

Blood Proxy

Uruz



Viola
Grace

BLOOD PROXY

RUNE SERIES - URUZ

BY

VIOLA GRACE

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Rune Series - Uruz
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URUZ MEANING:

DAJGER AND FORCE - I DO FACE AND WIN!

Uruz denotes strength, the basic and primordial forces. That of a mother protecting a child, a lioness defending territory. Rage, defence, compassion, and patience are all epitomized by this symbol. The basic instincts and characteristics that make us human.

URUZ UPRIGHT: Physical strength, potential, energy, health, freedom, action, courage, strength, tenacity, understanding, wisdom, sexual desire, masculine potency.

URUZ MERKSTAVE: Weakness, obsession, abuse, subjugation, sickness, inconsistency, ignorance, lust, brutality, rashness, callousness, violence.

*To everyone seeking a happily ever after.
Sometimes happily for now can count.*

CHAPTER ONE

“We have to stop meeting like this.” Eleanor Palmer was a Companion and this was her fourth visit to the Vimpyr home world in the last two years.

“Well, if you would agree to move here, renewing your contract to get you here would not be necessary.” Her employer walked at her side, graciously taking her baggage from her.

“You know that I can’t. My contract with the Alliance and the Companions’ guild means at least one more year of service. But, I am here now and all yours.” Her arm moved around his waist and her hip bumped into his. “What did you want to do first?”

His Royal Highness Naccar Hala nudged her back. “I need to practice my hand to hand combat and knife work.”

“Then as soon as you get the courtyard clear, you are on.” She skipped forward and nodded to the guards that hovered near the skimmer’s entrance.

“You know that as soon as I come of age I will no longer be allowed to be near you.” It was only as his tutor that he was allowed exposure to an alien Companion. The stigma of being an intergalactic whore was hard on Eleanor, and Naccar appreciated her for her wit, her beauty, and her willingness to fight him.

He was still not an adult by Vimpyr standards, at the age of nineteen and had quite a bit of growth left to engage in. Keeping his body in good shape was only prudent. By hiring Eleanor, no one knew that he was receiving combat training. Everyone just thought that he was hiring a whore. It was expected of his rank and gender.

They buckled into the harnesses of the skimmer and took off, only one of his personal guards with them in the tiny space.

“Are we heading to the summer palace?” It was already unseasonably cool. If they had been heading out for a secret tryst, it would have been most uncomfortable.

“Yes. The rest of the court is dancing attendance on my father at the winter palace. We will be alone.”

“Fantastic!” She reached into one of her packs. “I found a Terran style checker board. I can finally teach you to play.”

He shook his head and steered around an outcropping of rocks. “I will never regain my dignity with you, will I?”

“Nope. Lost forever. After that first game of tic-tac-toe.” She reached over and ruffled his dark hair; he grimaced at her and showed her his teeth. The daggers in place of his canines didn’t frighten her. He only used them to eat, and she wasn’t on the menu.

If he ingested human blood, his body would engage in its final growth spurt without hesitation. He would physically become a man in a matter of hours, but until he was ready to take the throne, he didn’t want that type of responsibility.

It was why Vimpyrs had been banned from Terra to begin with. The immature among them would not stop consuming, and came into their powers too quickly to control.

He didn’t want to court that madness, and Eleanor couldn’t blame him. He reminded her of her brother Timothy back on earth. All elbows and knees, and a burning urge to learn about other places and peoples.

They first met three years ago when she had been on a contract with a Tival ambassador. He was only a consulting contract and she had a lot of free time while he was waiting for an audience with the king.

When she was exploring the corridors of the palace she ran into Naccar, the prince who had a thousand questions about the races that she had studied. They formed a fast friendship, and when

her companion contract expired, he hired her as his tutor.

They had had an on again, off again contract relationship ever since.

He looked over at her slyly. "Commander Matias has been asking about you."

She flushed slightly, "Has he? I haven't given him a second thought." Seventeen, or possibly twenty, but not merely two thoughts for the devastatingly handsome Commander.

"Of course you haven't. And I also didn't catch you two on a balcony engaged in a heated debate, in silence and using only your tongues."

"Never happened." She tried to be prim, but that moment with Matias had burned in her body ever since.

He had backed her up against the balcony railing and started a conversation, while slowly seducing her with his midnight eyes and slow smiles. He had leaned in to kiss her, and she had moved to meet him halfway. His hands had only begun to explore her when Naccar came barrelling around the corner. His bark of laughter had made her face heat with blood, and a sharp move from Matias reminded her that his people were sensitive to blood and the rhythms of her body. Controlled predators.

"Of course not." They both began to giggle and she gave in on that topic, then quizzed him on his studies. He was doing well at histories,

mathematics and composition. His weak points were etiquette and dance.

"I can help you with that, since I am here anyway."

"I was hoping that you would say that. I get on the dance floor with an attractive girl and I trip over my own feet."

She gave him a wink and smiled as the Summer palace came into their view. "I have taught Oesh to dance. You will have no trouble."

"You have no idea how relieved I am to hear that."

"A particular young noblewoman has caught your eye?"

"Yes. And she dances like a moonbeam brought to the surface and given human form." He sighed heavily.

"And I can see that my poetry lessons were well learned." She gave a bark of laughter and let him bring the skimmer in for a smooth landing.

So, he had been using what he had learned to engage in courtships. Excellent. Despite his father's intervention, she had every hope that Naccar would be a decent king who felt for his people. He was smart, clever, and had a good heart. All the traits that a good starting monarch wanted. Well, that his people wanted, what he wanted was immaterial.

As they landed, the house servants set up a meal for them both in his private chambers, and

took her baggage to her rooms down the hall. It was all completely normal.

Their mornings were taken up with combat, feinting and striking for hours, slicing at each other with numbing blades, then discarding the blades and kicking and punching instead.

She was exhausted, and he seemed to feed on her fatigue when she finally called it quits.

"You know. If my father would let me train with his soldiers, I wouldn't need to wrestle a Companion." He doused his head in a pitcher of water to remove the sweat.

This was their third morning together and she was regaining her stamina, but it was never fast enough for her energetic employer.

She was still wearing her leathers when her data pad chirped in an insistent manner. She crossed to it, a frown on her face.

Commander Matias was on the screen and as soon as he saw her he said, "Run, Eleanor. Take Naccar and run." Naccar was looking at the pad over her shoulder.

"There has been an uprising and King Chars Hala is dead, as well as Naccar's other brother, Borna. Troops have been dispatched to kill Naccar." He paused, listening to some shouting in the background. "You have to run. Go, I will find you."

She slowly turned to Naccar. "I am sorry. We need to get you somewhere safe. I'll grab ration

packs and you meet me in my quarters in fifteen minute, ready to travel. Pack everything you think you will need. We may be gone a while.”

Silent as a ghost he slipped out of the courtyard and she immediately went to the guardsmen and filled them in as well as filled her arms with rations. She sprinted back to her rooms and prepared herself for a difficult but essential ‘phone’ call.

CHAPTER TWO

Eleanor's heart was pounding. She knew what she had to do, but could she do it? Her body led her to the communications console and she was punching in a transmission code that might just save Naccar's life.

Ten minutes ticked by and she finally heard the chirp of the connected call. She straightened her robes and spoke to the secretary that answered the COM. "Priority message to Amy Tyrell." She was under control and affected a look of unconcern.

"I am sorry, the Empress is unavailable."

"Wake her up. She can nap later." The secretary seemed startled but left the image of the console and soon a bleary eyed Tyrell was in front of the screen.

"Eleanor? What do you need?"

"A vacation. Someplace out of the sun, you know I hate to burn."

"How soon do you need to leave?" All traces of fatigue vanished from her face and her hands

were typing on an alternate com device.

"Ah, you know how the stress of a Companion's life is. I just need a week or two to get a grip on my future. Plan for retirement, that sort of thing."

"Well, there is no time like the present. In fact, you would be a fool not to take advantage of the timing." She typed frantically at her data pad and smiled brilliantly. "There, all done. I am sending you a data burst with the names of a few likely planets. Enjoy your time off."

"Thanks. I knew you would have a few places in mind. Now get back to napping, your kid needs all the rest you can give it." Eleanor smiled in return and cut the transmission. It would be recorded and gone over by Murron's supporters and she could only hope that she hadn't given away too much.

Naccar appeared at her door with a bag over his shoulder and his eyes red from weeping. She went over and hugged him, tucking his head under her chin and holding him as tightly as he held her.

She felt less like a friend and more like a mother in that instant. Protective and grieving for the trauma that he was going through.

"I am getting a data burst, but for now we need to get to one of the shuttles that your family kept here for emergency. Let's go."

They ran through the Summer palace and got

into a shuttle, "Can I drive, Eleanor?"

She looked over at him and he was fighting a grin. "Nope, I have to drive. You don't know where we are going." She did a pre-flight check and when a proximity alert sounded, fired the engines and took the controls.

As they left the surface she saw shuttles with the royal insignia closing on the palace. This was her one chance to get Naccar away safely, and she was confident that she had made the correct decision.

The shuttle fought her control for long moments as she tried to get it out of the atmosphere, then behaved itself the instant that they cleared the first moon and began a hard burn into deep space.

"Where are we going?" Naccar looked out at the stars in the distance and noted that she had not begun to input co-ordinates.

"I don't know. I have a few ideas, and will aim for them if another option doesn't present itself." She turned to him. "I can't tell you that you will be safe, but I can tell you that I am making it my mission to deliver you to your throne as soon as I can."

His hand squeezed hers, "I know you will. But I want you safe as well. Me, they have to kill outright; you, they can torture or sell."

Eleanor shuddered at a reminder of what could happen to her. Not all of the planets who traded

with the Alliance were members. Some wanted to keep their slave-trading ways, and rejected the full membership requirements that were part and parcel of the Alliance regulations.

Humans were prized for their sensual reactions and their sensitivity to pain. Neither one appealed to Eleanor. She had chosen to only take contracts which did not involve intimate contact. It made her assignments less lucrative, but more satisfying as her studies had to make up for her lack of intimate enthusiasm.

“We are both going to be fine.” She turned her hand up and returned his grip.

They sat quietly as the shuttle spun through space. Finally after hours of tension, Eleanor’s data pad chirped and she almost dove for it.

The data burst was clear, and highly encrypted. Eleanor entered the key and read the message. Tyrell had gotten details of her situation from Imperium moles in the capital. She knew what Eleanor must be up to and wished her luck.

She also forwarded a set of co-ordinates and a time. They would be met and brought to a planet with suitable environmental requirements for a Vimpyr. There was also a set of instructions of information to be shared with those who would be meeting them. As well as her hiding her status as a registered companion.

She heaved a sigh of relief and began to program the co-ordinates into the shuttle

navigation system. "Naccar, we have somewhere to go."

* * * *

The pick-up went off without any trouble. Mind you, even Eleanor could not have missed the Alliance warship that was making its way through the emptiness of space. They picked her shuttle up with no communication and armed guards escorted her and Naccar to medical without a greeting.

The physician was the one creature that they could trust. Eleanor was a bit taken aback as she saw the Nyal doctor, as the Nyal were known slave holders and not Alliance members.

"Hello, Doctor. Why have we been brought here?"

He flipped off the recorders and looked directly at her and Naccar, who stood slightly behind her.

"You are a mother and son, are you not?" He raised one pale eyebrow over his ruby eyes.

Naccar looked at her, "Yes, yes. This is my mother."

"And this is my son." The words flowed from her without a thought.

The doctor gestured for her to take a seat on an exam table, and Naccar the one across from her.

"Then, I have been charged to make sure that your genetics match. If not when you entered this

room, then when you leave.” His eyes were kind and Eleanor’s eyes widened as she interpreted what he had said.

Her species was very susceptible to genetic tampering, and that is what he was about to do.

“I am to be a Vimpyr as my son is?” Just for clarification.

“Yes, one week in the tank, and you will match to any scan.”

“What will happen to Naccar while I am being altered?”

“There are several physical training exercises going on. We are transporting a mixed group of colonists and he is welcome to train with the guardsmen that are being brought in with them.”

Naccar’s eyes lit up at the thought of combat. He had loved to spar with her, but she was only human and her reflexes couldn’t match his. He had had to hold himself back. “What do you need from me for this process?”

“Simply your blood. I will extract the genetic markers from there.” Naccar rolled up his sleeve, exposing his pale arm, and the doctor withdrew his sample.

The guards still outside the door led him off, all ease and friendliness now. She could hear them joking and laughing down the hall and she smiled. It was good for him to be around other men, just as a young boy and not a prince.

This time on board would lead to changes them

both. Internal for him, and external to her.

"Ok. Let's get this started, Doctor."

"Fine. Disrobe. I will prepare the initial stages."

He moved over to a tray of supplies, and she began to peel off the battle gear she had been wearing. The buckles and ties fought her for a moment, and then the rigid breastplate fell away, followed by the tight leather trousers and boots.

She sat quietly, nude, and waited for the physician to turn. When he did his eyes widened in surprise.

"It is a shame that your species doesn't go into heat. You are quite lovely." He extended his hand to lead her to the top of the tank and help her in.

She had had repairs to her body before, on occasion. This was no different. He inserted the IV wires while she adjusted the mask that would provide a portion of her air. The rest of the oxygen would be brought in through her lines and tubes. Waste tubes were also placed and that was one thing that did make her blush to the roots of her hair.

She was not used to being handled in such a matter-of-fact manner. But, it was soon over and she was in the tank. She was completely helpless and it would be a week before she would be able to see if the physician was any good.

CHAPTER THREE

With every visit to her, Naccar looked more and more excited. He was living in the barracks and had made several friends with the Tival adolescents. They were around the same size and enjoyed all of the things that he did. With the exception of poetry and dance. Those were talents that he was sharing with the female contingent of the multi-species colonists.

Apparently he was becoming quite adept at certain country dances and they admired his control and grace. She smiled at him from behind the mask. He was truly blossoming with the freedom from his duties and rank.

She could feel the changes burning along her nerves, moving through her bloodstream and even altering her teeth. She now had the canines of a Vimpyr woman, and her skin had gone from pale to chalky with the nanites rebuilding her with the information from Naccar's blood.

As her hair floated past her she noted the

darker strands in the cloud and sighed in resignation at the loss of her blonde locks.

Time crawled, and the doctor took to chatting to her tank while she was in there. Finally the week completed, and after a final check she was decanted. Hauled out by medical assistants, naked and wet, to lie on an exam bed until the doctor could remove all of the umbilical attachments.

She was swearing with impatience as he finished sealing the last of the holes that had been drilled into her to give her nutrients and the nanites.

She didn't feel much different, a little thinner, and a little taller. It was only when her Doctor leaned over her that she felt the first stirring of hunger. She could feel his blood call to her and she only needed to reach out and take it.

Just as she was extending her hand to grab the Doctor's neck a hand stopped her by grabbing her own.

Her head whipped around and she saw a sight that she thought to never see again. "Matias!"

He looked worn and there was a new scar running down his cheek, but it was her beloved Commander and she had never been so happy to see anyone.

Without another thought she leapt from the table and into his arms. His mouth took hers in a greeting as fevered as her own and it was only when he broke the kiss that she realized that she

was still nude and dripping wet.

"How did you find us?"

"A data burst for my eyes alone. It told me that I had to come to you alone, but that you were safe." His hands caressed her damp hair from her features and she trembled at the warmth of that smile. "And your 'son' Naccar is safe. He is training well with the Tival but another Vimpyr to spar against will be welcome, I think."

She leaned her forehead against him and relaxed for the first time since the missive about the murder of Chars Hala, king and father.

His arms came around her, and stroked her back and spine soothingly. She trembled and pressed her body more firmly against him, coming into contact with leather armour and cold clasps. "I think you need to get dressed Eleanor. You are attracting some attention. I brought you some clothing."

On the exam table nearby, there were the formal robes of a Vimpyr woman. She shrugged them on, layer after layer until she was swathed in the fluttering silk.

"Shall we go to see Naccar?"

"As soon as you put on your shoes."

Muttering under her breath she hardly noticed when he turned to the doctor and shook his hand, she saw the glint of a payment chip and pretended that she had seen nothing once her sandals were in place.

"How long have you been here?" She paced him as they left Medical and followed his lead.

"Two days after you arrived. The message had been sent on a time delay. So by the time we arrived, you were in the tank. Your transformation was underway."

He seemed to know his way around the ship and he offered her his arm as they progressed over a catwalk. It was a relief to engage in contact, her new body was shaking with fatigue, so she let him take on more of her weight that she normally would have.

"Your hair is darker, but still has glints of gold in it. You look beautiful, as always." His voice was matter-of-fact but she couldn't help but be warmed by his notice.

"Thank you, I haven't had a chance to see myself yet. The Medical bay is lacking in reflective surfaces. But your compliment is welcome."

He steered her through a doorway and into an atrium in the center of the ship. They were on a balcony looking down into the heart of it when she noticed Naccar. He and another youth were sparring with the double blades that she favoured. She watched him closely, noted his feints, thrusts and parries. "Hmm, he over lunged on that one. Lucky that his opponent didn't take advantage of it."

"He has learned remarkably quickly for a prince who was never allowed to practice

combat." Matias' voice was amused. She grimaced. He had figured it out. "So, how long were you training him in hand to hand combat?"

"For the last three years." A cheer went up and Naccar was congratulated by the group, including his opponent. A maternal flutter of pride ran through her. He had friends, and judging by the girls fluttering around, a female courtship was quite possible.

"I thought as much." Matias took her hand and tugged her away from the view of her charge in a group friends and well-wishers of various races. "When I looked into your records with the idea of taking you in an intimate companion contract, imagine my surprise to find out that you had never engaged in such a contract before.

"Naccar had put it about that you were his concubine and my heart ached at the thought of you with him." He was moving rapidly down a corridor, and the increase in his circulation was making her mouth water. "I looked up your specialties and found only languages, etiquette, dance and of course, combat training. Only the standard training in the sensual arts."

They were practically running now and her hunger was taking over. She wanted Matias, his body and his blood. This craving was new, sudden, and took her over in a matter of seconds.

She tried to stop and he simply swept her up in his arms and kept going. His pulse was

hammering in his throat and she reached up with one hand to caress that heavy beat.

“Eleanor, your transformation has woken your hunger. Wait a moment, love, you will be able to satisfy it.” He seemed to know what was going on, so she simply let him take her to his quarters.

The door hissed open and he closed and locked it after them. “Breathe deeply, Eleanor. Relax, I am not going anywhere. You will be able to feed.”

“Feed?” That would explain why her mouth was watering at the sight of him stripping off his armour and tunic. No, it had done that before. The first time she had seen him, she had been swallowing heavily and trying to breathe. Aside from her body, nothing had changed.

His boots were next, making heavy thunks as they hit the floor. His trousers were next and her breath caught in her throat at the erection that was unveiled with short and choppy movements.

She paused in her worshipful perusal of him when he pulled a dagger and began to walk toward her. He stood nude in front of her and raised his hand. With a sharp motion he made a deep cut in his left thumb, causing a well of need to rise in her as she watched the dark blood that ran down his arm.

“Drink, Eleanor. You will be calmer.” She moved as if in a trance, her tongue flicked out to lap up the trail of blood, sucking and licking her way to the wound he had opened. She clamped

down over his digit and flicked her tongue back and forth across the coppery well.

Both of her hands came up to grasp his and she absently felt tugs at her shoulders and wrists while she fed. Her eyes rolled to meet his, and she welcomed the passion and sensuality that gave his features the stamp of cruelty.

The skin under her mouth sealed and she cried out at the loss.

"Your saliva closed the wound, to get more you will have to use your teeth." He drew her back to the bed and she found that her only clothing was the shoes she had put on in Medical. So that was why all the tugging and pulling. He had stripped her while she drank.

Sneaky.

He fell back onto the bed, his body pulling hers like a lodestone. A slick gathering of moisture coated her thighs and she crawled over him, rubbing her body against his as she went. She licked at his lips and was rewarded with a ravenous kiss that left her shaking with hunger.

His hands were waking her body, stroking her breasts and thighs in a fevered manner. When one hand worked its way to her core and a finger thrust inside, she gasped, arching her back and exposing her teeth. "More." She nibbled at his neck and stroked his body with one hand while she rode his hand.

The thumb that pressed against her clit made

her mewl and her hair flowed around them in a curtain of midnight and daylight. His hands gripped her hips and he positioned her over his cock, slowly lodging the flared head in her hungry flesh. Her hips thrust back as his moved up and his hands pulled her down.

She began to ride him, his hands on her hips guiding her rhythm. When she came apart around him, her orgasm exploding throughout her newly sensitized body, he gripped her head and pulled her down to his throat. "Drink."

Without a thought, her body still pulsing, she bit down on his neck, blood flowing into her mouth in a hot spurt. He grunted with the pain and said, "Good aim," before rolling her onto her back and thrusting shallowly so as not to disrupt her grip.

The wounds began to close and she licked them clean, then looked up at Matias with shining eyes. As she withdrew, he groaned with the self-control he had been exhibiting and pounded into her with mindless enthusiasm.

She was climbing the sensations of arousal once again as he climaxed, thrusting into her with a ferocity that almost frightened her with its intensity. As he howled with his orgasm his burning eyes met hers, and his own head darted forward to close on the joint between her neck and shoulder.

She would have writhed against him, if he

hadn't held her in place with his jaws. The pain blended with her building pleasure and she squeaked as he began to feed on her body in the same manner as she had on his.

With every stroke of his tongue and suction on her flesh she climbed in the same manner as when he had been pounding into her. She climaxed again with a shudder and a groan as his mouth worked at her and his body throbbed within her.

Her body closed off the scarlet fountain that was feeding her lover and he withdrew his mouth from her neck to kiss her deeply once again.

"Do you want me to explain the mating habits of Vimpyrs?" He nibbled and nipped at her lips, his cock still hard within her.

"Was the hunger I felt normal?" She unwrapped her thighs from the death grip she had on his hips from somewhere in the throes of their coupling.

"For an adult female that had not mated before, you were more restrained that I would have imagined." A shallow thrust made her eyes flare in heat.

"How long are you going to stay like that?"

"Like what?"

"Um." Her back arched her against him for complete contact, "Hard, moving."

"Ah, as long as I wish to. Unlike females, male Vimpyr can control where the blood in our body is." His smug smile made her want to smack him.

He moved again. Maybe not.

This time was slow, the pleasure building between them until they both moaned in their releases. He tucked her against him and stroked sweaty strands of hair from across her eyes. "How long will you run with Naccar, Eleanor?"

She snuggled into his body with repletion, "Until I can regain his throne, or make sure he is safe."

"Then I will run with you."

She smiled into his chest then looked up to meet his eyes, "I was hoping you were going to say that."

CHAPTER FOUR

Naccar was thrilled at Eleanor's new appearance, and acted every inch the protective son as he asked Matias what his intentions were.

"I will have her if she will have me," was his reply. He was back in his guardsman armour and smiling at both mother and son.

Eleanor was stumped. "I still have a year left on my companion contracts. I would gladly have you, all of you." Her brows wagged lasciviously. "But I have a debt to the Alliance to pay." She sighed and rubbed her temples.

Matias and Naccar didn't look pleased, but there was nothing that they could do.

Her hunger had been satisfied, her body was sated, and she was suddenly in possession of a family. They would definitely fit right in with the colonists.

The klaxon rang to indicate that they were nearing the jump point, and they all took seats to

brace for the jarring wrench. It happened a minute later and Eleanor removed the hand that she had used to clutch at Matias the instant that the all-clear was sounded.

Her pale cheeks flushed lightly at the knowing look that he gave her.

A crewman knocked on the door and delivered three ultra violet suits. "You will be shown to your assigned place in the colony which is in a protected area of the planet."

"Protected how?"

"They will explain it when you arrive. You will be given orientation after planet fall." He left, and they climbed into the suits. Eleanor changed in the sanitary chamber and left the males to the main room. The UV suit was extremely snug and left nothing to the imagination. She tucked the robes away and put on the boots that matched the suit.

She had no exposed skin, and a loose hood kept her hair safe and a scarf covered her face. She checked out her reflection and then put the sunglasses in place.

Sliding back the door she returned to the main room and saw the men waiting for her. She could easily distinguish between her lover and her son, strictly by the width of his shoulders. They were geared up as she was and with the planet-fall alarm going off they moved to the shuttle that they had been assigned. The shuttle seats were full of others dressed as they were, the UV suits

removing any trace of species, and only the form fitting properties hinted at gender.

A few more colonists took their places in the drop ship and at another alarm, they felt their stomachs rise as the shuttle released from the belly of the jump ship and then they were falling through space.

As they left the artificial gravity of the ship their bodies stabilized. Eleanor began to suck in air, she hated drop ships.

A solid hand gripped hers and squeezed it. A hand to her other side did the same. She held on for dear life as the shuttle shook and blasted its way through the atmosphere. When the shuttle rounded the planet and the sun struck her fully for the first time, she almost hissed in fear.

The suit kept her safe, but she couldn't fight the new instincts that were running through her. Her body shook with panic; she just *knew* that the sun would burn her.

"It's alright, Eleanor, the suits have protected us for years. It won't hurt you." The soothing murmur in her ear calmed her somewhat, but it was the hands that kept her anchored to her seat when her body would have fled.

The landing was anticlimactic. It was smooth and direct to the ground with hardly a bump. A shaded skimmer was waiting for the shuttle occupants and they filed out, carrying their baggage to the waiting transport.

The skimmer took them into a valley and immediately the fear of sunlight abated. There was a mist hanging over the valley and it formed a heavy veil that filtered the sun.

When they arrived, they were escorted to a large building and given their assigned quarter numbers. It was explained that the valley that they were in had an inert gas cloud over it provided by the local flora. It was perfectly safe for species sensitive to ultra violet radiation. When they called Herun Matias she looked over at him in surprise. He gave her an inclination of his head and went forward to pick up the keys and a bag of supplies.

"Um, why did they call you Herun?" She walked with him out the door and down the long path to the living quarters that they had been assigned.

Naccar skipped ahead, then stopped and laughed when he heard her question. He kept up his snickering the whole way to their new home.

Matias waited until they were inside the Alliance built home to answer. "It is my first name."

"Oh." She watched them strip out of their headgear and she hung back, waiting for her blush to fade.

"If you are waiting for your embarrassment to fade, you will have to wait a little longer than a day. I don't plan to let you forget that in your

mind, my first name was Commander.” His eyes were twinkling and she quickly began to look around the house. She went in search of her room and only found two. One with a very large bed. Crud. Fortunately, they were on opposite ends of the house.

She heard another snicker behind her and looked to find Herun leaning against the doorway. “There is a data burst on the communications console. It’s from Torgny and it has an Imperial encryption on it.”

With a heavy sigh she peeled off the hood and scarf, tucking the lenses into the back of the hood so she wouldn’t lose them. “Alright, show me the console.”

The message was clear and it was from Empress Amanda Tyrell, Terran Representative. “Hello, Eleanor. By this time you are at the colony site and will have already have completed your transformation. The amount of people that I have had to bribe to bring this about is surprisingly small. Everyone was only too happy to help a pair of star crossed lovers and their son escape from the horrors of arranged marriages.” She chuckled into the monitor.

“It was mostly true. You have no duties at the colony. You are a new family and are on your honeymoon. This will allow Naccar and Herun to train for the return to their home world.”

“I have found a formal challenge that must be

accepted in the Vimpyr archives. Well, Kyra found it. You have six months from the time of King Chars' death to challenge Murron to trial by combat. The winner will be declared the heir by virtue of superior strength."

"The problem here is that Naccar will need to be at his peak strength for the challenge, that means the accelerated growth that will come from your blood, Eleanor. But he has to be willing to take it."

Naccar was pale, paler than normal at the information that was being baldly given by the pre-recorded image. It was his worst fear. That his accelerated growth would drive him mad.

"He has to be ready to take the throne. If not, he can abdicate and be sterilized. This is a one shot deal. Murron is noted to be incredibly quick in battle and Naccar will need to be ready. Send me a data burst and let me know what he decides. I have left the routing information in a separate encrypted file. Remember, you only have a few months for this. After that, they will simply kill Naccar on sight." Amy sighed into the screen then smiled, "Oh, and if you haven't discovered it yet Eleanor, you and Herun are sharing a room as a couple. It is about freaking time. He has been after you for years." She looked behind her and sighed heavily, "Okay, have to go. Palden is trying to untie himself, and it looks like he is almost free. Good luck and keep in touch!" A masculine snarl

from off the screen emanated and she squeaked and the screen went black.

"She set me up!" Hands grabbed hers and held them as she lunged to smash the com.

"This is not about you now Eleanor. Naccar has a decision to make." She stilled immediately and turned with stricken eyes to Naccar.

"I am so sorry, Naccar. I forgot about what you have to think about." She looked at him, pale and alone on the other side of the room, weighing his future.

She stood and went to him, offering her hands to him. It was a formal greeting. As he took her hands she sank to the floor, kneeling gracefully. "You are the last of the true line of Hala. You have a choice to make, and I offer my blood to help you."

He kissed both her hands and drew her to her feet. "I accept your offer of blood. Commander Matias, will you act as my second?"

The Commander gave him a smart salute, "I will indeed, my king. It will be my honour."

Naccar's face was bleak. "Then I guess the only things we need to start, Eleanor, are a knife, a goblet and your arm."

CHAPTER FIVE

“Naccar will not drink from your flesh, as it is reserved for lovers or emergencies. You will cut your arm, bleed into the goblet, and when it is full, I will seal the wound.” Herun explained it to her quietly as they knelt in the family room. “His body will transform your blood directly into muscle mass, and we will repeat this over the course of weeks so that he can adjust gradually to the changes of his body.”

“You will need to drink from me regularly to replace a portion of what you are losing. Your body is still Terran on a fundamental level and this will be traumatic for you. We will also increase your food intake. It will help.” He stroked his hands down her arms and she firmed up her resolve. Naccar’s eyes met hers, the goblet between them.

She picked up the dagger and raised her left wrist. With a smooth stroke she drew it along her flesh and winced at the pain. Blood welled and

dripped into the goblet, with a grimace she set the dagger aside and took her bleeding wrist in her hand, opening the wound to increase the flow.

The goblet filled and she took it in her right hand and proffered it to Naccar. His teeth extended as his lips drew back in anticipation. He took the goblet and began to drink.

She felt lips on her wrist and looked to see Herun on his back, drinking at the still running blood and slowly closing the wound with his tongue. Bolts of lust ran through her as she closed her eyes to focus on the sensations. She was almost shuddering with arousal when he pulled his mouth from her arm. She saw a thin line of scarring and the blood around his mouth. It was all she could do to keep herself from crawling over him to lick his mouth clean.

Naccar was dealing with a blood problem all his own. His head was thrown back and the muscles of his body were rippling in reaction to the blood of Terran origin.

"Herun, take him out and start working out now. He needs it." She caressed his face, loving the look of intensity that he had taken on. She watched disappointment flick across his features and she couldn't help but smile. "I will be here when you get back."

He took her mouth in a savage claiming, "Be in our room, and be naked." He left her on the floor with her mouth swollen and her body wailing in

hunger.

With shaking hands she fixed herself a meal, knowing that they wouldn't be back in for hours. The burst of energy that Naccar had received would take a while to work off.

She ate quietly, then with the clashing of practice swords ringing outside the house, she went to bed. Naked, as ordered.

She didn't know how long she slept, only that there was a fire on her breast that was burning between her thighs and causing a slick reaction. Her cunt wept in desperation for possession and her legs shifted together in agitation.

Herun's dark head was at her breast, his teeth teasing at her and his mouth engaging in a strong sucking. She let out a moan and her hands threaded through that dark hair, holding him to her. At the sign of her waking, he rolled her to her back and switched from breast to breast. She felt the prickle of his teeth and sighed, arching into his mouth. She could feel those full lips twisting in a smile and he trailed his mouth lower.

He crossed her ribs, using his nails for gentle irritation and sensation, nipping and licking his way down. He shifted to her navel and used his tongue to sport with her, chuckling as her body flexed at the gentle stimulation. He blew a stream of air across her dampened skin and then began to move lower.

He pulled her thighs apart with gentle

insistence and she trembled in anticipation as his tongue began to trail up and down the delicate skin on the inside of her thighs. She shifted restlessly under the delicate touches and teasing strokes.

When a strong stroke of his tongue parted her damp clinging folds, she bit her lip. Her breath held as he lapped at her with slow and deliberate strokes. Her heat built in her core until it was pounding in her bloodstream. His lips fastened onto her clit and he sucked deliberately while inserting two fingers into her and stroking slowly. Her body was weeping openly at his touch, a damp heat that spread with every plunge of his fingers.

His mouth left her clit and moved to the inside of one of her thighs, "Oh hells!" was all she had time to say before he had bitten into the soft skin and was drawing her blood from the punctures with a strong suction that echoed his fingers in rhythm.

Her orgasm swept through her in a fiery wave, arching her body against his mouth and hands. She sobbed, twisted and then finally relaxed, until the next wave twisted her body. Five times she fought his hands, and five times he hung on, using his strength and teeth.

She finally felt him licking the wounds closed, and she relaxed in the sweaty sheets. He moved in a catlike manner, rising up onto hands and knees

to stalk her. With slow and deliberate movements, he covered her body with his, and bringing his throbbing flesh into her slick channel with one smooth thrust.

He leaned down for her kiss, and it was a sweet meeting of the lips that rapidly turned savage as he took control. His body rocked against hers in a frenzy, the slapping of flesh a sharp retort in the room. Her voice gave way to sighs and grunts as he rutted within her, driving for his release. Her body was much slower to climb the heights this time, and it was only when he rolled to his back and let her impale herself on him, while digging her eager fangs into his neck that she shuddered and came again as the blood ran across her palate. She drank deep, sucking hard and felt him groan and shoot within her in a distant manner. All that mattered was the blood.

His cock remained hard within her and she continued to feed until the source of her snack closed up. Licking her lips in satisfaction she looked at him once again, then leaned down for his kiss.

He regretfully lifted her off him and held her, spoon-fashion against him. A little manoeuvring and he had slid into her from behind. "Naccar did well. He is in control of his mind as his body. Tomorrow will be easier."

She felt completely sated, and yet cherished at the same time, with Herun's body around hers.

"Not if we have to fuck like bunnies after every blood sharing."

"Oh, we don't have to." He gave a wicked chuckle. "I just like it. You could take my blood the same way that Naccar takes yours, but I enjoy this much more."

Giggles took her over. Typical male. Give them a chance to get laid, and they jumped at it. He gave her a sharp slap on the thigh and her body flexed around him. He groaned and she sighed.

Having him passive inside her was more intimate than even the sharing of blood, and ever so slowly she nodded off. Her body exhausted from bed sport and blood loss.

* * * *

A slow movement within her woke her in the dark of the night. He had spilled her onto her stomach and was slowly riding her from behind. She moaned and widened her thighs to allow for greater depth and he continued his steady pace until she shivered and bucked against him, moaning lightly at the waves of sensation that lapped over her. His own groan of satisfaction followed a few minutes later and again he tucked her against him to sleep.

Herun was yawning over breakfast and Eleanor was smug. She had woken him at dawn with her mouth on his cock, coaxing it to life, sucking and

swirling her tongue over him until he spilled his semen into her mouth. She had sat up and dodged out of his embrace, getting into the shower before him and trying to work the soreness of the night's unaccustomed activity out of her muscles.

He was waiting impatiently for her when she left the sanitary chamber, but she dodged him, explaining that someone had to make breakfast while he showered.

Naccar met her in the family room and her wistful gaze took in the physical changes that had already taken place. His shoulders were broader and his jaw line heavier. He looked more like his father than she would have imagined. Chars had been devastatingly handsome and had never lacked for bed partners, even when he blackmailed the women into his bed.

His streak of cruelty had been one of his most obvious attributes. He had enjoyed forcing families to send their daughters to court where he could pick and choose the freshest faces to debauch. Not even arranged marriages or engagements could slow his rampant appetites and many of the nobility were forced to either take his discarded bed mates, or to find women who had never been to court.

Naccar had always had a sweet gentility toward women that Eleanor had found charming and worth encouraging. That is when the dance and etiquette lessons had begun.

She walked to him and hugged him. A chaste embrace from a mother to a son. He hugged her back and they both mourned the loss of the boy he had been, and shared the hope for the man he would become. They separated and she dashed tears away.

"Silly to cry. I know. But I never wished this for you." She turned away and started to assemble food packs and re-hydrated a selection that would normally have fed her for three days. The guys would go through it in one sitting, and she was a bit peckish herself.

"I know. Eleanor, you have always been a true and honest friend, and if my mother had survived, I wish that she would have been something like you." He filled water glasses and set the table and she brushed away more tears.

By the time Herun had finished his shower and gotten dressed, they were both cheerful and in better spirits, having said what needed to be said.

As Herun yawned for the fourth time Naccar looked at him and laughed. "Didn't you sleep at all? What were you doing all night?"

Eleanor froze and a blush ran up her cheeks and across her chest, Herun merely looked placidly at the younger man who looked from one to the other and burst out laughing. "Not nearly as much as I wanted to."

Chuckling, Naccar took the plates and washed them as Herun reached out to take her hand and

ran his thumb across her palm.

"If I am up for it, can I join you later for combat practice?" Her voice was huskier than she would have liked, that small contact between hands was doing strange things to her hormones.

"Yes, as long as you take it easy and rest when you feel fatigued." He dropped a kiss into her palm, then helped her rise for the blood sharing.

It proceeded as it had before, with Naccar across from her and Herun licking the wound closed. Her entire body was focused on the wet heat of his mouth as he sucked and licked at her, it was as if he lay between her thighs again, his mouth over the aching heart of her.

Naccar had an easier time of it this time. They immediately rose to their feet and left her sitting, aching and exhausted on the floor. She crawled to a nearby couch and had a nap, then rose and headed outside where the grunting, sweating and swearing was still going strong.

The sight that greeted her should not have surprised her, but it did. A variety of males from the ship, including Tival, Selna, and an Avari contingent were all watching the combat with intense faces.

As Herun disarmed him again, Naccar stepped aside and another young male took his place. Herun was apparently teaching swordsmanship to these males and as Naccar stepped aside, he received his own opponent. Two matches

continued until both of the foreign males were disarmed, then Herun and Naccar faced off against each other again.

Wearing a loose tunic and trousers with her boots was comfortable enough for her purposes, and she stepped toward the line of young males eager to take their turn with one of the combatants.

“May I cut in?” She spoke to the young Selna male. That his parents had come here spoke to their good sense. If he had remained in the Alliance proper, they would have pressed him into Companion service the instant that he was of age.

The male was startled and handed over his weapons to her with a graceful bow. “Of course, lady. But what will you do with them?”

At that instant Herun and Naccar separated and she strode forward with the two short swords in her hands. Herun was startled by her appearance, but as she took a fighters stance, he matched her.

The instant that her blunted weapons contacted his the fire of battle was in his eyes. They feinted, struck, twisted and struck again for what seemed like hours.

Eleanor’s arms were leaden as she made a final defence with both swords. His strong blow knocked her weapons out of her numbed hands. His blade rested against her neck and she simply

looked up at him with exhausted eyes.

The crowd broke into howls and applause as Herun cursed, picked her up and flipped her over his shoulder. "Naccar, continue to practice. You have plenty of partners."

He strode into the cool dimness of their home with the hoots of lewd amusement following them every step.

CHAPTER SIX

He took her to their room and dropped her into bed, then went to get a cloth and a bowl of water. He had her stripped down in seconds and was sponging the sweat off her with a brusque and efficient manner. He cleaned the sweat off his own neck and pulled her to him roughly.

“Drink, Eleanor.”

His hand held her head in place as she was shaking so hard to support it herself. Grunting, he rolled to his back and waited for her to bite him. It was slow in coming as she shifted her nude body against his armour, getting comfortable.

He pinched her buttock and repeated, “Drink, Eleanor.” Holding her mouth against him until he felt the prick of her teeth, followed by a strong pressure and suction as her instincts took over.

It wasn't only her instinct to feed that was woken by her proximity to Herun, her nipples had hardened against the cold steel of his armour and her thighs now straddled his hips as she drank.

Her body flexed against his in a parody of mating and his hoarse groan at the scent of her rising arousal fanned the flames higher. His hands clutched her hips as she ground herself against the hard planes of metal that encased him. She rocked faster and faster as she fed, seeking more and more stimulation as her body climbed to orgasm.

She screamed, her mouth breaking from his sealing wounds as her body found satisfaction. She twisted and arched against him, his blood marking her mouth a heady scarlet. As it stilled, she returned and continued to lick at his throat until the punctures that she had made were completely sealed. She then cleaned off all traces of blood. It took some time and a lot of tongue work, but she did it.

She collapsed on his armour and just lay there, letting the cool metal reduce the residual heat in her body.

"I told you not to tire yourself." His hands ran through her hair absently.

"It looked like such fun, and I haven't fought someone like you in a long time."

"You put up a good fight. Even Naccar wasn't that fast when we started."

"I am a feeble girl, I have to be fast." She snorted against his neck and licked at his skin absently. He tasted so good.

"A few weeks of training and you will have a lot more stamina. But first, you have to do

everything that I say.” He was using his Commander tone of voice. The one that meant he was planning to train her.

“If you agree to help me train, then I will do whatever you say. I promise.”

He chuckled deeply. “First, carefully climb off me. I don’t want to snag you on anything.”

With a heavy groan she pushed herself up and dismounted from her comfortable resting place. With a flare of self-consciousness, she grabbed the cloth he had used on her and started to wipe her juices from his armour. His hand caught at hers and raised it to his lips which were twitching with amusement. “Don’t worry about it. It is the most enjoyable stain that I have ever had on the armour.”

Her face heated, “I am sorry, it just took me over. I started to feed and my body started to throb.”

“It is a normal reaction, when you have taken a mate. The more intimate we become, the more intimate the feeding.” He stroked his hand down her body and asked, “How did it feel when I bit you here?” His fingers touched the tender flesh inside her thigh.

“It felt amazing, each time you sucked, it was as if you were pulling a string of desire ever tighter.”

His pupils flared, “That is what it was supposed to feel like, for me, the taste of your blood is reminiscent of your wet heat. The damp

honey that even now wells from you at my touch." His fingers moved lightly on her and she shivered again, her body tingling in reaction.

She was just leaning up to kiss him when he withdrew his hand and scooted off the bed.

"You, my dear, need your rest. You over did it today and I am ordering you to spend the rest of the day in bed. I will fetch you a meal and I will check on you in two hours. You had better be asleep."

Her jaw dropped open as he was a good as his word. He prepared a meal for her, cold rations, and tucked her between the sheets, then left.

She ate in sullen misery, but as soon as her body was full she slept. She didn't hear him come back in two hours, but she did wake regretfully as he brought her a hot meal for dinner. She showered, changed the sheets and went back to bed.

Sometime in the night he joined her, his warm flesh sliding against hers. But this time he simply held her and let her resume her rest.

The next day, they set a pattern. Breakfast in the mornings, the blood sharing after, a light workout for Eleanor, which consisted of chopping wood to increase her stamina, lunch, a feeding from Herun, either a light combat lesson or Eleanor was free to practice dance to keep her supple. Dinner was now a family event, all of them sitting down to discuss tactics and the formalities of the challenge.

Eleanor was beginning to be upset however at what took place next. Nothing. After that first day, her only sexual contact with Herun was when he fed her, or closed her wrist for her. She had tried to ask him about it, but he only said that it wasn't time.

She had tried begging, seducing, and finally jumping him as he came out of the shower. Nothing worked. He simply peeled her hands from his body and held her close, saying that it wasn't time. She couldn't even sneak attack him in bed. He wrapped himself around her before they slept and he never shifted.

She tried to ask Naccar and ended up turning away in disgust as he laughed until tears flowed from his eyes.

It was her against the Vimpyr males, and they were winning.

Her combat training had improved to the point where she could trade off and take on additional opponents, and her stamina allowed her to start teaching a dance class in the new village on odd afternoons.

Eleanor got to know the women of the colony, their urge for a new life and the drive to pursue it. They also considered the combat training that their brothers and sons were getting as full payment for sharing resources and properties.

She started them slow with some formal Entex measures. A single drum needed for most of those

dances. They excelled and she progressed through Azon promenades, Avari group dances, and finally Selna fan dances.

Those were the most gruelling. The dances combined with the movements of hands holding and flipping the fans in a flirtatious manner was a skill that most of them would never gain precision at, but the very gestures that made the basics of the motions could be adapted to seducing almost any species.

One of the Selna who was learning the dances for the first time brought with her a set of Vilar fans. They were micro thin metal fan that had often been used for defence by certain groups of Companions.

It was with gratitude and amazement that she was given these fans in appreciation for the lessons. As the Selna said, "I have no need to defend myself to the death. For you, it just may be an option."

The days melted away from her as she kept to her schedule and made friends, participated – with her men – in social events in her little community and her life had a nice and predictable pattern.

A data burst from an incoming ship caught her household by surprise.

When she got in from one of her dance classes she saw the flickering light the console. She triggered the encoded message with her

encryption key. "A priority one message from the Empress of the Haldis Imperium."

She keyed in her access codes and the message began. "Hiya, Eleanor. Your ride is on the way."

"I have been kept apprised of your progress, and with the two weeks of travel ahead of you, he will arrive in enough time to make his case and present the challenge." The glow of pregnancy rode heavily on Amy's features, her ivory hair twisted into a coronet. The tiara that had been fastened to the braids was probably of sufficient value to buy a small moon.

"You will be escorted by guards from the Imperium to Vimpyr. From there they will watch over you to the palace in the capital and keep you safe until the challenge is over. If Naccar wins, I can have the Companion guild extend your contract so that you can stay on as his advisor if you wish, or should he lose, they will remove you before your own life can be taken."

"I know that this is not what you want to hear, but there it is. Someone is not leaving that challenge alive, and you need to prepare for that."

"The transport that I have arranged will be arriving in six hours. Good luck and stay safe." She gave a formal nod and the screen winked out.

"Shit." She sat down heavily and rubbed her eyes. *Alright, better get things moving.*

She went outside and found the hard working men taking a break. "So, this is why our store of

juice keeps dropping.” Sprawled over the bare ground that had been stomped bald by fighting feet over the course of months was every young male that could spare the time from their duties to come and spar.

They were all sitting and had cool glasses of the diluted pod juice that passed for a strange type of lemonade to Eleanor’s palate.

She hated to disrupt this domestic bliss. “Herun, Naccar, I just got a message. It’s time to go.” Her hands opened in helplessness and they simply stared at her for a moment. They both looked so stunned that she wanted to take it back.

Naccar looked close to tears. His friends here had become a touchstone for his life, they supported his physical changes and accepted it as normal. He had ceased to drink her blood two weeks ago, and he was now a man in every respect. Women of the colony followed him with their eyes, sighing at his pale skin and silky black hair.

Herun looked ready for battle. His eyes went flat and he stood and made his regrets to the males around him, asking them to pass along the message of their departure. Hands were shaken and it was two sombre Vimpyrs that went into the house to collect their things.

She prepped her own clothing and few new possessions before meeting them in the main room. “Are you ready for this, Naccar?”

"One thing this planet has taught me is that everyone deserves an equal voice. No matter their race or gender."

Herun nodded. "It's an excellent start, and though I have no right to say it, I am proud of you."

"You have every right. If it wasn't for you, I would not have survived the blood sharing." They eyed each other for a long moment, and then embraced in a masculine manner. It was that manly hug that brought out the silliness in her. Eleanor giggled, snorting and bending over in her amusement.

She shrieked with giggles as they each grabbed her in a bone-cracking hug, then handed her off and let the other one have a go. Back and forth she was hugged until tears came to her eyes. "Ok. I give up. You can have your man-hugs, I won't laugh...just let me catch my breath."

She was tossed onto one of the couches and Herun took up a position next to her, her hand lightly gripped in his. "We were sharing a serious moment of masculine appreciation."

She leaned her head against his shoulder. "I know. But like it or not, we have indeed become a type of family, and I am proud of Naccar as well."

Naccar grinned at her and quipped, "Thanks, Mom."

Herun laughed as she threw a pillow at him and he calmly batted it away from his face before

it struck.

They spent the rest of their wait answering the door and accepting farewell gifts. Their house was full of well-wishers when the small Imperial shuttle landed in the field beyond their home. During their wait they had gotten into the ultra violet suits and as soon as they passed the mist layer they were glad of it.

Knowing what stress and tension awaited her, she relaxed and let the rays play over her suit, her body acknowledged that a light burn was not the worst thing that would happen to her in the next few weeks.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The voyage back to Vimpyr was relatively uneventful. At first the Imperial guardsmen were taken aback by having a woman train with them, but after the first two sparring partners that she ousted, she was allowed to stay.

One of the guardsmen was named Xalli, and he handed her a package and message from Amanda. It contained a note of encouragement and two specially made Vilar fans that she practiced with in private.

They continued to eat together in the mess hall of the ship, a habit of months not to be destroyed by fear of separation. Herun was often to be found in long talks with the Imperial guardsmen, and Naccar trained almost constantly, only resting when fatigue took him over. Eleanor focused on her dance and agility while maintaining her strength. They grew quiet as they approached the planet where their fates and the fate of an entire species would be decided.

She was also almost desperate for Herun's touch. He still fed her as she needed it, but no more intimate contact than that. She was bewildered and not a little rejected by his lack of interest.

Naccar merely laughed and told her not to worry about it, giving her a hug to still her agitated fussing. The only good point to that exchange was that she saw the stress of the upcoming battle lifted from him for a moment as he laughed at her.

* * * *

Planet fall was uneventful. The shuttle was far superior to the one she had used for her most recent trip down and she hardly felt a thing. No bumps, few shakes and a tiny thump as they landed.

"Prince Naccar, we are here to take you into custody. Please come with us." The voice shouted into the interior of the shuttle as the door opened. They looked at each other and smiled as the Imperial guard took their positions around them, and together they moved down the walk way to face the royal guard.

Naccar strode forward and looked down his nose at the guards that had betrayed his father by not avenging his murder and in fact, supporting the usurper.

“I am here to issue a challenge to the usurper Murron. In trial by combat I shall prove my right to the throne of my fathers.” He stood with his sword at his side and his head held high.

The Royal guard looked at each other in confusion. Where was the boy that had run from their world? This man could not possibly be that boy.

“I am Naccar Hala as my DNA will confirm. We will now proceed to the great chamber in the palace and I will announce my challenge to that coward Murron.” With two of the Imperial guard in front of them and four behind, they strode through the town outlying the palace. A murmur of surprise from the members of the population that they passed. Their little parade was causing quite a stir.

The royal guard was forced to run ahead of them to keep up which severely dented their authority with the townspeople who laughed at their attempts to keep up with the Imperial stride.

The doors to the audience chamber swung wide at their approach. A member of the Royal guard ran forward to alert the king to his guests.

They were all dressed in their formal clothing and armour. Herun was dressed in a ruby red version of his regular guardsmen armour. Naccar’s armour was more elaborate, denoting his status as king. It was Eleanor’s clothing that had caused her some problems. Her robes concealed a

leather fight bodice and a set of leather trousers with a leather draping from hip to hip and falling to the floor for decorum. It was designed to give her elegance of movement and easy concealment under the Companion robes that she was wearing.

Her Vilar fans were tucked into the jewelled sash that she wore for support around her middle. She really hoped she wouldn't need them. Her hair had been lightened by a groomer on the ship, removing the obvious mark of her transformation. Her teeth she would simply have to hide by keeping her mouth shut. An impossible task, but she would try.

She followed in Naccar's wake her feet silent in the boots that had been provided with the costume. They were dancer's boots. Designed for maximum mobility. She felt the smooth stone under her feet shift and the doors swung closed behind them.

At the head of the room, under the Hala coat of arms was Murron. He was sprawled in the throne, and judging by the terrified woman kneeling in front of him, he had decided to take over his uncle's vicious habits.

The Imperial guard cleared a path for them and with a twist of their arms and an extension of blades, space for the challenge was created.

"Murron, step forward and accept this challenge from your rightful king!" Naccar took the center of the circle and waited for Murron to

answer.

"You are not Naccar, he was still to grow into the body of a man. He was a mewling child."

"I am Naccar, and the blood of a Terran will turn even the most callow of youths in a matter of days." He stood and opened his arms to indicate sincerity. "Test me. I am Naccar Hala, and the challenge will be answered now."

"Fetch a physician, a scanner and the guardian stones." He smirked at Naccar, then looked behind him. "Oh, look, the whore and the coward who sought refuge with a child."

They didn't answer him, merely stood there and waited for the scanners to be brought. Eleanor had patience, and obviously so did Herun as he stood next to her and waited.

The five minutes caused a buzz in the courtiers that were clustered around. Speculation of who Naccar actually was, were the most popular. A scanner was brought forth and Naccar offered his pinkie for the testing. One quick stab and the machine began to work.

"This person is identified as Naccar Hala. There can be no argument." The technician took his equipment and left.

The guardian stones were placed around the circumference of the ring that had been formed, a thirty foot diameter circle had been cleared in the great room.

"You accept the challenge?" Naccar needed

confirmation for the official challenge.

"I do. You will die this day, cousin, and your whore and Commander will be killed after you." He shrugged off his cloak and sent for his breast plate.

The Imperial guard stepped between them as they faced each other in the circle. He held out one of the guardian stones, and each opponent pricked their fingers and attached the blood to the stone. The guard explained the rules of combat. The sword fight would continue until one opponent would be disarmed, unable to continue, surrendered, or dead. No weapons other than the blades would be allowed. The stones would keep out anyone not involved in the fight.

He backed away and activated the stones, a glowing ring flaring out around them, and creating a barrier of energy that none could cross.

"Begin!" At his barked command Naccar drew his weapon, a sword and dagger, and braced for the rush of his cousin's attack. It was not long in coming.

It set the pattern for the clash, Murron would charge and Naccar would feint and deliver a slash that would have his opponent bleeding in a matter of instances.

Naccar was by far the superior swordsman, but he attempted to give Murron the time to come to that realization.

Forty five minutes of watching the battle had

her sweating from her position on the side lines. The only thing that kept her attention was a male behind Murron who was shifting from foot to foot as if waiting for a signal.

That signal was obvious when Murron called out, "Loman! Get in here."

The assembly gasped as the man that she had been watching stepped across the barrier which could only mean one thing. He was a blood relative of Murron.

Naccar was now in a two against one fight, and Loman was a much better fighter than his relative. He needed help and she had to get it to him.

With a trembling hand she pushed against the barrier, and as soon as she felt it give she made her way into the circle and took on Loman while Naccar concentrated on the rapidly weakening Murron.

She removed the two fans she was wearing and hoped that her practice was going to pay off. She deflected the first thrust that he aimed at her, snapping open one fan and flipping the blade aside. The fans had been made of a variety of alloys that rendered them stronger than most blades and sharper as well.

She used the lithe manner of dance to evade his blades, blocking some moves with her forearm, and others with the flat of the fan. When he finally threw his arms wide and lunged at her with madness in his eyes, she opened the fans, crossed

them and let him come to her.

She ducked and shifted inside his guard, raised her hands and separated them viciously. In the process, she also took off Loman's head. His body stood for a moment, then fell back as it lacked the control to keep it standing.

With the fans dripping blood she turned to see how her son was doing. Naccar had his opponent on the ground and was demanding that he yield. Murron glared up at him sullenly and declared that he would never yield the throne to Chars' little bastard. As Naccar pondered what to do next, Murron decided for him.

From the top of his boot he pulled another blade and shoved it into Naccar's abdomen. Blood welled and dripped down Naccar's body, but Murron would never see it. The instant that he lunged Naccar had slashed his throat.

"Long live Naccar Hala! Long live the new king!" The shout rang out and all that Eleanor saw was Naccar buckling to his knees and she rushed to him.

He had pulled the dagger from his gut, but she saw the barbs that ran along either side. He had severe internal damage and he would not live long enough to reign if something was not done that instant.

Herun stood over them with his eyes stricken.

"Does this count as an emergency?"

"It most certainly does. Give him your wrist. It

is acceptable in this situation.” Herun guided her left wrist to Naccar’s mouth. “Drink, Naccar, it will heal you.”

When his teeth bit into her wrist she winced. This was nothing like the sensual sharing that she had with Herun. She felt the blood being drawn from her and into her son, and she had never felt more maternal. If he could repair his body with blood from hers, she would open all her veins.

The Imperial guard had taken up protective positions as Naccar fed, and as she felt the wounds on her wrist close, Naccar sat up.

He accepted help to his feet from Herun. With the wound closing rapidly and the blood drying on his thigh he took the throne.

“I hereby accept the outcome of the trial by combat. Both Murron and his blood proxy Loman were defeated.” He looked to Herun. “Commander Matias, release the guardsmen that were loyal to my father from their incarceration. And round up all who raised up against the crown in the coup. We will deal with them later.”

“Sire, I do not wish to leave you undefended.” Herun looked around at the appalled and hostile faces of what had obviously been supporters of the Murron regime.

“I have the Imperial guard to protect me until things have stabilized.” At his comment the Imperial guard took up places around the throne and in the exit of the throne room.

Eleanor shook herself, wiped most of the blood off the fans on one of the bodies and folded them neatly, tucking them back into her sash. She slowly moved forward and knelt before the throne. "King Naccar, what is your wish of me now that our contract is almost at an end?"

His hand raised her with a touch on her chin. "You have been tutor, friend and mother to me. You will always be welcome here. But for now, take the lady Eleanor to her chambers. The scent of blood does not become her."

A maid came scurrying forward to lead her away. Herun was on duty, and Naccar had his kingdom back. What was left for a Companion who didn't even sleep around?

CHAPTER EIGHT

She was led to a lovely suite that had not been occupied for some time. "What is your name?" she asked the female servant that had brought her there.

"Kita, my lady."

"Whose apartments were these?"

"They belonged to the King Chars' official mistress. They have not been in use since then." She fluffed the bedding after she ran a bath. "You will want to wash off the blood, my lady."

Blood? Oh, right. She looked down and her clothing was coated by the arterial spray that had occurred when she decapitated Loman. Her hair was probably covered as well.

"Is there a shower as well? I don't want to sit in this while I wash." She began to strip off the robes and the leather beneath it.

"Yes, my lady." Kita moved to pick up her clothing and held it at arms length. It was still wet with blood. "The shower is to the left, the bath to

the right."

"Thank you." Naked, Eleanor went and washed off the residue of her battle. The water ran pink for a long time as she let it run over her. Her arms were covered with small nicks and scratches. A few long slices decorated her thighs. Funny, she hadn't even felt them. Now they burned like hell.

She stepped out of the shower. "Kita. I am going to forgo the bath. Can you get a medical kit?"

"Of course, my lady, but why would you need one? Oh stars!" Kita came into the bathing chamber and stopped cold.

"Apparently Loman did more damage than I thought." She crumpled to the floor, weak and still bleeding. "Help me up, please."

"I had better get help. Just stay there, my lady." Kita ran for the door, and for a Vimpyr she was rather squeamish about blood. Her face was chalky as opposed to pale and she spoke urgently to one of the guards who was stationed at the door.

Kita then left her alone.

"Just great." Pain was now riding her brutally, her wounds burning with every movement. Taking a deep breath she forced herself to her feet. The towelling that she had grabbed out of the bathing chamber became her blotter as she laid it on the bed and used it to keep her blood from the lovely coverlet.

It was long minutes before the door opened again. Naccar took one look at her lying in her own blood and he barked an order to the guard at her door. Based on the pounding footsteps whatever he had said was slightly inflammatory.

"Oh, Eleanor. I had no idea that you were injured." He sat next to her and helped her to cover herself with another length of fabric.

Here she was losing blood rapidly, and she was mortified that he was seeing her naked. "Neither did I, Naccar, so don't feel too bad. Is there a Med tech coming?"

"No. Someone better. Don't worry. You will be fine."

"Hey, weird question. Why am I in the mistress' quarters?"

"They used to be my mother's rooms. I thought it fitting to have you here." His hand kept pressure on her thigh wounds and she relaxed a little.

"Oh, that's nice. Are Herun's men ok?"

"For the most part. A few were killed before the others were taken, but most of them survived and are now taking their places in the palace corridors. The injured are in the hospice and receiving treatment."

"Good. Hey, you did it. You won the challenge." She smiled at him, pride in her eyes.

"How did you enter the circle when Loman came forward?"

She laughed, a harsh bark. "Tyrell figured that one out. The blood proxy. By binding your DNA to mine, we became family in truth. The barrier could not keep me out, because it recognized my blood as yours. It was close enough to get me in."

The door flew open and made her jump, which then made her hiss in discomfort. "About time you got here." Naccar's mutter was almost lost to her as she watched Herun come close to her bed where she lay quietly and stained with blood.

"You are the one who sent me to retrieve my men, Your Majesty." He elbowed Naccar out of the way. "Why didn't you mention that you were hurt, love?" He carefully pulled the cloth that covered her away, wincing as she hissed when it stuck.

"I didn't know it was my blood. I did just finish a fight after all." His mouth covered one of the slits on her thigh and licked at it until it began to close.

Naccar left them and Eleanor simply surrendered to Herun's mouth. One by one, her wounds were closed; he lifted and examined each limb for damage, and then finally rolled her to her stomach.

"Stars, Eleanor, it is amazing that you were still on your feet." She felt his mouth touch her shoulder and begin to lick down at an angle. The bastard Loman had sliced her back.

Long minutes ticked by as he worked, and she

was amazed that he was able to continue tirelessly drinking her blood as it sullenly seeped from her flesh.

At last he finished and gave her a complete inspection, flinging the cloths aside as they were now soaked in her blood and were of no use.

She was so tired. Her lids fluttered shut and she snuggled down into the bedding. Well, she tried to snuggle down, Herun lifted her by her shoulders and gently shook her awake.

“Eleanor, you need to drink from me.”

“Later, I wanna sleep.”

“Your body is consuming itself, you need to infuse some blood to your system, or you might not wake up.” That got her attention where the gentle coaxing didn’t.

She sat up and watched bemused as Herun removed his armour, then his clothing. She let herself be tugged across his chest and he guided her head to his neck. She nuzzled around a bit then opened her mouth and bit down.

Oh, she had missed this. Feeling his body hard under hers, his cock rising against her stomach as she fed. Her thighs parted to straddle him, and once again she ground her pussy and clit against him as she fed. With each ounce of blood, she gained strength and the warmth of passion bloomed in her belly.

His hands stroked her back and shoulders restlessly and she moved her hips back until he

was prodding at her opening with the blunt head of his erection. His hips shifted up, and her teeth bore down as her body welcomed him with her slick heat.

She continued to feed and work her body against his and she moaned around him as her body released the tension in a wave of sensation that left her limp and relaxed. The fountain of blood that had been feeding her closed up and she cleaned up, then sat back, driving him to the hilt and rolling her head back at the full sensation.

His hands gripped her hips and held her still. "We can't do this."

There it was. The rejection. Here he was buried to the balls within her welcoming body and he didn't want to fuck her.

She swiftly moved off him, stumbling as her head swam with spots then cleared.

"I am sorry to have importuned you. It won't happen again." She grabbed at one of the robes in a nearby wardrobe and drew it on.

He looked like he wanted to say something then sighed and got dressed to leave the room. "We will discuss this when things have settled."

He probably had some Vimpyr girlfriend or lover that he had forgotten about while they were on their mission.

The door closed around him and her heart broke. She slumped to the floor and sobbed. It was in that pitiful state that Kita found her, and she led

her calmly to the bath, and soaked her in freshly warmed water.

While Eleanor grieved, Kita changed the bloody bedding, when she finished her bath she was ushered into the bed and was asleep in an instant.

* * * *

Kita was there when she woke and the dawn was moving through her window with no regard for her mood.

"The King is expecting you for breakfast, my lady. I have put out a selection of robes for you that you can choose after you finish your toilette." That was more of an order than a suggestion, but Eleanor got out of bed and moved to take a quick shower, then work on her hair.

Kita helped her arrange her golden locks in a fetching manner, and the four layers of jewel toned robes went on without any protest.

Naccar and Herun stood as she entered the room and she looked around for any other advisors. There were none. It was just like breakfast at the colony. Only with servants.

She took the chair that was held out for her and refused to meet Herun's eyes. Uncharacteristically silent, she ate the food put in front of her with deliberate focus.

Naccar finally asked her, "How are you feeling?"

"Fine."

"General Matias healed you satisfactorily?"

"Yes." Wait a minute, "General?"

"Yes, he received the promotion after dispatching the traitorous General Talli last night."

"Congratulations." She gave him a formal inclination of her head and he looked frustrated. He muttered a small curse and an, "Excuse me, Your Majesty," then left to attend his duties.

Naccar smiled and munched on a piece of fruit. "I imagine that he can hardly wait for your formal acclimation as my mother."

She was confused. "What are you talking about?"

"He didn't tell you?" Naccar chuckled. "I gave him a royal edict. He is not to make love to you again until you are formally declared as my parent, and legitimately wed. I don't want to have any brothers or sisters who are unable to inherit because of their birth status."

She breathed deeply and then couldn't contain herself any longer. "*What?*" It was a shriek that echoed through the palace walls and sent a murmur of concern through the household staff.

"Are you done eating? We have some statesmanship to engage in." He helped her to rise and her mind was reeling with his announcement. It explained why Herun let her take her pleasure from his body, but never took his own, not since

those first few times.

A chair had been put next to the throne and a dark mutter of anger ran through the royal court as Naccar guided her to the seat.

Eleanor made a note to bring her fans to the next event.

This day consisted of the treatment of traitors and tax evasion. She offered her opinion when Naccar asked for it, which was not often and more for show than anything else. General Matias remained off to one side and watched her with a focused intensity that she tried to ignore.

They stopped for lunch, then resumed in the afternoon.

Herun watched with mounting frustration as Naccar continued to mete out justice and punishment and made no mention of any formal announcements.

Eleanor sat quietly and only commented when she could not contain herself.

A gong rang, the day was over and she retired to her chamber to rest. She was more tired than she thought as she woke the next morning and the events of the previous day repeated themselves.

Four days later, the moment Herun had been waiting for had arrived. Special robes were delivered to her rooms that morning and Eleanor dressed with care. She made sure to carry her fans with her as she had for every day since that first, tucked into her sash.

She ate breakfast with Herun and Naccar, discussing the previous days' events and the variety of details that were having to be dealt with. Naccar was enjoying their discomfort just a little too much, and she didn't want to give him any excuses to cancel the announcement.

Naccar took her hand and escorted her into the court, seating her and remaining standing as the nobles and petitioners milled in conversation.

As he raised his hands they fell silent. "Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce you formally to the matriarch of the Hala family. Eleanor Palmer Hala. She is my regent, my guardian, and my adopted mother by Alliance records and standings. We are bound by blood. Although not born to Vimpyr, she is more mother to me than any I have known. She is entitled to all courtesies and honours due to her ranking as Queen Mother."

She was stunned. This was not the formal statement that she had been expecting.

"In her honour, there will be a formal dinner and celebration this evening." He flipped his robes straight and took his seat for the day's petitions.

She sat perfectly still for hours, mulling over the ramifications of being a Queen Mother. There would be endless public appearances, events, and very little privacy. What had Naccar been thinking?

Just before lunch a servant crept forward and

handed her a data pad. Apparently she had a priority message from the Haldis Imperium. She touched Naccar's arm and murmured, "Please excuse me, I have another message from my friend." He nodded and she left to return to her chambers.

CHAPTER NINE

The two guardsmen that accompanied her were wearing the new livery that Naccar had ordered, and she ran her hand across her sash to take hold of her fans as she noticed that the new tunics didn't quite fit.

They made their move as soon as they had passed the main corridor and were heading into the private quarters. The one on the left slammed her into the one on her right and she stumbled, then whirled as they tried to catch her arms.

One drew back a slashed wrist and the other suffered a deep gash to his shoulder as she flared the fans and prepared for a fight. She screamed at the top of her lungs as they tried to move against her. As the rushing of feet alerted her to her reinforcements her attackers fled.

"What is it, Your Highness?" One of the guardsmen asked her with a look of confusion at her serene countenance.

"Two men in guardsmen uniforms just tried to

abduct me.”

He looked at her in disbelief. She simply held up the blood smeared fans and pointed out the trail on the floor. “Follow that and you might still catch them.”

As they all turned to pursue her victims she grabbed the last of them by the sleeve. “Escort me to back to the King’s presence, please.”

“Yes, Your Highness. This way, please.” He looked embarrassed to have forgotten his manners. He took her swiftly back to the room where petitioners were requesting a new aqueduct system be put in place.

“Thank you, you may join the others in the hunt now,” She gave him a stern glare, “And I expect them to be caught.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He snapped off a salute and ran back down the hall.

She serenely sailed back to her seat at Naccar’s side and left her open fans dripping blood as she crossed her wrists on her knees. She imagined that she formed quite the image. A Vimpyr woman in iridescent robes with two bloody metal fans.

She wanted it to be an image that the nobles remembered. They were all staring at the blood slowly dripping from the fans and their horror caused Naccar to turn to her from the plans he had been reading.

“Eleanor, what the hells happened?” He knelt before her and she simply smiled.

"I just thwarted an attempt to kidnap me. Or kill me. I am not sure which." She moved her hands sharply and snapped the fans shut. She absently tucked them back into her sash as Naccar reached for her hands.

The two men she had wounded were dragged into the hall and thrown to the floor. The guardsmen were puffed up with their success. She punctured it when she mentioned, "You might also want to take that man there into custody. It was his false message that coaxed me from the room." As she spoke the 'servant' made for the door and was tackled by Herun.

His head was slammed into the floor with force that almost shook the walls and he was bloody and barely breathing when Herun finished with him.

"General Matias. Let your men question them. I am assured that when they realize the alternative is to face either you or Eleanor in a ring, that they will speak." Naccar was furious, but amused.

Herun left his victim with a look of contempt and rushed to the dais to take Eleanor in his arms. She rose and went to him without hesitation. As his arms closed around her she heard the words she had been longing for.

"General Matias, you have my enthusiastic permission to take my mother as your wife. This evening's festivities will celebrate your impending nuptials." Naccar's voice was quiet but carried

throughout the room. "I will also humbly request that you alter your schedule to include acting as her bodyguard until you can choose a suitable set of guards to take on the duty."

"I will gladly take her as my wife, and keep her safe." He chuckled and she smiled into his chest, "Although, she seems to do a very good job of keeping herself safe."

"Well, as a newly engaged couple, you will need some time alone. The Imperial guard will see to my safety, please enjoy the afternoon to yourselves." Naccar waved them off and with a nod of his head he dismissed the group of nobles and had the bleeding and beaten abductors dragged off.

Eleanor looked into Herun's midnight eyes. "Did he just give us permission to...?" Her eyebrows raised.

"He did. But I am going to restrain myself and instead take you to my home." He took her arm and a look from him had two of his guardsmen following them. They promenaded to the skimmer pad and he seated her with a formal bow.

The guardsmen took their places in the back of the skimmer without any comments. They were alert, seemed responsible and definitely respected Herun, so she liked them instantly.

She also noted that the fit of their uniforms was impeccable. She smiled and turned back to watch the Vimpyr countryside pass by. The thick layer of

atmospheric gases filtered the sunlight to the point where it was no longer harmful to the population, and it created the main reasoning for the lack of colonies. Few planets were properly equipped and not already populated.

They also had a low birthrate and close families, which kept them close to home. The urge to travel was not often found in Vimpyrs. Naccar's fascination with other worlds was an anomaly.

The trip to his home was relatively short and Eleanor was amused at the modest stone manor in the center of a vineyard. He held his hand out to her as she left the skimmer. "Come along, I want to show you my home." His pride was unmistakable and she took his hand with a smile.

They walked through the trellises covered with vines and he explained the wine making process that his family had been engaging in for centuries. Her robes fluttered in the gentle breezes and he stopped to just look at her for a moment. "You are absolutely beautiful today, Eleanor. The formal robes suit you."

"You should have seen me back on earth. I would wander around in jeans and a t-shirt." She looked at his perplexity and realized that the words hadn't translated. "Tight blue trousers and a form fitting tunic with short sleeves."

His eyes flared at the thought of the form fitting clothing. She laughed as the urge to give her the tour fought with the urge to throw her to the

ground and ravish her. His emotions were clearly stamped on his face and she admired the tick in his jaw that his control was causing.

She stroked his chest slowly and then laid her hand on his jaw. "We will soon have all the time in the world to be together. Show me the rest of your home." His face calmed and they walked back to the manor house.

His housekeeper was named Keliah and her family had worked for his at the winery since it started. She was on the border of elderly and had a grandson that she was training to take over the care of the property while Herun was away.

She was also delighted at his promotion and gave him a hug that had him squirming for freedom. When she was introduced to Eleanor, her manner changed. "The new King's whore?"

Herun's face blackened and he drew his breath to scold Keliah. "No, I was never Naccar's whore, and am now classified as his mother under Alliance law. I was his tutor and dance instructor, as well as teaching him a bit about self-defence." Eleanor was quick to speak as Herun seethed with irritation.

"Tutor? But Count Hagen has been putting it about that you fed him in public." Keliah looked embarrassed.

"Did he also mention that Murron had gutted him and he was bleeding out? And that I was the only one inside the barrier?"

Now her face was positively pink with humiliation. "No, that has not been made public. Count Hagen posted a public announcement and I am ashamed to admit that I believed the worst."

Herun spoke. "Even though he could marry her off to anyone, Naccar is allowing me to take this courageous woman as my wife. She is loyal, passionate, and a very skilled fighter." He grasped her hand and kissed it. She was warmed by his praise.

They left and discussed the manipulation of Hagen. He had obviously tried to win a popularity campaign against the new King. She was an easy target for him to focus on.

When they arrived back at the palace she strode straight to Naccar and said, "My son, we need to talk."

Herun had been hard pressed to keep up with her sweeping stride as pure fury ran through her. She had made her announcement to Naccar, then turned her back and made her way to his private quarters.

Herun explained the media report that Hagen had leaked, and Naccar purpled in fury. Eleanor was seething and pacing as he spoke and finally Naccar asked her, "Would you mind disclosing the details of our contracts?"

"Of course not. If you are to find a suitable wife yourself, wiping the spectre of an off-world whore will only be an asset to your search." Her fury had

the men looking a little hesitant.

"Contact the Empress Amanda Tyrell of the Haldis Imperium. She can get you a full list of my training and contract histories that will be accompanied by Alliance seals." She threw herself into a chair and put her head in her hands. It was really too much for one day. Wait, her day wasn't over. "Do I still have to be at that party this evening?"

"Of course. I have had it planned for days." Naccar had the look of a host for whom all was not going as he planned it.

"Fine I will be there." She checked the chronometer on the wall and cursed. "Then I had better get ready. I am assuming that the appropriate clothing has been left in Kita's care once again?"

"It has."

"Then I will see you this evening. Which is only two hours away. Dammit." She surged out of the chair and tried to storm out of the room, only to be stopped by the Imperial guard. They took their assignments very seriously, any sudden moves and they were on alert.

"Out of my way, boys. I have to do my hair." She shoved them aside and was brought up short by the fist that tangled in her hair. Her head twisted and she glared at Herun and the grip he had on her.

"I am still your bodyguard, Eleanor, until I

choose replacements," He dropped his head to whisper in her ear, "and that won't be for some time. I will indeed enjoy watching your body closely."

He took her arm and escorted her at a stately pace to her apartments.

CHAPTER TEN

The ball that evening was actually one of the highlights of her time on Vimpyr. The dancing was entertaining and only a few of the noblemen dared to ask her as Herun glared at them over her shoulder.

When she was finally allowed to choose her own partner she turned immediately to Herun.

"I don't dance much."

"I have seen you fight, it's not that much different." She hauled him onto the floor and set about teaching him the finer points of the waltz.

"This dance is extremely, intimate. Is it common?"

"It is actually antiquated by my people's standards. It caused quite a stir when it first came out, but it does suit the Vimpyr music, don't you think?" After long moments of staring at them, a few adventurous souls took to the dance floor and mimicked the smooth movements that Herun had mastered.

The crowd began to ebb and flow with the music, couples swirling, and laughter during collisions became common.

The musicians took their cues from the dancers and soon almost all in the ballroom had tried the new style.

Naccar came up to them as they moved to the music and finally gripped their shoulders to get their attention.

"I have some matters of state for you to attend to." Herun shrugged and she took his arm, trying not to let her disappointment show. She had been having fun dancing, it was one of her favourite pastimes.

The 'matter of state' was a wedding contract. Once signed it was legal and binding. Herun raised his eyebrows at the clause requiring him to spend no less than four nights every seven days in his wife's bed. No matter his obligations at the time.

The section on children interested Eleanor, including the astronomical amount that Naccar would settle on his brothers or sisters, not to mention the titles. One of her children would be appointed as his heir if he had no children of his own.

A judge had met them in the council room. "Are you willing to abide by the terms of the contract? To fulfill them in mind and spirit as well as body?"

"I am." Herun stepped forward and affixed his signature, a bold scrawl that made her despair of his penmanship.

"And you?"

"I am." Her signature was everything that hours of calligraphy lessons had made it, graceful, bold and distinctively feminine.

He looked at both the signatures and nodded. Then he turned to Naccar. "And do you agree to the settlements and the enforcement of this contract?"

"I do." He affixed his own signature, and then handed the contract back for the judge's seal.

At the heavy stamp of metal on wax Herun grabbed her and flipped her over his shoulder. He strode out of the room to the sound of Naccar's laughter and Eleanor's question of "What the hell?"

Her room was no longer a safe haven as Kita rose to greet her when the door opened and Herun barked, "Out." She giggled and scampered away. No doubt to spread the rumour of the wedding in the palace.

Herun peeled the robes from her as soon as he divested her of her bladed fans. Her sash fell and the robes sighed as they met the floor.

As soon as she was nude he placed her carefully on the bed and then shed his formal uniform all at once. His boots were kicked free as he loosened his trousers and he opened only

enough buttons to pry the jacket and tunic over his head. The pants seemed to be caught on something and she smothered her giggle as she realized that his erection was holding up the disrobing.

With an impatient mutter he shoved his trousers off his hips and then he was on the bed, crawling toward her with sensual intent. His full lips parted and she saw the ivory hint of his fang glinting in the dim light of the candles.

He wasn't going anywhere until he got what he wanted, and right now, he wanted all of her. The intensity in his eyes caused a dampness between her thighs and the wave of heat that assailed her was welcome. She was going to need all the co-operation that her body would provide.

As he moved up her body he licked, sucked and nipped his way to her throat, then nuzzled her jaw aside until she let her head fall back in surrender.

The blunt head of his cock was nudging her at the petals of her sex and lodged in her opening. She gasped at the heat that was demanding entrance and parted her thighs in invitation. His teeth parted her flesh as his cock surged into her and she trembled and kept herself relaxed as he began to feed. Her hands stroked restlessly down his back cupping his buttocks as he began to pump within her.

It only took a dozen strokes until he groaned

and thrust his hips into hers as he spilled his seed deep in her belly. His teeth took much longer to finish their penetration and he licked at her neck as she stroked him, enjoying the feel of his body on hers after so long.

He was still hard inside her and she moved her hips against him, clenching lightly around him. His mouth came to hers and their tongues tangled in a heated duel that had her moving her hips feverishly under him as her body flared to life.

The rocked together, shifting and writhing in passion as her body sought satisfaction and in a frenzy of lust she dug her own teeth into his flesh, tearing lightly into his neck as she twined her arms and legs around him. He shuddered and bucked against her as she sucked at the blood welling from him, drinking him in as she had wanted to for the last several months.

His fingers wedged between them and stroked at her clit as she fed, a heady moan broke against his flesh as the first of a wave shattered within her, convulsing her around him.

He kept her orgasm going by riding her gently, stroking her inner flesh with his erection as he moved back and forth in a gentle rhythm, then unexpectedly grinding against her with a hard thrust that kept her moaning against his neck.

As his neck recovered, the wounds closing, she fell back exhausted in repletion. "Oh, no my wife. You don't get away that easily." His kiss was

gentle but insistent. His hands ran over her breasts and belly, stirring her and coaxing her body to respond.

"Wife?" She blinked and the reality of the day's events hit her. Her hands stroked down his back and she arched against his hands as they covered her hips and belly with a possessive touch. "Mmm. Husband."

Her legs were hooked around his hips, and she remembered something he had said when they had their first night together so long ago. "How long can you stay hard?"

He laughed and rolled her across the bed until she was on top of him and she was impaled to the hilt once again. "Let's find out."

EPILOGUE

“So, what can Naccar want us here for?” She was sleepy, and had been since her third month of pregnancy. It took nothing for her to nod off and Herun found it wise to keep an arm around her just in case she relaxed while standing.

“He said that there is a new statue in the Royal Gardens. Each King is only allowed one in his reign. For Naccar to have chosen one, he must have had a fantastic idea.” He steered her through the crowd and to the dais that had been erected for the occasion.

Naccar went to her and hugged her warmly in front of the gathered crowd. The mood was jovial, Naccar’s reign having become one of the most successful in the last five hundred years. It was still early days, but his reforms were proceeding at a slow and deliberate pace that allowed everyone time to adjust.

She was escorted to her seat by the King and her husband of six months, her pregnancy just

beginning to show. General Matias held his wife's hand and his gentle caresses kept her awake throughout the proceedings.

They were in the Royal gardens looking at the silk draped statue that was about to be unveiled.

Naccar stood and walked to the edge of the dais and took hold of the cord that would drop the covering. "Welcome one and all. I know that it is unusual for a new king to have chosen their addition to the garden so soon in his reign, but it was in my mind from the moment that I took the throne."

"Without further delay, here is my addition to Vimpyr culture." He tugged at the cord and the silk slithered to the ground.

Eleanor's jaw dropped and Herun hooted with amusement. Naccar was grinning like a fiend.

It was a statue of Eleanor. The figure was dignified yet amused. She was wearing her formal robes and had one Vilar fan open in her left hand and a closed one in her right. It was a statue of grace and beauty, and the plaque at the foot of the statue declared its meaning.

*In honour of Eleanor Palmer Hala Matias
Mother, tutor, warrior, friend and Companion.
She protected a child not her own, for a planet that
would see her dead.
A true defender of those she loves.
Queen Mother of Naccar Hala I*

The flutter of a kick in her belly let her know that she was not the last of her line, nor the last warrior of her blood that this world would see. She gave Naccar a blinding smile through her tears and held onto Herun for dear life.

A strange wind had blown her to Vimpyr, and she couldn't be happier to be a registered bloodsucker.

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.