



VIOLA GRACE



Rune Wunjō

AN HONOURED
WIFE

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RUNE WUNJO

BY

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An Honoured Wife
Rune Series - Wunjō
Copyright © 2007 Viola Grace
ISBN: 1-55410-812-8
Cover art by Martine Jardin

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Published by eXtasy Books
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MEANING OF WUNJO

The Rune Wunjo symbolizes happiness, joy and glory. A battle fought bravely and won with the reward of prosperity, peace and friendship beyond.

When drawn in an upright position it stands for joy, glory, happiness and recognition for a struggle overcome.

When reversed it indicates loss, shame, alienation, mourning and berserker rages.

It is a rune of emotion, and the opposing feelings of winning and losing in all things are epitomized when it appears in a reading.

To Mystery Meat. A thorough and fun editor.

PROLOGUE

Emily stood with her third eye facing the heavens and sighed. The stars were falling. It would be days before the comet's tail reached Shavin and her lovers crashed, but she knew they were coming.

She always knew when things were coming, when her life would change. It was part of her charm, and part of her curse. But, for now the meteor storm was days away and she needed to hunt for her clan. As honoured wife of the chief, she had but one responsibility. To feed all of his children.

She had better get started.

CHAPTER ONE

“**T**hey are coming today, Vinca, and I will be going with them.” She nestled into her husband’s six-armed cuddle and sighed. It was the only contact possible between them as her body found his venomous. Mainly due to the acid in his blood.

“I knew that you would have to go eventually. I had just hoped that it wasn’t this soon.” His bass rumble reverberated not only in her ears, but in her mind.

“I have been here for three years, two and a half of those as your wife.”

“My *honoured* wife.” He gently squeezed her for forgetting her title.

“Yes, your honoured wife, and the best hunter in the village. You are going to have to get off your butt and go out hunting again, you know.”

A deep shudder moved through him. “I know it. It has been convenient having you here. My sons and daughters will never eat that well again.”

“Well, I am going to spend the morning with Miniska and the little ones then call a lizard and ride it to the crash site.” She closed her hands over two of his. “I will have bonded to them by the time I come back. Be ready.”

He carefully closed his mouth over his fangs and kissed her lightly on the top of her head. “We will be. But you are always welcome to return, even if you cannot rejoin us after the ceremony.”

Tears formed in her eyes. She drew a deep breath and moved out of his grip. It was the last cuddle she would have with the teddy-spider cross that was Chief Vinca of the Xarit Colony of Shavin.

The Xarit enjoyed the environment and the humidity of the planet Shavin. The abundance of edible wildlife also was one of the attractions for their species as they needed kilos of meat per day to survive.

The precognition that the Alliance had developed within her mind was hit or miss for her own life most of the time, but excellent for predicting the movement of prey. When her shuttle crashed on Shavin, the Xarit had taken her in. By becoming the most accomplished hunter she had earned the position of honoured wife of the Chief. This meant that it was her responsibility to provide for him and his entire household.

His beloved wife was Miniska, mother of his nine children and a good friend to Emily. She had

protected Emily in the early days of her planet fall and had insisted on her hunter marks as her skills in the forest expanded. When they found out that she was a precog, the third eye was tattooed onto her head with decorative bands denoting her status.

They were usually all she wore. Her hip wrap and loincloth were the only covering she needed while running through the jungle.

The morning air was a little cool and her nipples in their serpent's grip stiffened in response. The tattoos bemused her when she looked down. For all the world they looked as if the snakes were about to bite down on her breast. According to Miniska it was a mark of a hunter, not a warrior, but one who provides. Men usually wore the icons in their fur as jewellery, but when she explained to them of the human style of tattoos, Mini had had the idea to have her imprinted with them.

Her Terran markings had given them the idea. Her stylized solar system in blue and silver was on her belly for all to see. The idea behind those markings was to keep the Terrans from being sold or kidnapped. For the most part, it had worked pretty well, but several humans had disappeared before the marking idea had been enacted, all of them women.

When Emily had crashed it was in the tail of the same comet. The fast little bugger had caught her

up, disabled her systems and thrown her to the soil of Shavin. If not for the Xarit, she doubted that she would have survived. But they took her in and, as soon as she could, she began to repay their hospitality.

The path between the Chief's official dwelling and his family dwelling was well worn and she followed it easily in the dim light. The kids usually romped back and forth on the path with abandon and cheerful chittering. They had not learned Alliance common yet and so it was only with the greatest of efforts that she managed to communicate with them. The most important thing was to teach them not to bite her.

When Shim, a toddler, bit her after their first meeting, he created an inflamed response in her body that had her at death's door until they were able to flush the toxin from her system.

Since that day, she didn't approach the children that were under five years old, when they could be made to understand that they couldn't bite their Auntie Emi. They could come with her and learn the basics of moving in the jungle, hunting, and a few of them could use their psi talents with her once they had learned that important lesson.

She carefully pitched her voice to a high whisper. "Morning Mini! Are the all the little ones up?" The Xarit had excellent high-range hearing and in no time a herd of six-armed, two legged fuzzy children were swarming over her.

The elder ones kept the younger ones away until they calmed down, and by then their mother had made her appearance.

"You just had to wake them up, didn't you?"

"It was past time." She crouched down to be eye level with the eldest, Raymisk. "Ray, I have let seven *mitros* loose in the village square. More than enough for breakfast. The first one of you to bring back two becomes Honoured Hunter for the week."

With a chitter and squeal he translated for the younger ones and en masse they ran from the house to hunt their breakfast.

"There Mini, I got them out from under you. Happy?"

"You have no idea." She moved her pregnant bulk around with surprising grace. Her six arms moved rapidly to assemble her own breakfast as her children could be heard shrieking and squealing as they caught the rodents that made up the majority of the Xarit diet on Shavin. "You know, when I let Vinca talk me into coming here to raise a family, I had no idea what I was getting into."

Emily chortled. Their species did not flourish in space, so to raise a healthy family they needed to find a planet that was uninhabited but full of lower and edible life forms. Vinca was taking advantage of his mate being grounded to grow their family to the fullest. Miniska had been

pregnant almost constantly for the last ten years. She was certain that this would be the last one. Her cycles were getting further and further apart, and she couldn't be more relieved.

"I can hardly wait until this one is old enough to travel. I am tired of being stuck on this backwater planet." She sat at the enormous table and put her head down in two of her hands. "I want to shop again."

It took seventeen minutes for Emily to stop laughing. Xarit lived nude for the most part. A singular hip wrap was all that Mini usually wore. A mini skirt. Even in space. Their fur kept them from more obvious demands of climate or modesty.

"Your amusement is not appreciated. What will you do when we return to civilization?" She was munching on one of the flat nut cakes that she baked in the evenings. She handed one to Em and together they had breakfast.

"I wanted to tell you Mini, that I may not be coming back after today." She tried to keep it casual, but tears flooded her eyes. Mini stopped chewing and her eyes widened.

"What? But why?"

"My destiny falls here today. Imperfect and uncertain. It arrives today." She shrugged. "A shuttle is caught in the same damn comet that brought me down, and in it are my mates."

"You have seen it?"

"No. I just have a hunch." She slapped the fuzzy shoulder. "Of course I saw it."

They both rose from the table and embraced. "I could just let one of the little ones bite you. Then you wouldn't be able to go."

"You would rather risk my death than let me leave? Nice Mini. Really classy." The hug grew a little more violent than called for and Emily separated them with difficulty. The bulge in Mini's belly had protested the close contact with a solid kick to Em's abdomen.

"When this one comes out, I am naming it after you." She wiped tears from her face with a taloned hand.

Em was busy with her own tears and managed to sniffle out, "That won't be appropriate for a boy."

"Fine, Emica if it is a boy, Emiska if it is a girl."

"What will Vinca say?"

"If he ever wants to have sex again? He will say nothing and honour his Honoured Wife."

Laughing, Em went in for another hug. It was the last time that Miniska would see her alive.

CHAPTER TWO

Wiping tears from her eyes, she walked through the jungle and to the top of Lizard hill, as she liked to call it. With some difficulty she cleared her mind and let it follow the wind down into the valley below. Each life form was distinct in her mind's eye and she found her mount with little trouble. A small pulse of emotion and he was on his way.

She put the bags containing water and nut cakes down, he wouldn't be there for close to an hour. In the mean time, she could meditate and absorb the patterns of life around her. This planet was so alive it was almost scary.

She listened to the life of the planet for almost an hour then stood as her ride arrived. Back on earth a twenty foot gliding lizard would have scared her. Here, it was just part of the scenery.

"Hiya Slinky. How are you today?" She would never know why it had bonded to her, but the day that her ship had crashed he had pulled her out

and taken her to the Xarit village. He asked nothing of her but the occasional pat on the nose and removal of molting skin. She obliged every time.

"Slinky, I need some help today." The yellow eyes blinked rapidly. "Today, a star will fall in the lava field and we need to be there to help them." A tingle in her mind expressed his curiosity. She shared her vision and he blinked more rapidly.

"I haven't met them yet. But they may be important to me." The tingle warmed her mind and she knew he would do as she asked.

Moving quickly she strapped the water bags and the food onto his back, then swung up behind them. He had a fine crest of fur between the scales of his flesh and it was that that she held onto.

With directions passed from her mind to his, she directed him up to the apex of the next hill and then, with a deep breath, off the cliff and into the air.

It wasn't flying, it was more of a controlled fall. Enormous flaps of skin under his legs and belly flared open and caught the winds. He controlled their fall based on her directions then climbed the next hill to continue their walk and glide pattern. With each drop they were closer to the lava fields.

When they were still two drops away the meteor shower began.

"Shit!" The rocks were falling to the planet a few miles away, but the small shuttle had

managed to pull out of the wave to head for the field directly in front of her. It was a different shape than standard Alliance issue, but apparently still susceptible to the magnetic field of that damned comet.

“Come on, we only have one chance at this. Do you know what to do?”

He sent a warm flutter through her mind. He was ready. They made their second last jump.

As he scampered up to his next vantage point for launch she hoped that it played out as she had foreseen. If not, those two would be crispy critters in a matter of moments.

She watched them open the hatch then saw the first of two faces that had been with her in her dreams for a week. The second was not far behind and she noted with approval that they both moved to the highest point of the crashed shuttle to keep out of the heat.

“Alright Slinky. Time to earn your snack. I promise if we manage this, I will make it a good one.” He would have to reach out with his hind legs and grab them. She outlined it clearly and waited for his response. He understood.

* * * *

Tabor could not believe it. The comet’s tail had pulled them in and thrown them into a field of lava. All they had wanted was to complete the

rescue mission that the Alliance had set them on.
Fuck!

Vallej was shaken, but intact. He had been fighting the controls during their descent and had taken the brunt of the shock. He had had to haul his brother out of the ship and only then did he seem to revive.

Their ship was slowly melting beneath them. If they didn't find a way off, they were going to die. Just as he formed that thought, he saw the lizard. It was looking at their shuttle with an intense focus and, when he saw that it had a rider, he didn't know what was going on. Tabor thought he felt a fluttering against his mind, but his shields were up and so he could not be sure.

Their ship moved under them and he saw the lizard shifting its footing. It was going to jump, but he didn't know why.

Tabor gripped Vallej by the arm and pulled him to his feet. Explaining without words what he thought was about to happen. Vallej nodded and they watched the lizard as it leapt off the cliff and banked in slow circles toward them.

The lower limbs of the lizard extended and the clawed feet opened. He lined up with one of them and made sure that Vallej matched the other. One deep breath and they were captured and lifted off their melting ship.

A high pitched cursing in Alliance common was the first indicator that something was wrong.

They were coming down too fast to make a graceful landing, so the instant that they were over solid ground Tabor and Vallej jumped. They tucked and rolled in unison, landing on the green lush grasses of a small clearing.

It was a wise decision as the lizard and its rider crashed into some low trees just beyond the clearing. Sometimes having a direct psychic link with his brother was an asset. Like now.

The cursing stopped and with a groan of pain, their saviour appeared without her lizard. She turned and yelled over her shoulder. "That was great! Go home Slinky!"

A rustle in the trees was the answer. A flash of green tail and he was off.

The creature that approached them was definitely female, but her species was impossible to determine. At the distance that she was approaching from they had ample opportunity to view their saviour.

Her skin was an even gold, helped along by her lack of covering, only a hip wrap a few inches wide covered her below the waist, the rest of her was bare. Her belly wore the marks of an Alliance protectorate, two serpents wrapped around her breasts and mysterious designs wrapped her biceps. The third eye that she sported was only partially obscured by her wealth of ash coloured hair. As she closed the distance between them her amber gaze took in everything.

"Hello. I am Emi, honoured wife of Vinca of the Xarit colony." She gave a formal bow from the waist in Alliance fashion and his gaze immediately followed the dangle of her breasts and the pert peaks of her nipples.

"We are Tabor and Vallej, of Solnav." They bowed and Tabor read in Vallej an interest equal to his own. They were wondering if she was sexually compatible and they had only just met her.

"Are you heavy worlders by any chance?"

"We are." Vallej's low voice seemed to reach something inside her, her nipples beaded at the sound.

Her own tone was slightly husky, "I surmised so. Slinky could have carried you otherwise."

"Slinky?"

"The large gliding lizard. He saved your lives." She was close to them now, her scent was wild and feminine. Not what they needed when they were on a rescue mission.

"We thank you for your rescue." Vallej was rarely this outspoken, he must have really become enamoured of their rescuer.

"You are welcome. But are you able to travel? Your crash was nasty."

"You saw it?"

"Of course. It is why I was here."

"You knew we would crash? Yet you sent no warning?" Tabor was getting angry. This forest

nymph knew they would crash and did nothing.

His accusation set off something within her. She slammed her hands to her hips. "What was I supposed to do, clap two coconuts together?"

With fury in her eyes she was even more attractive. He didn't know what she was talking about, but she looked fantastic. Tabor fought the reaction in his ship suit. An erection would not improve his mood. But flinging the minx to the ground and rutting with her had definite appeal.

"I suppose not. Is there anywhere we could get some assistance?" Vallej was always the reasonable one. Especially when there was a woman concerned.

A grin split her face. She was heartstoppingly beautiful. The smile made her eyes dance and the third eye on her forehead crinkled with amusement. Upon closer inspection it was yet another tattoo.

"I can take you back to my village. Did you manage to set off a beacon?"

"Yes, when the comet took us. A ship will be here to pick us up in four days." Their voices were as one. It happened sometimes, sharing a soul had strange effects.

"Good. We will be back at my village in three."

"Three days?" Again in unison.

"Yes. With your weight we can't travel by lizard, directly through the jungle is our only path. I hope you like meat, because we are not going to

be berry picking on this walk.” She turned and picked up some sort of leather pouches from near the edge of the clearing where the lizard had crashed then waved for them to follow her.

CHAPTER THREE

With her hormones flashing signals to her that she was desperate to act on, she led the two survivors through the jungle.

“From the little that the ship told us before our descent, this is a Xarit inhabited planet.”

With her back turned she had to depend on her hearing to tell them apart. The golden skinned one had spoken, his words were slow and measured with a tone that shook her bones.

“It was correct. The Xarit do have three dozen small colonies here. The planet is Shavin by the way, in case you were interested.” She was trying not to gasp for air as the heavyworlders managed to keep a very brisk pace going, even after their recent crash.

There was a palpable pause. “You are not a Xarit.”

“That is correct. You are very astute for crash victims. Are you two of the same species?” She had to ask, they looked so similar to each other in

feature, but one of them was a metallic green and the other was a burnished gold.

"Yes. We are Khaharim. I am Tabor and this is my egg brother Vallej." The green one was speaking. Tabor. His voice was not as low pitched and it was obvious that he was the one of the pair that did most of the speaking.

"Egg brother? How does that work?"

Vallej filled her in, "Our planet once had two distinct races. The Harim and the Khahar. They had been intermarrying for years, but it was only when the pure races became sterile through disease and pollution that a serious blending of the two began. Instead of creating a blended race, the matings created an aberration in the male chromosome that split the egg in utero. Two males would be born at a time, one gold, one green, representing their parent races. Females were unaffected. One egg, one birth."

Tabor chuckled. "Vallej is a doctor. He has a serious fascination with Khaharim reproduction."

Emily smiled and kept forging forward. She was developing a fascination of her own. Her precognition had always been more of a curse than a blessing, but remembering her body tangled with theirs was enough to cause a hitch in her breathing. The visions had begun weeks earlier, and now that they were here in the flesh, she had no idea how her body would tolerate their heavy gravity touch.

The sky took on bluish tint. It was a signal to her that she had to find a place for them to camp for the night, fast. When the sky went purple, it would only give them an hour until complete dark.

"We need to find somewhere to stop. The sun will be setting soon and the moons are dark this week." Her eyes scanned for telltale signs of water and predators. A stream satisfied the first requirement, and no signs of anything that found her tasty was a welcome relief.

"The water source is sufficient?" A green arm touched her shoulder as she came to a stop.

"Yes. Now we just need a clearing."

"I believe I can help with that." Tabor took point and made his way from the stream a few meters into the growth. From his ship suit he withdrew a small orb.

Terrans called them blast balls. The technical term was defoliation orb. "Oh hells. Those aren't allowed here."

"But they are very convenient." With a grin and a wink he twisted the orb in his hand, then drew back his arm and threw the orb into a dense packet of growth. "Run."

"Fuck." She turned and ran back to the stream they just left and, as the blast wave hit, she leapt into the air. A golden arm snagged her and pulled her under the water. Her breath had been held on instinct in the air and it now served her well as the

five second flash burn erupted above the stream. She watched the flare fade and counted to three before surfacing. As she broke the surface, she gasped heavily. It was really more excitement than she needed.

Remembering that she probably could not injure him, as soon as Tabor surfaced, she put her hands on his shoulders, hooked one ankle behind his knee and shoved him back into the stream. "What the hell is your problem?" Every time he surfaced, she shoved him back into the water. "You bring forbidden tech to a restricted planet and set it off when we are in the vicinity. You idiot!"

Vallej was laughing his ass off on the bank of the stream, his head thrown back and his dark golden hair gleaming in the bluing light.

"What are you laughing at? Did you know about the blast ball?"

"The what? Oh, the defoliator. Yes. It is standard in the emergency packs we are carrying." His ship suit clung to him in a most fascinating manner and she had to tear her gaze away reluctantly as what seemed to be an erection was tenting it at his groin.

"Will you use yours as well?"

He gestured to the trees and the barren ground around them. "There is no need. It has taken out the ground cover and left only the trees untouched. No small predator can hide and any

large predator will be seen before it can injure us.”

Tabor spoke from behind her. “I am sorry I did not warn you, but it was much more fun this way.” He shook his head vigorously and she flinched at the water that sprayed her. Deep green locks fluffed out around his face and he looked almost boyish. If boys over six feet could lift a small car.

Muttering under her breath she clamoured out of the water and moved into the clearing the ball had created. Looking around she nodded and picked up a few stones. They were still hot and she dropped them with a sharp curse.

“Well, smart asses, since you decided to burn everything, you can find firewood.” She crossed her arms under her breasts and scowled at the two that she had rescued from the lava. “I’ll be here. I need to work on a few things. Tomorrow is gonna be tougher.” The shifting of the light had her adding, “You had better get moving, night will be here soon.”

They bowed and headed off together to do as she asked. Their lack of resistance to her order gave her a small smile. Men were the same on whatever planet you were from she supposed. She dug through one of her packs and was relieved to see that the nut cakes had made it unscathed and only slightly damp. Mini had triple wrapped them for protection, she had packed for Emily before and had taken care.

Em almost cried at the thought that it would be the last time that Mini would be packing supplies for her. Pushing her wistfulness aside she went into the other pouch and removed her knives. Now that they were not moving, she would be a target for all the predators of the area that caught her scent. She needed to be prepared.

Taking one of her six inch blades, she tied the handle into her hair and after suitable assessment, chose one with suitable limbs. She shinnied up the tree with quite a bit of grunting and effort, but made it far enough up to sit on the lowest branch, eighteen feet in the air. Sitting in the tree with her feet off the ground she giggled. She couldn't help it. Nothing in her life reminded her more of her childhood than sitting with her feet unable to reach the floor. This was no exception.

She heard a faint rustling and was recalled to her precarious place and the task at hand. She needed a spear. Selecting and sawing off likely branches occupied her for ten minutes. By the time she was done, over seven candidates were on the ground beneath the tree. Once again she tied her knife into her hair and scooted down the tree, mildly satisfied that it was easier to go down than up.

The branches were sorted and checked for straightness. Two final candidates made the cut, so to speak. She stripped them of bark and bound the two blank blades she carried into the head of

each spear. She kept leather thongs in her pouch for just this purpose. A few test throws let her know that she had chosen correctly. Now it was time to find dinner.

Not having an audience for it made it easier. She cast her mind out and found three deer-like creatures, a school of fish coming down the stream and a few large lizards that had run the other way when the ball went off. With three mouths to feed, the deer became her choice. She focused on them, keeping their minds linked to hers as she hunted them down. A flicker of movement in the trees and she knew that she was almost upon them.

They were grazing quietly, no idea that she was about to come among them, and she felt bad for it then felt hungry. With no telltale inhalation or exhalation of breath she launched her spear into the air. It sailed straight and true and into the eye of the deer standing on the edge of the herd. It dropped without a single sound. The rest of the herd were remotely curious, but had not seen or felt anything out of the ordinary. To spook them from her kill she came out of the jungle and into the clearing.

They scattered predictably. She moved in and field dressed the carcass then threw it over her shoulders and walked it back to the burned out clearing. The boys were just coming back as she came in and she began to butcher the deer for dinner.

"You just killed that?" Tabor was impressed. It showed.

"Yeah. That is what I needed you guys gone for. Somethings a girl likes to do alone." She kept her head down and watched as they used another forbidden gadget to start the fire. She arranged some of the rejected limbs into a spit and, with instructions to turn the haunches of meat, she left them to cook dinner while she washed the blood from herself and her tools.

The water was brisk and she had a lot of blood in her hair that she tried to clean. It wasn't working. She would have to wait until she was at home for a proper bath or shower. This was just so that she didn't smell like carrion. With her body dripping, she attended to another matter of nature, bathed again and wandered back to the campsite.

The boys were positively domestic. Salt and pepper were on the deer meat that was roasting, but they were still rotating the spit as she had ordered. Great, they could improvise.

"How long will this take?" Vallej made the query as he was the one turning the spit.

She assessed the browning of the joints. "We can start shaving off bits in a few minutes. But one of you will still need to turn it occasionally."

She settled in on her knees and laid out the water bag and the nut cakes. "We can start on these. They are nut cakes made by the Chief's

Beloved Wife, Miniska."

"I thought you were the Chief's wife."

"I am his Honoured Wife. We are not physically compatible, but we share a bond of affection and respect. I do all the hunting for his family." She poked at the meat with one of her knives then sliced off a strip and offered it to Tabor. The second went to Vallej.

"How can you be a wife if there is no physical interaction?"

"We can't mate, but we can mind touch. It was one of the first things that the Xarit taught me. They did a helluva better job than the Alliance." She chewed on her own strip of meat and then did the rounds again.

"What are you, exactly?" Vallej was more than curious. He was awaiting her answer with a tension that was not appropriate to the question.

"A Terran. Human of the Alliance protectorate of Terra. I crashed here three years ago and the Xarit rescued me and took me in. I owe them my life, and all of my hunting skills."

"A Terran? What was your Alliance designation?"

"I was a Tracker, a lone tracker. No one would work with me. Personality conflicts." She smiled grimly and kept the pattern of feeding them and herself going. She passed the water skin around and they sipped at it as they needed. Silence fell.

Vallej broke it. "Did you ever consider entering

diagnostic service? They use the same psychic skills and are a lot less likely to end up in a shuttle crash."

"My talent is not under my control. It is a wild combination of precognition and clairvoyance." She laughed bitterly. "In fact, it is so out of my control that the Alliance did not even deign to send a recovery team to my last location."

"Yes. They did." Tabor smiled ruefully. "We were just a little late in getting here."

CHAPTER FOUR

“**Y**ou? *You* are the recovery team?” Her astonishment could not have been more evident. This was definitely not foreseen. She shook her head. “That is impossible. You...I...we...this is impossible.”

The distinct scent of scorched meat reached her nostrils and she flinched in response. With a sharp curse she jerked the meat off the spit. She laid them carefully on one of the rocks surrounding the fire. “It took you three years to come after me?”

“No, it took the Alliance that long to find you compatible mates. We were given your name and specifications and immediately set out to find you.” Tabor was looking hungrily at the meat on the stone.

Vallej however kept his gaze on her. “We were waiting for a match to be made. The instant the information was released to us, we grabbed the first shuttle we could on the first Alliance jump

ship in the area and here we are."

Tabor filled in the rest, "The comet took us by surprise."

"Join the club. It is what landed me here." She paused for a moment, "So, you have an entire jump ship at your beck and call? It must be nice."

"The Alliance wanted to make sure that those who retrieved you would be your assigned mates."

"Why did they need to be so particular?"

"There is a run on Terrans for mating and bonding rituals. They wanted to be sure that those who came upon you were suitable matches. Even if you choose to reject us."

That caught her attention, "Us?"

Vallej filled her in here. "The Khaharim mate in threes. The two egg brothers and their chosen mate. Together they form a family unit that will guarantee to produce both male and female offspring. And because of the multiple nature of male births, two fathers are better than a single parent."

She couldn't fault that logic. But she was still reeling from the information about the Alliance refusing to pick her up. She could easily have died on this planet and, without the Xarit, she would have.

"Are the children that difficult to manage?" Her mind was telling her that 'at least they weren't venomous'.

“We develop more quickly than the standard Terran infant. Our children can walk at four months. The running starts immediately.” He smiled in a soothing manner that was meant to calm her. He didn’t succeed.

Fuming and irritated, she sat back and waved at the deer meat. “Help yourselves, table service is over.” She watched them each tear into the meat that she had killed for their comfort. With nothing else to do, and no interest in speaking to them, she set about affixing one of her extra blades to the spear shaft that she had harvested earlier. One of the leather pouches that she had hauled along with her kept all of her tools and extra blades. It included thin strips of leather to attach the blades to a spear, and anything else she could think of to create snares or weapons. She could not count the amount of times that her bag of tricks had saved her life, and she hoped that she didn’t run out of inspiration anytime soon. Her life just may depend on it.

Vallej stretched his golden form out and rubbed at his stomach. Apparently, now sated, he was going to sleep. “Emily, would you care to sleep together for warmth? It is getting rather chilly.”

His logic was impeccable. “Yes, I would. The Xarit do the same.” She rose to her feet and moved over to him, the smell of smoke and masculine sweat blended into a heady musk.

He stretched out on his side, his back to the fire,

and welcomed her into his arms. She snuggled down, revelling in the warmth of his body. He put out enough heat to warm her hut.

“Do you mind if I join you?” Tabor’s voice rumbled above her and, with some effort, she looked up into the gold spiralling eyes.

“Nope. The more the merrier.” With a smile on her lips, she lay back in Vallej’s arms and waited for Tabor to join them. He didn’t hesitate.

Their arms felt heavy as they pinned her between them. It would take a Herculean effort to shift them and she wasn’t sure that she wanted to. This was not the coming together she envisioned, but it felt right.

CHAPTER FIVE

Waking in a tangle of heavy limbs felt so right that she almost couldn't bear to wake her companions. However, the large poisonous *niktal* changed her mind in a hurry. Summoning her energy, she shifted the heavy arm confining her shoulders then moved the green thigh tangling with hers.

The first time she had seen one, she had been with a hunting party and Vinca had kept himself between her and the beast that resembled a Komodo dragon crossed with a bearded lizard. The secretions of the glands in its mouth would kill her in seconds if it reached her, and she was its target. Something about her scent brought predators running and she had needed to learn to defend herself and those she was with in a hurry. Now was that time.

In three seconds, she was on her feet and facing the five foot lizard with two blades in her hands. The *niktal* charged at her the instant that it saw her

taking a defensive stance. Emily hissed and met the charge.

The salivating jaws snapped shut just inches from her face as she dug one of the knives into the breastplate and slammed the other into the soft palate of the lower jaw. With her blades pinning the lizard, she shoved it back and crouched low. Her new spear was now within reach and she grabbed it.

It was the final blow to her foe and she leaned heavily on it as the life fled from the *niktal*. A stream of the deadly venom formed a pool under the scaly head. When she saw a green hand reach toward her, she almost screamed, "Don't touch it! The venom is a strong paralytic."

"Alright." Tabor was awake, alert and naked. How had she missed that when she woke? It didn't matter if it was life or death, she should have noticed that. "Perhaps you should wash off the blood."

Her skin burned where it had been in contact with the lizard blood, it seemed like a helluva idea. She tugged her knives from the carcass, stumbled through the brush and into the stream that they had bathed in the night before. Running water was best for washing off blood on Shavin. Too many predators would come running if she bathed in a stationary pond. Even the diluted scent of blood would have them on her in a matter of hours.

As she scrubbed first her knives then herself, she noted a tingling in her left arm. "Dammit." Both of her companions had made it to the edge of the stream and it was to them she turned with her body slowly losing control. "Help." It was the only word that she could voice and she could not be certain that it had been audible, but both of them were in the water lifting her as she slumped into a boneless heap.

* * * *

Vallej took her in his arms and looked at her as she lost her color and her breathing became slow and shallow. "What happened to her?"

"The lizard was toxic. Paralytic. She was scratched while defending us." Tabor looked down the path that she had pointed out. Then up to the hill that housed the Xarit colony. If he and Vallej ran full out, they could reach the village in under six hours. Their heavy gravity upbringing gave them a distinct advantage while on planets such as this. He asked his brother, "How are you feeling?"

"Fine."

"Good. She needs help. Let's run." He picked up her knives and her water bag. "Let me know when you want me to carry her."

The protective look that his brother gave Emily spoke more loudly than words. He would rather

die than give her up. Tabor understood. He felt the same.

They began to run for her life.

* * * *

The jungle was rife with life, but no predator dared to stop them in their quest. Only twice did they rest and take water. Their heavy ship boots pounded into the rich loam under their feet and the fragrant air was so heavy it was difficult to breath.

Emily was still immobile, but breathing fairly regularly. Occasionally, they would feel a flicker on the psychic plane, but it would be gone before they could focus on it.

They ran in silence, only their harsh breathing and footfalls announcing their approach. The jungle was a solid wall of green around them one moment, and gone the next. A wide clearing opened and a Xarit medical team was waiting for them. Medical supplies were the only technology allowed on their colony worlds and it was a damned good thing for Emily's sake.

A large and intimidating male came toward them, "I am Chief Vinca, please give her to me."

Vallej stood his ground, but reluctantly held his burden out to the larger male. It didn't sit well, but the medics were not coming any closer to the aliens.

"You may wait in the visitor's hut. Over there." Two of his left arms gestured to a small hut on the side of the clearing.

"We want to stay with her." They stood shoulder to shoulder and faced the creatures that could, if provoked, rip them limb from limb. Not that the Khaharim wouldn't give them a good fight, but they were hopelessly outnumbered.

The medics began to swarm over the gurney that they had ready. Readings and machines suddenly hummed to life as she was hooked up to the monitors.

"It was not a request. Aliens are not allowed to mix with the Xarit children in the village. They need to learn their own strengths before being thrown into the Alliance worlds." Vinca patted them on the shoulders in commiseration. "We will take the best care of her we can, she is not Xarit and so we cannot remove the *niktal* venom entirely. But by the time the ship gets here, she will be stable."

"How did you know what kind of venom it was?" Vallej was suspicious.

He gave a toothy smile to the limp woman on the stretcher. "She told me. In my mind. She is after all, my Honoured Wife."

That was all that the Xarit had to say as they moved the gurney to another hut on the other side of the clearing. The burn scars in the center let Tabor and Vallej know that this was also the

shuttle landing area. They would be going home and this was the place to get them there. But they would not be leaving without her. She was theirs. They felt it in every part of their bodies and minds. They wanted her and they would have her. Xarit or no. She was their Say'rim. Their mind mate and no other would do.

Food was brought to them by some of the adult males, no others came near them. In the distance they heard chanting and wailing. No one had come to tell them of a death, but the noises sounded an awful lot like a funeral.

* * * *

"Emiska. You are not well. There is nothing we can do for you except slowing the toxin down." Vinca stroked her hair away from her forehead with the utmost care. "You are my wife until death, but that would mean you had to stay with me. And that would kill you. So, I am declaring you legally dead and letting the village know." A soft kiss was laid on skin that could not feel it. He stroked her hair again. "Only as a dead woman are you free to take the two men that you have bonded to. I wish you well. My most Honoured Wife." He turned to watch her immobile form for a long moment then moved to prepare for her funeral.

* * * *

Masks, garlands and the funerary spears that would accompany her in the afterlife were hastily assembled. A shocked village gathered and mourned the loss of their best hunter. Howls of grief from the adults and children that Emily had loved with, laughed with and taught rang through the village as the funeral cortege walked down. The Xarit tore their hair, beat their chests and showed their respect to the human woman who had become one of them. With a slow and patient step, the bearers brought her down the path to the visitor's hut and knocked on the door.

"The shuttle will be here within the hour. You will leave and take her with you, we have contacted the mother ship and they have a Medical standing by." Tears flowed freely down Vinca's face and he turned to walk the path back to the village. The other pall bearers touched him for comfort.

* * * *

As the Xarit walked away Tabor and Vallej looked carefully at their woman. She was almost buried under a heap of flowers, weapons, tribal carvings and drawings of Emily with Xarit children, obviously drawn by those children. She was well-loved by her family.

Vallej lifted a few of the offerings off to the side and sighed in relief as the life-support that had sustained her was still operating, simply tucked into the base of the palanquin she rested on. "She is still on life-support."

"Good. But what are we supposed to do with all this?"

"I think she will want it. All of it."

"I was afraid that you would say that. The shuttle crew won't like this."

"Tough. They won't argue with the Xarit." A grin split Vallej's face, pushing the worry of their Say'rim's condition away for a moment.

"Indeed. Who would want to?" A short chuckle from Tabor lit the air. Finally the pulsing sound of the shuttle engine could be heard over the grieving of the Xarit village. The faster they got out of there, the better.

CHAPTER SIX

The shuttle ride was a precious two hours back to the main ship. The whole time Tabor and Vallej did not take their attention off of Emily. Her breathing remained steady, but the monitors were indicating that her body was slowly and completely shutting down. Time was running out.

Walls, pristine grey walls around her. She was not on Shavin anymore. As Emily sat up, a delicate alarm sounded which drew the attention of an attendant nearby.

"Doctor Novess, she is awake." A communication panel winked out as the attendant removed her hand from the activator.

"Where exactly am I? Aside from being on an Alliance vessel?" Her voice was a harsh croak. "And who are you?"

"I am Alswin, the junior doctor on duty. You are on the Alliance ship the Solar Seeker. We picked up you and your companions from the

Xarit colony world. You were in a coma."

"The *niktal*. Damn. It must have scratched me." The roughness of her own voice was irritating her. "Can I get something to drink?"

"Not until Doctor Novess has cleared you. You were very close to death."

Emily heaved a sigh and flopped back to a prone position. Fine she would wait, but she didn't have to like it. She ran through the races of the Alliance and tried to place Alswin's features. The flat nose and split upper lip made her think of at least a dozen.

The door hissed open and Vallej and Tabor walked in. Vallej was wearing a doctor's uniform and, when Alswin greeted him, Emily's assumption was confirmed. "Doctor Novess, I did not expect you so soon." The warmth in her voice set Emily's teeth on edge, but Vallej's caress of her hair soothed her.

"You frightened us Emily. We only just found you and we did not want to lose you."

Tabor moved to take her hand and she felt his fingers shake against hers. "You were dead for several minutes before we could get you into Medical. It was only with Vallej's resuscitation skills that you managed to survive at all."

"Thank you Vallej. Your efforts are most appreciated." Her wry voice did not go unnoticed and she received a sharp squeeze of her fingers from Tabor while his brother went over her stats.

"How long have I been here?"

"You have been in treatment for seventeen days." Vallej smirked and nodded to his assistant. She reluctantly left the Medical bay. "We made a few Alliance authorized modifications to you as well."

She knew it was coming. They would have to have increased her gravitational tolerance to enable several of the scenes in her mind. Her body just wasn't up to handling that much weight.

"Am I clear to leave Medical?" As she squirmed a bit with the lascivious images running through her mind, she noted that she was in a set of scrubs. She hated the feel of clothing on her breasts. It didn't feel right anymore after three years on Shavin.

"I suppose. But there are no quarters available for you. There is another matter that must be decided." Vallej nodded to Tabor and the unnaturally quiet Khaharim took out a small box.

"In the fashion of your people we wanted to ask you. Will you marry us?" They knelt and looked up at her with slight blushes darkening their differing complexions.

She could not have been more surprised if they had stripped naked and started juggling. They were actually asking her permission for something that she knew they had authorization for from the Alliance and her own government. That they would go to the trouble of getting an engagement

ring and formally proposing broke a defensive wall inside her.

They were doing their best to play by her rules. That had to be rewarded.

"Yes. I will marry you. Both. In a formal ceremony in Terran fashion." She smiled and was slightly distressed when her face would not complete the motion.

"You will not regret it. Now, this goes on the third finger of your left hand?"

"Yes." Two masculine hands made the ring seem miniscule as it slid into position on her ring finger. It fit perfectly, but she guessed that they had had plenty of time to measure her hand while she was in the coma. "Why won't my face move?"

"The paralysis is only temporary. It will pass in a few weeks." Vallej rose to his feet once again and kissed her lips sweetly. Tabor followed suit. Her body was tingling in reaction and she wanted nothing more than to fling them to the floor and have her way with them.

"The captain is standing ready to perform the ceremony. We have a gown for you and Alswin can be your Maid of Honor." Tabor was in a hurry, the tenting in his trousers a wordless explanation.

"Do you have some one to give me away?"

"Yes. We arranged for a member of your species to be present."

Wow, that was thoughtful. "So, when do you

want to do this?" She assumed that she would have a few days to adjust to the change in circumstance.

"Now?" Vallej was hopeful. "Everyone is here, you need simply to change into your gown and we can become one."

"Holy crap. That's fast."

"There is nothing gained by delay." Well, he had a point. Their arrangement was authorized by every governing body that they reported to. This was for her benefit.

It was touching really.

"Fine. Bring me the gown and let's have a wedding." She forced humour into her tone then realized that her throat was still raw. "Can I have something to drink now?"

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was her wedding day. She only wished she knew more about the men she was marrying.

The gown was beautiful, a silk that hugged her curves, a wrought lace veil and a helper to assist her dressing and to tame her hair. Asha Timmons was a Hunter, and very good at her job.

She was also the human representative that would give Emily away. Her black leather made quite a counterpoint to the white silk, but it was detailed enough to qualify for formal wear.

A chime rang and Emily nervously adjusted her dress and fussed with her veil. "Don't be nervous Emily. These guys obviously want to make you happy. Let them." The chime rang again. "Time to go. The rest of your life awaits."

Together they made their way through the halls of the Solar Seeker. Crew personnel bowed with respect as she passed. A shy crewman handed her a bouquet of flowers as they arrived at the Captain's formal dining hall. With Asha on her left

side and the bouquet of alien blossoms in her right hand, she went in to meet her men.

Keeping herself to a measured pace she wondered if she would have agreed to marry the two hunks in front of her if she hadn't 'seen' them first. Would her body have responded so violently to theirs if it didn't have a precognition memory driving it? It was a moot point, but it did slow her steps slightly.

Asha took the bouquet from her as they reached the podium. Tabor and Vallej each held out a hand to her and she took theirs. One on her left and one on her right.

The captain was wearing a formal uniform and greeted her with a grin. "I am glad you didn't make a run for the escape pod. Welcome to the Solar Seeker."

"Thank you. Your ship is lovely." It was hard to come up with a compliment when her stomach was doing flip flops at the light touch of their hands on hers. Her hormones were officially in overdrive.

"Can we begin?" Tabor sounded excited. He looked outwardly calm, but his voice was definitely betraying a deeper emotion.

The captain's full lips twisted in amusement. "Yes, by all means, let's discard the pleasantries and get on with the main event." The room around them chuckled.

Despite her best efforts she could feel a blush

heating her face and body. A blushing bride, with two grooms. *How appropriate.*

"We are gathered here together to join this trio in honoured union. While the traditions of Terra have been included in these proceedings, it is the psychic joining of the Khaharim that will ratify the union. When the Khaharim find their perfect mate, they know it. The dreams of the woman that the males will marry haunt them their entire adult lives. For the women, they dream as their mates approach." He stopped addressing the room and addressed the trio. "Do you agree that these initial signs have manifested?"

As one they announced, "I do."

"And in these manifestations, did you see the woman or man before you and feel a connection to them?"

"I did." She pondered the nature of the questions then had the dawning realization that she was experiencing a link to them and had been for months. It was the way their species picked their mates.

"With your link enacted and your attraction confirmed by the pheromones emanating from all three of you, it is time to formalize the union."

She raised her eyebrows in surprise as he reached beneath the podium to extract three crowns. Formalizing did not mean consummating apparently.

The captain handed the crowns to Tabor who

handed one to her and one to Vallej. "You will each put the crown upon your head then, after activating it, you will hand it to the member of your trio on your left. The process will be repeated twice more then your minds will have been keyed to each other."

With trembling hands she put the cold metal on her head. How she was supposed to activate it was a mystery. The veil clouded her features as the crown pushed it tightly to her head and she waited. And waited. With a thread of inspiration, she tried to send her mind out as she did when she was hunting.

That was it. The metal warmed and cooled on her head and she felt a surge of triumph. She looked from one of her grooms to the other and basked in the approval in their eyes. It was not something that could have been explained to her, she had to discover it for herself.

With a smile, she removed the crown and handed it to Tabor then turned to Vallej to receive his crown. Her hands trembled as she prepared herself for the next event. This time it was different.

As her mind ran through the ring of metal and touched the guests beyond, a heat that was not hers carried itself through and into the room. It was the essence of Vallej and, when she pulled her senses back, she pulled his essence into her.

She took a deep breath and shuddered as the

unfamiliar sensations made themselves comfortable in her mind. Hands on either side reached out to steady her and she opened the eyes that she didn't remember closing. "Wow." A chuckle and light applause ran through the guests as her statement indicated that they were truly a bonded set. A grin broke from her grooms and a giggle came out of her lips. "That was so cool. Let's do it again."

The next crown carried the essence of Tabor and Vallej and was just as heady. They made room in her psychic mind and settled comfortably in. She could now sense the lives of those around her and had an urge to run her hands over her new husbands from head to toe.

It was now time for the final exchange. The captain stopped them. "Before you don the final crowns, do you agree to set the minds of the others in yours for the rest of your lives? In the final stage it will be irrevocable and irreversible."

"I agree." Three times it rang out, each time as true as the first.

"Then place the crowns and complete the union." Murmurs of excitement grew around the room as they all held their crowns above their heads for a moment then slowly lowered them into place.

Her hands were gripped and held steady as their minds reached out and found each other. They tangled and met, emotions shifting, they felt

her trepidation and she felt their anticipation.

Her veil was lifted by Tabor's mind and Vallej leaned into her for a kiss then Tabor took his place. She had been unable to pin down the nature of Tabor's gift, but now she knew. Lightweight telekinesis.

With the feel of two sets of arms embracing her she almost swooned with the rightness of it. She could hear the cheer of the crowd as she was passed from one set of arms to the next and back again.

"Congratulations Navess Union. Now, onto the traditional wedding banquet." The captain rubbed his hands with glee and it was with a smirk of satisfaction that her new husbands escorted her to the reception.

CHAPTER EIGHT

It was less a wedding banquet and more a full-out party. Every member of the crew that wasn't on active duty came to eat, drink and dance. Congratulations were everywhere, they flowed like the wine and, the more wine that was served, the more creative the wishes of the crowd.

It was only when the dinner was well over, the dessert had been served and the crowd was dancing that Emily felt the sadness of remembrance of her first wedding.

The Xarit ceremony had consisted of Chief Vinca declaring that he would take her on as Honoured Wife and Miniska's agreement to let the hunter into their union. Miniska had designed her tattoo and, while the rest of the colony were laughing and enjoying the celebration, Em was on her back with dye and needles in her head.

The endorphins were riding her when Carvo finished his work and pronounced her finished. His artistry would not be appreciated by her until

two weeks later when she had seen her reflection in a pool of water. Wild hair and a third eye. She had definitely become someone else in the few months that she had been on Shavin.

Now it was time to make that same change again. And once again, she didn't know what she was getting in to. She wondered what kind of marks she would bear from her union with Tabor and Vallej.

Speak of the devils, "It is time for us to leave the party Emily." It was whispered in both of her ears and the stereo was more that she was comfortable with. It brought to mind the private festivities that were looming and she was ever so nervous in an instant.

She bolted upright and the wave of laughter that ran through the room was not aimed at her, but was genuine goodwill. She felt it. The emotions in the room were nothing but positive.

The anticipation she felt from her grooms however made her slightly nervous. They were amused by her hesitation, but led her from the room with dignity and decorum. It was difficult to pull off due to the hoots and yells of encouragement that followed them, but they managed.

* * * *

"Emily, I know you must be nervous about

physically consummating our union, but we are not going to fall upon you. You will choose one of us the first night and the other will go to an adjoining chamber." Tabor took the pressure off of her anticipation with that quick summation.

With her hands being held gently, but firmly by theirs she sighed in relief. "Oh, that is a lot better than what I had anticipated."

Vallej murmured to her, "We do not expect our women to accept both males in her bed on the first night. We do not take umbrage to not being chosen the first night. The male who is not with the woman still shares the pleasures of the other two parts of the union. He simply is not physically involved."

"So, our minds will still be meshed?"

"Until we pass from this plane of existence." They were almost to their new shared quarters now. They had been readied for them shortly after the Solar Seeker picked them up and it was determined that she would survive. A Khaharim union required two bedrooms, so the VIP quarters had been used for the wedding night and subsequent trip to their home world for yet another ceremony.

The door hissed open and Tabor led the way in with Vallej bringing up the rear. Flowers were strewn around the room and petals were dusted across the bed in a large interwoven heart pattern. It was straight out of a Terran home decorating

journal, the three hearts on the bed in delicate petals doing what her own wedding had been unable to. She began to cry.

“What? Is it not correct?” Both males were suddenly wide-eyed and panicked. In an instant she was embraced from both sides. Sandwiched between them, she hiccupped with laughter and tried to calm them.

They were muttering to her and stroking her arms in an effort to sooth her and her laughing finally stilled when she felt their concern in her mind. With a deep breath she opened her thoughts. Desire mingled with nostalgia, the pressure of choosing one or the other with the shame of wanting them both. Their joy mingled with her hope and feeling of rightness and, before she knew it, there was a pair of lips on hers.

Her eyes were shut tight and she simply let the emotions and feelings of the moment ebb and flow in her mind. Hands gripped her arms, lips brought her lust to life as she felt them on her mouth and neck.

Her body’s response seemed to be what they were after. With the heat of their bodies pinioning her between them, she relaxed and let the sensations was over her. Air caressed her as her gown was unbuttoned and shivers broke out at the light touch and the waves of heat in her. With her eyes closed, the trail of fingers across her breast and down her spine were sending a flood of

wet heat in her womb, her body craving a more direct touch.

She leaned her head back and gripped Vallej's neck with her left hand then pulled Tabor's to her with her right. A hiss and groan of approval echoed in the room and she was suddenly loose. Staggering at the cold and disorientation that she felt her eyes opened to see her men rapidly shedding their clothing. Slabs of muscle that she did not fully appreciate on Shavin were revealed to her gaze.

Each inch of skin that was revealed made her mouth water. She was almost shaking with the urge to throw herself at them when they peeled their trousers off. The buttons and snaps that closed the formal wear gave up their duty with agonizing slowness. An endearing moment seared itself into her mind as Tabor's pants caught on his shoe as he tried to kick free of the restricting fabric. Vallej steadied him and she bit her lip as he half-turned giving her a fantastic view of his ass. The flex and shift of muscle under the golden skin made her hands clench in an effort not to grab him to test the enticing resilience.

Finally, they were nude. And looking at her.

She looked back and their expressions turned expectant. Finally they spoke as one, "Choose."

"What?"

Tabor took the initiative as he always did, "Choose which one of us you wish to spend the

night with."

She eyed them carefully. Calculatingly, she stripped off the remaining clothing that she was wearing, the stockings and shoes. As she rolled the stockings down she bent over to give both men a splendid view of her buttocks and smirked at the gasps that followed. Teasing them was fun, but as she shed the last of the footwear she turned and posed for them with an arched back, chest out and head held high.

"Let me think." She slowly walked toward them and assessed them with a frank gaze. Her hands reached out to touch them as she mulled the choice before her. Tabor's green skin was slightly rough against her fingers and, upon closer inspection, he had fine scales all over. His cock was nice and thick, a dark pine against the emerald of his flesh and there was no body hair on him at all.

Vallej was satiny smooth, his golden skin hard over muscles that flexed and bunched as she trailed her fingers across the washboard planes of his stomach. His cock was longer and narrower than Tabor's, but just as tempting with its bronze hue.

"It's a hard decision." Her gaze dropped to their crotches again, "Very hard. But, I have finally decided to choose neither of you."

The shriek of "What!" was enough to make her cover her ears.

CHAPTER NINE

She took a deep breath before she explained herself to them. "I choose to have both of you in my bed this night. The rest is up to you, but my mind is yours, my soul is yours and my body is yours to do with what you will."

The shock that ran through them echoed in her mind, swiftly overridden by a surge of lust and affection so deep that it shook her to her core. As one they approached her, each of them took one of her hands and led her to the bed. They crawled up onto it and knelt in the petals of the three twined hearts.

As the scent wafted between them their minds opened completely. No hidden emotion would be part of them this night. To be open and honest was all that they would be together, no matter what the consequences.

They sat for a long moment learning the nuances of the group mind that they were weaving. Her insecurities about her talent were

acknowledged as were Tabor's frustration at being an accountant while his brother was a brilliant surgeon.

She brought forward her loss of the Xarit. They embraced it and it became part of them.

A wave of nervous energy came over them. It was a memory of their mother. She was not going to be pleased by their mating an alien.

Emily acknowledged it and soothed them both. With a great deal of effort she took her focus off the psychic plane and onto the two men before her. She trailed her hands up their thighs and closed her fingers around the objects of her attention.

Their flesh was hot and smooth as she began to stroke them in a matching rhythm. It formed a pulse of sensation in her mind and, glowing with mischief, she alternated her strokes on the right and left palm to see if the sparks in their minds changed pattern. They did.

Her giggle was her undoing. With a roar, Vallej tackled her back to the bed and Tabor grabbed her feet to stroke and kiss his way up the inside of her ankles to her knees then the inside of her thighs.

Vallej was working his way from the soft curve of her neck to the plane of her collar bone and onto the rising slope of her breast to tease her flesh with his tongue. The aureole around her nipple puckered tightly and when his mouth closed over the top she sighed heavily. Her cries became more

vocal as her hips rose against Tabor's mouth.

The insidious nibbling of his lips and tongue was almost to the top of her inner thigh as he reversed his course to track back to her ankle on her other leg. He was going to drive her mad. Shifting and squirming under them she ran her fingers through Vallej's hair as he worshipped both breasts with insistent devotion. Each nipple and aureola was aroused and suckled in turn, licked, kissed and nipped with gentle insistence.

Emily noted that when she liked something, they pursued the pleasure storm, and when she didn't, they tried something else. Neither of them took the most direct route to her arousal to touch her weeping core and she was almost embarrassed at how wet she was getting. Her clit was throbbing for a touch and the heat and musk coming out of her were noticeable even from her distant position. If they didn't do something soon, she was going to.

Tabor was now sucking lightly on her toes and the unexpected caress almost brought her off the mattress. Vallej fell back with a surprised laugh and she could now see Tabor with her index toe in his mouth and she could feel his tongue against it.

No wonder guys liked blowjobs. The inside of his mouth felt so hot, so wet. She had no idea that she had so many sensitive nerves in her feet. She writhed softly against the sheets, waiting and, when they did not move to do anything, she could

take it no longer. She moved one hand to the joint of her thighs and stroked her fingers through the curls. Her toe was released with a soft pop.

With slow and deliberate motions, terribly aware of her audience, she found her clit, parted her labia with two fingers, stroked down to moisten the tips of those delicate digits then back up to make slow circles around her clit just the way she liked it. She trembled on the edge of release when a shadow fell over her and she realized her eyes had shut as she pleased herself. A masculine and very aroused body was moving over her and she didn't care which one it was.

The heat of the blunt cock seeking entrance was all the encouragement she needed. Her thighs widened to take him and her hips tilted to ease his first foray into her. His entrance was welcome and smooth. Everything a first time with a lover should be, yet never was.

Once he worked himself into her to the hilt he stroked his hips back and forth, learning her paces and preferences. It was only then that she realized this night was all about her. She had been focussing on them, learning their textures and tastes, but they had been focussed on her, and frankly, she was happy to be outnumbered.

In moments, she felt her body tighten to slow him down. She squealed when a finger crossed over her clit and rubbed it until she bucked

enough to make her rider clutch at her shoulders to stay on. Since his two hands were on her shoulders and there was still a finger driving her nuts by rubbing at her clit as she came, she had suddenly become a team sport.

Her muscles were slowly relaxing as her body wore down from its spasm of bliss and her beleaguered mind finally figured out that Tabor was still firmly seated within her. With her thighs cupping his and her ankles locked behind him, he was going no where until he came.

He pushed himself back on his arms and looked down at her. When she gave him a grin and lifted her hips against his, Tabor began to thrust again.

This time he drove for his own pleasure, but she was gratified that Vallej's talented hands made sure she was along for the ride. She screamed again as a counterpoint to Tabor's harsh groan and Vallej's muffled curse. After a few moments of pulsing tableau, Tabor removed his spent cock from her slick channel and fell to one side. She let him go.

Vallej rolled her gently to her side and rubbed at her back. The slow massage relaxed muscles that had recently been tensed in pleasure.

With each stroke, she moved closer and closer to Vallej. His arousal was pulsing and red hot, a fantastic counterpoint to her lazy sated self. His cock prodded at her buttocks and one of his hands shifted her upper thigh out of the way. He held

her open for him as he moved to take the place so recently occupied by Tabor.

With Vallej it was less of a whirlwind and much more the relentless movement of the tides. His hips moved back and forth in an endless wave, his hand held her against him by pinning her by the belly to his groin and abdomen. Tabor must have recovered because he was now slowly suckling at her breast.

Vallej's teeth bit gently into her neck and in seconds his persistent and methodical lovemaking paid off as a wave of sensation washed over her and she shuddered and bucked in his arms.

His orgasm came with a heady grunt and a sharp movement of his hips drove him deeply into her as his semen burst into her with single minded intent. As they lay together in a sweaty, spent and happy pile, she said the last ritual words of the day. "And I now pronounce us, Men and Wife." They began to fall asleep. Their minds hummed down from lust to idle and she smiled at the sated quality of all their thoughts.

It had been one heck of a wedding night.

CHAPTER TEN

Waking up naked with Tabor and Vallej was not a first for her, but being able to lay there and enjoy the feeling was definitely new. The heady slide of skin on skin had her body purring with satisfaction. One of the hands on her hip flexed lightly and she squirmed as fingers began to trail across her hip, over her stomach then brushed the curls between her thighs.

It was a familiar caress and she dimly remembered those same hands cleaning her gently of the residue of their passion then learning her body's shape and softness for himself. Vallej liked it slow. He liked to savour every moment. And now that he was awake, he rolled her to her back and ran his hands over her, propping his chin on her hip.

"Morning Emiska."

"Why did you call me that?"

"It is in your mind, you feel attached to it." He fed her warm feelings through their link and she

recognized it as her reaction to the name Emiska. When she was with the Xarit she was a wife, auntie, friend, hunter and companion. All aspects of her personality came out of her on Shavin, except for lover.

And now, with Tabor and Vallej, that missing piece was filled.

"Emiska." It came out on a sigh as he lowered his lips to her belly and traced patterns with his tongue.

"Vallej." Her own sigh came through her lips and she wove her hands through the thickness of his hair to steer him the direction she wanted him to go. He shifted until he lay between her thighs and bent her knees to bracket his head. With great attention he examined her folds then parted them with his fingers to expose the slick interior.

He dragged his tongue along her slit, flicking her clit with the upstroke then lowered his tongue to begin the dance again.

She mewled in frustration with her fingers knotted in his hair when Tabor lowered his face to hers and kissed her deeply. One of his hands kneaded at her breast and taunted the serpent that guarded it.

Lost in a sea of sensation she climbed the path to paradise slowly, panting and sweating as her body fought for release. She finally shuddered as Vallej slid two fingers into her weeping slit and pounded into her with a heavy beat. He kept his

fingers moving within her and kept her locked in her orgasm until she folded limply back to the bed.

The light touch on her clit made her flinch in discomfort and she grunted and tried to shift herself away. She was simply too sore, her oversensitive flesh turned pleasure into pain.

“Enough. You need a bath Emi.” Tabor took her by her hand and dragged her off the bed. She stood on wobbly legs for a moment then held her head high and walked into the sanitation chamber. A hot bath was what she needed, but what she got was a sonic shower and thirty seconds of water. She felt clean, but she didn’t feel relaxed. Damn it.

As she dried off, she thought about her clothing situation. On Xarit she didn’t wear much if anything. It wasn’t necessary. But now, she needed something aside from the ship suits that they had scrounged up for her. She hated the damn things. They confined her and left marks on her skin when she took them off. She was going to have to ask the guys to help her out with options.

Striding—alright hobbling—out of the sanitation chamber, she was greeted to the sight of two perfect backsides making the bed. Sure, there were men attached to the backsides, but asses like that should not be allowed to wander around on their own.

“Tabor, Vallej, I was wondering if we could make some changes to my wardrobe? I am sick to

death of ship suits and running around with just my hip wrap isn't something you two would enjoy." Seeing their faces she amended her statement. "Well, if I was running around the ship in nothing but a hip wrap. In front of crewmembers."

"You are right, we wouldn't enjoy that. But, can you wait a day until we get to Solnav? We can have a few things made up for you, or you can select some ready made." Tabor was talking as he sent their breakfast order in to the kitchen. It would be delivered by tube when it was ready.

"So, you have completed all of my people's rituals, are there any of yours that we have yet to engage in?" She tugged one of the hated ship suits into position on her body then sealed the closures.

"Well, there is the formal ceremony on Solnav that we will engage in. It is the same as the one we had last night, but it won't bind our minds. It is just for family and friends." Vallej headed for the sanitation chamber.

She turned back to Tabor. "Anything else?"

"Well, you will have to meet our parents. That will require formal clothing and a formal introduction." He smiled. "More than I have seen you wear yet. But when my mother accepts you and folds your cloak back, she will kiss you on the cheek and welcome you to the family. It is a formality, but it sets a certain tone."

"Wow, a meet the in-laws function? How alien.

We would never do something like that back on Earth.” She held her straight face for a moment then burst into raucous laughter. Families were the same all over.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The shuttle shuddered on re-entry. Emily closed her eyes and swallowed the nausea that rose in her as they fell heavily toward the planet. While her body was ready for the increased gravity, her mind was rejecting the density of the environment that it was entering.

“Relax Emiska. We are almost there. Almost home.” Vallej was excited, his mind was vibrating with eagerness to be home once more. His use of her Xarit name warmed her from within.

Tabor was slightly more controlled, but no less enthusiastic. “Our mother and fathers will be waiting to welcome us when we arrive.” He continued, but she noted a hint of caution in his voice, “Our mother is eager to meet you. She has only heard of your species. She has never seen a Terran.”

“Then this will be a real treat for her, although I don’t look much like a Terran anymore.” Her fingers brushed past the hood of the heavy cloak

she wore and touched her third eye. Her other tattoos were hidden beneath the formal clothing that they had bullied her into.

"You are still you and she will be pleased to meet you." There was an implied threat in Vallej's tone that mystified her. When she probed his mind he clammed up tight. No stray emotion beyond his enthusiasm at being home again leaked into her mind.

Not to be outdone she probed at Tabor. He was also defensive, of her if she didn't miss her guess. She set about interpreting their emotions in the context of their conversation. They were worried about their mother, and her. Their mother was not looking forward to their meeting, or if she was, she was not going to like what she found. Nausea rose in her again and she concentrated on breathing while the pilot took them down to the surface. There was time enough to worry about her mother-in-law, later.

* * * *

"Tabor, Vallej! Come and greet your poor mother!" Sanyel had Tabor's green skin and Vallej's golden hair and eyes. She was striking and lovely. And her entire focus was on her boys. Emily's boys.

Emily, a shrouded figure, brought up the rear as her husbands formally greeted their mother.

Their fathers stood behind Sanyel. Sorna and Marek grinned at their sons with pride. At that one moment it occurred to Em that the Khaharim did indeed love their children, no matter which of the twins sired them.

They had the same DNA only different manifestations during development. The same way that humans could be born with tails or extra fingers. All the DNA was there, it only had to change during gestation to alter the baby. Or babies as the case may be.

“Emiska! Come and greet your new mother. Sanyel.” Once again they were speaking as one. One mind, one soul, and one set of genes.

She glided forward and bowed formally to Sanyel. “I greet you mother of my husbands. I am Emily of the Navess Union, born of Terra.”

Sanyel said, “Rise daughter.”

She raised her head and looked into the dark gold eyes. The hand that struck her across the face was a bit of a surprise.

“Whore! You have been wedded already!” Sanyel came back for another attack, but was held back by her sons and husbands. She looked frantically at her offspring. “What were you thinking? She is a married woman! How can you have taken her in Union?” She spat at their feet. “You have shamed me, your fathers and your family.”

Emily’s face stung from the impact of her

mother-in-law's hand and she stood bewildered as Sanyel swept her men away from the shuttle port and into a ground conveyance.

Tabor and Vallej looked at each other and nodded. Whatever they were agreeing on was completely between their personal connection. They linked their hands with hers and tugged her gently toward a hired ground shuttle. They got in and in moments they were off, speeding inches off the ground. It was silence that they travelled in, their minds calming and comforting hers as their hands stroked her body to relax and sooth her.

She nodded off, her body slumping against Tabor's and her feet across Vallej's lap. Hours passed before they shook her awake as they exited the vehicle.

She was being carried. She hadn't been carried since she was a child. She fought the urge to kick herself free and breathed deeply to relax. Through the doors of a beachfront house and to a bedroom in the back, which overlooked the fresh and vibrant ocean. As soon as the guys turned around she hit them with, "So, your mom hates me, huh?"

"She doesn't hate you. She just doesn't understand the circumstances of our...courtship."

"What? You mean my being clinically dead on Shavin and having to be resuscitated? That little thing?" She crossed her legs and tucked her hands under her head.

"Yes. We will explain it to her and she will

apologize to you for striking you." Tabor looked uncomfortable. His mother had attacked his wife, it was almost unheard of.

"It doesn't matter. She was only concerned with your traditions and practices. I know that you must mate with an unattached female. My Xarit wedding tattoos will be with me forever, but I am dead to them now. And you have my medical records to prove it."

"No we don't." It was Vallej who spoke this time.

She loved the timbre of his voice, it was so stimulating. "Check your personal communications. Vinca would have had them send it on. He is no fool." And she had foreseen it. Though the slap to the face had been a complete surprise. She hated not having control over her talent. She was also expecting a communication from...

"Emi, there is a private message for you from the Haldis Imperium. From the Empress." The astonishment in his tone almost made her laugh.

With a sigh she unclasped the cloak and began to unbutton the top of her gown. The layers of fabric were stifling. The communications terminal was off to one side of the bedroom and she shook her head. She was going to have to have them move it. When she scanned her retina for the sealed communication she was given a priority code for transmission. Another sigh escaped her as

she dutifully keyed in the code. The screen flashed 'communication processing' in Alliance Common while she waited.

As the lights continued to flash she heard Tabor messing about in the kitchen. Vallej was sitting behind her on the bed and as soon as the signal came through to indicate the connection, he summoned Tabor with a flick of his mind.

They sat together like mismatched bookends and she had to smile at them in the reflection of the monitor. It was at that moment that she snapped to the realization that her affection had turned to love. She had known that she wanted them, that they were her destiny, but she had not thought that she would love them so completely.

"You look like a woman who has come to an amazing discovery." Amy, Empress of the Haldis Imperium, and her little daughter, were looking out of the monitor at the Terran who had just discovered she was in love.

"And you look like one who is happy with the life that she ended up with." It was hard not to smile at the tiny cherub in her mother's arms. "Is that the little Vorka that I have heard so much about?"

"It is! A fine princess of the Imperium. She will make her father exceedingly nervous in time. Now, onto you! What a lovely Xarit tattoo!"

"I am so glad you like it!" The brittle cheer in her tone highlighted her next comment, "It made

my mother-in-law try to smack me down and call me a whore."

"Ouch!"

"Yeah, but it wasn't all bad. At least I don't have to go to their thanksgiving dinner." Emily relaxed.

"Well, I was actually referring to the snakes around your breasts. They are quite detailed."

Oops. She had stripped for comfort without a thought for her audience. "Sorry." She closed the front of her gown and buttoned the center button to keep it closed.

"Don't be. I love a good tattoo." The baby in her arms gurgled and Amy looked down fondly. She looked up and faced Emily. "Now, on to business."

Suddenly the Empress was in place, as well as the Terran Representative for the Alliance. "As the first human to mate with a Khaharim you will need special medical care. Vallej agreed to that before we told them where you were.

"The increase in your gravity tolerance will let you live on Solnav comfortably, but whether you will be able to conceive is unknown."

Emily nodded sagely. She was already pregnant, and would bear at least one girl that she could foresee, but until she passed into her second trimester she wasn't telling anyone.

"As the Terran Ambassador to Solnav you will be paid an annual stipend. As a new wife you will

be receiving presents from all Terrans in a position to do so as soon as they are notified. I think there is even one of us on Jela now." An impish grin crossed her very royal features. "I sent you a punch bowl."

On either end of the cross system link the Terran women giggled like teenagers. It was too much for Emily to bear. As she laughed, tears began to leak from her eyes. Amy took the hint and called their tête-à-tête to an end. "If you have any difficulties Ambassador, please call me, you have my links." She nodded gracefully then she was gone.

Emily turned slowly in her seat, "Did she just make me an Ambassador?"

Two grinning and nodding faces were her reply.

"Well, shit!"

EPILOGUE

“**A**mbassador! We need you in here!” The voice was one of her assistants and she moved her bulk carefully through the halls and into the melee.

Her husbands were laughingly trying to separate their daughter from her grandmother. They had been notified when she arrived. As soon as she saw her mother, she let go of Sanyel and ran to embrace her.

“Hello, Miniska! Did you miss Mummy?” Her hands caressed the pale bronze curls. It was a relief the five year old was tall enough for her to touch without bending down. The boys that she carried in her did not give her much ability to move with grace or speed.

“Yef. I miffed you.”

“Oh, sweetie. You are getting your big girl teeth!” The imp grinned at her and, sure enough there were two large gaps front and center.

“Where have you been?”

"I have been picking up friends at the shuttle port, Mini."

"Where are they?" She looked around her mother's swollen belly and gasped. "Mommy! Behind you!"

Emily laughed gently and pinched her daughter's cheek as Tabor lifted her. Vallej put one arm around their wife and supported her as she waddled to the door.

"Miniska, this is one of the Xarit. Her name is Miniska and she is my best friend from a long time ago." Alliance Common was her daughter's second language.

"She has the same name as I do!" This excited the child to no end and she squirmed to be let down.

"Pleased to meet you Miniska. I am the Beloved Wife of Vinca of the Xarit. And this is my daughter Emiska. She is a little older than you, but she has learned enough about you not to bite."

A smile lit the furry face as the smaller Xarit peeked out from behind her mother and waved. "Hi."

Mini smiled and waved back. "Hi. Do you wanna come fee my room?"

A shy nod and the girls were away.

Sanyel set out a tea service and helped Tabor and Vallej settle their very pregnant wife into a chair. As soon as she was settled, Em asked, "Are the gravity supports very uncomfortable? I know

it took quite a while for them to get a set that could fit you and little Emiska."

"The fit is not fantastic, but the support is welcome. It is hard for us to move even a little, but it is well worth the effort."

"I am so glad that you could be here."

"As am I. So, you have been made Ambassador now?" Miniska settled her six arms comfortably and sipped at the tea that Sanyel passed her.

Sanyel had indeed apologized. Her shock had overridden her common sense at the time. The three governments and four planets intervening on Emily's behalf had not hurt matters. The Xarit confirmed that the marriage was over when she stopped breathing and Vinca had himself been in contact with her new mother-in-law to confirm that his wife, Emiska, was dead. And he could never see her as alive again. It was not their way. He could however, meet her again as the Terran Ambassador on Solnav. Or the Solnav Orbital Station. It was there that she had met her old family again. This time as Ambassador Emily Novis of the Novis Union.

They had laughed and talked, but due to her rapidly advancing pregnancy, she had to return home before the visit had properly concluded. And so it was with the greatest of fuss that two pressure suits had been found for Miniska and Emiska. They would visit until the new boy babies were born.

It took them two months to get the suits fitted, and in those two months, Emily had created three new treaties for volunteering Terran women to join to Khaharim men. They had been completely briefed and had agreed to the strange terms of the match. It was her new skill. Her new profession. She was now one of the finest matchmakers in the Alliance. She simply had to touch an object and the owner's perfect match would appear before her.

She told Miniska all of this over tea, with the guys occasionally offering a comment or two, and Sanyel gushing over the fantastic matches that Emily had made in the last few years among the Khaharim. It was hard for the men to find a woman, so for the woman or men to come and be told who their match was speeded up the process. It did not work for all, but for those who spurred her precognitive vision, were guaranteed an honest match.

It was good to be surrounded by friends and family. To once again be an Honoured Wife. And as she woke up in the wake of false dawn and unceremoniously dumped her husbands out of bed so that she could birth their children, she felt it all around her. Love, trust and honour. And if they didn't get moving...lots of pain.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Viola Grace was born in Manitoba, Canada where she still resides today. She really likes it there. Her hobbies have included cross-stitch, needlepoint, quilting, costuming, cake decorating, baking, cooking, metal work, beading, sculpting, painting, doll making, henna tattoos, chain maille, and a few others that have been forgotten.

Her writing actively pursues the Happily Ever After that so rarely occurs in nature.

A brilliant mind, with a twisted sense of humor.