

IMPURE

The book cover features a dark, atmospheric scene. In the foreground, a woman with long brown hair and a blue and green patterned dress is being embraced from behind by a pale, winged figure with dark hair. They are standing in front of a large, ornate, and weathered stone tombstone. The background is a dark, cloudy sky with a large, pale moon. A black bird is flying in the upper right corner. The title 'IMPURE' is written in large, red, stylized letters at the top, and the author's name 'Viola Grace' is written in large, red, stylized letters at the bottom.

Viola Grace

Ardel Sak was strong, confident and a stranger to herself. Her mind wiped of all but her name, she is given to a Vimpyr by the name of Sorcal. At first he wants nothing more than her blood, but after fighting for possession of her, his appetites take a decidedly carnal turn. In his arms, she finds the answer to a question she didn't know she should ask. What happens when an Impure Vimpyr and an Impure Terran join forces to fight the new exotic weapons dealers? It is a tale written in flesh and blood.

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Impure
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IMPURE
A TERRAN TIMES NOVELLA

BY

VIOLA GRACE

CHAPTER ONE

To say that the interior of Blood and Flesh was a crimson paradise was understating the matter. Ardel Sak followed her handler closely. Something told her that being loose in a room full of carnivores and sanguinarians was a very dangerous place to be.

The creature that held her leash was toxic to most of the species here, which was why it was a designated handler for new flesh, like her. Ardel trembled as they walked further into the nest of species that were using people like her as beverages and drugs.

The images of slaves being held in a variety of positions for the purpose of consumption, some of the clientele had their mouths, tentacles or other appendages latched on to what Ardel would consider intimate areas. A few of the slaves seemed to be enjoying themselves while others had their faces in a rictus of agony.

Anytime she was shocked into pausing, her handler tugged at her leash causing her to stumble

forward again. The collar around her neck was narrow, but it contained a vocal paralysers that was active and functioning. The leash attached to it was ten feet long but wrapped around the handler's fist to give her no running room at all. This was not the first time that it had yanked an unwilling slave deep into the club and it would probably not be the last.

Ardel hunched her shoulders, glad that the clothing she had been given was decent but afraid of the murmur that was following her into the depths of the maze of bodies, couches and servers. Finally, they stopped in front of a shadowed alcove where a voice greeted them. "Is this she?"

"It is, sir. Mentally scrubbed and ready for you."

Ah, that would explain why Ardel could not remember more than her own name.

A body shifted in the shadows, pale skin drawing her gaze. "Does she speak?"

"At length and in a number of creative cursing styles. She has been silenced." Her handler tugged her forward and forced her to kneel.

"Is she what I ordered?" He leaned forward and if Ardel hadn't been trying to control her fury, she would have gasped. Vimpyr. His skin almost glowed in the dark and his hair was a midnight counterpoint. It was his eyes that kept her staring though, liquid black with silver pupils.

"A true Terran. She didn't come willingly, but she has been tested and registered at the desk. This one won't be getting away." The handler held out the leash. "Would you like to sample her before you take possession?"

"That sounds like a wonderful idea." He reached out and gripped the leash, tugging her to him until she was kneeling between his spread thighs.

Mute, she met his gaze as he took her left arm and raised it to his lips. His tongue laved the inside of her forearm bringing an unwelcome heat to her body and causing a twinge in her clit. It caught her by surprise, the bite of the wound barely registering on her consciousness as her body woke with a sudden lurch.

The corners of his eyes crinkled up as if he knew the effect that he was having on her. The sucking sensation reached parts of her that no other lover had managed to arouse and he was biting her arm for Pete's sake.

He didn't waste a drop, sipping at her for only a few seconds before he withdrew his mouth and licked her wound closed. The silver glint in his eyes faded and was replaced by a metallic crimson.

"Perfect. I will take possession." His skin was glowing, the unnatural energy of his drinking from a Terran making his Vimpyr skin pulse with

the energy.

"Excellent. I kept thinking she would make a break for it. Just so you know, there may be bids on your new acquisition. She drew quite a bit of attention on her way through." The handler bowed and walked off leaving Ardel on her knees between the Vimpyr's thighs.

A small pulse ran through her collar and her vocal cords were free. She had nothing to say, she was lost in his eyes. They held her imprisoned and her body was humming with his proximity.

"Do you have a name, pet?" His hand stroked her deep chestnut hair off her shoulder.

"Ardel."

"So, they left you that, did they? Fortunate. You may call me Sir or Master Sorcal." He touched her chin and raised her head to take a closer look at her. "Do you know who you are?"

"Ardel Sak of Terra."

"What is your occupation?"

"I don't know." It was in her mind, tantalizingly close, but miles away. She should know what she had done for a living, shouldn't she?

"Understandable. Join me." He leaned back into the shadows and pulled her with him by the grip he still had on her wrist.

A semi-circle couch was inside the shadows. Her new owner settled himself back against the

cushions and pulled her to recline against him. It was strange how easy and comfortable it was. Her body conformed to the hard planes of his, as if she had done it a thousand times.

He stroked her hair back from her face and she sighed, it felt far too good. She should be wallowing in fear, but she wasn't. Her inner voice was telling her that Sorcal was a man to be trusted, which was going against the environment and the scent of her blood in the air.

His skin was warm, the opening of his shirt inviting her hand to slide inside as she felt the pounding of his heart. "Why am I so comfortable with you?"

He tugged on her hair sharply.

She looked up at him to see his frown. "Sir?"

"That is better. Never forget to address me properly. It may be worth your life to appear subservient." He threaded his fingers through her hair and leaned down to kiss her.

When their mouths met, sparks flew. Ardel could see a bright burst of colour behind her eyelids and a surge of energy transferred between them. His tongue stroked along hers, bringing the taste of her own blood back to her with a wild flavour that was all him.

The power hummed between them, driving the arousal that had been flickering into embers into a raging flare.

Ardel came back to herself only when he separated their mouths and pulled back, his own chest rising and falling beneath her. His hands gripped her hips, during the kiss she had ended up astride him. "What was that...sir?"

"Chemistry, my dear pet. Basic and undeniable chemistry." He flexed his fingers on her hips and she was suddenly aware of the ridge of his arousal against her. Hot, hard and quite substantial, he was pressed against her in a most direct manner.

From behind her, a voice broke their staring contest. "Sorcal, so this is the custom order? Not much to look at, is she?"

CHAPTER TWO

The sexual tension turned into a battle-ready tension when Sorcal looked over her shoulder to confront the newcomer.

"Hilart. What brings you to the surface? I thought you couldn't abide the scent of other beings." Sorcal lifted Ardel off him and placed her on the couch, leaning forward to put her slightly behind him.

"I heard there was a Terran at Blood and Flesh and wanted to try her for myself."

The creature came into Ardel's field of vision. Spikes crowned what would otherwise have been a very normal or even handsome head.

"You cannot. Go play with a willing partner. Or an unwilling one, but this one is not for you."

The creature looked Ardel up and down, his gaze focusing on her neck and her clothing.

"You have not fed from her yet."

"There is time for everything. I prefer to have a

little more intimacy when I feed." His leaning forward appeared casual, but she recognized it as a subtle defence.

Did what he had taken from my arm count as feeding? The pinpricks were invisible in the dim light.

"Well then, since you are not yet attached to her, I will challenge you for possession."

He raised his voice on the last words and a beverage server moved to the bar, striking a button.

Sorcal smiled, his fangs gleaming. "Accepted." The moment he accepted the challenge, a blue glow filled the room.

"Come along, pet." Casually, Sorcal took up her leash and led her out of the private alcove.

A crowd was forming around a large ring and the spectators moved aside to let them pass. Hilart was behind her and before she could squeak an alert, he had grabbed her by the arms and was holding her tight.

When the leash grew taut, Sorcal stopped. The electric shock that ran through Ardel should have been enough to take her to her knees, but she stood and merely vibrated in reaction.

"Tough little thing. I like it when they can take pain." Hilart sniffed along her exposed neck and shoulder, moving her hair aside so that he could get a better scent.

"She isn't yours, Hilart. Let her go." A burly Enjel, black wings and a body massive with muscle, spoke.

"She will be mine soon enough. Let's get this started." He let her go and she caught her balance quickly.

The Enjel took her leash and held it. "You will remain with me until this is decided, pet. Just relax. I don't bite."

She spoke in low tones. "Then why are you here?"

"I like the ambiance."

She shuddered. Sorcal and Hilart were stripping to the waist and the murmur of betting was moving through the crowd.

As appalled as she was by what was about to occur, her gaze happily roamed over Sorcal's pale musculature as he stretched and prepared for the fight. His trousers were tight leather, his boots knee high, laced tightly to his calves.

The blue light was bringing in more spectators until they ran out of room. A few commands from the Enjel holding her and screens came to life, broadcasting what was about to occur.

She gave a cursory glance to Hilart and shuddered to see a line of bony studs running down his shoulders to his forearms. Whatever he was, he was designed to fight.

Hilart leered at her, licking his lower lip with a

tongue that was far too pointed for Ardel's peace of mind. Laughter erupted from the crowd as her distressed face filled the screens.

When the men were ready and the crowd was in place, the Enjel holding her leash raised his free hand. "Gentlemen, you are here to decide the ownership of this new female. Hilart, you are the challenger, so Sorcal gets first strike. Last creature standing gets the female."

Sorcal nodded and as the light changed to crimson, he closed on his opponent. Ardel wanted to jump when he circled Hilart to land his first calculated blow.

The crack of bone and flesh made her flinch and made Hilart stagger. His lavender skin went chalky as he looked at his opponent in shock. "You drank from her."

From where they were circling, Ardel could see the blood coursing down the spiked one's skin. He looked afraid but simply circled, looking for his moment. When he found a place to strike, he backhanded the Vimpyr and the crowd roared as the spikes on his forearm opened Sorcal's face.

Her owner just stood there and in front of her eyes, his skin closed over the exposed bone and regained a healthy colour in seconds. The crowd howled and bets flew fast and furious.

It went on and on, the Vimpyr striking and then Hilart staggering around to take his turn. Sorcal

didn't even look tired. Finally, Hilart was swaying, covered with his own blood, his eyes glazed with pain. Her owner took a few steps forward and ploughed his fist into the face of his opponent.

In front of all comers, his fist healed itself while Hilart buckled and fell to the floor. Cheers greeted him as he raised his arms in triumph. Ardel was now in the position of having the half-naked Vimpyr approaching her with a look in his gaze that she could only describe as hunger.

"You have won, Sorcal. Your share of the winnings will be transferred to your account."

The Enjel handed her leash over to her owner. He didn't even register that he had heard the other man speak, simply taking her leash and using it to pull her tightly against him.

Sorcal pulled her against him with one arm around her waist and bent her backward with the force of his kiss. Ardel tasted her own blood but kept her body relaxed against him, his eyes were glowing red and she didn't want to antagonize him. A roaring started in her ears as she tried to keep calm while his mouth ravaged hers and his thigh worked its way between her legs to press against her.

When he released her, she gasped for air.

With one word, he lashed out and the crowd rippled with understanding as his voice echoed

sharply. "Mine."

They didn't return to the alcove. He gripped the leash tightly and hauled her through the back of the club and down a hallway that led to a lift that they took down below. Based on the figures in Alliance Common, they were going to the fifth lower level out of six.

Sorcal was vibrating with a tension that she didn't want to put a name to, but she was pretty sure that she was going to find out.

The strangest portion of that tension was that she seemed to be carrying her own version. Her body was humming in sync with his and it was making her eager to arrive at their destination. She didn't know much about herself and that struck her as a little unusual.

The irony of her knowing that her newly awakened sexual appetite was abnormal made her want to laugh. She didn't even know what she was doing yesterday, how could she possibly know what woke her hormones?

CHAPTER THREE

“Put your hand on the scanner.” Sorcal had stopped in front of a door and was entering some programming instructions.

“Yes, sir.”

He was programming for her access to this room. The plastic feel of the panel tried to shake a memory loose but failed. She held her palm to the plate and waited until he nodded for her to remove her hand from the scanner.

The door slid open and he tugged her inside. The moment the door closed behind him, the polite Vimpyr she had met briefly in the club transformed.

He lifted her high against him, nuzzling her breasts through the fabric of her top until he became frustrated by the restriction. With her held high in his arms, he walked into a room off the main chamber and set her on her feet.

He didn't say a word, just unlocked her

manacles and loosened her skirt. Her top was lifted and she was nude in a matter of a minute. Her nipples hardened under his gaze, the heat in his eyes and body transmitted itself to her on the most primal of levels. His own boots and clothing were removed in rapid succession leaving him aroused, rock hard and ready for her.

The moisture at the top of her thighs in response to his nudity shocked her, as did the clenching of her channel in an ache of emptiness. She wanted him inside her and she wanted him now, she just had no idea why.

Her collar and leash were the only things she was wearing, but she didn't want to cover herself, she wanted to throw herself at him and revel in the strength, warmth and that wonderful energy again.

He didn't keep her waiting long. In a flash of ivory flesh, he flipped her to her back on the bedding.

She shivered as he caressed her breasts, teasing and working at the nipples until a moan shuddered out of her. His mouth came into play, his tongue lapping and laving at her neck, down her collarbone and between her breasts.

He licked at her flesh slowly, his mouth almost distracting her from the feel of his hard cock pressing against the inside of her thigh as he moved against her. She was arching her hips

against him, begging for what she couldn't vocalize and she closed her eyes tightly when he slid two fingers into her, spreading her and heating her flesh with his touch.

Everywhere their flesh was in contact, sparks of pleasure ran through her until a foreign but all too familiar wave of release ran through her, cascading out of her mouth in harsh, broken cries.

Sorcal didn't waste any time. He surged up her body and pressed his erection into her with slow, rocking thrusts.

She met his black and crimson gaze as his body and hers moved in time to the surging of his hips. The peak that she had climbed came within view once again as her body hummed with the energy that they were sharing.

Her senses climbed higher and she gripped Sorcal's back, feeling the sweat that was coating his body as his muscles bunched and relaxed to drive into her. She didn't know how much more she could take as her body tried to clench frantically at the cock in motion within her. His eyes were focussed on a point inside her soul as he reached between them to stroke the clit that was sending pounding sensations through her.

The moment he touched her clit, she screamed and came apart in his arms. The moment seemed to draw on forever until he shifted inside her, plunged deep and moved his head to bite at the

joint between neck and shoulder.

The pain blended with pleasure and she screamed again as another wave of release rocked her body against Sorcal's, milking him as he groaned in his own rapture.

He drank deeply, leaving her lightheaded and limp when he finally withdrew his teeth and closed her wounds. He left her alone for a moment, returning with a warm, damp cloth to cleanse the top of her thighs and the residue of blood from her neck.

"My apologies for the abrupt nature of our joining, but the blood loss due to the fight made me not quite myself." He was kneeling on the bed next to her, his cock semi-erect and his body relaxed.

"I am not quite myself as well, sir."

He grinned, an expression that seemed unnatural. "You will not call me Master, will you?"

She thought about it. "Not if given the choice. No. I don't know who I was, but this is not who I am."

His eyebrows rose in surprise. Black wings arching above his eyes. "Interesting. I can taste something more than Terran in you. You are not a pure blood, are you?"

"I don't know. It sounds familiar, but I have no idea, really. Sir."

He sighed and lay down next to her, pulling her onto the planes of his body until they were matched and he was comfortable. With a quick flip of his wrist, he pulled a sheet over them and settled her against him.

"You need to rest and I need to absorb what I just took from you. Did you feel the power between us?" He was tracing idle patterns on her spine.

"Yes. I don't know if that was normal or not, but it felt different. Sir." She was tired. It was more than just the blood loss—he was hypnotizing her into sleep. She yawned and looked up at him.

"Oh, it was different all right. I have been waiting for a woman like you for a very long time." The low stroking of his voice combined with his hand lulled her into a relaxed state.

"What kind of woman was that? Sir."

"Impure." His chuckle rocked her into a deep, healing sleep.

Impure. She had heard that term before and when she finished using the sanitation unit the next morning, she had a flicker of memory. Impure Terran. That was her. She had alien DNA in her blood and it made her ineligible for Champion status, no matter how good she was at her job.

She just wished she knew what her job was.

Sorcal was lounging in bed, reading a data pad and making notes. He looked up and she smiled hesitantly at him.

"Your teeth aren't Terran standard, are they?"

"I don't know. Sir." The hesitation she gave before giving him his title was not lost on him. She switched the word *sir* with the word that sprang to mind, *jackass*. His expression let her know he was listening, but didn't care as long as she kept to the letter of propriety.

Curious, she put her finger to her lips and examined her teeth. She had the same extended canines that her owner exhibited. Odd.

"You are also missing the tattoo that they put on your species now, but the effect of your blood is unmistakable...you are Terran." He was talking to himself more than her.

"May I get dressed? Sir?"

"By all means. It takes no time to remove that silly excuse for clothing." He shook his head and returned to his studies.

She pulled on the ice blue, one-sleeved top and the almost translucent skirt that was made decent by a lighter fabric peplum that layered the upper portion into opacity.

"Do you have a spare data pad? Sir."

"No, but you can use the com in the other room. It is locked against outside transmissions, so don't bother."

"Is that by your choice?"

He looked at her pointedly, one eyebrow arching.

"Sir."

"No, it is the province of the management. This facility has a reputation for sheltering those on the wrong side of Alliance regulation. You can only send a message at a very public terminal or wait until you leave the facility."

"When will that be, sir?"

"You won't be leaving this facility without me."

Oh, excellent. She wandered into the next room and lounged on the couch watching the vid screen. There was more porn than should be legal on the menu, but she opted for a documentary of the Vimpyr coronation. She may as well learn what she could about her captor.

The Vimpyr sensitivity to UV rays was well known. It made sense that Sorcal would be at home in dark places. As she watched procession after procession, a face next to the throne kept drawing her attention. She was the same chalky white as the others, but her features were softer, rounder than the Vimpyr standing next to her.

She was interviewed finally as Queen Mother Eleanor Palmer Hala Matias. Eleanor. Something was jumping up and down at the back of Ardel's mind, but she couldn't pin it down.

Damn it! She was beyond frustrated. She was so

close to knowing who and what she was, but it always slipped out of reach.

She heard a noise and with a startled laugh, she realized it was her stomach. She was hungry and her stomach was empty.

She had better ask Sorcal if she could order food.

Sighing, she rose from the couch and meandered into the bedroom. He was still working on his data pad, so she cleared her throat. "Sir? May I order food?"

Her stomach rumbled in punctuation to her request.

He looked at her abdomen, alarmed. "Is that going to come out and get me if I say no?"

"No, sir. But I might pass out the next time you have a snack. I won't last long."

"All right. Food is not served in the rooms. Since you are technically food, we will need to bring you to the club to get a meal." He chortled at his little joke ignoring her scowl.

As he dressed, she muttered. "I am not food. Sir. I am a light snack if anything at all."

He finished putting his pants on and walked over to her, holding her chin and giving her a thorough kiss. "You are a full meal, pet. I could feast on you for days."

"Like hell." His scowl made her finish, "Sir."

CHAPTER FOUR

The food at the club wasn't bad. It wasn't good, but it wasn't bad. Standard rations for her style of species. Nothing fancy and virtually tasteless, it managed to fill the void in her belly. Water was hard to come by, but a very mild intoxicant was available that she used to re-hydrate.

She was very relaxed and leaning against Sorcal without a care in the world. She was draped across the dais with her head pillowed on his lap, occasionally giggling at the variety of creatures that came in to do business with and speak to Sorcal.

He was in the business of transporting exotics. He didn't capture them or disperse them. He merely arranged containment and movement.

Ardel simply rested on him and occasionally offered her wrist for him to bite when prodded by his hand at her back. It made a good impression on his clients. It showed he was completely in

control.

Ardel could play along. With her blood sample at the door, no computer was going to let her out without major damage to her mind and body. She needed to wait for an opportunity and for the moment when she figured out who she was and what she was doing there.

The Enjel from the fight came for a visit.

"Sorcal, how is your new addition?"

"Coming along. She is a little rambunctious, but nothing I can't handle, Razia."

The Enjel looked at her and she could almost feel him picking through her thoughts. "She wants to escape."

Sorcal laughed. "It doesn't take a telepath to know that. Half the slaves in here want the same thing."

"She is frustrated by not knowing the things she thinks she should know." Razia cocked his head.

Irritated, Ardel pulled detailed memories of sex with Sorcal into the forefront of her mind.

The Enjel blinked and his touch withdrew from her mind as he laughed in surprise. Apparently, feeling a cock plunge into him was not a sensation that he enjoyed.

"You are a sneaky creature. Where did you learn how to do that, pet?" He leaned forward and his wings flared out menacingly.

Before she could answer, a flare of light immobilized the clientele of the club, followed immediately by a thick gas. The gas solidified at waist height and just like that, they were locked in place.

As the gas started to spill into the chamber, Sorcal lifted her above it so that when the gas became, solid she would still be able to breathe. There were some in the club, she knew, who would not be as fortunate. This was an Alliance mass-arrest procedure. They must have sent an agent in earlier to plant the charges.

The harsh pounding of boots approached, several voices in other alcoves protested as they were cuffed and removed from Blood and Flesh.

When the incoming troops reached their alcove, Razia was cuffed first, freed from the confinement and hauled off.

Sorcal and Ardel were next. Screaming would not help and shrieking would just irritate the officers into sedating her. They were marched out past any number of curious and accusing eyes. Reaching the exit, the officer holding her keyed in the release and got her blood sample back. She could now leave the club without setting off the lasers and the electroshock around the collar she still wore.

Nine shuttles were visible immediately outside the club. The slaves were led to one of them, their

owners to another. The air was cold, bringing gooseflesh to Ardel's arms. She was lucky that she was relatively fully dressed. Some of the others were nude and looked even more depressed and unhappy than they had in the club.

The officers were gentle with those that they were handling. One by one, they were put in the shuttles and locked into their seats. Locked was indeed the word, they didn't trust the slaves not to make an attempt on the crew.

Two more slaves were brought in after Ardel was locked in and then they were lifting off. The pressure into the seats gave her a headache and she tasted the coppery tang of blood, but even after one day with a Vimpyr, she didn't mind it that much.

An Alliance warship was waiting for them. No other ship had a silhouette like that. Even with her missing memories, Ardel knew that shape. She was safe.

After a bumpy docking, the guards came and retrieved the captives, one by one. Each was handed over to a handler at the edge of the ramp and led away. She waited her turn.

After all the others were off loaded, the shuttle commander came to her. "Ardel Sak?"

"Yes."

"Welcome back to the Aslo Nekril."

"I have been here before?"

"You will get your mind back. Your mission was a complete success." He released her harness and helped her to her feet. He escorted her personally and they were soon in a private cubical in medical.

"I think you can leave me. I should be fine."

"I am under orders to stay with you and assist you with your reload."

"What?"

"Removal of the mental blocks you had put in place. A Minder has been notified and is meeting us."

"So, this was part of a plan?"

"There were several telepaths at Blood and Flesh, you needed to go in under cover and be convincing."

A horrible sense of reality set in. She knew that it was the sort of thing she would do in the line of duty, but what the hell was her job?

"What is my rank?"

"Hunter. We needed you to get some undercover operatives out. They could not leave under their own power or all of the stings that we had in place would be useless."

"Stings?" To hear the Tival Commander use that term made her smile.

"Your word, not mine."

"Well, it's nice to know I have a sense of humour."

"Far too much. You are assigned casually to the Aslo Nekril as a security officer. There is no one better at finding a spy in a haystack."

She sighed and rubbed her eyes. "Another phrase of mine?"

"Indeed, you remember!"

"No. It just sounds like me." She sighed. "Can you get this collar off?"

"The doctor will take care of it. After the Minder has cleared you."

A smiling female of Azon extraction came into the cubicle. "Talking about me?"

"Yes, Bara. She made it back in one piece." The shuttle commander waved at Ardel like he was doing a magic trick.

"Let's get that collar off." Minder Bara reached forward, but the commander stopped her.

"Ardel ordered me to not take the collar off until after she had stopped screaming. She didn't want to distress anyone when she comes to, so she wanted her vocal functions shut off."

Minder Bara pulled her hands back from Ardel's throat. "That is a fairly good idea."

She took the leash and flicked a few switches on the controller. "Are you all right? Nod if you are calm."

Ardel looked at the two worried faces looking at her and nodded. She tried to speak and smiled when nothing came out.

Bara stood in front of her and gripped her head on either side. "Breathe deeply while I remove the blocks. They were designed to be similar to your regular memories so their removal may cause a little bit of distress."

It wasn't like the prodding of Razia, a warm rush of calming energy ran across her senses. Bara removed the first block and Ardel remembered her job, the next block opened her entrance to the Alliance after becoming a Terran Volunteer. When her family came back to her mind, the screaming started.

The car, the crash, tears, blood, broken bodies on the freeway, it hit her in a rush. It was happening at that moment, all new again. Every moment of the funerals for her mother, father and little sister rushed back to her in that one second when the block came down. She lived twenty years of grief in that one second.

Hands were holding her, a cold spray at her neck made her sleepy and when she lay limp, they finally removed that damned collar. "You let me forget."

"And you had to remember." Bara was stroking her hair, but it was just for comfort. Ardel's mind was back and whole.

She let the sedative take her while she smiled at the one thought that brightened her day. *At least I got my targets.*

CHAPTER FIVE

Ardel smiled at the commander when she came to. "Zin. Nice to see you again. How have you been keeping?"

"Fairly well. You had me worried for a while." He helped her sit and then gave her a hug.

"I had me worried, too. I don't think I ever want to do that again. Coming back hurts. A lot."

"I know. I didn't want you to do it to begin with if you will recall."

She rubbed at her forehead. "I do. And you were right. Happy now?"

He smiled and gave her the folded uniform that he had in his right hand. "Delirious. Now get dressed."

"I thought I needed a physical."

"They gave you one while you were out. You are a little malnourished, but you are fine. A true survivor."

"Yeah, yeah. Get out." She waved him off and

swung her legs off the edge of the bed. She removed the slave outfit and tugged her fitted bodysuit into place. It hugged every curve but offered concealment, protection and rank insignia. She was marked as a Hunter, from the boots at the foot of the bed that she slipped into happily to the fangs that she had installed as soon as she could afford it. They tended to come in handy when your body was your last means of defence.

Her belt, complete with kit and ration packs, was folded on a chair. It sat snugly on her hips and when she was fully dressed, she turned to the mirror in the tiny lav and checked her reflection.

Ardel's long brown hair hadn't changed, but her dark chocolate eyes had something in them she didn't recognize. Her skin was still pale, but not the chalk white of the Vimpyr she had spent time with. The deep blue of her suit covered her all the way to the centre of her neck. It was nice to not be exposed to teeth or mouths.

Shaking her head, she pushed thoughts of Sorcal out of her mind. He was under arrest and it was for the best.

"Zin, what do you say we hit the commissary. Anything would be better than the last meal that I had at the club." She left the cubicle with a swing to her hips and stopped short. Her heart started pounding in her chest.

"Sorcal. I thought you were under arrest."

Zin was standing behind the Vimpyr, looking distinctly unhappy. Her pale owner was wearing a very familiar uniform, similar to hers in every detail, but one. He was a Master Hunter.

"Sorcal is under arrest."

"Then why are you here?"

"I am Hallor Matias, Master Hunter, leader of the Elite." He bowed formally and smiled. "Sorcal was killed in the holding cells. Tragic accident, but no one is looking for him."

Matias, Matias. It suddenly hit her, the married name of the Queen Mother of Naccar Hala I. She was a Terran. Eleanor Palmer by name. Eleanor Palmer Hala Matias by adoption and marriage.

The Elite were Naccar's personal guard trained and selected by General Heron Matias. "Are you related to..."

"My cousin. The King insists that his personal guard do some time on other worlds and my genetic peculiarity made it easy for me to spend two years in Alliance service. Getting out of it was a bit of a problem though."

It hit her with a sudden rush. "You were deep cover."

"I was."

She blinked. A thousand comments and insults flared in her mind, but all she said was, "Out of my way, Master Hunter. I need to get some food."

He grinned, showing his pointed teeth in a feral

grimace. "I told you calling me Master was an option."

She cursed, loudly, fluidly and all the way out the door and down the hallway. Zin trotted after her until she shooed him away, while Hallor, or whatever his name was, stayed in medical.

Ardel greeted a few crewmembers who congratulated her on a successful assignment. She merely smiled and nodded.

After loading a tray with her favourites and three rations of water, she sat at a table and worked things out.

Her assignment had not been to retrieve any particular person, just in case someone broke the mental blocks that Bara had put in place, but to go in as an enslaved Terran and give the Alliance a reason to raid Blood and Flesh.

Since Terrans were a restricted species, anyone caught trafficking faced the strictest penalties under Alliance law. She was the lure and they had taken the bait.

Her collar had had six different transponders in it, putting out a low and slow signal as the shielding on the club cycled on and off. Her clothing also was wired for sound and, she suspected, that the intake personnel had overlooked it on purpose.

When a figure sat down across from her, she didn't need to look up to know it was Hallor. "I

didn't say you could sit and I certainly didn't say you could steal my flat bread."

He munched casually. "You look better. Did they replace your memory?"

Dead, they were all dead. She nodded her head and looked him in the eyes. "Yes. I am aware that the wipe was my idea, but being used as a snack when you merely needed to keep me near you for the pick up was ludicrous."

"What about the other?"

"The sex?"

"Indeed."

"The sex was fine. Good. Great, I suppose."

He was suddenly all serious. "I would like to talk to you about the Impure."

"What about them?"

"What do you know of your status as a Terran Impure?"

"Nothing. No one wants to talk about it."

"It is something to be discussed privately. Will you join me in my quarters? I have dessert."

That was tempting. She loved sweets but rarely got the opportunity to indulge. "Fine. Lead the way."

Side by side, they walked through the halls, though Hallor made as if to take her arm twice before he caught himself.

She watched him out of the corner of her eye, still admiring the graceful flow of muscles under

his formfitting suit. He was beautiful. A true living statue of masculinity. Her body was humming with his nearness and she wanted to run to the opposite end of the ship until he was gone.

This awareness was bizarre. Nothing like it had been described to her by any of her social interaction councillors.

He led them to the VIP quarters. No wonder he had dessert. There was a full dispensing system in his rooms. He could have whatever he wanted, no ration spared.

The casual front room had couches and she took a seat on one, then looked at him expectantly.

"Tell me about Impures."

He walked to the food dispenser and fiddled for a moment before turning to her with two cups of coffee. He handed her one and sat on the same couch facing her from the other end.

"There was a race of energy beings called the Davil. They could no longer reproduce in their own bodies, so they travelled through space and found races they could bond to, inhabit and they spawned their legacy from there.

"My ancestors trace the Impurity back fourteen generations. It was my mother's side of the family that carried it, but my father did not care that his children would bear the marks of the Davil energy. He merely wanted my mother and

whatever came from her would be loved."

She nodded. It was nice that he had a supportive family. She caught a sob before asking, "So, what are the effects of this cross breeding?"

"In me, it means that I can be exposed to any form of light and I will not suffer from the sensitivity of my race. Nothing will burn me, which is why I was able to attain Master Hunter status."

She cleared her throat and sipped her coffee. "I don't have any side effects of the Impurity."

He smiled and ran a hand through that inky black hair of his. "Actually, you do. In you, the standard mate reaction is prevalent. When two unmated Impures come across each other, they start to sync up. This happened when we first touched and later when we were alone in my quarters."

"Oh. The energy tingle."

"Yes. I am told it gets more powerful with additional contact. Would you be willing to follow me home to try?"

"To Vimpyr? What would I do there? My blood is a freaking narcotic to them."

"I know. It was why I drank as soon as I could. There would be a challenge sooner or later for possession of you and I needed to be in full battle mode. Your blood revved me up nicely."

"And kept you revved up if what happened

next was any indication."

"Ah, my dear Ardel, one thing you need to learn about Vimpyr males, we can control the blood inside our bodies completely. If you had been up to it, I would have ridden you all night just to hear your moans and cries."

Her body rioted with the memory of his touch, but she scowled at him. "Enchanting image, thanks for that."

"Only the truth for you." He raised his coffee in a toast.

"That is fabulous, but I stand by my statement."

"I want you."

Her heart jumped in her chest as she pondered the implications of the statement. "Ah, the hormone thing. The electricity is causing the craving."

"The craving, yes, but the resonance between us is harmony. The energy just brought us close enough to check the attraction."

"I tend to find that a little farfetched." She cupped the coffee in her hands and breathed deeply.

He was looking at her with avid curiosity in his eyes. "You mean to say that in all your life, you have never felt this pull with anyone else?"

"No."

"Your parents never mentioned it? One or both of them would have resonated."

Her parents. The flashes of the crash hit her, but then she rewound her thoughts to happier times. The warm hum of her parents' love.

She could feel the shock in her eyes as she looked at him. "Both. They both hummed like this."

Hallor smiled. "It explains the strength of your signal. The energy of your mind fairly sings out to me."

"So, it was my singing that brought you to me?" Her lips were twitching as she tried to push memories of laughter and family to the back of her mind.

"No. It was the application report that you filed when you wanted to join the Volunteers and the tests that you underwent. I just placed the order and when you were ready, they brought you to me."

Ardel would always remember the flare of satisfaction that ran through her as her hot cup of coffee caught him unawares.

CHAPTER SIX

He moved with the speed of his race, flipping her and pinning her to the ground in a submission hold before she had a chance to do more than get to her feet.

“Apologize.”

“No.”

“Ask my forgiveness for throwing the beverage at me.”

“Go to hell. You can’t just order a Terran like she is takeout.”

“I beg to differ. The Davil have made an arrangement with the Alliance to gain partners for their offspring. They are to achieve this by any means necessary as long as the species in question is eligible for Alliance membership.” He held her wrists in his hand with one knee in her back. She was squished to the floor like a bug.

Hmm. It was a fairly clean floor. “Did you know there is what seems to be a dried fruit slice

under the couch?"

"Are you listening to me?"

"Of course, there is nothing else in this room that is irritating me as much as what you are saying. They would have told me if I was sent across the galaxies to be a blow up doll."

"You are reading too much into this. Your readings were confirmed as compatible with mine and so they sent you to me as the undercover agent to allow the Alliance to bring a presence to the facility."

"Great, so a useful blow up doll."

"I want you as a companion and mate for life, not until you spring a leak."

"You have researched Terran sex toys?" That caught her by surprise. She was used to saying things that didn't quite translate.

"Anything and everything to do with you, my dear."

She reeled back through her memories and brought up a few things that rang a bell. "You have only been off Vimpyr for two years. We just met two days ago."

"I told you. I requested you the moment that you applied and your tests confirmed your bloodlines. I believe you would call it putting *dibs* on you."

That was it. She rolled suddenly and kicked out, absently admiring the flex of his thighs as he

jumped up to avoid her leg. A smooth roll to her feet and she was facing him, her chest heaving with outrage.

She was fast, but he was faster. Every strike and kick was blocked as soon as she made the move. Vimpyr reflexes were just too fast for her. It was why his kind were such devastating predators. If not for their UV sensitivity, they would have created an empire that would have covered the Alliance.

As they fought, he moved her so that her back was against the wall. She had nowhere to run. Her strikes grew shorter, had less power and before she knew it, he was pressed against her, controlling her legs with his own and holding her wrists to the wall above her head.

His eyes were glowing, he was breathing as hard as she was, but in that instant, her rage turned to lust and dragged him with it.

She lunged up and licked slowly at his lower lip, flicking his teeth with her tongue before leaning in for a sudden deep kiss. The hum between them flared into an orchestra of energy that shook Ardel while burning into her veins and muscles that this man was hers.

His hips pressed against hers, rocking her against the wall as he took control of the kiss. He lifted her higher until they were perfectly aligned beneath their uniforms.

Pinned to the wall by his grip on her wrists and the pressure of his hips, a moan fought its way free of her lips. She dug her nails into her hands as the rocking of his erect cock against her covered clit brought her to a peak that surprised them both.

Fabric tore and his tongue and lips were working on her neck, warming, driving the pulse up to a frenzied beat an instant before he bit. Her gasp and moan brought more blood to her cheeks as he drank and the sucking took her higher, the aftershocks of her orgasm echoing into a new and roaring surge of release.

He licked the tiny pinpricks closed, sending shuddering tremors through her. He slowly let her regain her feet and leaned back, licking his lips.

The black irises of his eyes were dilated, leaving the crimson glow of his snacking on her in his gaze. "You were saying?"

"I forget."

He leaned forward and nuzzled at her neck. "Something about me not being able to put a claim on you."

"Oh, yeah. Right. You have no right to put *dibs* on me. I can make up my own mind." Her breathing was finally slowing, but the tracing of his lips on her sensitive skin were making it hard to concentrate.

"What would your choice be?"

"To accompany you. On a trial basis."

"Not good enough. To adapt properly, you will have to be altered. We can't have anyone kidnapping you to use your blood as a controlled substance."

She blinked. "Isn't that why you do it? Take my blood, I mean."

"I can't deny that it is rather intoxicating, but for me, the stimulation is the package, not the contents." The light graze of his teeth on her skin made her shudder. They were having one of the most serious conversations in her life and he was talking into her neck.

"You tore my uniform."

"I was in a hurry."

"It has closures."

"This was more dramatic." He was grinning against her skin and when he lifted his head to meet her gaze again, it was all over his face. He was happy and still turned on. That was obvious by the hard ridge of flesh still pressing against her but now against the soft curve of her belly.

"What are you so cheerful about?"

"You want me. I was afraid it was a side effect of the mind wipe."

"Well, it wasn't. So can we go into the bedroom and try this again with me not restrained?"

He cocked his head, a charming grin creeping at the corners of his mouth. "Do you mean

fighting? If you do, I am afraid I will win. Until you are altered, I don't think you can match my speed."

She wriggled her hands, then lowered them when he let go. He hissed in sympathy when he saw the wounds she had inflicted with her nails. "From now on, dig into my back when you come."

Lifting her hand to his lips, his tongue flicked out and healed the small crescents she had punched into her palms. She overlooked his cleaning of all of the blood for relief that she wasn't going to have to explain those marks to medical.

"And while I would love to take advantage of your agreement and enthusiasm, you need to be debriefed before we return here."

She blinked at him in shock but followed him as he led her to the bedroom. In a drawer, he removed a new uniform for her and gestured for her to put it on.

Ardel gave in to the impish urge to tease as she removed her belt, boots and then got down to the serious matter of opening the centre closure of the suit and shimmying free of it.

The convulsive swallow that Hallor exhibited was more than enough and when she turned to push the suit over her hips and he licked his lips, she had to fight laughter. She removed the damaged suit and tugged the new one onto her

body, covering the skin that he seemed intent on memorizing.

Boots and belt back in place, she turned to face him. "Shall we go?"

"You will pay for that."

"My dear Hallor. I certainly hope so." She exited the room with a sprint, he was right behind her. The knock on the door came just as he caught her up in his arms.

"Come." He ordered the door to open.

"That is what I was trying to do." She muttered it under her breath before he covered her mouth with his hand.

Zin was standing in the open doorway, a look of shock followed by resignation on his features. "The captain is requesting you for debriefing, Master Hunter Matias. You as well, Hunter Sak."

"Lead the way." Hallor answered for them, his hand still firmly over her mouth.

She started to talk as they walked and he removed his hand. She breathed freely for an instant before scowling. "Were you trying to smother me? I was about to lick your hand to get some freedom."

"I might have enjoyed having your tongue on me." His lascivious look made her smirk.

They were lovers now or would be the instant that they were alone and away from their duties. Ardel sighed to herself the instant she realized

that she had given up the fight.

When Hallor returned to Vimpyr, she would be with him. He just didn't need to know it quite yet.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The captain was also of the Tival race and Ardel greeted him formally. "Captain Leosh. Nice to see you again."

"Hunter Sak. You as well. You look fit." He was giving her formfitting uniform a good once over. The instant that Hallor stepped in front of her, he looked up from his appraisal of her hips.

"You will behave with respect toward my mate, captain. She is not for you."

That was blunt, but the three men in the room resonated on a primitive level for a moment before they all relaxed in a strange kind of accord.

"Hey, I have not agreed to anything of the kind. I am not formally anyone's mate."

"Ardel, if you wish me to take you over my knee here and now, I will do it."

The look in his eyes said he meant it. She uncharacteristically shut up.

The captain fought a grin, but managed to get

out the formal, "Hunter Sak, please have a seat and tell me everything that you saw while you were in Blood and Flesh."

"Aside from the consumption of unwilling blood donors?" She took a deep breath and gave him everything she had seen. All illegal transactions. Drugs, the few couples who were just there for a little dark recreation and, of course, the transactions that Sorcal had been engaging in.

Hallor looked at her in surprise. "All that? They weren't kidding when they mentioned you were the most observant Hunter for the position."

"It explains why there is a reward for your capture, Ardel. A mutant has placed an exorbitant price on your head for you to be brought to him. Alive."

It wasn't the first time she had the dubious distinction of having a price on her head. "What mutant?"

"Hilart. He put together a raid on the facility with your appearance. Smart for one of his kind, really."

"What is his kind? I was trying to place it, but he has features from nine different species that I could recognize and none of those are breeding compatible."

"He is an infusion of the different races. He probably selected the characteristics himself. The process is painful and takes six months or more

and involves genetic grafting.”

Ardel shuddered. The thought of doing that to oneself deliberately chilled her. “Is this related to the push for exotics that is suddenly picking up speed?”

The captain steeped his fingers and placed his elbows on the table, leaning forward. “It was the first step. The next step is to either use the exotics to create unstoppable armies or to graft their genetic characteristics onto the pirates, raiders and slavers who want to pay for the privilege.”

“That doesn’t answer the question of why he wants me alive, I don’t have any particular talents.” She drummed her fingers on the table in a random beat.

Hallor leaned back and looked resigned. “I believe I know part of the reason for his request.”

“Well, don’t keep it to yourself, spill.”

“If he has any Vimpyr characteristics, being around you would have woken a hunger in him he hadn’t felt before.”

“So, he wants me because I make him hungry?” She shuddered, those spikes combined with the sharp teeth would create a very unpleasant scenario for her.

“Because his body is telling him that he could be stronger, faster, more aggressive with your blood in him.”

Zin finally spoke, “Is that why you want her?”

Everyone turned to look at him, but he wasn't backing down.

Hallor spoke calmly, not rising to the bait. "If I was another species, I would still want her. We are both Impure and we have a resonance together that is not easily dismissed."

The look on Zin's face as he looked at Ardel went from wistful to distaste in that instant. "You never mentioned that, Ardel."

"I didn't know what it meant. Still don't really. But it explains why some people I meet hum and others don't." She shrugged. It was nice to know that he only wanted her when Zin thought she was a pure Terran. Racist bugger.

The captain cleared his throat and drew their attention back to the debriefing. "Is there anything else you noted while you were there?"

"Yes. Nothing of concern though." A pitcher of water on the table got her attention and she poured herself a glass. Telling them that Razia was an Alliance sleeper agent was probably something they already knew and Zin didn't need to know. Enjels made excellent spies simply because no one suspected someone so obvious.

She looked around with an eyebrow raised. "Anyone else care for water?"

The captain and Hallor each raised their fingers for water and when she had served them all, she waited. Just before they took a sip, she held up her

hand to stop them.

"You may not want to drink that. Zin laced it with something."

The male in question froze in place as the two other men looked at him in dawning rage.

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Fine. Drink some of the water. If it's only water, you won't have a problem, but you looked at the carafe thirty-two times while I watched, so there has to be something in the water."

She held her glass out to him, watching as he literally flinched backward away from it. "That answers that question."

Hallor moved out of his chair with a spooky gliding speed. Zin was pressed to the floor and his wrists cuffed behind him in under three seconds.

"Do you have an explanation?" Hallor's growl was unmistakable.

Of course, Zin couldn't answer as his face was flat against the floor.

Captain Leosh was using a scanner that he removed from a drawer to analyze the water. "Sedative, strong sedative. We would have been on the floor in seconds."

"Why?" She looked to Zin and he looked up at her from the floor, a fury that she had never suspected in his gaze.

Nothing was coming out of him, that much was certain. Well, nothing verbal. She walked to the

com unit and pressed a toggle. "Please locate Minder Bara and send her to this location."

"Will do. She is en route." The voice was masculine and stern. The Pilot was speaking through the unit, using the ship as his own body. It was a peculiar arrangement, but the Pilots seemed to like it. "The brig is expecting Zin as soon as you are done with him. Security will be outside the door."

Ardel thanked him and turned to the tableau that was behind her. Hallor had Zin up on his feet with one arm around his neck. Leosh was staring into the eyes of his favourite shuttle commander. "Why, Zin? What could we have done to you that was so horrible? The whole ship would have been in an uproar in an instant. Where did you think you could go?"

"Wait for the Minder, captain. Hallor might let him breathe by the time she gets here."

Though it was tempting to intervene, Ardel could tell that keeping Hallor from shoving Zin around would have been foolish. He was in an alpha-male fury and it was best to stay at a safe distance. She didn't want to be bitten and his teeth were out.

Bara was flustered, her faintly leonine features confused as she took in the situation.

"Zin tried to sedate us and we don't know why. Could you read him and get an answer?"

“I can, but you may not like what turns up.” Bara gestured for them to seat Zin as his eyes grew wide at the approach of the woman who was going to rip his mind apart. “Hold him. This is going to hurt.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bara's gaze went distant as she entered Zin's thoughts. It was painful to watch until she started to speak.

"He wants *upgrading* as they are now calling it, but the price was Ardel Sak. They want her for something, but he doesn't know what." She shivered but kept her hands cupped to either side of Zin's skull. He was shaking, a small trail of blood leaked out his left ear and Ardel cupped her elbows as she crossed her arms.

"Seduction was his first line of attack, but when you didn't fall into his arms, he came up with the idea of drugging all of you and under the guise of carrying you to medical, taking you to a shuttle bay. There is a jump ship waiting on the other side of the third planet of this system. He just needed to get you to them and they would give him what he wanted."

Ardel had heard of a forced reading before, but

seeing Zin's body thrashing around and held down by Leosh and Hallor with Bara calmly raping his thoughts was enough to make her nauseous.

"Why was he shocked by my Impurity?"

"He thought it may queer the deal if you were not a pure-blood Terran. He feared for his chances to make his dreams come true. He really wants fangs, claws and wings. He feels it will make up for all injustices that he suffered growing up."

Bara removed her hands from him as he slumped unconscious, blood and mucous flowing freely from his nose, crimson trickles out his ears.

"He's out. No need to hold him, he won't be waking any time soon." The Minder looked like she wanted to scrub her hands, so Ardel directed her to the small lav off the conference room.

Captain Leosh was at the com quietly issuing orders. If the exotic collectors wanted Alliance personnel, they would get them.

Ardel went to the door and took the shackles that the security personnel handed her. Just to be safe, she tested each clasp, then frisked Zin to make sure that he didn't have any auto releases or keys.

They took him into custody, possibly to throw him in with the rest of the prisoners, she didn't care. She was spoiling for a fight. "Which boarding party will I be assigned to?"

"None. You are remanded into Master Hunter Matias' custody for medical treatment."

"What? I am perfectly healthy."

"And we want you to stay that way. You are undergoing alteration to match your physiology to that of the Vimpyr so that you won't look like a walking intoxicant when we deliver you to their home world." Captain Leosh jerked his head toward her and Hallor moved.

"Sonofabitch!" Hallor had her up against the wall, this time face first while he worked on securing her hands. "How can you force this change on me?"

"Your Representative authorized it, three years ago. We just didn't get around to it until now." Hallor's voice was hot in her ear and before she knew it, she was swung into his arms and carried down the hall.

Medical was ready and waiting for her.

Resigned, she let them uncuff her, strip her and lower her into the tank with a tangle of inserted wires and drips coming off exposed skin. Hallor held her hand until the last moment when the top of the tank sealed and she was floating in her own little world.

Fury rippled through her when Hallor stood in front of her tank and spoke with Captain Leosh. She could read lips well enough to know that they were planning the boarding of the vessel that she

was now blocked from attacking. *Bastards.*

Bobbing in her tank, she flipped Hallor the bird while he blew her a kiss. *Jackass.* Reading lips was Hunter protocol.

He looked a little surprised but terribly smug as he patted her tank before he left.

She watched his tight ass until the doors slid shut, leaving her with the doctors and assistants who were preparing for the influx of prisoners and personnel.

They didn't have to wait long. The first injuries were from electric burns and blasts of weapons as well as radiation exposure. They were the personnel from the battle turrets.

The ship shuddered occasionally as debris from an unknown source struck and bounced off the hull. The frustration that Ardel felt was hers alone. Fear was stamped on several faces in the medical bay, both on and off the gurneys.

Minder Bara came into medical and helped to calm some of those traumatized. When everyone was calm, she wandered over to look in on Ardel. *How are you feeling?*

Frustrated. They just had to pop me in here before they went into battle, didn't they?

They meant well. You are a desired commodity and they needed you where they could find you. Well, Hallor does. He worries about you.

Anything in particular?

Whether you will love his world as he does. If you can adapt easily to life with a limited UV range. If your blood sings when he touches you like his does when you give him the lightest caress.

I don't know if he would appreciate you telling me this.

Tough. He locks you in a tube, so he deserves what he gets. Bara smiled, then cocked her head. They are boarding the cargo ship. Minimal resistance. Oh lords.

What, what is it?

They have found tanks. Lots of tanks. Each with a Terran and each with an extending blood tube.

Ardel shuddered. What does that mean? Are they alive?

They are alive, two dozen of them. It seems their blood was being used as a reward, possibly a food source. Whatever it is, they are going to be brought into the cargo bay of the Aslo Nekril. The fighting is moving to the upper decks. Minimal casualties.

She shuddered in the grip of the nutrients and oxygenated fluid that she was suspended in. Food. There were humans out there being used for food and they were in tanks just as she was, only not placed there by loving hands.

If there was any food in her stomach, she would have hurled it right then, but the docs had removed anything that would contaminate her environment.

Maybe life as a predator would be better than

what was rapidly becoming life as prey.

Bara stayed with her for the six hours it took until Hallor came back to rest his hand on her tank. He rested his forehead against the plexi that separated them and sighed. Ardel matched the placement of his hand and scooted down as best she could to mimic his position. He was exhausted. It showed in every line of his body. The heavily muscled shoulders drooped and despite her irritation at her confinement, she felt a moment of sympathy.

Ardel counted on his being able to read her lips.
How long will I be in here?

Ten days. There has been a new improvement in the technique.

How many of the Terrans didn't make it?

He didn't ask how she knew, it showed in his posture. *Four.*

Twenty survivors?

Yes.

Then think of them. We all knew the risks of coming out amongst all these races. Our lives were forfeit the moment we stepped on those shuttles.

I am glad you didn't forfeit.

As am I. Now, what will I be able to eat during the adaptation phase when I get out of here?

His grin lightened their mood. *Me. It is only appropriate to share blood between mating couples.*

Never in public either, so I will have you all to myself.

Then you had better get some rest, because when I get out of here, I am going to drain you dry.

She was smiling at him in an effort to get him to grin, but the heated lust in his gaze almost had her breaking through the tank in a bid to jump him. She sighed and sent up a stream of bubbles. *Nine more days.*

CHAPTER NINE

***D**ecanting day. Your new eyes are lovely, but your hair hasn't changed.*

Minder Bara, Captain Leosh and the doctors were standing next to the only one she had eyes for, Hallor Matias.

The platform was swung into position and she was lifted out of the top of the tank, her pale body was slick against the metal as she was removed from the liquid and lowered to a gurney where the leads and tubes would be removed.

This part of the procedure was not comfortable, but Hallor stayed in her line of sight the entire time. It was part comfort and part tease. Though the tank had met her nutritional requirements, a hunger that was new but not unknown gripped her. She wanted Hallor every way she could think of to have him and a few new ones that had just come to her while she bobbed along changing her physiology.

The doctors sealed the wounds made by the equipment and draped her in a light hospital gown. Her skin was almost painfully sensitive, so when Hallor got the all clear to take her off to rest, she gasped when he lifted her.

“What is it?” He stopped and was turning toward the doctors.

“I just got a full body shiver when you touched me. Can we get me showered before I latch onto your neck and don’t let go?” Fighting the urge to feed was hard. She was shaking with the effort to keep her hands off him and deliberately not looking at the corded muscles and veins of his neck.

His steps picked up speed as they headed to the VIP quarters. He was stumbling as he opened the door and when he made it into the lav, she sighed happily. “Just a minute.”

He let her slide down his body and her hunger spiked again as she realised that the small contact they had was acting on him as well. The hard, hot ridge of flesh called to her. First a shower.

She flipped the gown over her head and walked into the shower, turning it on and shivering until the water warmed. It got a lot warmer when Hallor joined her, crowding her against the wall and lifting her until that hard appendage was nudging between her folds and her own body weight was impaling her.

His groan as he slowly became fully seated in her and resonated with the pulse of power between them. He lifted her hips and let her slide back onto him in a slow and intense beat.

When she couldn't stand it anymore, she locked her ankles behind his hips, dug her fingers into his shoulders and bit the joint where neck and shoulder met. His howl of satisfaction as the pain-pleasure pushed him into orgasm muffled her groan of satisfaction as blood filled her mouth and she swallowed convulsively.

Oh. That was what she wanted. The trickle of warm, rich, coppery liquid down her throat matched the warm spurts in her belly. *Whoa. That's new.*

She had had sex before, but despite what years of reading romance novels had led her to believe, she had not actually *felt* the ejaculation of her partner. It must be the adjustments of the new body, but she liked the sensation.

A sharp pop to her head got her attention and she released his neck, licking the small trails of blood away. "What?"

"You are going to continue to need to feed over a period of time, best not to kill me, love."

She leaned back and licked her lips. "Your taste changed a few seconds after I bit you."

"Pleasure. Pleasure changes the taste to something intoxicating."

He was still embedded in her and they were still standing in the warm spill of the shower. Bemused, she kissed him, rocking her hips to feel the rigid flesh inside her.

"So, you said pleasure changes the taste?" She leaned forward and licked at some of the small crescents she had cut into his flesh.

"Let me check." His head darted forward and she gasped as he bit her without first numbing the area with his tongue. The pain still rippled through her, but as he sucked, he pressed her against the wall and pounded into her over and over until she came in a gasping shriek.

Hallor withdrew his bite and licked her flesh closed. "Yup. Different and intoxicating."

She was still clinging to him when he walked back into the bedroom and fell to the bed with her above him. He tugged her hair until she lay across his chest with him still buried inside her.

"Where did the DNA come from?"

"What?"

"The DNA that was blended with mine for Vimpyr characteristics. Where did it come from?"

"King Naccar Hala. He graciously allowed me to use his DNA for my mate's new bloodlines." He kissed her forehead.

She leaned up, pressing him more firmly into her. "You are serious?"

"Deadly. I had to clear it with nineteen Alliance

officials, but we managed the paperwork." His finger idly caressed her jaw line and trailed down her throat.

"We?"

"Eleanor Palmer Hala Matias. Queen Mother. She is looking to add another Terran to our population. She was delighted when I mentioned that you were my blood mate."

"Oh." She placed her head back into position on his chest and thought things out. She had engaged in quite a bit of research and introspection during her confinement. If the alteration was complete, she would even be able to bear a child with the Vimpyr-Terran characteristics. The process just made sure that she no longer smelled like a cream pie at a diet convention to the Vimpyrs.

Involving the royal family made her head spin, but Terrans were a surprisingly close group for people who had never met until they left their home world. Eleanor probably jumped at the chance to have another Terran nearby. It was like being members of a large, extended family, but you liked all of your relatives on sight.

"If you wish to work, there is a place for you in the Queen Mother's detail. Or even the King's entourage if you wish it. If you simply want to blend into the community, I have a charming house near Herun's home. We can live there or the palace—anywhere you want to live is fine with

me."

"How close are the members of your family?" Her fingers traced idle patterns on his chest.

"My parents are both still alive, I have two brothers and a sister. I am the second child." He played with her hair a little. "What about your family?"

"Dead. All dead in a car wreck when I was seven. My parents and little sister died on impact." She let the tears flow and sniffled a bit as the memory washed over her. "Sorry about the water works. The Minder's touch brought it all back like new."

"It is a side effect, but don't worry. You have all the time in the worlds now and some of the most exclusive blood in those worlds flowing through your veins."

"And now through yours as well. How did it taste?" She wiped her tears away and leaned up on his chest. A weak smile was all she could manage, but it was enough.

He rolled her to her back and supported himself on his elbows. "I think I might want to take a taste again to make sure."

"Sound thinking." She extended her neck.

"Oh, I have a different location in mind. Do you know how many nerves you have between your thighs?" He slid free of her body and she shivered as he used his tongue to trace a line down her ribs

across the soft curve of her belly and down her left thigh. Her legs were still spread, so he lapped and licked down to her knee, then slowly dragged his tongue back up until he had her arching under the lash of his touch.

Mindlessly, she wove her fingers through his hair, holding him between her thighs. She started to go over the edge when his teeth grazed her flesh and the moment that he thrust his fingers into her while biting hard, she bucked in an effort to bring him inside her.

The suction so close to her sex had her shaking and shivering as waves of pleasure washed over, around and through her.

She gasped in exhaustion when he finally let her come down and rejoined her at the top of the bed. "Yup. Pleasure makes you taste better and the royal blood gives you a certain richness that wasn't there before."

She punched him. "Funny."

He snickered. "I thought so."

She slugged him again, then curled up against his side. He may be a jerk, but he had a sensitive side and he had given her all she needed. He had called her *love*.

CHAPTER TEN

The formal wear of the Vimpyr was lovely, but Ardel really liked the metal fighting fans that she was given and she practiced frequently in the week before the wedding by stripping Hallor one slice at a time.

He was a remarkably good sport about it and merely ordered more uniforms.

Eleanor Matias was a down-to-earth woman who had been a Companion to the King before adopting him and becoming Queen Mother. Together, they had used her status as a Companion to hide his self-defence, etiquette, off-world negotiation and deportment lessons. They had also fought for his throne, a matter made possible by the Blood Proxy. Eleanor had been given Naccar's genetic template and was able to step in to assist in the battle to the death that had won his throne.

She had two little girls and they were being

given defence lessons by their mother and father in equal measure. It would take a strong man to date one of those girls when they grew up.

King Naccar had settled fortunes on his two sisters by blood and was delighted to extend that courtesy to Ardel, his daughter by blood. He was the same age that she was and they got along very well, including rounds of checkers while they awaited the formalities of a royal-blood wedding.

Hallor had brought his family in to meet her, his mother smiled when she felt the resonance that Ardel generated and his father was delighted that she was coming with a huge dowry.

Her hunger had abated. She was only peckish when she was in Hallor's arms. An occurrence that was in stolen moments until the contracts were signed.

Weddings on Vimpyr were not simple or quick. Even the lowest caste could not rush a wedding more than one week.

Ardel and Hallor were dancing, a formal waltz that Eleanor had brought back into fashion.

"Any regrets?" She smiled as he swept her in a turn that left her dizzy.

"No. Are you sure that you want to take a hiatus and live in the countryside?"

"Yes. I want to learn the pulse of this planet and the only way to learn it is to really live in it. I can't

do that in the palace.”

“No complaints here, but I hope you know how to cook.” His last comment was murmured in her ear. His breath snaked down her exposed neck and warmed everything it touched.

She laughed, throwing her head back and letting the peals of mirth ring through the ballroom. “It is a little late for that, Hallor.”

“Am I to guess that you don’t have skills in the kitchen?”

“Oh, I have skills, but it is finally time to turn the tables.”

“What?”

“It is time to put your life in my hands.”

Chuckling, they moved to the side table where King Naccar was standing ready to confirm the official documents. They each signed with their Hunter standing and planet of origin, the word Impure after each of them.

No secrets, no lies, no hiding. Ardel smiled as the seal was set on the contract and she leaned into Hallor’s arms. And as soon as she could manage, no clothing.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Vimpyr race was born of my urge to turn creatures of human myth and legend into alien races. They first appeared in Blood Proxy. A tale of love, lust, fight and flight. Eleanor Palmer was wonderful as a first character as a Companion that didn't sleep with her clients. She was the ultimate instructor, nanny and friend for a lonely prince who would be king. Having General Matias around distracted her, but she kept her mind on her business.

As you can tell, I like Eleanor, but then, I like most of my characters. It is why I write them.

Thank you for joining me in this tale of blood, lust and bloodlust. ☺

Viola Grace

<http://www.violagrace.com>

<http://www.extasybooks.com>

<http://www.devinedestinies.com>

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.

Viola's email:

viola@violagrace.com

Viola's website:

<http://www.violagrace.com>