

SPIAERA

A woman with long, dark hair, wearing a blue dress, is seated on a large, ornate wooden spinning wheel. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky with a bright, glowing light source, possibly the sun or moon, creating a strong backlight effect. The overall mood is mysterious and ethereal.

VIOLA
GRACE

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Spinner

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SPINNER
A TERRAN TIMES
NOVEL

BY

VIOLA GRACE

CHAPTER ONE

Dear Gran, today I woke up with an elf in my lap. He is exceptionally cute and has the most darling pointed ears. He also looks to be about six and a half feet tall. You lied to me, you said elves were short.

Dehlia Maner winced as she stretched the limbs that the elf had landed on. Her cot groaned as she sat up, unhappy with the extra weight. Whatever ship they were on was not designed for support when it accelerated within an atmosphere. "Hey, Blondie, come here often?" There was no response, but she wasn't expecting one. The deep, even breathing that he was engaging in let her know he was out for the count. The fact that his breath was heating her groin and inner thighs was distracting, but he was too heavy for her to move on her own. The others who were sharing the large sparsely furnished chamber with her had not been talkative, and she had the feeling that they would not offer her assistance in lifting the blond behemoth.

It seemed to Dehlia that a multitude of races

were represented in this facility, but none had more than one representative. There were no mate pairs that she could see, and that alone made her try to recall how she had ended up in this hold lined with cots.

She had been leaving a party, a shower for one of the weavers of her guild. S'olon was going to marry her first three males and the l'nal would be setting up a new household. It was very exciting and so all of her guild mates, Dehlia included, gathered to assist her in furnishing her first nest.

Most Terrans were a little leery of the giant spider race—instinct at work—but Dehlia had conditioned herself to see them simply as another race and to never think of those commercials with cartoon bugs screaming and running for safety. Well, rarely.

She had been walking home from S'olon's party and something had hit her from behind. There was a pain in her lungs and then she was waking on this ship. It was absolutely the weirdest thing that had happened to her since she had left the Earth, and she had seen her share of weird.

"Oy, sleeping beauty, wake up." She tried to slide her legs out from under the elf, but his hands reached up and gripped her hips to keep her still. "At last, signs of life. Can you let me get out from under you, please?" Formality was always good, it tended to make people react on instinct, no matter

the species.

He groaned heavily into her skirts, his hands bunching the fabric in pain.

"They hit you, too, huh?" She ran her hand through his impossibly golden hair and felt the lump at the back of his skull. Idly, she ran the threads of his hair through her fingers and his groaning stopped. "It will only last until the hair falls out, but you should be healed by then."

She was really wishing that he could get his face out of her crotch. The set of his shoulders and the heat from his breath were starting an answering heat in her. If his species was scent sensitive, then she was going to be really embarrassed by her interest in his unconscious body. She couldn't help it, she was a sucker for a strong set of shoulders, not to mention his pointy ears were so darned sexy. There was a bright side to this abduction if she got to cop a feel. She was just reaching out to touch when he lifted his head to stare at her with bright red eyes.

His voice rumbled over her skin and she tried to keep from wriggling in pleasure. Now was not the time. "I know you."

"I think I would remember if we had ever met." She blinked her own hazel eyes at him and sighed deeply. "I wish we had, but we haven't."

"Why am I in your lap?" A light flush mantled his high cheekbones, giving his pale skin a rosy

glow.

"They gassed us for transport. I am guessing they threw you in here after I was already out. The landing was simply chance." He still hadn't let the fabric of her skirt go. She was held as tightly as if she was bound. She squirmed a little to give him the hint that he could let go. He didn't take it. He opened his grip a little and was now cupping her hips rather than gripping her dress. It was still far more familiar than she was used to being five minutes after meeting someone, well, unless there were margaritas involved.

He stayed looking up at her between her thighs as if it didn't cause him any discomfort whatsoever. "May I beg your name?"

"Dehlia Maner of the Alliance Protectorate of Terra, Spinner to the l'nal colony of Bathi." In reflex, she pressed her hand to her chest and gave a short bow from the waist.

"*That* is where I know you from. You are the woman that I was coming to meet. I am Taneus of Admar, woken by the great computer, Aissa, to come and bring you back to our world." He smiled brilliantly "One of the Terrans has already taken Demetrius to mate. I believe her name is Sarah Marks."

She drummed her fingers impatiently against his arm. "So do you know why they took us?" He wasn't going anywhere so she may as well use

him as furniture.

His brow furrowed in concentration and she had to fight the urge to smooth her fingers over that skin. "They said something about *exotics* the first time I woke. Does that mean anything to you?"

Dehlia sighed heavily. It made a lot of sense. The exotics market was booming with the Terrans coming into the mix. Their transferable genetic heritage made them popular targets with pirates and slavers. Many races could not interbreed, but the Terrans were remarkably adaptable in that regard. They were compatible with five percent of the species of the Alliance. A huge number in the grand scheme of things. "Unfortunately, yes. We are heading to the marketplace, with our genetics up for sale." Despite it being illegal to possess a Terran, they were a hot ticket black market item.

"That isn't a pleasant sounding thing. Are you sure?" He shifted a little on her thighs and she tried not to squirm in response. His lightest touch had her hormones running rampant.

"If they mentioned exotics, it makes sense. We fetch a higher price than those classified as altered."

"Altered?"

"People who no longer meet their species specifications through medical or mechanical alterations."

"Ah. Does this happen to you often?"

She grinned and stroked his hair out of his eyes. "To me? No. To Terrans, far more frequently than it should. The fact that they will be given death sentences if we are found under ownership does not even slow many of the pirates down."

Taneus nodded wisely. "I can understand it. You are very desirable."

"Um. Thank you. I think. Could you get off my lap now?" She squirmed a little and he finally released her hips to push himself upright. She was right about his height, he was about a foot taller than she would be standing.

"Reluctantly, I will bow to your comfort." His red eyes sparkled in amusement and he took a long look at her seated on the cot, then moved in a blur. By the time the room had stopped spinning around her, his hard thighs cushioned hers and she was leaning against his broad chest. "There. This is better."

"If you say so. The edges of the cot must be digging into you."

"But the soft surface above is well worth the discomfort." He wrapped one of his hands around her thigh and pulled her snugly against him. He was definitely enjoying the contact if the ridge under her hip was any indication. "You are mine, you know."

"So you said. Something about Admar?"

"You are aware of the Admaryn project?"

"In passing. I have read a few articles on it. Your planet was peppered with volunteers. Sleepers, those who were willing to dilute their bloodline by mixing it with Terra's."

The hand that he was absently rubbing her leg with was distracting. "This is true. It took a lot of weeding out to find men who would be appropriate for the cold sleep. And men who would welcome a Terran in their bed when they did come out of it."

A flare of irritation popped into her. "So you just wake up and they shove a woman at you? How convenient."

He chuckled. It was one of the greatest sounds she had ever heard in her life. The soft pulsing of his chest had her whole body trembling in unison. "Not so easy. We wake up when our match is nearby. I woke up six months ago, had Aissa bring me up to speed with the modern Alliance and then I went to find you."

"Just like that? You set out across the stars to find me because you think I am your destiny? Your match? Did your cryo pod freeze your brain?" She looked up at the strong line of his jaw. He was really quite beautiful, hypnotic if she was honest with herself. If the weavers on Bathi could capture his features in a tapestry, she would fade to nothing staring at it.

"I will always come to you, wherever you are. Our psyches match, we resonate on the same wavelength and when we make love, you will fit me perfectly." Those coal red eyes looked down at her with the same rapt attention that she was giving to him. Unbidden, she leaned up for his kiss and he met her halfway.

If she hadn't been wearing boots, her socks would have flown off. As it was, her toes curled as his lips took on a carnal purpose, teasing her mouth into responding and pouring a bolt of heat through her lips, deep into her belly. She felt the first fluttering of lust an instant before dampness followed. She was getting wet and they weren't even using tongue. Oh lord.

"Stop! You are not to be in this hold! How did you get down here?" Two of the pirates were storming toward them. Distracted for the moment, Taneus pulled away from her, then grinned and stood, placing her precisely on the cot before facing the guard. "The males and females are not to mix."

One grabbed him by the arm and started hauling Taneus away. He half-turned to Dehlia and blew her a kiss before letting them drag him out. "Later, Dehlia."

She was left sitting alone on her cot with the audience of the rest of the women's hold staring at her.

Dehlia sat back and touched her lips.

Dear Gran, today I kissed an elf...and it was good.

CHAPTER TWO

“How do you know him?” A pretty, young Selna sidled up to her.

Dehlia smiled. “He woke up on top of me. We haven’t met before.”

“He looks like he knew you.” The young woman sat next to her on the cot. “I am Isaro. I was supposed to be on my way to the Companions Guild when they grabbed me.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Eight days or so. It is hard to tell. You came in two days ago.” Isaro twisted her fingers together. “What kind of a talent are you?”

Dehlia looked over at the confirmation of Taneus’s eavesdropping. So they were all talents, interesting. “A broadcasting empath. I can weave my talent into the strands I spin. I was taken from outside a guild event.” She extended her hand in formal greeting and Isaro took it gratefully. “Why didn’t you come over to speak sooner?”

“I was afraid. The other females in here don’t

like Selna. I thought since you had a male interested in you already that you would not worry about me. I mean, he didn't come to me first, so there was nothing for you to worry about, right?"

The logic was sound. "Right. So what is your talent?"

She looked down into her fingers as if they would bring her the answer. "I have the power of attraction. More than the standard pheromones. I change my body to become whatever they want most in a female and I don't even mean to." Shame coloured her tone.

Dehlia sighed and took Isaro's hand. "Sweetie, don't ever be ashamed of a naturally occurring talent. It was the first thing that my Gran told me when my talent started to surface. We need to learn the ins and outs of our talents so that we can use them to the best of our abilities."

"What possible use could this be?"

"Perhaps it isn't as beyond your control as you think. When near males who start your shift, take a deep breath and try to feel the way that you feel right now, calm, relaxed. In time you will feel confident. Your ability to change your features may be useful in the Negotiator Corps., or in Ambassadorial service, possibly even at becoming a Master Companion."

She smiled briefly, her golden eyes in her black

velvet face lighting for a moment, "My brother, Isabi was a Master Companion. Now he is a member of the Sector Guard."

"There is that pride I was talking about. Is he an exotic as well?"

"He is, but I am not allowed to mention what." She suddenly grimaced. "I am not even supposed to mention that he is in the Guard. It is kind of obvious which one he is." Isaro would be blushing if there was any chance it would be visible on her complexion.

"Shade." Dehlia couldn't fight the grin that bloomed.

Her companion gasped. "How did you know?"

"There is a Terran Pilot on that crew of the Guard and she has a big mouth." She would have said more, but the pounding of boots stopped their chat. Dehlia whispered, "Feeding time."

The captured exotics froze in place, taking the ration packs from their captors with water and frightened looks. When the scowling and leering pirates finally got to Dehlia and Isaro, the young woman was shaking with fear. "Who's pet are you going to be today, pretty?"

A sudden sinking feeling about what had been going on before her arrival hit Dehlia. She stood and put herself between the pirates and their target. "We are to be offered for sale, yes?" She couldn't believe she was using this to defend a

stranger. "Will her price not be damaged if it becomes known that you have all had a round?"

"Listen, you Weaver Guild cow, you had best step aside because today is going to be my day." The pirate in question was not terrible to look at, but his demeanour promised that Isaro was going to be punished for the delay. An unhealthy lust was coming off him in waves. "Now."

"No. Let your right hand lose respect for you today. She and I were having a private conversation." While she spoke, Dehlia worked a fibre of her belt out and twisted it around her hand.

"Out of my way, bitch." He grabbed her shoulder and that was when she took action. The blow to his abdomen was glancing, but the psychic pain she gave him was more than enough to have him doubled over and screaming in seconds. Moaning took over and his companions were looking at her with a combination of anger and fear.

"Can we just get our rations and then you can take him to your medical bay and have them try to retrieve his testicles? I think they are in his lower colon by this point." It was a blatant lie, but they didn't know that. Two trays slid toward her cot with the water rations on top. The pirates dragged their moaning companion out with them.

"Hopefully, we will be at the destination soon.

That took a lot out of me." She sat heavily back on the cot and Isaro looked at her with a sort of stunned surprise.

"You looked like you were about to take them all on. You did that for me?" Tears were welling in her amber eyes. "Thank you. The thought of one of them touching me again was too much to bear." The young woman collapsed against her and sobbed into her arms.

"How often?" Her words were as quiet as she could make them.

"Twice a day since I was taken. It's why I dread feeding time. None of the others will even be near me when they come in. Tainted by association I suppose." The sobs stopped eventually and she sat up, straightening her gown and patting her midnight hair into place. It was the hair that gave Dehlia an idea.

"Can you get the food for me? My head is still spinning." She needed some time to put the idea into action, but it just might work.

It took less effort than she thought to get donations for her project from the other females in the hold. They may not want to be active participants, but donating strands of their hair eased their consciences.

By the time that the next feeding time rolled around, Isaro was girded in a bikini set made of

the hair of the exotics in the hold with her. The charge that the hair was holding was powerful, but unless they could stifle their gag reflexes, they would not be able to hold her.

The nausea had been a brainstorm brought on by eating the ration pack left for her. Few men could feel horny and queasy at the same time.

"You know, I hate to say it, but this is not the most uncomfortable thing that I have worn." Isaro was smiling an instant before the boots approached. As the noise spread through the hold, the women went silent, waiting.

Isaro stood separate from Dehlia, she didn't have the strength left to fight if this didn't work. Five pirates entered the room, one keeping watch while the others distributed the rations. As soon as each female had a meal packet in front of her, or in her hand, they left. Blinking in surprise, Isaro looked over to Dehlia. "I guess you taught them a lesson."

Laughing, the women choked down the nourishing but tasteless food, swallowed the water, attended to the needs of nature in the small facility chamber provided for that purpose and, as the lights dimmed, they slept.

Dehlia woke while it was still dark, a heavy weight on her breasts and belly. A breathing weight. "What the hell?" She fought for freedom

and had her lips crushed by a mouth that tasted too familiar for words. Taneus.

"Evening, lover." He raised his head and his red eyes glowed in the darkness. It had the effect of pushing his erection firmly between her thighs, only the separation of fabric kept them from a delicious alignment.

She caught her breath, "How did you get in here?"

"Sheer talent. I missed you." He came down for another kiss, his red eyes crossing as he watched her face.

She closed her eyes to enjoy the caress of his tongue along her lower lip, the delicate tug of his teeth and the response of heat in her belly. It was only too soon that she heard the booted footsteps outside the door. "Your date has arrived." She broke their connection and whispered into the darkness.

"No. I don't think so." He levered off her and she could feel him crouch next to her. "They don't check at night."

"Damn. Isaro." She couldn't remember which bed the Selna was in, but if the pirates were looking, they would find her.

"Who?"

"A new friend. A Selna," she whispered rapidly, hoping that he could help. "If you can find her, bring her here, but do not think any

horny thoughts while doing it. You'll puke."

He was moving away from her. "You will have to explain that later."

As the door hissed open, Dehlia kept her eyes closed and feigned sleep. If Taneus was found, he would be taken back to men's quarters, but if Isaro was found, something worse could happen. Her talent may not hold the defence.

A light played over her eyes and across her face, she kept her breathing low and even. The light moved on and she counted the footfalls. There were only four. Two pirates.

A gasp and a thud interrupted her count. Suddenly there were only two feet and they were moving fast. Another sharp noise and the second of the intruders was down.

Dehlia's skin tingled. "Did you do that?" Taneus was back. He crawled back on top of her and part of her sighed in welcome.

She swept her hand up his back and cupped the back of his head, bringing his mouth back to hers. She hadn't enjoyed making out this much since she was a teenager, but she wasn't going to waste the thrill that she felt as his mouth played with hers.

"They interrupted me. My time with you is precious. I don't want to waste it, and I certainly won't let them waste it." His hand stroked down her thigh, then pulled the fabric up as it ascended.

"How many petticoats are you wearing?"

She smothered a giggle against his neck. "Twelve. Eight for a Weaver's limbs and four for my own." His fingers were ruffling through them and finally his skin touched hers. Sparks of need shot from the trail of his touch straight to the centre of her sex.

"That is twelve layers of clothing too many, but I think I have found my way clear." His voice was a husky chuckle as he moved his mouth to her neck. She fought a moan as his breath heated her skin before his lips stroked, pulled and pressed at her flesh. Her neck had always been her biggest erogenous zone, and he had honed in on it in a few light touches. It was the pressure on her neck that had her gasping, not the hand slowly working its way between her thighs. Well, perhaps it was both, she didn't care. All she was concentrating on was his touch, his mouth and her impending orgasm.

The instant that his fingers grazed her clit, she squeaked and bit down on his shoulder to stifle her screams. She was a noisy lover, and her boyfriends back on Earth had despaired of silencing her. He disengaged her jaw from his shoulder and took the rest of her sounds into him, drinking them in as her body pulsed and shook in happy release. Finally she quieted and he separated from her slightly. "Next time we will be

in a place where I can hear your screams ring from the rafters.”

Whoa. He wanted noise? He had no idea what he was in for. She was just drawing breath to lecture him when the lights went on and he disappeared.

“What the hell?”

CHAPTER THREE

“Isaro, did a man pull you out of your bed last night? Maybe stash you under it?”

“Someone did, but I didn’t wake all the way up.” She looked over to the two pirates in the centre of the room. “Was it the same man who did that?”

“Well, I sure as hell wasn’t up to it.” She shook her head. “Perhaps we should let the management know that we have two of their dead guys in here. We might want to get rid of the stink before we eat.” Dehlia walked over to the large door that kept them separated from the rest of the ship. When the door didn’t open, she pounded on it. After the fourth round of pounding, it opened.

“What is it, bitch?”

She let that pass. “Two of your men crept in with rape on their minds last night and didn’t survive the night. You may want to retrieve the bodies.” She turned and walked away from the stunned pirate and took a prim seat on the edge of

her cot. The rest of the women were in similar poses. Each race represented was sitting still and ladylike.

The guard shut the door and, five minutes later, four more men were with him, dragging the bodies out the door. Dehlia followed the bodies and spoke to the guard who was on edge. "How long until we land?"

"A few hours. We planet fall today and then you psychotic whores will be out of our hair." The bodies were clear and he shut the door inches from her face.

She turned and announced the landing information. "We change hands in a few hours. Probably on some outpost somewhere." She went back to her cot and sat with her head in her hands. Her braids were pressing into her skull, but she didn't want to blow the only tactical advantage that she had. The pins holding her hair in place were long, sharp and could be deadly if she only had one opponent. Her hair was a deep brown and the pins were a dark mahogany with a steel core. No one could see them in the twisted mass she kept it in.

She had long given up on fighting that her dark hair and eyes were the same shade. Her Gran would say that at least the curtains and the drapes matched the carpet, and Dehlia would pretend to be shocked. Of all the people she left on Earth, it

was her Gran she missed the most. Her mental letters to her were her way of communicating, and she felt that her Gran got everyone of them.

The mood of the hold had shifted, the women were talking a little more freely now that two of their captors were dead. Of course, they were looking at her as if she had done the deed. That brought her mind back to her disappearing reappearing Taneus. He seemed to be a short range teleporter. If he was tuned to her, then it explained his appearing on top of her. That or he just had exceptionally good aim.

Isaro left a conversation across the room and slid into the cot next to Dehlia. "Hello. That was quite something. Did you kill them?"

"No. Taneus appeared last night and took care of it." She could feel her face heat with embarrassment. The knowing look from the woman at least five years her junior was enough to make her try to change the subject. "So, it looks as if we provided you with a defence mechanism that you don't need."

"I may need it yet. We don't know what will happen next."

"We sort of do. We are going to be separated and sold." It made her feel worse to say it out loud.

Isaro snorted. "At least you have mastered your talent. You will go for a higher price."

"I don't know if you noticed, but when those jerks were closing on you, you kept your current appearance. No shifting." The dawning of confidence was a wonderful thing to behold.

"I didn't, did I?" Full of exuberant energy, Isaro twirled with joy. It was lovely to see her throwing off the depression that had clouded her features.

The steady pulse of the engines shifted into something heavier. The atmospheric engines had been engaged. The women all scrambled to their cots, waiting for the deeper shuddering of the ship to signal their arrival on the world where their fates would be decided.

It was what Dehlia had anticipated, they were sorted by genetic compatibility, scanned for tracking devices and assigned to holding cells. The slavers who took them over from the pirates were a blend of races, few of them attractive. Ick.

The men were being processed at the other end of the large courtyard. She could just make out the golden head of Taneus as she was grabbed by each arm and dragged down a corridor. "You don't have to be so rough. I am not in the mood to injure myself." They eased up a bit, but continued to force her down several halls and through a doorway to a small room. With them in the hall and her in the room, they triggered the energy field to block her exit while being able to see her at

all times. Smart.

They would have been smarter if they had stripped her. She waited until the guards viewing her had moved off before starting to unravel fibres of her skirt. She had gotten a good handful going when her guards came back. "Drop the fibres. Strip."

That shocked her. "What?"

"Remove all clothing or we will do it for you." They crossed their arms and scowled. She slowly peeled her clothing from her, each layer of skirt causing them to raise their eyebrows in surprise. Dehlia folded all of her clothing neatly into a pile and winced as they wadded it up and took it. Cold impersonal hands patted her down, investigating crevices and sweeping under her breasts, removing every piece of lint, hair, or fibre that they could find. "They forgot to read your spec sheet when you came in. You will remain unclothed with no fibres available until you are in the custody of your new owner."

The guards took her mattress, the cover, the sheets and all points of comfort from her. She was left sitting on the floor with nothing to cover her. Naked, cold and miserable, she curled into a ball and watched the sun go down.

She wasn't asleep when he arrived this time. A miniscule pop of air and she knew Taneus was in the room. She didn't say a word, only met that

glowing red gaze blindly. "Dehlia, are you alright? Did they..." He scooped her into his arms and set about warming her by rubbing at her exposed skin.

She chattered a little. "They simply figured out that my talent is fibre based, so they took my clothing and all fabric." She huddled into his warmth, rubbing herself against him to increase the heat generated by friction.

"This isn't working." He pulled away from her and she almost wept at the loss of warmth that his touch brought. She heard rustling and then he was back against her, naked.

Her body welcomed his with a rush of wetness that had her face flaming, and she blessed the darkness for that minimal coverage. He lifted her against him, "Put your legs around me." Dehlia did it with speed that surprised her. One hand cupped her ass as the other held her head still for his kiss. Her own fingers wove together behind his neck and held him to her as their tongues wrestled and slid in a parody of the wet heat of her body and the hard cock pressed against her. Whimpering, she lifted her hips against him, dragging the blunt head through the lips of her sex. He inched into her and she held herself still, her thighs vibrating with tension. "Relax, lover."

She hissed against his neck as he rocked into her by another inch. He solved her tension by

aligning her with the wall and using it for support as he bent his knees to push completely into her. She groaned happily as he was fully seated within her. Full was the operative term. She was amazed that he was all the way inside her. He stood up straight and took her with him, leaving her impaled on his cock. Her anchor points were now her legs and his pelvis, with balance provided by her hands on his shoulders.

Taneus leaned her back so that he had free reign to stroke her torso and admire her in the blackness that covered her. His eyes glowed violently in the unrelieved blackness, and she knew without a doubt that he could see every nuance of her expression as his cock throbbed insistently inside her. Her body was lubricating freely around him, making every shift of her weight audible. Still, he didn't thrust.

With dedicate precision, he held her in place so that his mouth could explore her breasts one by one, laving her with his tongue in a slide of heat that had her trembling in seconds. It was bliss. The coil of sensation in her sex drew ever tighter until he bit gently at one nipple and she came, gasping around him. He kept still until she stopped moaning and writhing around him. It took a while. She felt the heat of his breath against her ear. "Next time I want you to scream."

"I don't want to alert the guards."

“As long as I come, I don’t care if they do.” His teeth tugged lightly at her ear and gnawed at her neck. The spasms of her orgasm continued around him, weakening waves that flared every time he touched her neck. Damned erogenous zone. She hoped he never forgot it.

She began a steady moan that raised and lowered in pitch with each contact of his tongue on that spot on her neck. His cock began to move inside her, a steady thrust and retreat that built the tension in her in a matter of moments, she was still so high from her first release that it would not be long until she was over the edge of orgasm again.

His thrusts got faster, pounding into her as she squeaked, gasped and screamed with every inhalation of breath. Her breasts bounced wildly as he rammed into her with the intention of gaining his own release. She screamed her release when it rushed upon her and he roared his triumph as his own found him. His hips jerked into her as he spewed his seed and she felt the heat of his contribution within her. He fell to his knees, but kept her on and around him as his body stopped shuddering in reaction. Cuddled against his chest, she could hear the pounding of his heart as it matched hers. They synched their breathing, heartbeats and, Dehlia was quite sure, their libidos.

His dark whisper made her laugh, “Are you

warmer now?"

"On fire. Was that your grand plan?"

"After getting you naked was already accomplished, yes." His baritone strummed chords low in her belly and she tightened around him again. His response surprised her. She thought he was down for the count.

"Step away from the female!" The guard was shining a light through the energy field of the doorway.

Taneus stood with her still impaled on his rapidly growing erection. "I am afraid I can't. We will be seeing you." The world around Dehlia turned bright for an instant and then they were standing in an unoccupied room with a large gateway built into one wall. The wall lit up at their approach.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Where are we?”

“The short answer is Underhill.” He crossed to the gateway and pressed a few icons on the side. “The long answer is that these morons took over an old Admaryn stronghold without bothering to look for the gateway to Admar in the basement.”

How he was so nimble while wearing her like an armoured breastplate was beyond her. She was simply fighting the urge to start contracting her muscles around him in an effort to get him to move. He had felt so good moving inside her and this walking around was just torture.

“Where are we going?” She was guessing that he was setting the gate for his planet.

“To my home. We will get you some clothing and weapons and then come back to free and rescue the rest of the victims.” A swirling energy was now pulsing in the archway and he stepped into it. She hung on for dear life.

The trip was longer than the one from her cell, and it was much colder where they arrived. "Aissa, turn on the heat."

"Why? You don't need it."

"My mate needs it. And get the fabricator online, we both need some clothing." Reluctantly it seemed, he separated their bodies. She slid to the ground and, as soon as he realized her trembling thighs would not hold her up, he lifted her in his arms. "I will get you somewhere warmer. I tend to keep it cold here as I have not needed heat for a few thousand years."

"How was this place maintained for that long?"

"Aissa. She kept bots running from one sleeper to another, kept it all ready for that moment when Terrans would return to claim what was owed them."

"What was owed to them...us?" She was shivering. The walls of the corridors were made of ice.

"This planet. I am your humble servant." His grin was purely wicked. "I saw you in a seer's image thousands of years ago and I jumped at the chance to wait for you."

"That's a long time to sleep. I wonder how many wet dreams were involved." Her tone was idle and she felt herself drifting off. Sleep was coming and not even the fuck of a lifetime would hold it at bay.

A silky sheet, cool pillows and a covering were the last moments of consciousness, well that and warm arms around her and a voice in her ear whispering, "Sleep, my love."

Dear Gran, this morning I woke up and admitted that I was in love with the elf that I met in the hold of that pirate ship. And then I cursed out loud, realizing that he had shackled me to keep me from following him back through the portal. The brave idiot left me here to wait.

Light flowed through the room, highlighting the translucent panels that made up the walls. She was tucked into a blue and white dream of a bed. The silver links of chain on her left ankle and right wrist didn't even enter into her consciousness until she stretched and felt the tug of the weight pulling in toward the bed. "Son of a bitch! Taneus! Get your ass back here so I can kick the crap out of you."

Silence was her only answer. He was gone and she had a feeling that he had gone back to get the other slaves, before they settled into their new occupations. She also didn't know how long he had already been gone. It could have been hours, or even days. No, she wasn't thirsty enough for it to be days.

Dehlia sat up slowly, not wanting to put any stress on her arm or leg. The chain ran under the

bed and it was a single set of links. She moved slowly and lifted the wrist links over the four foot bed post by stretching. That just left her attached by a link that caught up on the leg of the bed. She tried, but wasn't able to lift it.

She had a total of fifteen feet of play on the chain and was able to make it to the sanitary chamber. Wow. That had been close. She washed her hands and dampened a cloth to do a quick sponge bath. Astonishingly enough, her hair was still pinned in place.

The room that she had been left in was thirty feet by thirty feet. The bed took up a goodly portion of the space, but the rest was occupied by a desk, wardrobe and a small communications unit. A light was blinking on the console and she made her way toward it. It took a bit of stretching, but she got close enough to flick the toggle to open the com.

The message came roaring out of the unit, "Taneus, what do you mean dragging Morpheus out of his sleep to go on some freakish quest?"

"Uh, this isn't Taneus. This is Dehlia, and can someone come to where ever I am and get me? I am kind of confined here and I don't like confinement."

"Where is Taneus?" The voice softened slightly.

"If I knew, I would be kicking his ass right now instead of talking to you." She was leaning

forward, pulling against the chain that held her. "Can you send someone to unlock me?"

"Someone is on their way. Just hang in there. Um. Do you require clothing?"

A wave of relief ran through her. He had asked a very good question. "Yes. Please. I am a Terran female of average height and body type."

"So is my wife. She is on her way. Just hang on." The masculine voice softened. "I am Demetrius."

"Pleased to meet you. Hope to see you in person soon." The light on the console flickered out and she was alone.

With the call of nature attended to, she crawled back into the bed to wait for the person who would set her free. So there was a Terran here. If his name was Demetrius, then she was on Admar and his wife was Sarah Marks, Reader of the Citadel and the third Terran Champion.

Her wait turned into a nap. A gentle hand on her shoulder shook her. "Dehlia? I am Sarah. Where are the restraints?" The genteel woman who woke her was wearing the robes of a Reader, and an impish sparkle in her eyes. She was also wielding a hacksaw with a wicked grin.

"My right wrist and left ankle. Thank you for coming." Her words were sincere as she held the sheets in place, extending her ankle for the first attempt. Sarah was a master with the saw and

ripped through the metal in under five minutes. "So do you saw women free of beds often?"

"No. Taneus was the first riser after Demetrius. My husband, by the way, is a little cranky that Taneus woke the next sleeper before he had homed in on his mate. Morpheus is going to have to actively look for his woman if he is to find her." She smiled and gestured for Dehlia to extend her wrist now that the ankle chain was off. She kept talking and sawing at the chain connected to the right cuff. "The men of Admar have it fairly easy. They just wait for their women to come to them. Face it, if guys back on earth looked like that and gave you their undivided attention, you would never have left."

"That is probably true. Um, did you bring clothing?"

"I grabbed a gown on my way over here. Dem likes me to dress casually when I am not on duty as a Reader."

"Then why are you wearing your Reader's robes?"

"They are warmer." Sarah smiled at her, a gentle smile that took in Dehlia, the chains and the bed. "He must really be smitten by you. Dem hardly ever ties me up anymore. Less than twice a week." A wicked wink startled a laugh out of Dehlia. A few more strokes and she was free, with the cuffs still firmly attached.

"Sorry, I don't have the tools or keys to get you out of them. Here is the gown and some slippers." A swath of blue silk spilled out of a pack that Sarah produced from near her feet. Matching slippers were tossed next to them. "I also have some food and water in case Taneus forgot to send the bots to feed you."

That statement surprised her. "There are robots here?"

"Of course. All of the sleepers have been guarded by Aissa's bots since they went under. It hasn't been said directly, but I believe that Admar is one of the sentient planets, and Aissa is its personality."

"What is she like?" The gown fell around her with a whisper, the bodice crossed to support her breasts, the sleeves flowing to her fingertips. Not an inch of her was uncovered, but all was outlined by the stroke of the dress as it swung around her and caressed each of her curves. The slippers were a close fit, the slack taken up by a lacing of black ribbon that ended under her knees. Feeling like a pretty princess, Dehlia fought the urge to twirl.

"Bitchy and a surprising prude. She has far too much attitude to be a simple AI." Sarah stood and looked her over from head to toe. "You look lovely, now, shall we go and see what your elf has been up to?"

Dehlia blinked at that. "They are really elves?"

“Or what our people knew as elves. Yes. The Draí are the dragons of old, the Dhémóns self-explanatory, and the Enjel—far more villain than angel for the most part.” Sarah led the way out of the bedroom and down a hallway. “If you look at some of the other races, you find merfolk, goblins, dwarves, and a host of other creatures. My biggest surprise coming out into space was that there were planets who thought and could talk for themselves.”

“I think I remember seeing you at Orientation. You sat in the front row.” Dehlia had been wedged in the middle next to an Olympic athlete and an army commander of some variety. One had ignored her and the other had kept putting a hand on her thigh. It had been most disconcerting, but after the Orientation, she had been picked up by the Weavers Guild and been given Citadel training to focus her ability to spin her emotions into fabric. As she learned, she became able to weave a remembered emotion into thread, and it was those emotions that she had used on the pirate ship. She wondered idly if Isaro still had the bikini that she had woven.

“I did, and I was scared stiff. When the Citadel trainer came to greet me afterward and didn’t try to touch me, it was pure relief.”

“So you are a contact Reader? How can you manage without gloves?”

Sarah turned back and gave her a huge grin. "Dem lets me practice on him." They were standing in front of a huge door. A few sharp jabs of her fingers and Sarah had the door opening for them.

It was the room that Taneus and Dehlia had arrived in. The gateway still pulsed with energy, but there was someone that Dehl didn't know in front of it. "Dehlia, this is my husband, Demetrius of Admar. Demetrius, this is Dehlia of the Alliance protectorate of Terra, Spinner of the Weavers Guild of Bathi."

Solid velvet black with red eyes and snow white hair, he nonetheless had the same pointy ears and high cheekbones that Taneus had. He offered her a courtly bow and she bowed in return. "Pleased to meet you, Lady Dehlia. As soon as I retrieve Taneus and Morpheus, we can return to our city for dinner."

"You feel that you can find him that easily?"

"Indeed. I need only wait for dark as I do not easily go into sunlight. My body is not designed for it." It was a bit of frustration in his tone that Dehlia read easily enough. Sarah's touch on his arm seemed to soothe him, and her kiss did more than soothe.

Leaving the couple to a moment of pseudo privacy, Dehl moved through the portal room, looking in drawers and shouting, "Score!" when

she found a ball of twine. "Do either of you have a knife?"

They had separated at her shout and Sarah blinked for a moment and then handed her a small blade pulled out of that pack. Chortling with delight, Dehlia started measuring out spans of the fibre and began to make weaponry.

"What are you doing?"

"Making weapons."

"Why?"

"I am coming with you. I don't know how long it has been, but Taneus isn't back yet and I can't give him hell if he isn't here, now can I?" She was most practical with her statement and Demetrius began to laugh.

"I am guessing that he will have more to worry about from you than from me."

She hefted strands full of nausea, asphyxiation and power disruption, swinging them back and forth. "Smart boy."

CHAPTER FIVE

The halls were as she remembered them, too small and full of doorways leading into cells. The few guards that they came across didn't see Demetrius's gleaming eyes in the darkness, they were too busy gawking at Dehlia striding through the halls as if she owned the place.

Finally, she felt a trickle of the connection between her and her lover. She followed it rapidly, heard Demetrius curse and then the pounding of his boots as he caught up to her. "He's here. To the right, tied up and asleep."

The elf known as Morpheus was also confined, but his red eyes were blazing with fury at being bound and gagged. The knife Dehlia had borrowed was put into play to free him first and Taneus second. She tried to wake him, but it was no use.

Morpheus spat on the floor, his long black hair swinging as he stood. "They drugged him. Heavily. I will carry him. Demetrius, you free the

rest of the captives. Lady, I assume you are Dehlia?"

"You assume correctly. Pleased to meet you, Morpheus." She nodded and turned to follow Demetrius.

"What are you doing?"

"I am helping. The men might trust you, but the women won't. They will, however, trust me." As they jogged through the halls, she dropped a few strands of asphyxiation along the walls. If one of the guards was dumb enough to pick one up, he would choke until he dropped it.

As Demetrius ran along opening the women's cells, then moved on to the men's cells, Dehlia stopped and opened the one containing Isaro. Her midnight skin was invisible in the darkness, but the bright colors of the bikini against her flesh stood out. "Isaro. It's me, Dehlia. Come on, we are escaping."

The young woman blinked for a few minutes, then threw herself into Dehl's arms, sobbing. She didn't bother shushing her, but simply steered her out of the cell and down the hall, herding the women down the hall and to the corridor that would lead them to the portal. "As fast as you can, ladies. We are running an escape, not a tour."

The men came streaming from the other hall and soon there was a solid press of bodies making their way through the portal to Admar. Dehlia

made it her mission to be the last woman through the gateway, pushing Isaro ahead of her just as the thunder of footfalls behind her let her know that the changing guard shift had noted their disappearance. Demetrius snarled and looked ready to take them on, but she shoved him hard and he fell through the portal. She grabbed her strands and threw them like a handful of spaghetti over the oncoming guards. Laughing, she ducked through the portal and Sarah sealed it behind her.

"Why are you laughing?" Demetrius was obviously ticked that she had deprived him of the chance to roughhouse.

"I am just thankful that I am not the person who has to clean that hallway. Can they open the gateway from their side?"

"No. I scrambled it before I closed it. Nothing can come through there again unless we reprogram it from this side." Sarah was standing with her hands up her sleeves, covering the exposed skin. With that many panicked beings in the room, Dehlia didn't blame her. Empathy was hard at the best of times, she was just lucky to be a broadcaster and not a receiver.

"Alright, we have saved them, now how do we get them home?" Morpheus was scowling at Dehlia. He was not pleased to be awake, but having done his duty, he wanted it done right.

Dehlia caught Isaro's gaze. "I think I have an

idea. Contact the Sector Guard of Morganti and request assistance. They will be happy to help. Have Isaro there and ask for Shade."

Sarah looked at her, suspicious. "Why?"

"He is also a Selna and will understand her need to be with her own kind." Isaro's face lit with joy at Dehl's words. She would see her brother again.

"That sounds like a good idea. We may as well use them now that they are in place." Sarah looked thoughtful and if Dehlia wasn't sure that Sarah couldn't read her mind, she would have been creeped out. "We will have to send the message from the city. This transmitter is planet wide only." She looked around at the milling ex-prisoners. "Alright, everyone back into the portal. Dem will set it for the City and we will have food and quarters for you in an hour or so."

Demetrius moved over to the portal and followed his wife's directions. The door splashed open with a burst of power and through it she could see an open courtyard and the start of sunrise. "So that was how you got here so fast."

"Yeah, sorry, but it took me a while to pick out a dress for you." Sarah was smiling as she walked through the gate, "See you later, Dehlia."

Demetrius waited until all of the rescued creatures had made it through the gate before turning to her, "Morpheus will help you get

Taneus up and running. They seem to have used a pretty strong sedative on him. Did they know about his talent?"

"Yes. It was pretty apparent when he kept popping in on top of me."

The bark of laughter that her companion gave out exposed sharp, white teeth. "I wish you luck with him, or him with you, I am not sure." He gave her a very formal bow and turned toward the portal. "We do expect you and Taneus to visit soon."

It was less of a suggestion and more of an order. She had the suspicion that if she didn't go to them, they would come to her.

Now, where was her sleeping beauty?

CHAPTER SIX

***D**ear Gran, Today I found Sleeping Beauty and he was stunning. I will spare you the details, but he is better looking without clothing than with. I have used my spinning in rescue efforts and am feeling pretty good about myself. I just need to find the bitch who set me up with the slavers and everything will be fine.*

“He just needs to sleep off the rest of the sedative. He will be fine.” Morpheus was standing near the edge of the bed where Taneus was tucked in. A medical bot was standing by, but was not doing more than monitoring life signs.

She stroked his hair, smoothing the golden strands away from his face. He had been beaten before he was drugged. “Why didn’t he just teleport back?”

“He is short range only. Despite the gateway, he was literally worlds away.” Morpheus sighed and took the chair near the desk. “I can feel her

now, you know. She is out here, off Terra and out in space."

"Do you know where?"

He slammed his fist down on the arm of the chair. "No. I can't get a fix on her, and none of our seers have woken yet."

"The Sector Guard has a Seer amongst them. He may be able to help you."

He snorted in derision. "You are so sure that they will come here to help the displaced ones, aren't you?"

Her sleeves flowed as she crossed her arms over her breasts. "Yes. But that is because I know something you don't."

"And what is that?"

"I am not telling. Because then you would know." Sharing Isaro's secret was none of her business. "On another note, do you know where Taneus kept his keys?"

"Why?"

Grimacing, she held up the cuff that was still locked on her wrist. "I can't get it off."

Morpheus looked stunned for a long moment, then laughed his head off. "No wonder Taneus was so eager to get back to you. He tied you up."

"With no supplies."

"How did you get loose?"

"I made it to the com unit and Demetrius and Sarah came. She brought a hacksaw and some

clothing." A short glance at the occupied bed showed the coiled length of chain on it.

"Too bad. I bet you looked fabulous tied there." The leer was genuine, as was the admiring look that he gave her curves. "I love a woman with curves."

"Shut it. Will he really be okay?" Taneus's breathing was easy and deep. She went to the head of the bed and stroked his hair from his forehead, touching the tips of his ears lightly as she drew her fingers across his features.

"He will be fine, and I will be going now. My own woman awaits and she is a good distance away from Admar. I will have quite a journey ahead of me to find her. May as well catch a ride with the infamous Sector Guard while they are in the offering. Make sure to visit the City as soon as you settle in. I am sure Aissa will be unable to contain her enthusiasm." He stood and stopped at her side, taking one of her hands and kissing the back of her knuckles with a quick flick of his tongue. She shivered and he smiled, then bowed and left the room.

"And now alone with a sleeping fairie. Fabulous." Dehlia moved to the unoccupied half of the bed and curled her fully clothed body around a pillow. If Taneus wanted anything when he woke, she would be here to get it for him. Or at least to get him to unlock her restraints. The cuffs

were getting on her nerves.

Lips nibbled at her mouth as his hands stroked along her body. A wet rush of heat woke between her thighs as he moved his mouth to the spot on her neck that drove her absolutely nuts.

"You were watching over me, how touching. But you sleep far too heavily to wear clothes to bed." He spoke against her skin and the deep rumble of his voice added another level of sensation to what he was already inflicting on her body. "This time will not be short, will not be for body heat but *will* be for mutual pleasure."

She sighed against him, turning into his touch and moving his hands on her breasts with her own. "Promises, promises."

He slid his body over hers. "I always keep my promises. And I promise you will beg me before I am done." Lust pulled his face into sinister lines, his lips full and the skin across his cheekbones tight, his red eyes were almost black.

"Beg, no. Politely request, perhaps." She relaxed under him, and revelled in the weight of him on her and the hot bar of flesh that was pressed against her belly. A slight lift of her hips increased the friction between his cock and her abdomen and he groaned. She chuckled and thought that perhaps the begging would be on the other foot.

"You are laughing? Then I am obviously not doing this right." A flare of his eyes and the flick of his fingers and the chain uncoiled from the foot of the bed. He attached it to her right wrist cuff faster than she could blink. The fact that she now wore a left cuff came as a surprise to her as the chain clicked into place and then the slack in the chain lifted to loop around the posts on the headboard. "That is more like it."

"That is cheating. Was that telekinesis?"

"A little. It is restricted to tying you up, I am afraid." With her arms out of the way, he stroked her body from top to toe. When he got to her feet, he slipped a toe or two into her mouth and sucked gently. When his tongue flicked between her toes, she squeaked. The answering wet rush between her thighs shocked her. His wicked chuckle answered her shock. He knew what he was doing.

Maybe the begging wouldn't be too far off if he—*oh, he did that toe thing again*. His lips and tongue trailed random patterns up her calves and thighs, each one worshiped in turn. Her breathing was coming faster and her clit throbbed, needing more than this indirect stimulation. His tongue slid across her hipbone and she whimpered as he got close to her core. She sighed in frustration as he moved away and worked his way up her torso, nuzzling the soft skin under her breasts and licking at the nipples, chewing lightly. She hissed

at that, enjoying the stimulation, but not the frisson of pain.

He laved them with his tongue, soothing the sting. Her body was humming with a steady heat level at this point and she parted her thighs in reflex as he moved up her body. He settled between them comfortably, teasing her opening with the head of his cock, moving it up and down against her slit to cover it in her body's moisture. He teased her, putting the head inside and then withdrawing it, over and over until she was thrashing her head back and forth, sweat flying. She wouldn't beg. She refused to beg. Her hips tilted to take him in deeper, and still he taunted her.

"You know what you have to do?"

"What? Beg?" She mulled it over until he grinned and homed in on her neck again, then she was lost. "Taneus, I beg you to take me now."

He left her neck for a moment and looked down at her, surprised. "That was formal."

"It was what you wanted. You didn't say it had to be sexy." She was giggling at his disgruntled look. "Keep up to your end of the bargain and fuck me."

"I am making love to you, there is a difference." That he could carry on a conversation while his cock teased her entrance was mind boggling.

"Fine, make love to me until my eyes roll back

in my head, please.” She fought her laughter, fought it hard, then forgot it as he finally slid home.

A few experimental thrusts inside her had him setting up a smooth motion that dragged the base of his penis against her clit and she was mewling and crying with every stroke. Her body exploded against him with fire and pleasure burning through her veins. She shrieked as the second wave came over her and he continued to piston into her, but when the third wave came over her, he was with her all the way, snarling his triumph to the skies. She felt the spurting inside her and smiled at the feeling. Then her smile froze. She wasn’t on birth control, and the timing was about right. Oh heck.

Her grimace was lost on him, his head had come to rest on her shoulder, his chest heaving with the effort to calm his adrenaline rush. Their bodies were both coated with sweat and she tugged at the chains that bound her, wanting nothing more than to thread her fingers through that golden silk hair and stroke his pointy ears. “Let me go.” It was no more than a thread of sound.

“I will never let you go.” His snarl was angry and he lifted his head to glare at her.

“I meant, unshackle me, you idiot. I can’t touch you like this.” She flexed her shoulders and

jingled her chains.

"Oh." A wave of his hand and the chain sprang loose, but the cuffs stayed in place. She decided to fight that one later and ran the strands of his silken hair through her fingers as she had longed to do. The texture reminded her of fine l'nal silk strands and she dragged her hands through the mass over and over. When she started to stroke the tips of his ears, he groaned. "Do that again." His whole body rippled over her as she stroked, tugged and fondled the pointy symbols of his race.

"Oh boy, are you easy. Stroke your ears and you are putty in my hands."

He thrust his hips into her and she realized that while she had been playing, his cock had swelled to record proportions inside her. "Does that feel like putty?"

He rolled to his back and held her to him as he shifted into a more comfortable position. Her knees were spread wide and she was almost doing the splits on his pelvis. Bracing herself with two hands on his rock hard belly, she began to move. She shifted, rocked and slid over him, gasping as her clit was ground against him with every shift of her body. She had never felt anything that deep, and yet it felt so good to just keep rocking against him.

Taneus blinked sweat from his eyes and took on a feral grin, sitting up, he held her against him

as he came to his knees with her astride him. His hands held her hips and lifted and rocked her on him with the lazy surety of one who knows that he is safe and that no one will come barrelling through the door. And no one did.

Their lips met in a wet echo of their bodies as they worshipped each other and the sensation of finally having a true mate in their arms. This time when they came, it was together, clinging to each other as the pulse of their bodies met, mingled and became one.

In the aftermath, Taneus lay them down and smoothed the errant strands from her face. He whispered in her ear as she drifted off in his arms, "Your hair has got to come down some time."

She smiled, secure in the knowledge that there was a time for everything. Even justice. That would come soon.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Something was picking at her head. She batted at whatever it was and heard the distinct clink of metal on wood. “Hold still, woman. I am just trying to undo your hair so that you can wash it.”

“I can do it myself. But a bath or shower does sound appealing.” As she stretched, Dehlia noted a distinct musky scent combining with sticky residue on her thighs.

His hands fell away, but he looked disappointed. “You can watch if you like.” A grin ran over his beloved features and she smiled back, lost in his ruby red eyes. With practiced ease, she came up on her knees and lifted her arms to draw the pins from her braids one at a time. Her appreciative audience reclined nude on the coverlet, watching her with rapt attention.

She laid the pins neatly on the covers in front of her, counting them out so she could be sure that she hadn’t missed any. He asked her a question as her count climbed. “Why do you bind your hair so

severely?"

"So that it does not become part of the thread." She smiled and sighed in relief as the pins were out. Now she needed to unravel the braids. Heavy loops fell to rest against her breasts, shoulders and back. One at a time, she released her hair from its restraints and covered her body in a curtain from the crown of her head to her knees. Dehlia tugged her fingers through the strands to make the mass slightly more orderly as the waves flowed down to rest upon the sheets. "So should I cut it?"

Taneus took a hank of the silky stuff and wrapped it around his wrist, letting it slide free after gentle tug. "I think that if you dare take a set of shears to this, I would have to turn you over my knee. It's beautiful."

"I am glad you think so. It's mostly a pain in the ass. I need a shower." She removed her hair from his grip and staggered a bit as she stood on legs that felt slightly bowlegged. The sway of the ends of her locks against her knees tickled, but she steadfastly moved to the sanitation chamber.

"I think you need a bath. Second door on the left." He was still lying lazily on the bed, his head propped up on his fist as he watched her slow progress. It was a temptation that she fought to rejoin him in the sheets, but she was way too sticky and it offended her sensibilities. She turned to the left.

A few deft twists of her wrist set the temperature for the tub and she sat flat in it as it filled. "Oh, that feels good."

"Scoot forward. I will make it feel better." Taneus wandered in behind her, and moved her forward simply by stepping in behind her and forcing her to shift to accommodate him. She groaned in complaint as he lifted her into his lap, but that groan changed pitch when he started to massage her thighs and lower back.

Her hair was scrubbed by those same deft fingers and his admiration of her knee-length hair was not feigned. Taneus draped it over him as she leaned back in his arms, clean and relaxed. "You seemed distracted. What were you thinking about, I know it wasn't me." His hands lazily trailed over her breasts and belly, drawing absent designs in sensation on her skin.

"I was thinking about the arrival of the Sector Guard and how I want to head back to Bathi to use some bug-killer." He was more comfortable than any chair she had ever owned.

"Why?"

"Because I'nal don't have wedding showers." She refused to say anything else on that topic, no matter how hard he pressed. Their leisurely bath turned into a slow lovemaking that had water sloshing over the edges of the sunken tub. Dehlia was boneless with relaxation and satisfaction

when Taneus towelled her off.

"We will be expected in the City for dinner this evening. If we don't show, Demetrius will come and get us." He sighed heavily. "It is just as well, I suppose. You need a wardrobe and anything else you wish for your life here. They have the manufacturing centre there."

She mulled it over for a moment. "Fine. Where did you put my dress?" The cuffs that he had put on her earlier were still glinting in the light. "Why haven't you taken the cuffs off me? They are pretty and all, but I don't wear much jewellery."

He took her wrists in his hands and ran his thumbs over the cuffs. "In my caste, they were symbols of a growing bond. It shows that the woman has chosen to bond to her mate as he has bonded to her. Females had the choice of selection. By sleeping in my bed, unbidden, you chose me and I bound you before you could get away."

Dehlia looked him over for a moment, his face was earnest and quite serious. "Is there any way you can write these rules down for any kids we might have? Surprises at this point suck." She took one of her hands from his and touched the side of his face, the gesture was instinctive and he immediately covered her hand with his own, closing his eyes. "Now, where is my dress?"

He sighed in resignation. "One of the bots is washing it. It will be back soon." A whirring came

down the corridor. "In fact it is here now."

A small robot approached, its extended limbs covered with blue fabric. It stopped in front of her and spoke, "Here is your gown. I look forward to meeting you in person."

"Who are you?"

"Aissa, the living computer of Admar. You are Dehlia Maner of Terra, and the Sector Guard will be arriving in the morning to pick up those who were captured."

"Excellent. I look forward to meeting you as well. Thank you for the laundry service." Dehlia scooped up her gown. She inclined her head to the bot and it nodded in return.

"All part of the Admar experience, or so Sarah keeps telling me." The bot raised one claw and whirred away.

* * * *

To travel on Admar, one only needed to know the address of the portal one was traveling to. The portals were buried deep in the ground, Underhill, to protect them from those who would use them for unpleasant purposes. The Admaryn used them for travel, trade and for experimenting on indigenous species of distant worlds. Like Terra.

It was their experimentation on Terra that created the plan to put members of their species in

cold sleep as a method of atonement for the genetic tampering they had engaged in. Sacrificial males who would wake up when their mate was nearby, willing to hand the possession of their planet over to this new Alliance species. A species who was flourishing in space. It was her pride in her species that kept her moving forward, pride and a sense of hope that something wonderful was around the corner.

Dehlia felt almost naked in the single layer of the gown without the insulation of petticoats, but the freedom of movement reminded her of jeans, t-shirts and sundresses back home. Taneus escorted her gallantly, reverently through the halls underneath the City. The hum of electronics called to her and she allowed herself to be steered toward it.

"Ah, the infamous Spinner in the flesh. Welcome to the last and first Admaryn City. Sarah hasn't named it yet, she isn't comfortable with the whole *owning a planet* thing." A glowing female form took shape in the corner of the room. "This is a new thing that they got me from the Alliance communications centre. As long as there is a projector, I can have a body, sort of."

"Aissa, I presume?"

"Indeed." The figure was glowing, a bright silvery blue that had no features aside from the obvious hints of breast and hip. "I haven't decided

on anything specific yet, so I wear this. Do you like it?" The projection turned in a slow circle so that she could be admired.

"It's lovely."

Taneus was keeping himself in the doorway. A slight smirk on his face, keeping away from the womenfolk, no doubt.

"Well, I wanted you here to make sure that you had everything you needed to keep you happy and occupied." Two bots dragged a spinning wheel out of the shadows and Aissa's voice took on a smug tone. "I thought you could use one of these. I will have the bots deliver it to Taneus's stronghold, along with some fibres for you to play with."

"Excellent. What next?"

"Stand on that scanning pad and hold still. I am going to measure you for your wardrobe." She didn't want to piss the projection off, so she took a few steps into the room and stood where directed. "That's it. I am done. You can go and enjoy your visit with Sarah and Dem. A fresh gown for your meeting with the Guard will be delivered this evening."

"Thank you, Aissa." She curtsied to the hologram and was rewarded with a laugh.

Returning to the doorway, she took Taneus's arm again and they moved through the halls and upward into the City. "That was weird."

"She means well, she just has no people skills."

"That is an understatement." She cuddled up against his hip. "So where will we be sleeping tonight?"

"My old home in the City. The bots have prepped it for a short visit." His grin answered her questions, she didn't need to worry about privacy.

Sarah and Demetrius were amazing hosts to both Dehlia and Taneus, and the rescued persons. Sarah was charming and looked surprisingly at ease in her rose-coloured gown. "We really wanted you to visit because we have some amazing news." She looked to her ebony spouse and smiled. "We are having a baby."

The cries of congratulation from herself and Taneus spurred laughter and a few tears from the Reader who was hugging them indiscriminately. Ideas for blankets, yarns and threads immediately ran through Dehlia's head.

Her creative ideas kept scampering through her mind as they said their goodbyes and waved to Dem and Sarah while crossing the courtyard to Taneus's City house. "I am so happy for them. They must be so excited."

"Hells, I am excited. I am going to be an uncle, of sorts." He squeezed her shoulders and then in a burst of exuberance, grabbed her around the waist

and swung her into the air. She squealed in surprise and his laugh was her reward. "When do you think we will have one?"

"When the moons align and I get pregnant. I guarantee you I won't have a baby before I get pregnant." She smiled at his consternation. "I don't control it. It just happens in its own time, of course, you have to help."

"Oh, I intend to help until you won't have me." He snickered.

"Promises promises." She laughed as he carried her kicking and shrieking into his home and together they discussed the likelihood of compatible genetics.

She woke up with a new cuff on her right ankle and a pleasant soreness between her thighs.

She turned to give Taneus her appreciation, but he was gone. The sound of shuttles passing over the City told her why. Swearing and struggling into the fresh gown provided by Aissa, Dehlia hurried to the courtyard to greet the newcomers. She skidded up to Taneus's side. "Why didn't you wake me?"

"You looked so beautiful asleep, I didn't have the heart to wake you," he murmured it to her sincerely and her heart melted.

"I love you, but don't do that again. Not when it is this important." A light flared in his red eyes

at her words and she realized after they were out what she had said. "No, I am not taking it back."

Sarah approached the five uniformed couples as they entered the City. Three of the males had wings, one Dhemon, one Enjel, and one species that Dehlia didn't recognise, although his wife was Draï. A bright grin covered Sarah's face as she looked over at the human-looking woman. Dehlia looked closer. "Helen!" She sprinted to the Pilot and gave her a hug.

"Dehlia, what the heck are you doing here?" Helen's Azon companion looked a little taken aback.

"Oh, same old same old, wedding shower, abduction by pirates, teleporting elves and an interplanetary gateway brought me here." She got it out in a rush.

"Yikes. So you are one of the people we need to return to their homes?"

"Nope. I am staying on Admar." Taneus was making his way to her slowly, and as some of the males eyed her speculatively, he wrapped her in his arms. "Apparently, I woke one of the sleepers."

Helen shook her head in surprise, then remembered why she was there. "Oh, geez. I forgot. This is my mate, Commander, Shade and his mate, Fixer, Morph and her mate, Thinker, Beast and his Fury, and last but not least, Seer and

his mate, Order. Don't get on her bad side, she can make you do the dishes."

Dehlia bowed as formally as she could in Taneus's arms. "Shade, I believe there is someone here that you may remember. Isaro was also taken by the pirates, she is safe and well, but I think she may be an excellent candidate for the Guard."

"Gods. Where is she?" His words came out in a rush and Fixer grabbed the hand that he held out to her.

"The freed persons are in that large building over there. They have been under guard and attended by a series of bots. Because of her talent, Isaro has been staying with me and Dem." Sarah's words calmed him.

Commander stood and faced Dehlia. "I still don't understand why you requested the Sector Guard and not the Alliance patrols?"

She sighed. "This will require some explanation." She looked to Sarah who led the way to a lovely room where they could all be seated in relative comfort. "Someone wants exotics, and they want them now."

Commander blinked at her. "What?"

"Every single person in the hold with us was a psychic exotic of some kind. Including me. We weren't taken to a standard slave processing area, and we were kept apart for the time before the auction. Someone wants psychics and they want

them fast. They kept the males and females separate, but not for our benefit. They didn't want to chance an unwanted breeding."

Beast was standing behind his wife. "This is serious, but why tell us?"

She looked at them all, considering. "You all are out of biological specs for your race. Most of you with psychic talents. With you out there, do you think that it is so impossible for some races to try and breed their own super teams?"

"You really think that that is what is going on?"

"I think that it is something that the other Guard teams need to be aware of. Check and find out how many psychics are disappearing in your areas. I think that you may be surprised."

As a group, they broke into a discussion on possibilities. It was gratifying that they had at least listened to her.

Seer looked over at her and his eyes lost focus for a moment. When his bright blue gaze came back to her he said, "You are right. You were sold."

"I never thought I wasn't." She grinned and nodded to him. "Do you have the means to arrest a l'nal?"

Morph stood up. "I do. Shall we?" Thinker grabbed his mate's hand and held her in place. "Commander? Can we go? Please?" She sounded for all the world like a child begging for a treat.

Commander looked at Dehlia. "You are sure of it?"

"Yes."

"Then you may go, but turn the criminal over to the appropriate authorities. Take Beast and Fury."

"Yippee!" Morph was hauling her husband out of the room and then she stopped. "Where am I going?"

Laughing at the woman's exuberance, Dehlia and Taneus escorted the Guards to the portal and then to Bathi.

She had forgotten the acidic tang of the air on her previous home world. Leading her group from the foothills to the small village of Hixith where she had her house and her shop, they bypassed a number of people and I'nal Guildmates who were happy to see her.

She stopped outside of S'olon's home and indicated that this was the offender's residence. Dehlia stepped aside and let justice be done.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Whatever Morph did to her, it caused the l'nal to curl up like it had been doused with bug spray. Beast did the heavy lifting and carried the criminal to the local jail. They stayed in the small facility until S'olon rose.

"What just happened?" her translator added some nervous ticking, but was still clear.

"You were arrested for arranging my abduction."

"What? No. I would never!" It was almost convincing, if four of her eight eyes hadn't been darting around madly, refusing to make contact with hers.

"l'nal don't have wedding showers. It is a human tradition and I thought nothing of it until I was sitting in a hold with other exotics who had been captured or sold. It was the sold thing that got me thinking about your obsession with money."

"I...you..."

"So how much is friendship worth?"

"One hundred and fifty thousand credits." It was the lawman who broke that news. "I checked her accounts."

Dehlia almost passed out. That was a helluva lot of money. Enough to help a weaver retire to live happily with her new mates and live a life of leisure. "Wow. Well, that settles it." She turned to the lawman and took a deep breath before she spoke, "I would like her charged with trafficking in a restricted species, enslavement of a restricted species, and denial of Weaver's Guildlaw."

She led her little parade out of the jail and into the streets. Taking a shaking breath, she burst into tears. Cool fingers touched her head and she was being carried through the streets, sobbing like an infant.

A door opened and she was settled in a chair in her own home. She hiccupped to a halt. "Sorry. I'd like to be able to pick spinning fibres." Her entire house was covered with baskets, bins, skeins and bales of silks, cotton-like fibres and something that held heat like wool, but dyed beautifully.

"I will make sure that you will have a lovely workroom in our stronghold. You can fill it with all this and more." Taneus was kneeling at her feet, trying to comfort her. She sniffed a few times before she managed a smile.

"Thanks. I actually intend to leave you with one room *not* filled with weaving supplies." The room

at large burst into laughter. "Thank you all for your help, but with that large a bounty on me, can you see why I think that there is a larger organization at work here?"

Thinker nodded. "We do. We will brief Commander when we get back. I was able to glean a few details of the transaction from her and we will look into this further."

"Thank you, Thinker. It eases my mind." She looked around her. "Well, I guess I will need some of my hand spindles and a bale of silk to start. Could someone carry it back for me?"

Morph went to pick it up, but Beast got there first and gave her a patient look. "I can do it without shifting, Morph. Let it be."

Moving as quickly as she could, Dehlia gathered her basic supplies, carding combs, drop spindles, and everything else she could think of and carry in her medium fibre basket. Fury was almost laughing. "Don't you need clothing?"

"Aissa has promised to manufacture my clothing and I am taking her at her word. So I just want to take things that are a little harder to put together." She hugged the basket to her chest. "Plus I am attached to them. They are the tools of my life and new ones don't have the same feel that I have injected into my work." A last long look around her fibre-filled home and she nodded. Looking at Taneus and his patient smile, she

sighed. "We can go now. I have everything I need."

Sarah was on one of her frequent visits to the stronghold. She said it was soothing to watch Dehlia work and the baby liked it. Her foot kept the treadle pumping and the wheel spinning as she spun yarn for Sarah's baby clothes. The feelings that were in the thread were love, health, and joy. It was easy to keep her mind on those emotions with Sarah right in the room.

Dehlia laughed, her fingers twisting, winding, and feeding the yarn onto the bobbin. "The baby isn't bigger than a kiwi, Sarah. It doesn't know what it likes."

"It does. I promise." Sarah winked and batted the small bump on her belly. "Did I tell you that I am having a home birth?"

"Wow, is Dem up to it?"

The Reader laughed. "A midwife is coming in. Genea is another Terran and she has been travelling around to midwife human-other crossbreeds. Did you know that some medical teams won't touch us? They are afraid of us dying in their care."

"Creepy. So one of us is moving in and setting up camp? Cool. The more ladies, the more nervous the men will be." With both of the women laughing, the men eased back from their

eavesdropping in the hallway.

* * * *

"So, when are you going to tell her?" Dem's mouth was twitching with amusement.

"As soon as she figures it out for herself." He didn't want to have that conversation with his beloved. He had just gotten her to wear the last band around her neck, proclaiming her married to any and all who would see her. At their first anniversary, she would exchange them for filigree bands. Of course by then, she would be holding their child in her arms.

"Is she normally this slow in catching on?"

He slugged Dem in the arm and then they settled into the serious discussion of baby names while they assembled Dehlia's new loom in the sunroom.

* * * *

"So when are you going to tell him?" Sarah was smiling softly as she felt the presence of her husband fade to another part of the stronghold.

"When he gets his head out of his ass and tells me that I am pregnant. He has been tiptoeing around it for weeks."

"How long have you known?"

"Since about ten minutes after conception. I had an energy surge and it wasn't my talent that caused it." Dehl laughed and took up another hank of fibre. "Men are cute when they are trying to be excited and polite at the same time."

"I would have to agree there." Sarah changed the topic away from babies for a moment. "How about that project for the Guard?"

"The stealth yarns are tricky, but they can be done. Fixer is going to apply them to one of the suits and see how they work. They just blur the wearer, but it might help them keep their identities confidential."

"Excellent. The emergency beacon pendants that she made for the kidnap victims are working well. Someone tried to recapture two of them, but with those beacons they were recovered in less than two days." Sarah was privy to all communications as owner of Admar.

"And how is Isaro?"

"She is in training at the Guard base on Morganti. There is talk of a Citadel outpost being built there as well."

"It certainly is well fortified."

"The Citadel is becoming aware of active training potential by allying themselves with the Guard. If it is successful, then there may be a whole new batch of battle trained psychics out there to help keep the pirates at bay."

"Why does that not comfort me? I am worried about those being abducted now." She stopped spinning while her mind ran through the possibilities. Dehl didn't want the negative emotion to taint the fibres.

"Don't. The Sector Guard is on it, and they are getting the Alliance to acknowledge it as a growing epidemic. Let it go, Dehl. They have it under control, or as under control as it can get. Worry isn't good for anyone." She stroked her belly. "Especially small anyones."

"You are right." Taking a deep breath and concentrating on the joy of initial pregnancy, she wove it into the fabric. "So how long should I let him try and figure out how to break the news that I am pregnant?"

"Oh, try to make it to your ninth month. See if he can hold out that long." The two humans cackled with glee on an alien world far from home, and for them, home was now definitely where their hearts were.

Dear Gran, today I told my husband that I have known I was pregnant for four months. The capper came this morning when I asked him if I was getting fat. He was so stricken that I finally took pity on him and told him that I had known since the moment of conception. I wonder if he will ever talk to me again.

If it's a girl, I want to name it after you. Cordelia Emily. If it's a boy, he is on his own.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Admar was always supposed to be the elven homeworld, so in Marks of Admar, Demetrius became the face of the elven community. They had moved on and blended with other races, except for the purebloods who volunteered to stay on Admar and go to sleep until the Terrans were in space. Their stories will be told in the upcoming stories of the Terran Times.

For more of the Sector Guard, hop on over to Devine Destinies and pick up Freak Factor, Running Wyld, or coming soon, Hael's Fury, Seering Order and Star Breaker.

Thanks for reading.

Viola Grace

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Viola Grace was born in Manitoba, Canada where she still resides today. She really likes it there.

She has no pets and can barely keep sea monkeys alive for a reasonable amount of time. Her line of day job tends to be analytical which leaves her mind hopping to weave stories. No co-worker is safe from her character analysis.

In keeping with busy hands are happy hands, her hobbies have included cross-stitch, needlepoint, quilting, costuming, cake decorating, baking, cooking, metal work, beading, sculpting, painting, doll making, henna tattoos, chain mail, and a few others that have been forgotten. It is quite often that these hobbies make their way into her tales.

Viola's fetishes include boots and corsetry, and her greatest weakness is her uncontrollable blush.

Her writing actively pursues the Happily Ever After that so rarely occurs in nature. It is an admirable thing and something that we should all strive for. To find one that we truly like, as well as love.

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