris. “I must go for a bit. Zar is requesting my attention.”

She stiffened. “Are you in trouble because of me?”

He chuckled. “Of course not, but he’ll have questions that I need to answer.”

“I would never forgive myself if I caused you trouble...Kade.”

His dick went instantly hard at hearing his name pass her lips. It’d been the first time she’d ever used it and he desperately wanted to strip her bare and take her right where she sat. His creature stirred and his wings flexed in agitation. Oh yeah, his other half liked the sound of it as well. His phone pinged again as if right on cue. Damn it. “I’ll be back soon and we will finish this discussion then. Stay and make yourself at home. There’s food in the kitchen if you’re hungry.” He looked at his pets sprawled out at Iris’s feet. They perked up when he snapped his fingers. “Keep her safe,” he ordered the pair as he stood. They both got to their feet and leaped up onto the couch on either side of her. Iris smiled and patted them both on the head.

“I’ll return as soon as I can.” He hated the separation already, but it was necessary. Knowing she would be here when he returned sent a strange sensation skating up his spine. Happiness, he realized. Yes, coming home to Iris was sure to put him in a good mood. He longed to lean down and kiss her goodbye, but he damn well knew better. If their lips touched, there was no way he’d leave.

Kade forced himself to walk across the room. As he reached his balcony and stepped out, he turned and closed the double doors. Something he never did. No one would dare enter his home without his permission. Nor would Bar and Kera allow it. Still, Kade chose to err on the side of caution this time because Iris's safety was at stake. Extra precautions were necessary. He quickly extended his wings and leaped into the air. The sooner he got the meeting over with the sooner he could be with Iris. Before the night was through he would have her in his bed. In his arms. And the sun would be coming over the horizon before he let her sleep.

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