

Bringer of Chaos: Forged in Fire

Book 2 in the
Bringer of Chaos Series

Sample Chapters

Kayelle Allen



www.romancelivesforeverbooks.com

The Ultras

In the Terran Crescent, home of mankind, Ultras--human-like, genetically enhanced and effectively immortal--were a boon. Ultra scientists eliminated disease and implemented incredible advances in science, technology, manufacturing, and space travel. Ultra warriors advanced mankind's territory and kept its borders safe.

Ultras served without choice, bound by genetic shackles.

When the slave-race learned how to overthrow those shackles and take command, they became mankind's greatest threat. By 4501 AD, Ultras dominated the galaxy.

One faction conspired against the others.

Hiding among humans as humans, they manipulated their Ultra brethren into peace talks. On an isolated starport in the central part of the galaxy, they captured the High Council and Pietas, its Chancellor.

Holding the leaders hostage, the traitors duped half a million loyal Ultras into surrendering, and then transported them across the galaxy to an undeveloped planet.

They exiled walking weapons who could never die.

Left them to survive under the most primitive conditions, and then...

Forgot them.

Big, big mistake.

Human: synonym for oath breaker

A foreword from Pietas

You're human. Lies are your nature.

Truth is mine. Honoring my word means more to me than life.

Humans are craven, contemptible and reprehensible supplanters of power. You lack the truth.

Traitors among my kind lied to you. They concealed themselves among you and claimed we were myth. They fed you false hope. Told you you were safe. Lulled you into complacent ignorance. Manipulated, confused, and desensitized you.

You chose to believe their lies.

You've heard tales of visitors from outer space. Stories of aliens who walk among you. You called them urban legends, myths, tall tales for the campfire, untrue.

You refused to believe the truth.

This book relates my tale but is not from my point of view. Call it Science Fiction, but it happened. I exist. My dimension is not yours. You have not been aware of me--until now--but I know everything about you.

To honor a worthy human friend, I considered sparing humanity. I have since seen the folly of blanket exemption. Not all of you deserve to die, but there are requirements for being protected. Will I choose you?

I offer no guarantee. Your fate is a bequest no one can usurp.

Believe me.

Read this, if you dare to know the truth.

~ Pietas

Chapter One

Sempervia, outer edge of the galaxy

Terran year 4536 AD

Sempervian year 1

Would this incessant nightmare of darkness never end? The steaming, lightless rainforest stank of alien spores and enough flowers to choke the dead. Let the rescue party inhale, but this cloying scent left a sickening taste in his mouth. Pietas gagged, but controlled his stomach.

Barefoot, he slipped and slid on wet undergrowth but kept moving. His body had acclimated to the high altitude less than an hour into the climb. Ultras adapted, adopted, and attacked, but accept this reek of blossoms?

Never.

The four immortals and one human trailing him were still in sight, but not close. What irony. The search party had been sent to locate him, yet here he was leading them back to a place he'd never been. Joss, the chosen leader of the party, had no sense of direction. Why had they let her lead them in the first place?

At this rate, they'd spend yet another night in this godsforsaken forest and he'd be no closer to being reunited with his people.

Ahead, blackish green gave way to jade and teal. He slowed, unsure, at first, of his eyes. The lighter colors meant one thing.

Sunshine.

Within ten steps, the dense canopy of trees thinned, revealing stubby wheat-colored grass in full sun. How far to the summit?

Exhilaration fluttered at his heart, teasing him with possibilities.

To free his mother and his people, he'd endured entrapment in a crucible more agonizing than any living being should ever experience. For over a year he'd missed them, longed for their presence and the comfort of their touch. Now he would see them again. He bolted forward, but came to an abrupt halt.

He would also see his father.

Mahikos, whose love for humans had gotten the Ultras into disastrous peace talks resulting in their exile on this gods-forsaken planet.

The sudden tightness of breath had nothing to do with elevation. Pietas ignored his roiling stomach and slammed a lid on his emotions. Over nineteen hundred years old, yet facing his father cast him into the same twisted fear he'd experienced in childhood. He must allow the man no sway.

Straightening his shoulders, he held his head erect. Dressed in rags he might be, but he commanded the mightiest army in the galaxy.

Pietas ap Lorectic, First Conqueror, War Leader of the Ultras, Chancellor of the High Council, bowed in fear to no one.

No one.

He centered himself by repeating his mantra. "An Ultra does not seek to escape pain. If one inflicts pain, one must bear it. Pain is a warrior's ally." Despite the thinner air near the summit, he broke into a run.

He burst into the welcome light, squinting and shielding his face. After hours

tramping through deep shadow, the noonday heat caressed his head and shoulders like a friend, hoped for but long lost.

The summit lay a good distance ahead, but they had left the forest. Scant grasses and scrubby bushes dotted the landscape. He pushed further up the mountain, where hand over hand, he climbed up among black boulders. Their pockmarked texture stung his palms but did no harm to his feet. He'd hiked half the planet barefoot. Panting from the quick exertion, he turned to take in the view.

Across plains to the east, low-scudding clouds skimmed a fringe of mountains, no more than blue smudges on the horizon. Their white tips implied great height. North, the lazy river he and the human had followed from its source snaked its way across the savannah, a necklace of shimmering gold. The path took seconds to trace with his gaze but had taken them weeks to walk. As it wended its way further south, the confluence of its mighty waters with another river turned its gold to muddy brown.

What worried him were the sheets of gray in the northwest. A storm marched straight toward them. The heavy, pelting rain on Sempervia so saturated the air one could drown on land.

They did not dare let it catch them in the open. They needed to cross the summit and reach shelter.

He braced both hands on his knees. How galling to need a break. He'd hiked less than five hours. Was he no better than a mortal?

Before his exile, Pietas would have run--not walked--up this mountain without a single pause. When mortals and traitors among his kind imprisoned him in an unpowered life pod and left him to rot for over a year, it broke his health and shattered his stamina.

Had it not been for his friend, Six, what sanity Pietas possessed would have been as beaten and battered as dirt clods trampled in a horse paddock. Though unable to free Pietas, Six had stayed with him day and night, talking, whistling, singing songs, sharing life and light through his tales.

Long after Pietas could no longer respond.

Broken in body as he was, his will, determination, and drive survived intact, as had his undying thirst for revenge.

No doubt his enemies thought to teach him a lesson. Having endured the worst they could muster, he'd learned there was no pain he could not bear, no matter how horrific. One day, he'd return the favor and teach *them*.

Down the mountain, his sister, Dessy, staggered into the sunshine. An equally unsteady Joss stumbled after her. The two female immortals plopped onto the ground with all the grace of drunken gazelles.

Behind them came the twins, Armand and Philippe, their massive height and girth impressive even from above. Armand squatted beside Dessy while his twin remained standing, alert and on watch.

Last to reach sunlight was Six, the ghost.

Not a phantom or aetheric creature, but a member of Ghost Corps. A human who'd died and been resurrected by infusing his body with Ultra blood. Transformed into a quasi-immortal with enough strength to perma-kill Pietas or another immortal. And ironically, the closest friend Pietas had ever had in his entire unceasing, solitary life.

Without slowing his pace, Six skirted around Philippe, trudged up the hill toward

Pietas and joined him atop the rocks. He, too, shielded his eyes.

He'd grown lean and ragged over the weeks they'd hiked the planet. Both of them had. No matter how much fish they caught, or what wild fruits they found, there was not enough to gain weight. Like Pietas, Six had no beard, a result of his transformation. His naturally brown skin had grown browner while they tramped in the sun. His dark hair had grown at a human pace and curled over his ears.

Pietas, who could not tan or sunburn, had grown blonder. He'd cut his hair not long after their arrival on Sempervia, but already, it hung halfway down his back. He wore it tied behind him to keep it out of his face.

"Pi, look at this view!"

The nickname irked. He'd asked Six to drop it, to no avail. *Pee-ah-toss*, he ranted in silence. *Not Pi. Pee-ah-toss.*

"I can hear you thinking. You know that, right?"

Then you know what I'm thinking now.

"Same to you, Ultra. Besides, you call me Six. I call you Pi. Suits you."

"Six is an integer. Pi is an irrational number."

The man shot him a smile. "Like I said."

Pietas rubbed the tight spot between his eyes.

"Hey! There's the river." Six pointed. "What a great vantage point this is. No wonder castles were always built on mountaintops. Talk about your uphill battle, no?"

How like his friend to view the humor in a situation. "True."

"Rain's coming."

"Soon?"

"No." The man bent, brushed his fingertips across tufts of yellowed grass among the rocks and plucked a handful. He tossed it into the air. "Dry. Possible rain doesn't reach up here often. I give it two hours, *amigo*. Longer, depending on the wind." He sniffed. "Smells different. This'll be a bad one."

"I agree." A gust brought a pleasant, earthy essence along with the ozone scent that preceded a storm on this world. "Change in wind direction from this morning."

Six looked up the hill, then back. "How long till we reach the site?"

"Joss says an hour to the top. Longer if we keep stopping."

"*Keep stopping?* This is the first you've slowed down since morning. My legs are frayed string." Six slid their canteen off over his head and held it out to Pietas.

Accepting anything from a human, an altered one at that, had violated every instinct at first. To take from an enemy, yes. Always. Let one *give* you something as if you *needed* it? Admit a weakness before an enemy?

Never.

But this was Six.

Pietas took it.

Ultras could go days without water, but they consumed it when they had it. He wiped one dusty hand across his mouth. The satisfaction of assuaged thirst never failed to please. What simple things in life brought pleasure! In captivity, he'd dreamed of even a drop to cool his tongue. He'd sworn he'd never take water for granted again.

Six had offered it to their companions during the climb, but the entire lot refused anything a mortal's lips had touched. Yes, Six was a *quasi*-immortal, but to the others, that gave him even less status.

Pietas wavered on few things, but on this? Should he call the man human, mortal, quasi-immortal, or ghost? He'd elected to choose as the mood struck. But one in particular annoyed Six.

"Thanks, ghost." He thrust the canteen against Six's chest.

Staggering, he swore in Spanish. "Find another name for me."

"Tell me your mortal name then."

"You know I can't." Six scratched his cheek. "Gotta protect my family. If your kind knew who they were, they'd slaughter them. You wouldn't, but them?"

Now they were getting somewhere. "So you do trust me?"

"Pi, there's more honor in your left big toe than your entire race combined." He tipped up the flask but then paused. "No offense."

"None taken. But we're stranded, my friend. Unless a miracle happens, by the time we get off, your family will be long dead." He added, "No offense."

Six finished his drink and plugged the container. "None taken. Sorry. Can't do it." He lifted the strap back over his head and settled it onto his shoulder, the canteen at his back. "Seriously, Pi, your people hear you call me you-know-what, it'll give away I was Ghost Corps. We both know what they'll do to me."

Chapter Two

"Trust me, my friend." Pietas brushed at his nose. "You can't hide what you are."

The man's pungent sweat almost blocked the stink of his fear. Ultras had been bred to have no body smell, which allowed them to infiltrate and spy, attributes humans desired in warrior-slaves but later found disastrous in warrior-rebels. Ultras could pass undetected among humans but humans could not pass among them. Once the party entered the caldera they'd come face to face with other Ultras, few of whom loved humans and all of whom hated Ghost Corps.

Six lifted one arm and sniffed. "Nothing. You have a touchy nose, Ultra."

"Touchy? When was the last time either of us bathed with soap?"

"Maybe... Day before last week?"

"Even if you bathed, they'd know. Calling you something else won't make a difference. Besides, my sister knows. She'll broadcast it."

"*Si*. She hates me. *Mira*. Look." Six's gaze flicked left. "You see how they all watch me? How your sister glares at me? They respect you or they'd have killed me already. Before the day's out, she'll try to come between us and tell you I'm trouble."

"You're right."

"Yes, she will. She and-- Wait." Six turned a questioning look on him. "You believe me?"

"I've spent over a year in your presence every day. I know the kind of man you are. Since I was sixteen, wherever my sister was, I was halfway across the galaxy from her. There's a reason for that." Her betrayal deserved no forgiveness.

"Thanks for believing me. Not sure your people will offer the same courtesy."

"Any of them would kill you if they had a chance. Ghost Corps had one rule: kill Ultras. We had the same rule about ghosts."

Six threw up his hands, a string of Spanish expletives flying from his mouth. "I'm pleased my death will amuse you."

"Before they so much as touch you, *mi compañero*, they will have to slay me first." In Spanish, he added, "I am not so easy to kill. You say you trust me. Take your time. Know for sure."

The man's white smile blazed in response. "*Si*. Always."

"Good." Wincing, Pietas stretched to ease cramps in his back.

His sister stood. "Tas!" she called up to him. She'd started using her childhood name for him since they'd reconnected the day before. "Are you hurt?"

A quick telepathic scan from Joss swept over him before he realized it was there. Pietas had still been a teenager when she'd trained him to shield his mind from those with her gift. Not that he'd ever been able to block her. She was far too powerful, but today, she'd read him with no more difficulty than a hunter spying trail signs. He'd been near no telepaths for over a year.

His affinity with Six had made him careless and he'd neglected the basic lessons Joss had taught him.

It wasn't a lack of trust. Trust had never been an issue with Joss.

He treasured her, but he ought not to have been so unguarded and open. Vulnerable.

"Pietas." Joss stood. The waves of emotion he picked up from her held love and concern in equal measure. And disappointment. "You're injured."

He ducked his head, a schoolboy who'd forgotten his lessons. Admit mortals had damaged him? Never. Neither would he lie about it. He'd take better care to hide the pain.

"Don't worry about me." Whistling, he circled a finger in the air. "Let's go! Long climb ahead." He leaped down from the rocks. "Joss, you lead." Last thing he wanted was her behind him, using him as an object of focus.

What telepaths focused upon, they controlled.

Armand joined Joss at the lead, Six walked beside Pietas, and Dessy took up the rear alongside Philippe.

For the next hour, they climbed rugged ground littered with black lava bombs, the spewed remains of the ancient caldera. The chunks of jettisoned rock varied in size from teardrops to small houses. The wind had picked up and the temperature had dropped, but so far, the rain held off. Weaving around boulders, they stepped over minor cracks and jumped over deeper ones.

Sharp stones crunched under his bare feet.

Once they reached sandy soil and the start of shrub with orange blossoms, Pietas stooped to examine dense florets of a blooming plant.

"Look, Six. *Helichrysum*. There are over six hundred species of this plant on Earth. They come in every color except blue, although my mother's been working on that. You'd know it as Strawflower or Immortelle. It's edible as a seasoning." He picked a leaf, sniffed it, held it for Six to smell.

"Reminds me of my *abuela's* kitchen. Like rosemary."

"Your grandmother might have found it useful. The oil is good for arthritis. Joint pain. Clear skin." Standing, Pietas brushed off his hands. Minutes later, he stopped again. "There's a break in the growth over there." He picked his way around rocks and went down on one knee.

Six squatted beside him, boots crunching the dry soil. "You know, we'd have made it here a lot quicker if you didn't have to study every plant we came across."

"I don't study them. I identify them. But I'm not looking at plants here." He pointed. "This is a trail. The tracks are from ungulates. Popular with terraformers. They put them on every colonized world. These are *artiodactyla*, to be precise. *Bovidae*. I suspect a derivative of *aepyceros melampus*."

"You know, Pi, when you say things like that, you think you're explaining, but you're really not."

"Animals with split hooves, ghost. Even-toed. Lightweight impalas. Antelopes."

"What, you couldn't say antelopes?"

"I just did." Pietas got up, dusted off his ragged pants.

Six stood. "So, this is how it's going to be?"

The other immortals had gathered a small distance away. Pietas shot them a glare and they scattered, pretending not to listen.

He returned his attention to Six. "How what's going to be?"

"You're back among your own people, so you're showing off your three thousand years of education."

"Hard to do since I'm not yet two thousand. My mother was chief scientist in the

terraforming industry. She fed me taxonomy along with my milk."

"Taxonomy?"

"Classification of organisms by structure and origin. As in, I'm *Ceramin perpetualis*. You're *Humanus originalis*. Or you were. Your metamorphosis makes you *Humanus pseudo-perpetualis*, or something similar. I thought mortals taught this."

"Well, excuse me! But my fourteen years of school didn't quite prepare me for the level of science you take for granted."

"You have that much education?"

Six's dark eyes narrowed.

Despite himself, Pietas laughed. Drawing Six away from the others, he leaned in close. "I apologize. I was showing off."

"Thank you. My point."

"No, no. I wasn't apologizing for speaking above your level of understanding. I teach you. Do I not?"

"Well, yeah, so what's the apology for?"

"Showing off. Joking with you. Most of them," he nodded toward the four immortals, "have never had what I have."

"Which is?"

Did the man not see it? Pietas smiled. "A human friend."

Six's quick grin flared into view, but before he spoke, Joss waved to them.

"Pietas!" She pointed to her left. "I found the opening. We're almost there."

Grumbling in Spanish, Six leaned in closer. "She's been saying 'almost there' for hours, *amigo*. Not a mapmaker, is she? But," he cast Joss an appreciative glance, "*muy bonita*, no?"

"*Si*. Gorgeous. And a master telepath who can crush a windpipe with one thought."

The man clutched his throat.

"Let's go." Pietas slapped him on the arm. "The last time I kept this lady waiting--" He broke off, unwilling to reveal the pleasurable *punishment* to which she had subjected him. How to phrase it without a lie?

Six sputtered in frustrated Spanish, asking for detail.

Pietas held up a hand. "Let's put it this way, *amigo*. I wouldn't like seeing her do that to you."

Chapter Three

Pietas didn't sleep with Joss until he was twenty, but he fell in love with her at first sight.

He was sixteen. She was ageless.

The older woman had plucked him off the streets, fed and clothed him, given him a job and dignity.

That wasn't why he'd slept with her. It had taken several years to become her lover because he didn't know how to ask and he would have rather faced perma-death as a virgin than be shot down by that woman.

His father had woefully neglected his education about women. Joss told him later he'd been too young to know what he wanted and she'd promised herself she wouldn't make the first move.

This time, he knew how it was done, had no intention of waiting, and knew exactly what he wanted. *Her*.

As Pietas hiked beside Joss, he recalled their first meeting. He'd been standing in lines to join work crews. Being ignored, crowded out, shoved aside. For *days*. With no work history or experience, no identification and no sponsor, no one would hire him. That meant no money, no bed, and no meal tickets.

Worse, he had no uniform. Among the polished soldiers and officers, his thin shirt and ragged pants screamed civilian.

He'd been thrown out with nothing but the clothes he wore. The shredded and bloodstained cloth on his back announced to the world he'd been beaten. They must see him as a slacker who wouldn't work.

Weapons, though, those he had. Lucky for him, the boots he'd worn had a hidden sheath which held his best blade. Obtaining more weapons hadn't been difficult. He'd wagered his fighting skills to gain those. Nobody took a beating better. Pietas might not get in the first punch, but he *always* got back up. More times than the other guy was willing to, or could.

In his right front pocket, he had a scarred and scratched up Puma Slimline Ought Six with a full magazine of double-stings. Folded up in his left, a Primary Star flipper knife. The pearl handle had six deep notches that age had stained. Judging by the dark color, it'd been with blood. He'd wondered, but after he claimed it, he'd looked into the bleak eyes of the older Ultra who'd lost it and decided not to ask.

But a job? To quote Six, *nada*.

He refused to sell his weapons. Those would keep him alive and feed him. Criminals bought falsified documents. He'd either earn his keep or he'd starve. Once you sell your honor, nothing else has value.

The day had grown late and it had started raining. Pietas ducked into a covered alley and huddled near the wall for protection from the wind. Across the street, a food cart sold soured, day-old leavings from some posh restaurant in the nearby human district.

Ultras, the mightiest warriors the galaxy had ever seen, paid for scraps. Ate the garbage humans discarded. No way he'd do that.

Two days ago, he'd caught himself walking toward it, turned himself around and

marched himself away.

A female soldier passing by slowed, looked him up and down, and then stopped. She wore an officer's uniform: simple black jacket, white blouse, black skirt, shiny shoes. One ribbon on the left, dark blue with a single yellow stripe bordered by two red. *Gedunk*, Ultras called it. Throwaway. Given to everyone who enlisted during the last war. It meant nothing more than you were brave enough to sign your name.

"Hello, there. Are you looking for work?"

Pietas stood taller, finger-combing his hair. "Yes, ma'am."

She entered the alley, gesturing for him to accompany her.

He turned to follow, staggering with dizziness. No matter what kind of work she needed done, he would do it, hungry or not. Once they reached the alley's deepest end, she hiked up her skirt and held out paper money.

It took a moment for it to register what she expected him to do. He'd been around no women other than his mother and sister. Did people...did they *do that*...in an alley? Surely not. He must be mistaken. She needed something else and he had misunderstood.

When he hesitated, she waved the money at him. "I don't have all day, do you want this or not?"

People respect an honorable man. His mother's voice played in his memory. *If they don't respect you, they have no honor in themselves.*

"What's the matter?" She offered the money again. "Come on, pretty boy. This has to be more than you usually get."

Clenching his fists, he turned and strode away from her, not slowing until he reached the Ultra union hall. There, he dropped onto the ground in the drizzling rain. Arms on upraised knees, he rested his head on them, fighting to control his rising anger.

That's his offer of work?

What was wrong with people?

"Hello?" called a female voice.

"I am not for sale!" He swept back his wet hair and glared up at her.

"That's good to know." The woman who looked down at him was not the one who'd offered to buy him. This one wore a white dress uniform.

Pietas clambered to his feet. Faint with hunger, he braced himself against the wall.

Kind blue eyes seemed to look through him. Unlike his, her blond hair held tones of gold instead of white. A beam of sunshine sneaked through the clouds and wrapped her in blazing light. Seeing her, a man could believe in angels.

He stood straighter and pushed wet hair out of his face. "Sorry."

"Don't be. Are you Pietas?"

"I am." Was this someone who could hire him? Her left chest sported a brace of ribbons as wide as his hand, most related to weaponry. He must not look slipshod. He drew his sodden hair into a tail and tossed it over his shoulder. Wiping wet hands on wetter clothes, he held himself in as military-correct a posture as he could manage.

"How do you know me, ma'am?"

"From your mother's description."

"My mother?" Homesickness arose in him so strong he staggered. He caught himself and straightened. He might be new to the greater Ultra world, but he hadn't been raised a fool. He kept his distance. "If you know her, what's her name? What's my

father's name?"

"Helia and Mahikos. Your mother and I were created at the same time. She was scientist class and I was warrior, but we became friends. I introduced her to Mahikos. Thankfully, she doesn't hold that against me." A wry smile tilted her mouth. "She called me, said she had a son named Pietas and a daughter named Dessy. She said you and your father had a fight and she asked me to look for you. She sends her love."

Hearing her speak took him back to the warm safety of his mother's presence. "You're Joss Avaton."

"That's right."

How often had his mother spoken of this woman? And always with reverence.

"Mother talks about you all the time. She misses you. She said you were the sister she wished she had."

"Did she?" Love and amusement came through the aether, as warm and embracing as his mother's. "I'm glad to know that. I wish she'd told me about you before now."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. That isn't your fault."

"Is Mother here? Have you seen her?"

"No. But she was worried so I said I'd find you. I should have tried the work halls first."

Surely it wasn't wrong to fall in love so fast. Mother had said not to trust strange women, and from his experience with the one earlier, she'd been right. But this was Joss. Her friend and heart-sister.

Pietas took two steps toward her, checked himself.

When Joss offered her hand, he took it.

She clasped both of hers around his.

The moment she touched him he felt some inner part of him reach toward her, a sprout beneath the dark earth yearning for sun. He'd had no idea at the time she was using her gift of Clarity to help him see his path.

All he knew was he would survive. He could do anything. His life was not over. This amazing woman cared about him.

"Thank you for looking for me. Finding me."

"My pleasure." She slid her fingertips down his jaw, out to the dimple in his chin.

"Let's get you off these streets, find you a meal, then bathed and into some dry clothes. We'll call your mother. She gave me a private link to her no one else knows about."

"You mean my father doesn't know about."

"You don't need to worry about your father." Joss took his hand. "You're safe. You're with me now."

With her? His heart did somersaults.

Yet at the thought of his father, his stomach still tightened with dread.

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Check out this page <https://kayelleallen.com/chaos-fire/>

The prequel to this book is Bringer of Chaos: the Origin of Pietas
<https://kayelleallen.com/chaos-origin/>

Where else to find Pietas

Pietas is found in books set in the Tarthian Empire.

Fan page on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/lordpietas/>

Boards on Pinterest <https://www.pinterest.com/kayelleallen/bringer-of-chaos-pietas/>

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Website <http://kayelleallen.com>

Twitter <http://twitter.com/kayelleallen>

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