



IMPATIENT

Viola Grace

Eva has met her match, but though he is older than she is, he will not be physically mature for sixteen years. Their solution is to put her in stasis. She would have gone mad, but her connection to her match keeps her sane, even if he is way too short for her. When she wakes, her best friend is holding her and with his help, she will soon be back to her normal activities. If only she didn't have the almost constant urge to peel his clothing off, she would be fine. Giving into her lust is fun, but preparing for his ascension isn't. As much as she is enjoying romps in the sheets, shower, sofa, chairs, she has no urge to engage in a public consummation of their affection.

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Impatient  
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**IMPATIENT**  
**A TERRAN TIMES NOVELLA**

**BY**

**VIOLA GRACE**

## CHAPTER ONE

**E**va Morris checked her reflection one more time before she turned to leave her rooms. Every hair was in place and the folds of her gown were immaculate.

Her hands shook slightly as she finished verifying her appearance. Today was of paramount importance to her future and she wanted everything to go perfectly.

When she opened the door to the hall, the honour guard was standing there waiting to take her to her fiancé. The guards did not even look at her, intent on their surroundings and delivering her safely. She was free to analyze their features, she sighed mentally, confessing to herself that she wanted to stroke that golden skin. Golaz were a very lovely people. She recognized the race even though details were not available for her to check in any of the Alliance databases. They were a mystery.

Her stint in the diplomatic service was going to be of use to anyone that was chosen as her match

and she had long ago given up plans to find the man or creature of her dreams out here in space. Her conversation with the Terran Representative and fifth Champion, Amy Tyrell, echoed in her mind.

*"I am going to make the best deal I can for you, Eva, but you have to know that there is already a bidding war for your genetic contribution. You may not get the best looking, but I will negotiate for the best match."*

With Amy's history as a Negotiator as a resounding endorsement of her talents, Eva had simply waited, her time spent as a translator for etiquette and social visits. She lived on Nycal station and she was always busy assisting travellers with their communication requirements.

Now, she finally had the request she was waiting for. A wedding proposal that would grant her property rights on Golaz as well as the children she wanted to have. If only she could stomach the male they had selected for her, everything would be fine.

No. She had to push those thoughts out of her mind. Amy would never have entertained an offer from someone that Eva couldn't learn to love. She took a deep breath and concentrated on holding her head high as she walked in the protection of the honour guard.

They stopped in front of a door in the VIP wing of the station. A complicated access code opened

the door and she stepped into the audience room of the Golaz royal family.

*Uh oh.* There were two males in royal garb in the room. One was so old as to be almost living jerky and the other looked to be about twelve.

Suddenly, Eva had the urge to strangle Her Royal Highness, Empress Amanda of the Haldis Imperium.

"Translator Eva Morris? I am Storoth Elengar, Prince to the Golaz throne." The short blonde stood and gave her a formal bow, then reached forward to raise her hand to his lips for a kiss.

"Uh. Aren't you a little young?"

The elder on the other side of the table snorted. "I told him the same thing, but he insisted that if you were his perfect mate no other would do."

"I am not as young as my appearance would have you believe. In the research I have done on your species, I realize that my looks will lead you to assume I am much younger than yourself. In truth, I am half a decade older. The Golaz mature slowly."

That would make him thirty-two. She felt slightly less queasy. "I still don't see the point to all of this."

"Please sit. I have a proposal to make to you."

She took her seat. "What's on your mind, squirt?"

His dark gold eyebrows rose over eyes that

were a fascinating shade of amber. His skin was the same rich gold as his guards, but the scowl that he gave her was all immature male.

"That is an inappropriate way to address me."

"I know. I am checking your temper." She sat up straight and tried to make her face take on an attentive look. "You have a proposal?"

He stood and began pacing with his hands behind his back, an earnest look on his features. "You are here because this is the last resort and I cannot risk not having a mate when I reach maturity."

"Why not one of your own species?"

"There were two matches made for me at birth and both women have been assassinated. No other of my race who is available is a suitable match. You are the next best thing."

"Flattering."

"Not really. In lieu of my own kind, we found a Class Zero of a suitable race. Terrans. You seem to be rather easy to manipulate genetically and as a Class Zero, you will allow our offspring to have the greatest amount of Golaz genes in action. It is imperative to keep our transformation talent in the royal line."

This was news to her. "Transformation?"

"I will demonstrate, Your Highness." The elder stood and blurred in place. The spot where he stood was no longer occupied by a man, but a lion.



Though even in this new form, he was a senior, the power in his stride was unmistakable. She smiled as he turned, winked and then shifted into his bipedal form once again.

"Thank you, Eslor." Storoth smiled as he took in the expression on her face. "You seem surprised."

"I have heard of the shifters but have never seen an actual shift. Thank you for the demonstration, Eslor, was it?" She nodded to the elder and he grinned and nodded back.

"Enough. This is what I propose. Since you are at your peak reproductive age for your race..."

"Hey..."

"And I will not be at my peak for another sixteen years, we have arranged cryo-stasis for you until we match up."

*Cryo?* "What?"

His pre-adolescent smirk was justified she supposed. "Are you dense? Your medical reports indicate that you seem to be in good health...perhaps your species does not age as well as we had hoped."

"Very funny, squirt. I suppose I have to agree to this?" Her mind whirled as she imagined all of the things she would have to do, all the calls she would have to make to let her people know that she was coming back in under two decades.

"Not particularly. Your government has agreed

and you really have no choice in the matter. I am sorry."

The elder had moved faster than her eye could track and the hiss of a hypospray indicated that she had been dosed.

"They have the facility to start your stasis here, Eva." Storoth's face was in front of her as she buckled and fell to the carpet.

"I will get even, squirt." She felt his hands holding her head gently as blackness overtook her. "Sixteen years and I will kick your..."

\* \* \* \*

"She seems rather aggressive, Your Highness."

"Just mouthy, Eslor. It is her only defence mechanism after all." Storoth stroked the golden brown strands of her hair, so like that of his own people. Her eyes, as well, were a deep brown, not unusual and if their offspring would have her colouring, it would still blend in.

"Even so, are you sure that she is the one? You may find another in the next sixteen years."

"If I don't? It took ten years to find her and she has been in the Alliance for five years. My line will end if I do not have a mate for my ascension. That is something I will not tolerate." He knew that his voice was grim.

"Get the guards and help me get her to

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Medical. She will be out for hours, but I don't want her to wake during processing. I have heard it is rather uncomfortable...even for those who are prepared."

As his tutor, mentor and guardian summoned the guards to carry his mate to Medical, he buried his face in her hair and breathed deep. Yes, she was the one. The moment that he had been sent a scent sample, he had known and enjoying the banter with her had proved it. She was his destiny. Now, they only needed the passage of time.

For the first time in his life, he was impatient.

## CHAPTER TWO

Installing his mate in the catacombs beneath the city had seemed like the most prudent thing to do. Storoth was erring on the side of caution with his first two matches murdered. They had been nice girls, friendly and charming, but their families had not taken their safety seriously and death had been the result.

It was tradition for the mate-to-be to attend all formal functions and Storoth and Eslor had come up with a solution. It was a bit of a cheat, but it held to the spirit of the tradition. A holographic camera would be aimed at the still face of Eva and a projected image would attend all formal functions. The advising council accepted it as it kept Storoth from dismissing them all.

“Be careful with her containment unit. I don’t want her jostled.” He was supervising her placement. They had her reclined at a seventy-degree angle and the cameras were going into position for the body scan.

“Yes, Your Highness.” The workers were efficient and soon had Eva’s unit supported and hooked up to its power and supply lines.

The false wall went into place around her unit. She was safe, protected, monitored and camouflaged. There was nothing else that Storoth could think of to do.

When there was nothing left in the room that remotely looked like a stasis unit, Storoth laid down a column of wiring from wall to wall. A decoy so that anyone who did find the chamber would think that they were able to destroy the stasis unit by wrecking that cable. The chamber would only open to his hand or that of his private guard. Valen and Rosh had been in his service since birth and he trusted them with his life.

There was no one to see him walk to the wall and press his hand against it. No one to watch him activate the implant that he had insisted on. *Eva?*

*What the hell?*

He smiled. It was working. *You are on Golaz – safe and in stasis.*

*Great. Why am I hearing you?*

*Because nerves communicate faster than speech. You are hearing my thoughts in less than a second and I yours.*

*Neat. But I am still going to kick your butt, squirt.*

*I look forward to the moment that you can try.*

*Go and be a prince. I have some napping to do and*

*you need to age so I am not picking on a kid.*

*As you wish, my lady.*

*Nighty night, squirt.*

\* \* \* \*

Storoth sighed as he indulged in his favourite guilty pleasure. Speaking to Eva. It was long after everyone had gone to bed and only Valen and Rosh were still around. They accompanied him without question as they had for the last ten years.

*Eva, are you there?*

*Where else would I be, squirt?*

*I thought you might have found a way to tunnel out by now.*

*Haven't looked into it. Didn't want to ruin my nails, short stuff.*

Her constant references to his lack of stature were now amusing. She had no idea that he had grown almost two feet since they had last met. His training with his warriors was coming along as well. Speed and strength were taking shape as his body took on the aspect of an adult.

*I will remember to keep standing appointments for you at the groomer when you emerge.*

*When will that be? How long have I been in here?*

*Ten years. Only six to go before my ascension.*

*Fabulous.*

*You have some maintenance scheduled for next week.*

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*Do I? I will have to check my calendar.*

*I am pretty sure you are free.*

*What will they do?*

*Take you out and put you into a new chamber.*

*Brush your teeth, that sort of thing.*

*Funny, short stuff.*

*I think so.*

There was a matter of necessity that he needed to discuss with her, but he didn't know how she would feel about it.

*Eva.*

*Yes, squirt?*

*I am having my formal introduction to pleasure this week.*

*A what?*

*You know what I mean.*

*Ah. Oh. I understand. Aren't you a little small for that kind of thing?*

*I have grown in the last decade.*

*I suppose it is all right then. Is it all right?*

*I thought you might have an objection as my mate-to-be.*

*Well, an objection wouldn't really do me any good, now would it?*

*Well, not really, but I wanted to keep you in the loop.*

He didn't know how she could sigh in his mind, but she did it. A tumbling gust of air through his consciousness.

*Consider me in the loop. Just spare me the squishier*

*details. I want to keep the inside of the chamber clean.*

His laugh was not only in his mind. It echoed in the chamber.

\* \* \* \*

“Be careful. I have her.” She was in his arms at last. Of course, she was also an unhealthy shade of blue and cold to the touch, but Eva was with him.

*Storoth, are you holding me?*

*I am.*

*You smell good.*

The pleased grin surprised the technicians working frantically to put the new unit into position. *Thank you.*

*How was sex 101?*

*Fun. I understand all the fuss now.*

*Oh goody. Enjoy yourself, I guess.*

*Have you ever...*

*Done the horizontal mambo?*

*Uh...yes?*

*Nope. Never found a guy I wanted to get naked with.*

He looked down at the pale, sickly creature in his arms. *Never?*

*Well, not so far. Put me on a gurney and wheel me through the halls and I will go shopping for a bed buddy. The snort in her mind was unmistakable and not very ladylike.*

*What about me?*



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*We will see. Six years to go, right?  
Five years, two hundred and fifty-six days.  
Are you petting my hair?  
Can you feel that?  
Yes.*

"Your Highness, it is time to place her in the new unit." The technician was a little bemused by the tender manner in which the stasis patient was being held.

*"Very well."*

*I will see you in five years, two hundred and fifty-six days.* He placed a gentle kiss on her lips and backed away so they could seal the unit.

*You had better. If I went through all of this and you change your mind, I am going to find a way to run you through. With something dull. Possibly a spoon.*

*And I will deserve it. Goodnight, Eva.  
Goodnight, Storoth.*

\* \* \* \*

Something wasn't right. She could feel someone else close to her. Too close.

*Storoth?*

He was far away, but she could hear his voice.

*Eva? What is wrong?*

*Someone is in here with me and it isn't you.*

*I am on my way.*

Eva felt the urgency in his tone. She kept her mind out and scanning the area in a way she

hadn't realized that she could. Storoth had explained the implants, but this was beyond that. She was seeking and finding other minds in her vicinity, but the closest one was hostile, angry and feminine.

Storoth arrived in under five minutes, but it was the longest five minutes of Eva's time in the case.

*I have her. She is being removed from your vicinity, Eva. Don't worry.*

*Who was she?*

*A lady who wanted to take your place. Well, not much of a lady, more of a psychotic whore.*

*I see. How did she find me?*

*One of my new guardsmen is currently looking for other employment.*

*Ah. Thank you for coming so quickly.*

*Thank you for making the effort to call for help. How did you do that by the way?*

*I don't have the foggiest notion. It just happened.*

*I am glad it did. She had already taken a knife to the decoy cable, but she was hacking at the wall that shields you. It was a very near thing.*

*Thanks for coming to my rescue.*

*Whatever I can do for my lady. Goodnight, Eva.*

*Goodnight, short stuff.*

His chuckle sent her back into the warm cocoon of darkness.

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*Eva, it's decanting day.*

*Is it? So soon? The eagerness in her mind was unmistakable.*

*It has been sixteen years, love.*

*It didn't feel that long.*

*Just relax and you will wake up in the royal hospital. I promise to be there when you wake.*

*You had better be, squirt. I still owe you an ass kicking.*

*His laugh was unconfined. You will need to regain muscle control first. Give yourself a few weeks.*

*Fine. But then your butt is mine.*

*All yours, love. Now sleep and when you wake, I will be there.*

*Goodnight, Storoth.*

*Good day, Eva.*

\* \* \* \*

Her throat was dry. It was the first thing that she noticed. The second was that she was not reclining on a standard hospital-issue bed. There was a large male under her. She was propped up against his chest and he was absently running his fingers through her hair.

"Storoth?" It was her first word in sixteen years. "Water," was her second.

"Yes, Eva. I told you that I would be an adult by your standards by the time you came out, but I

don't think you really believed me." He held out a cup with a straw and she sipped slowly at the tepid water. His voice was a bass boom and she wanted nothing more than to turn around and examine him, but she couldn't even hold her hand up without tremors affecting her.

The hand holding the cup was huge. Calloused and warm, it dwarfed the cup that would comfortably fit her two hands.

The skin was the gold of the Golaz and his scent was what finally stopped the staccato beat of her heart. It *was* Storoth.

"You got big."

"Are you sure you aren't learning impaired? I have checked your medical files and they don't mention it." His repeating of their first encounter made her smile.

"You remembered. It was only five minutes for me, but you remembered."

"I did. Now, how long do you think it will take before you are well enough to kick my ass?"

## CHAPTER THREE

**S**toroth lifted her off him and placed her on the bed, then stood beside her as the doctors and technicians finished checking her body and scanning her brain. When their examination included an internal exam, he held her hand until the doctor finished and helped her smooth her gown back into place.

She was wearing a lovely gown, simple lines and covering all essential body parts. It had wide enough sleeves for the doctors to examine muscle tone while allowing her the warmth of the silky fabric. "Nice dress."

His amber eyes lit up. It was a very pleased boyish look that was at odds with his very manly exterior. Her little squirt had turned into a man well over six feet tall that had a jaw you could use to break granite. His face was scarred in a few places and she vaguely recalled dreams in which he told her about wars and battles that had rippled through his lands.

"Did I dream all those conversations?"

His eyes took on another look, as if he was telling her a secret. "No. You have been my best friend and confidant all these years."

The doctor got his attention. "She can try to stand if you will assist her. Her muscles are coming under her control much more rapidly than we would have imagined."

"She does come from excellent stock." Storoth shifted her legs off the bed, forcing her to sit up. "Kick your legs, love."

She kicked out in a violent jerk, nearly unmaning him. "Oops. Sorry."

He narrowed his eyes and squinted. "That had better have been an involuntary reaction."

"Oh, it was. I am almost sure of it." She raised her arms to him and batted her eyes. She was more comfortable with this muscled hulk than any other man she had been near before.

Sighing, he gripped her under her arms and lifted her like a toddler before balancing her feet on his own.

Good lord, he was huge. "What have they been feeding you?" The words tumbled out before she could stop them.

He threw his head back and laughed. He took a few steps and got her legs used to the motion of walking as well as letting her body feel the blood back in her feet.

"Okay. Your own feet now." He shifted her so that she was standing between his thighs.

She held onto his arms with a death grip. *I'm scared, squirt.*

*Don't be. I have you.*

A little more relaxed, she took a hesitant step with Storoth's arm for support. Then another.

The doctor was marvelling, "My lady, your progress is incredible."

"Thank you. I want nothing more than to get something to eat and maybe have a nap that I can wake from."

Her feet were bare, but she caught a glimpse of some slippers under the bed to match her gown. "Oh. Shoes. Can I please wear the shoes?"

Storoth sat her back on the edge of the bed and put her shoes on.

"Is she free to go?"

"She should be checked at least once a day for the next week, but after that, there will be no need until you begin sexual relations."

Just that one phrase and all the blood rushed to Eva's face.

"She is still a virgin then?"

Eva scowled. "What, you think I was screwing an icicle in there?"

He calmly put a hand over her mouth. "She is gynaecological sound then?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Good. We will return tomorrow."

"Yes, Your Highness." The doctor was bowing and trying not to laugh.

Storoth had simply picked her up and was carrying her out of the room before he even finished speaking.

Eva waved at him as they turned the corner.

One bodyguard was in front of them and one took up a post behind him as they proceeded.

"Why are you carrying me?"

"Because I want to eat today and it looks like it will take you a few days to walk to my quarters at the best pace you can currently set."

"Smartass."

"Your obsession with my ass is flattering but highly inappropriate as you have not even viewed the body part in question."

"You have a point. I will call you bonehead." Her beatific smile got her a pinch on her own bottom. "Your head I have seen. Nice earring by the way."

"It symbolizes our engagement."

"Oh, good lord, you didn't pierce me while I was out. Did you?" She wasn't up to checking her body for new marks.

He looked partially amused, appalled and something else. "Piercing you was on my mind, but it didn't happen. I decided to wait."

She mulled that over for a minute before she



deciphered the look he was giving her. That was lust, attraction. Something that she wasn't used to seeing in a man's eyes. Mind you, she had never looked for it before.

Safe in his arms, she didn't even notice the bowing courtiers and servants in the halls until they passed them. "You have quite a few people here, don't you?"

"This castle is the largest on Golaz. It has been in my family for eons."

"You are the last of your line?"

It was a serious conversation to be having while he was walking through the halls, but she was grasping at topics.

"I am. Hence your presence in my arms."

She was suddenly embarrassed for being so weak and looked down.

"I didn't mean any offence, Eva. I like you in my arms, but lineage is the reason that we first met if you will recall."

She nodded but didn't say another word until they were through another guarded door. The room was huge, well appointed in pale wood and rich blues. Eva's favourite colours.

There was a table, three doors and a servant.

The servant was standing next to the table and helped seat her.

"Eva, this is Hak. He will be your personal guard, maid and chaperone until we formalize our

union."

"Hak?"

"Yes, my lady?"

"Maid?"

"Yes, my lady. I am fully conversant with all feminine clothing, though I do prefer taking it off to putting it on." His wink made her blink.

She turned her startled gaze to Storoth. "But..."

"I know that your species has stricter gender rolls, but Hak is really the best person for the job. A female could not assist you physically as much as you require and I will have quite a few hours every day where I must attend matters of state."

She looked down again. "You are right, of course. I am not used to not being able to manage things myself."

Hak smiled a comforting smile. "Don't worry. You will soon be up and running again. If my wife weren't in her last trimester, she would be attending you, but she is a little unwieldy right now and her hormones are enough to drive me mad."

Storoth was uncovering plates on the table. "Hak is wed to my cousin Seltha. She is with her mother and sister, so don't think that he is abandoning them. They are all ensconced here in the palace."

Hak served Eva. It was a platter covered with tiny bowls, all filled with mush. "Sorry, my lady.

Doctor's orders. Each one is a single flavour, so use the eating paddle and dip it into any mix you wish."

Something in his eyes tipped her off. "This is baby food, isn't it?"

He grinned and nodded. "Mostly, my lady."

Grumbling and with Storoth mangling his own meal, she started dipping and tasting. It wasn't terrible. In fact, if she took some of the meat and dipped it in the cream sauce followed with some peas, it was actually quite nice.

She was still eating long after Storoth was leaning back, sipping a cup of wine and watching her. Self-conscious, she put the paddle down.

"Don't stop on my account. I have taken today off and have the whole afternoon and evening to entertain you. Hak will stay outside if you want some privacy."

She snorted and he grinned.

"I was wondering if you did that outside your thoughts."

She pinked again. It was a bad habit and she hadn't even thought of someone watching her. "I do. I just try and limit the audience."

"Colour me honoured then to witness your lack of delicacy."

"Lucky you..." She leaned forward and supported her head in her hands. Light was spiralling behind her eyes.

"Is something wrong?" Storoth was out of his chair and at her side in an instant.

"I am dizzy. I am thinking I might pass out."

"Do you want some water?" Hak was hovering in the periphery of her vision.

"Yes, please, over my head if you would." Her wish was granted in less than three seconds. The shock of cold water stopped the dancing lights.

"Thanks for that. Maybe I should go lie down?"

"That might be a good idea. Come on, love." Storoth lifted her in his arms and opened one of the three doors.

It was his bedroom. She could tell by the desk, pens and a set of boots at the foot of the enormous four-poster bed. He laid her down on his bed and slipped off the shoes that she had been wearing.

"Relax and rest, Eva. You need to ease back into active life. Don't worry, I will be here when you wake."

She snuggled into the sheets that smelled of Storoth, "Yeah, I have heard that one before."

## CHAPTER FOUR

She was cold. Horribly cold. There was a source of warmth nearby, so she squirmed and climbed until it was under her. Her shivers stopped almost immediately, but her pillow was grunting as she shifted to become settled.

Several portions of her new heat source were lumpy and one was even prodding directly at her, but she simply moved her head until she was comfortable and nodded off again.

\* \* \* \*

Storoth heard her moving, felt her shivers but merely lay still as she reached out for him in her sleep. It was surprising that she was able to climb onto him and damned uncomfortable when her soft curves caused a surge of lust and blood to his groin. She merely parted her thighs to accommodate his erection while tucking her head under his chin.

He sighed and groaned as she squirmed again, then held her with one hand on her back and the other on her buttocks. It was going to be a long night, but the satisfaction of having her with him, in his arms was worth a sleepless night.

Her curves fit his hands perfectly. Her hips drew his gaze even in the shapeless gown that she was wearing. Storoth was glad he couldn't see her in the dim light of his rooms. Those dark brown eyes of hers were deadly to his self-control.

Eva was truly his match. He had known it when he was immature, but now that he was grown, he was *sure* that she was his. Her scent was more intoxicating than he remembered. All the meaningless interludes since he had become a man faded into his memories the moment she came out of that containment unit. In less than a week, she would be strong enough for a few interludes that he had in mind.

He wanted to mark her memories with him alone. Once again, uncharacteristic impatience reared its head.

\* \* \* \*

"Come on, my lady. You need to get up and have breakfast." A warm hand on her shoulder shook her lightly.

"Mmf."

"Get up. The maids are here to change the sheets. Time to get out of bed so they can do their jobs."

"Don't wanna."

"My lady, you have spent the last sixteen years asleep. Time to join the waking world."

The sheets were summarily pulled out from under her, sending her spinning across the bed to land on the floor with a thump.

"Ow."

"Get up. I am not going to have you slipping into a coma my first day on the job." Hak was looming over her and hauled her to her feet, steadying her until she could walk on her own.

"You are mean in the mornings."

"It is afternoon. Come on, your bath is ready." The smile on his golden features was kind and slightly amused.

"Bath?" she perked up immediately. "Just aim me and off I go."

"Your targeting is off. Come this way." Slowly but surely, they left the three giggling maids who were waiting for her to vacate the room.

Eva leaned more heavily on Hak's arm than she would have liked by the time they made it through the anteroom and into the bathing chamber. She didn't need any of the other facilities yet, she didn't have enough liquid in her system to process. Kidney failure was a concern, but she had

copious amounts of water on her agenda today. It would be taken care of.

She tried to balk when Hak assisted her with her dress, but he simply lifted the gown away from her and helped her into the warm water without so much as a pervy comment. A sigh of happiness escaped her lips.

"So, Hak. How did you end up as my maid?" She smiled as he added a light citrusy floral scent to her water.

"I volunteered. There were several volunteers, all genders and many social classes. The whole castle has been buzzing with your imminent waking. I have to say that your hologram didn't do you justice." He began to wash her body with calm attention to detail.

"It seems a little odd to me. That a male wouldn't mind another with his female."

Hak chuckled. "We don't let many know about this, but as you are now one of us, a mated male, like me, is inert with a female not his own. It is why Storoth's guardians were obsessed with him finding a perfect mate. A close, but not exact match would mean that he would suffer dramatically reduced chances of breeding and that tenuous match would render him useless even if a proper match was found."

His hands were moving on her with medical efficiency, but even with the light touches across



her breast and between her thighs, she could feel a flicker of heat. Her nipples beaded, but it was simply physical.

"Lean back so I can rinse your hair."

She complied and smiled at the warm rush past her ears while he worked his fingers through her hair.

His hands guided her up again and he poured an aromatic solution on her hair, then massaged it through her locks.

"Why are you here with me instead of attending your wife?"

"Because during the last phase of a Golaz woman's pregnancy, she gets very aggressive when she is around males. Down to slashing with her claws. After my third round of stitches, my doctor ordered me to find somewhere else to be until my daughter is born. As soon as she appears, my dear and beloved Seltha will be back. Rinse."

Eva dunked her self a little too enthusiastically and Hak rescued her with a hand on the back of her head. She spluttered and wiped her face with the towel he presented. "You know it's a girl?"

"Of course. Three likely matches for her mate have already been spotted."

"So, your entire race is composed of arranged marriages?"

"Yes."

"No one marries for love?"

He gave her a strange look. "We all marry for love. Our matches ensure that we are biologically compatible and we become companions while young so that we have a shared history. When the male reaches his breeding age and the female is willing, they consummate their relationship and the final bond is forged. Until that moment, we are free to break the bonds and go our own way."

"Oh. So you mean..."

"You," He tweaked her nose, "Are not free. You are under contract and have been since the moment that Storoth and Eslor came to claim you."

"Spoilsport."

"I live to serve." He held a large towel up and grinned, "Out you come. Time to get you in some decent clothing."

"Yippee." The slosh of the water made her a little nervous, but he caught her when she stumbled on exit. "Thanks."

"Part of the job description. I know you are still feeble."

She snorted again, startling a laugh from him. "You know, when Storoth told me that you made that noise, I didn't believe him."

She yawned and scowled. "Do you have something like coffee?"

"We do. Tea. Plenty of it." He towelled her dry. "When you are dressed, you can have some."

"Meany." She reached for another towel to work on her hair, but he slapped her hand away.

"Don't reach up. Your blood pressure isn't stable. You need a lot of rest and careful and controlled movement before you are one hundred percent. Don't throw your recovery into question by over doing."

"Fine. But I am going to keep pelting you with questions to stay awake."

"Go ahead. I await your queries." He knelt, stood, turned her and roughly dried her hair. He sat her at the dressing table and brushed her hair while she sat swathed in a dry towel.

"Is the castle coastal or on the mainland?"

"There is an ocean outside your windows. Storoth had them sealed until you are no longer in a delicate condition."

"What is the standard hairstyle for women?"

"Braids and loose hair combined. Each braid symbolizes a treasured personality or social trait. Generosity, hospitality, modesty, pride, love, lust, ferocity, that sort of thing."

"How do you tell what they mean?"

"By the position on your head. I will draw you a map."

"What about language?"

"What about it?"

"When I met Storoth the first time, he was speaking Alliance Common. Is that a common

language here?"

"It doesn't matter. You are speaking Golaz. You were programmed with a number of talents in the last year of your confinement."

"I had a talent for languages already."

"That was not one of the programs that you were given. Self-defence was one of them, but you need to be stronger to use it. So, we will dress you and then you will eat."

She let him brush her hair until it was almost dry and then followed him slowly out of the bathing chamber, through the antechamber and into another room that she had not yet been in.

This room was more feminine. The deep purple of the bedding startling against the white of the wood. Hak led her to an arched doorway and inside was a walk-in closet bigger than her first apartment.

There was a couch in the centre and he deposited her there while he fetched a deep blue sheath, a heavy velvet corset and a mandarin-collared shrug.

"No underwear?"

"Not necessary unless you are having your moon time. Hands up." He dropped the sheath over her head and it fell in a heavy wave of silk all the way to her feet. The corset was laced up efficiently and the shrug was put on as if he was dressing a toddler.

"Now shoes." Flat, hard-soled slippers matched the dark blues she was wearing.

"Now can I have some tea?" Her jaw-cracking yawn was uncontained and she stood to follow Hak slowly back to the anteroom.

They had only been gone a few minutes, but another tray of hot baby food had been provided for her, a steaming pot of what had to be tea holding court on the table.

She seated herself with a graceless thud, but fell to the food with a good appetite. One day up and around and she was already moving on her own. What could the next day bring?

She dreamed that it could be coffee.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**E**va was sitting in her bedroom when Storoth came back. "Time for your doctor's appointment, Eva."

"And hello to you, short stuff." She stood on legs that felt fifty times stronger than the day before. "Let's go."

When she stood and walked toward him, the look in his eyes changed from cheerful to lustful. "You look amazing."

"Thank you. Hak is an excellent maid." She would have twirled under normal circumstances, but she still wasn't up for it.

He didn't answer her, but instead caught her around the waist and pulled her firmly against him. He was aroused, that much was certain, and the kiss that he gave her left her in no doubt as to his interest.

He tasted wonderful, like chocolate and cinnamon. His scent seemed to grow stronger the longer they were in contact and when he finished

plundering her mouth with his slightly rough tongue, she was intoxicated.

"Let's go." His voice was husky.

She cleared her throat three times before a tiny, "Okay," squeezed out. She tried to walk toward the door, but he hadn't released her.

"I will carry you. It will be faster."

"Yes. But it lacks a certain dignity."

"True. But I get to hold you some more." His smile was genuine—affection, amusement and lust all together.

"Sold. Pick me up, squirt."

She squealed as a pinch was her punishment for the nickname and was chuckling to herself the whole way down the hall to the hospital wing.

The guards that accompanied them were unobtrusive but definitely present. "Do you always need the guards?"

"Until my ascension. Then no one would dare to attack me."

"You are under attack?"

"Not every day, but attempts on my life have been made. Just as there have been coalitions to find and murder you. Fortunately, we are both here and both strong and healthy."

"I thought I dreamt those stories."

"No. You were my sole comfort after the attacks." The light squeeze he gave her was unmistakable for anything but the hug it was.

"I am glad I could be there for you." She meant it. No one should have to face a situation like assassination alone.

The visit to the doctor's was anticlimactic. "Your lady is doing well, Your Highness. She is days ahead of schedule. Whatever she is doing, she should keep it up. Her blood pressure is good, her digestion is commencing and the only difficulty is a slight dehydration that she needs to address."

"Hey, I drank enough water to float a ship."

"Your cells are still recovering and may not absorb the moisture as well as if you were not recovering from stasis."

"Fine. I will keep drinking."

"She has a clean bill of health. She can continue to exert herself a little more every day as long as she is supervised."

"Excellent. When does she need to see you again?" Storoth was picking her up again.

"Three days. Unless there is a problem. In which case, bring her immediately."

"Will do. Good day, doctor."

"Good day, Your Highness."

She was pouting. There was no other word for it. The whole situation was bugging the hell out of her.

"You will be back on your feet soon and then I



will have you on your knees the instant you aren't looking."

It took her a few seconds to register his comment, then she blushed. "My people say, flat on your back."

"What?"

"You mentioned me on my knees. My people say flat on my back. If you were referring to sex, that is."

"Seriously, you couple face to face?"

"Face to face, on our sides, sixty-nine. You name it."

That got the guards' attention.

"The images in my mind are fascinating. What is the point of face-to-face? A male wouldn't hit the interior wall at that angle."

"Well, there are other benefits. Intimacy, fingers can be used on the clit to stimulate the woman and the supine partner does not need to exert themselves too much if they are a little weak."

Storoth lifted her and leaned down so that his breath was in her ear. "So, if I were to ask for a formal demonstration?"

"As the Terran cultural expert, I would have to walk you through the process."

"Excellent." He nuzzled at her neck and she shivered at the scrape of his tongue against her skin.

The moment that they arrived back in what she

now recognized as *their* rooms, he sent the loyal Hak out with a simple barked command.

Hak tried to protest, but Storoth put Eva back on her feet and shoved his friend and cousin-in-law out the door.

"Now. I believe you said that the female submissive position would be acceptable for a recovering stasis patient?"

"I think it would be fine." Her voice was breathy even to her own ears. "Your bed or mine?"

"Well, as your bed is the formal couple's chamber. That is by far the more appropriate venue."

She walked to her door and swung it open, aware of Storoth at her back. The heat he was radiating was making her weak in the knees.

Eva walked to the bed and turned to face him. "I am aware of the logistics, but I haven't ever engaged in this activity before."

"Then we will muddle through. Please allow me to assist in your disrobing." It wasn't a question. The warrior with chestnut hair, amber eyes and golden skin was watching each inch of skin intently as he uncovered it.

Her corset didn't even slow him down, reminding her that he had been taking lessons for this very purpose. When he got to the sheath, he leaned forward and peeled each strap off her

shoulders with his teeth. She was trembling from head to toe and he hadn't even touched her.

The wet heat seeping from her core was also a little unusual for her, when the silk slid to the carpet, her channel clenched in a sudden empty ache.

"Your skin is a lovely shade of cream." The words were said next to her ear in a tone so low it rumbled through her bones. She opened her eyes wide, not realizing that she had closed them tightly while he looked at her.

"Thank you?"

"No thanks are needed – it is a fact." He ran his hand down her back, up again and then down her arm. "And smooth, like warm silk."

"No flattery is needed. I am nervous enough as it is." Her dark brown gaze met his amber one and she put every bit of her insecurities into that look.

He left her and pulled off his boots, trousers and shirt in a flurry of fabric and an occasional rent seam. "There. Now we are even."

His erection was levelled at her and she swallowed heavily. Why she had taunted him with sex was beyond her.

"Take it easy, Eva. Nothing will happen too suddenly. At least my practice has given me a bit of self-control."

She still had nothing to say, but tears came to her eyes as he approached her and just before they

touched, he fell to his knees and buried his face between her breasts while his arms went around her hips.

She felt loved in that moment. Beloved and desired.

As he moved his mouth across to one breast and then the other, sharp bursts of pleasure ripped through her. She raised her hands to his shoulders, then tangled her fingers in his hair to hold him to the most sensitive spots. She gasped and threw her head back as his teeth grazed her flesh, shook when the hard suction of his mouth caused her body to respond with a surge of moisture that began to trickle down her thigh.

The hands holding her too him lifted her, positioning her on the edge of the bed, placing him squarely between her spread thighs. He paused for a moment and left the room without a word, returning just as she sat up and was preparing to dive under the covers.

“Stay put. I had to get this gel to ease your first time.” The small container in his hand made her blink in confusion until he opened it, scooped something out with his fingers and parted her for him all in one quick motion.

Her own juices eased the way for his fingers, but a tingling followed his touch. “What is that?”

She couldn’t keep the panic from her voice. It felt good and weird. The good was his fingers

inside her and the weird was the trace left of that gel. When his fingers reached and stroked her hymen, it burned and numbed at the same time.

"A pain blocker. It doesn't block the sensation of pleasure, but it will keep you from any severe distress."

She felt fuller now and his two fingers had been joined by a third. He stroked his digits in and out in a slow pattern until she was raising her hips in response to his retreat.

On her back with her legs splayed, she was focusing on the canopy of her bed, admiring the folds in the fabric while her body started to writhe on the bedding against her will. Her own hands had never evoked this feeling. *Wow.*

*Wow indeed. You are very responsive.* His mental statement was punctuated by the flick of his tongue on her clit.

Her mewl of surprise made him chuckle. *How is it we still retain this link?*

*You are asking me now?*

She stifled her own giggle and then gasped again as Storoth was no longer between her thighs but hovering over her.

The meeting of their mouths mimicked the meeting of their minds, tongues thrusting, lips eager, growls and moans rolling together.

The slide of his cock against her elicited her hips to rise against him. She took him into her,

inch by inch. There were a lot of inches.

She dug her fingers into his shoulders waiting for the inevitable pain. It never came, but she did, staring into his amber eyes as her body bucked and shuddered with his impalement.

His face showed his surprise at her response, but Storoth merely stroked into her slowly and withdrew even more slowly, keeping the shocks of pleasure running through her for what seemed like forever.

*This is a very good position. I like watching your face.*

Eva was gasping as her mind came back to her in tiny, sparkling shards. *It works for me.*

He leaned down and gave her a possessive, soul-searing kiss. *It certainly does.*

Storoth started to thrust into her harder, she lifted her hips to receive him. In the throes of lust, she clawed his back and wrapped her legs around his hips. Her body was covered in a sheen of sweat, but all she could see, wanted to see, was Storoth's face as he came.

His low growl preceded his release and the hand he slid between them stroked her clit into aching, throbbing awareness. This orgasm was not like the first, but a deep pulsing grip around the hot rod of his cock, pulling, milking, squeezing him until he gave her what she wanted. His release.

## Impatient

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The roar of satisfaction startled her, but the contorted expression of pleasure-pain as his body emptied into her was all she needed.

Her own pulsing body sated, she only needed one thing to make this night complete. "And now you know why I called you squirt."

He didn't think the reference was funny.

## CHAPTER SIX

“Wake up, Eva. Hak is eager to get you out of bed at a decent hour.” Storoth was naked next to her, stroking one hand lazily down her back.

She sent him a teasing, “And where do you want me?”

He gave her a sharp smack to the ass and rolled away from her. “In my bed at all hours. But that will have to wait for a more opportune time. Up you get. There is a robe in the closet for you.”

She grumbled but got up, then froze. The stain of blood was everywhere on the bed. She looked down and saw that her thighs were no exception. “Holy smokes. I am amazed that I am still up and running.”

“As am I. You lost quite a bit of blood last night but seem to be no worse for wear this morning. How do you feel?” He was putting on a robe of his own, as he walked toward her with her robe in his hand.



"Fine, I smell like copper though. Blood and something else." A strange musk that was not hers was emanating from between her thighs.

"Your blood and my body, those are the scents you are wearing." He draped the robe over her shoulders. "I like it."

"I don't mind your scent, but the blood is a little peculiar." She tied the thick sash of the robe, smiling at the disappointment in his eyes as his toy was put away.

"I would have to agree. I wish I could keep your scent on me during the day, but the blood would be distracting." His robe was hanging open. "Come on, let's get a little more presentable and then I will hand you over to your keeper for the day."

"Why is the bathing room off the anteroom?"

"The main one is. The private one is here." His hand caressed a panel on the wall and a door opened at the light touch.

"Nice. Of course, Hak could have shown me that one."

"No, he couldn't, it is keyed to our genetic code. We are a little vulnerable while bathing." His smile didn't dim as he herded her into the bathing room. There was an enormous tub, but also a large shower, big enough for two. Two sinks, a room divider that concealed a toilet and a dressing table with an array of brushes, ribbons and clasps.

“Nice. How does this place get cleaned if no one other than you or I can come in here?”

“Maintenance bots. They are in several key places in the palace. Our little nod to our high-tech history.” He was removing her robe and ushering her into the shower, adjusting the heads to send water over her at her waist and shoulders.

He washed her with a much different result than Hak’s perfunctory scrubbing. She twisted against his palms when he caressed her breasts, squirmed when he rubbed her belly and willingly parted her thighs as he slid his fingers between them under the guise of *cleaning*. Funny, she had never felt more dirty.

Storoth’s breath was coming faster while he worked the soap onto every inch of her flesh. She wasn’t surprised when he lifted her to press her against the wall and simply wrapped her legs around him for leverage as he thrust into her with slow intensity. She used her arms to brace herself as she lifted and dropped on him with the help of his hands under her buttocks. The clenching of his hands on her flesh made her smile as the building of the tension wound her body tighter and tighter.

She clenched on him so hard, he could barely move inside her, but it felt so good, she didn’t want to stop. Eva’s release broke her apart and turned her mind into a shower of sparks and dancing lights.

His growl and slapping thrusts pinned her against the wall as he followed her into glittering oblivion.

Steam was billowing around them. "Storoth. I think we need to finish our shower. You probably have things to do today and Hak promised me a very slow tour of the local area."

Dazed, he raised his head to look into her eyes. Obviously, his blood was not all back to his brain yet. "He isn't supposed to be taking you anywhere. You are to remain here until my ascension."

"I am going to go bonkers if it takes too long. What is the ascension anyway?"

"My formal induction to the throne. I will be King and you my Queen, but only after all attackers have a chance to destroy me."

That cooled her afterglow faster than anything he could have said. "What?"

"It's tradition. I am of age to take control from the councillors and they will object to being relieved of their duties. Well, some of them will. Others will simply become part of my cabinet. Golaz tradition."

She disengaged the grip that her legs had on him and slowly lowered them to the ground, separating their bodies via gravity.

"That is a helluva tradition."

"Isn't it just. Damn." He leaned his forehead

against hers. "What have you done to me, love?"

"I have no idea. Are you all right?" She looked up into his eyes and saw a relaxed happiness there that was pure masculine pleasure. "Yeah, you are fine."

"And you are delightful. If I had known that our coming together would light my nerves on fire, I would have woken you years ago."

She chuckled and pushed against him, his skin slick, hard and smooth under the spray of the water. "No, you wouldn't. It would have kept me at risk for too long and you wouldn't have done that."

He kissed the tip of her nose. "No, I wouldn't. Thank you for reminding me that you trust me to see to your safety."

"Hey, you kept a psychotic bitch from killing me in stasis, the least I can do is let you know I trust you."

He laughed and helped her finish her shower. As she towelled off, he let her know, "That bitch's name is Lady Olina. She has been trying to find her way into my bed again ever since that incident."

"Oh." She had been his lover. That is why she had attempted to kill her. Great. Now she was jealous of a woman who had been sleeping with Storoth while he was just barely a man. Fantastic.

A deep breath steadied Eva's emotions. Olina

may have had him at one time, but he was Eva's now and forever. No other woman would be allowed near him or she would deck her.

Wrapped in a towel, she sat at the dressing table and brushed her hair. Her locks were a lighter shade of golden brown than they had been before the stasis, but they still fell to her waist. Thinking about the map that Hak had given her, she started to put a braid into her hair. Affection was halfway up her head, fidelity at her left temple. She was unsure whether to put in the braid for love at her right temple, so she left it to the two she could wear with confidence.

"Fidelity and affection?" He was leaning over her shoulders and viewing the braiding in the mirror. "I will have to do better then."

"You do just fine, I am only practicing. Why would I bother with the whole set of braids if no one is going to see them?"

His hands rested on her shoulders and he sighed. "Everything in time, love. Everything in time."

Together, they walked through the bedroom. Eva winced at the sight of the bed. It looked like he had sacrificed a virgin, not had sex with one. She wandered into the closet and picked out some clothing that she thought was appropriate.

He slipped on trousers, boots and shirt and gave her a kiss goodbye. It was time to change the

guards.

Hak came in as she fought the first dress for submission. "Are you trying to wear it or be killed by it? That dress is a little advanced for a solo dresser."

"Morning, Hak. Help."

He stripped her, dressed her and commented on her braids. "Storoth saw those?"

"He did."

"He wasn't upset?"

"A little. But he is practicing patience. Not an easy feat." She thought back to their conversations as he had gone through the hairy details of adolescence through to manhood.

"He is the most patient person I know. His council members all comment on it. Storoth is only impatient in one aspect of his life."

Curious, she looked into Hak's gaze directly. "What is that?"

He rolled his eyes and shook his head. "You, foolish one. He has wanted you since you first went into stasis but had to wait. And in this, he did not enjoy waiting."

She was following Hak through the bedroom. He ignored the bed, but there were three maids who were looking at her with a sad sort of pity. She merely grinned and winked.

After all, she had had a very good time losing her virginity. Not something many women of her

acquaintance could say.

Hak shook his head and pushed her chair in, settling her at the table. "In a life of duty, my lady, you are the only thing that he wanted. The urgency actually gained him a little more empathy from the council. It showed he was living flesh and not a construct."

"Gotcha. What's for breakfast, more baby food?"

He grinned and lifted the cover. Softly scrambled eggs and toast greeted her. Jam was in a small jar next to the toast.

"Oh, this looks wonderful. Thank you." She tucked in to the meal without any hesitation.

She was halfway through when she realized something. "When do you eat?"

He chuckled. "Before I come to your quarters. Storoth eats most of his meals with his councillors, but today, he will have his first meal at lunch. He missed breakfast."

The wry look he was giving her almost made her feel guilty. Almost. "It was his choice to have a shower with me and to spend the night with me last night."

"You simply invited him, did you?"

She coughed and had a sip of tea. "Something like that."

Pushing aside her ravished plate, she sighed happily and drank half a glass of water. She

hadn't had time to work on her hydration the night before, but a sudden urge to attend nature filled her with relief.

She excused herself and entered the lav, attended to her needs and washed her hands. Hak was waiting by the door with a clipboard in his hand.

"We need to educate you a little on the origins of our species, as well as traditions. Later, when you are hungry, we will put you through some of your self-defence paces and see what you can manage."

She stretched, her gown exposing her ankles to all and sundry. "I thought we were waiting until I was stronger?"

"If you can take Storoth on in the bedroom, you have enough strength for this."

She blushed.

He handed her a textbook and started to fill her mind with the history of a species that wasn't a species at all.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

“Avari? Seriously?” The history book was telling her what she couldn’t believe.

“Seriously. The Avari divided into sects—those who fought the obvious uses of technology, those who used it to accentuate their own bodies such as the Golaz and those who rejected the tech entirely and eventually died out.”

“But the Avari are the most ancient of the Alliance races. Why would the Golaz become a splinter group?”

“Because the Avari elders did not want the nanites used for shape shifting. They considered it a perversion of the technology. So, under the leadership of Golaz Narlu, our ancestors left the Avari home world and started a colony here.”

“So, each of you are born with your own nano machines?”

“Yes, we acquire them from our parents. You were selected for Storoth, not only because your genetics are a near-perfect match, but you will not

produce antibodies to kill the nanites."

That made a certain sense.

After the history lesson, they moved on to etiquette, a light dance tutorial and finally the hand-to-hand combat.

She was able to move faster, hit harder and fight better than she had any right to.

"Something is weird, Hak. Can we go to the doctor after lunch? I feel funny." She turned her head from side to side as if trying to listen to the change.

"Do you feel sick? Are you ill? Storoth will skin me if you have come to any harm."

"No. I just feel too good if that makes sense." She wasn't even tired and she had had quite the morning's exertion.

"I will take you. Promise. Any anomaly is to be investigated."

She smiled as lunch was delivered. "Doctor's orders or Storoth's?"

"Both. Sit. Eat. You have had quite a morning." Hak sat across from her and made notes on her progress on his clipboard.

It was a digital clipboard but looked manual. It was the same with the history books, they looked like books but had screens inside that displayed the information the reader requested.

That seemed to be the key to the Golaz. They seemed to be normal, low-tech folks with quaint

traditions, but even the traditions had teeth.

The day of Storoth's ascension to the throne, he would have to do battle in both forms with any and all comers. After his battle, he would consummate his reign with his mate. She would be in a dark room with other women who would be willing to face the teeth of the ascension.

He would select her, take her hand in his jaws and lead her out of the room and into the light of the council chamber. There, they would prove the mating they were in was a true one, by fucking in public and hopefully, starting the new generation.

Eva was a little conflicted on that last part. She wanted Storoth to take his rightful place as ruler because he wanted it. But the public sex was a little much for a prude like her to take. Mind you, the night before, her prudish instincts had definitely gone the way of her virginity. Lost under a sea of lust. Perhaps if she were aroused enough, she wouldn't notice a few people watching.

Memories of Storoth moving over her, inside her caused a wave of heat to run through her. Nope, arousal wasn't a problem. Just the thought of him was enough to make her crave more.

"When is the ascension?" She was making her way through poached eggs, toast and fruit.

"A week from today. The timing of your removal from stasis was set to coincide with the

festivities. In three days, the parties begin and you and Storoth will attend as a couple, to give the councillors the image of a stable union."

"Okay. I assume there are appropriate clothes in my wardrobe?"

"I will walk you through the clothing for every occasion tomorrow. Are you finished?"

"Yes."

"Good. Let's go to see the doctors. Find out why you are in such good health."

Hak offered her his arm and paused next to the door to put a set of knives on his forearms. "Just a precaution."

"Is there really a physical danger to me?"

"Let's not push our luck."

Under the watchful eyes of two out of four of the guards posted, Hak led her through the halls, but she was on her own power now and it was a different experience. People stopped and stared at her, muttering and murmuring to their companions. A few smiled and bowed or curtsied, as their stations demanded.

Eva made a point to respond to each overt expression in turn. She ignored the impolite whispers. It was the ladylike thing to do.

The doctors were a little alarmed when she entered. "My lady, is something wrong?"

"Sort of but not really."

She hopped up onto an examination table and

gave the doctors a serious frown. "I am doing far too well. Unnaturally well. What is running through my system that wasn't there before I went into stasis?"

The doctor paled. "You noticed?"

"Oh yeah. Increased strength, speed, sexual appetite and mental dexterity, not to mention the residual telepathy between Storoth and myself. These are indicators that something was tweaked either as I went in or as I came out of the unit."

A sharp command from the doctor cleared the room of every piece of personnel aside from Hak. "My lady, are you aware of the nano machines that are in every Golaz?"

"Yes. I was brought up to speed today."

"Well, at the ten-year mark, you were degrading slightly. We injected you at that time with standard repair nanites. They should not have had a marked effect on you."

"Scan me, smarty pants. Then we will know for sure."

He took a palm scanner out of a drawer and ran it over her from head to toe. "Oh dear. Oh no."

"What?" Panic was setting in. The doctor looked ill.

"I need to summon Prince Storoth. He will need to know."

The doctor picked up a small communicator and spoke to someone in hushed tones. Hak came

over and held her hand as waves of unease ran through her.

Time stretched into an impossibly long strand as she waited for the doctor to say something. He wouldn't. He wasn't speaking without the prince and Storoth was on his way.

Her love came through the door in time to see her burst into tears. She was stressed enough to bawl like an infant when he took her into his arms.

The doctor was freaking when she broke her composure and babbled incoherently to Storoth as he cuddled and soothed her.

"What is it? What is wrong with her?"

"There is nothing wrong with Lady Eva. She has simply begun a transformation into a Golaz."

Storoth was astonished. "What? How is that possible?"

Eva snivelled to a halt. "What?"

"The nanites that she was given six years ago worked to stop her degeneration and assisted her in regaining mobility when she left stasis, but they did not cease function as they were programmed to. Based on the scans, when you triggered her mating hormones, the robots began to build her to suit her prospective mate. It is an unusual adaptation but not unheard of. When you two...interacted, her body took the new genetic material introduced and the nanites did their work. She will complete her transformation by

your ascension.”

“Is it dangerous?” She was still sniffing, but her eyes were drying.

“No. You should be fine. You will be as a Golaz with your particular DNA markers.” The doctor was looking less nervous now.

Storoth was stroking her hair and rocking her slightly.

“I am sorry you had to come running, Storoth. I will be fine.”

“We will return to our rooms. I had nothing else planned for the day aside from tormenting you with food and the history of my family.”

“Do I have to go back to our rooms? I am feeling rather twitchy. I need to work off some energy.”

He sighed. “Did you come with guards?” He looked to Hak.

“Of course, Your Highness.”

“Then fine. We will take a double contingent and take a walk through the atrium, the greenhouse and the grand hall.”

She didn’t squeal and clap her hands, but instead stood calmly, took his arm and screamed *Goody!* into his thoughts.

His wince and grin was not lost on her, but the doctor and Hak merely nodded their heads as they passed.

Her guard joined his guard and the promenade

commenced. Her feet were humming with pleasure at walking again.

More people came up to them, through their watchful guard and with respectful tones. Storoth introduced her as Lady Eva and she smiled and greeted everyone in turn. The etiquette lessons had not come a moment too soon.

Everything was going well, he was showing her their home and he was describing the woodwork and materials used in the construction when suddenly the moment she had been dreading was upon her.

Lady Olina was asking for an introduction.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

“**T**he infamous Lady Eva.” The golden woman in the low-cut gown was close to Storoth. Too close. Eva shifted between them.

“Lady Eva, this is *Lady* Olina. You may remember her.” Storoth drew her more tightly against his side.

“Lady Olina. Right. You were the one who tried to kill me while I was defenceless and in stasis. Classy move.”

“How did you know...oh, of course. He told you.”

“Of course not. I recognized your mind as the one sleazing around my unit. You do have an unimaginative mind. Please excuse us.” She stepped forward forcing the woman to either collide with her or step back. She stepped back.

“That was very direct. She really doesn’t like you, love.” He was stifling his laughter, as were the guards.

“I don’t like her.”

"I noticed. Now on to the greenhouse."

She smiled and nodded, keeping the smug image of Olina in her mind. That woman was going to be trouble.

Back in their quarters, she was finally able to show her outrage. "They hung out the sheets?"

He had been grinning since she first saw them and was forced to swallow her fury by decorum. "It's traditional. I just didn't think to take our tour outside the atrium."

"It looked like you slit my throat and then rolled around in the blood."

He was laughing so hard, she kicked him in the shin, astounded by her dexterity and the automatic positioning of her foot for maximum impact and satisfaction. He grunted and hopped backward. "Ow."

"Serves you right. People were surprised to see me alive." She sighed and sat at the table, removing her shoes and rubbing her feet.

He sighed, scooped her up and put her on one of the couches, then sat and took her feet into his hands. "You shouldn't have walked so far."

"I wanted to. I need to stress my body or I won't keep getting stronger." She groaned as the touch on her feet sparked nerves in her breasts and core. When he slid his fingers between her toes, she felt herself get wet, her body aching for

him.

“Storoth, how do you do that?”

“Do what?” His focus was on stroking the arches of her feet with his thumbs.

“Touch me and make me want to claw your clothing off.”

His hands stroked past her feet, up her calves and to her thighs.

“The same way you just need to walk into a room and breathe to make me want you.” His hands were up around her thighs and with a smooth jerk, he pulled her to him.

She pulled herself up to straddle his thighs, her skirt pooled around them. Eva reached between them to free his erection from his trousers and with a sigh of relief, she took him inside her.

If anyone was watching, she was simply rising and falling against him, their mouths meeting and connecting in ravenous bites.

He held her hips and controlled her pace as they both approached a sudden peak. Storoth held them back, slowing his strokes and her impalement until she whimpered and sobbed with every move.

She closed her eyes and leaned her head against his shoulder as the peak grew closer and her body filled with so much energy, she thought her molecules would fly apart. Shaking and shuddering, she closed her eyes as she rose and

fell, rose and fell. The slide of flesh on flesh was restricted to their groins, but she had never felt more connected.

When he picked up speed to end her torment and he held her so that her clit ground against him on every down stroke, she screamed as the waves of bright light engulfed her before everything went dark.

*Eva, Eva, are you all right, love?*

*Fine. Just tired, sweetheart. I over-exerted myself today. In more ways than one.*

*I was surprised you would take me again after last night.*

*As was I, but those nanos are great little beasts. No soreness, no aches and no compunction about trying it again.*

*Good. I have found myself waiting breathlessly for the end of meetings just so I was closer to being with you. It is a strange impulse.*

*Tell me about it. I wake thinking of you, want you near me and want to make sure you are safe all at the same time. Silly, since you are twice my size.*

*Not silly. I feel the same. One week and you will be at my side all day.*

*Why a week? I am up for it now and it will be easier for the guards to keep eyes on both of us rather than split their focus.*

*Because you still have much to learn, love. This is a dangerous place and you are still learning about our*

*ways.*

*But what about learning by watching? For a morning at least. Let me try it and then you can banish me if I do something stupid.*

*Fair enough. Tomorrow morning you will come with me, but now you will get up and have dinner. Hak is waiting.*

Grudgingly, she opened her eyes. Her gown was decorously back around her calves and ankles, she was across Storoth's lap and since he was tucked back into his trousers, only the scent of their coupling was still in the air.

Hak wasn't fooled by the look of a cuddly nap. "Stop the post-coital cuddling and get over here. Dinner is ready."

He opened the covers and stood back while Storoth deposited Eva in her chair. When the couple was seated, he bowed and left the room.

Eva blushed and picked at her meal. "I guess it was kind of obvious."

"Well, there is a certain scent of satisfaction in the air."

That was putting it mildly. The moment that she had sat up straight, the evidence of their coupling had begun to make its way down her thighs.

"How long has your family been ruling Golaz?"

"Two thousand five hundred years. We are the descendents of the original Golaz of Avari." He

chewed and swallowed, drinking a gulp of wine.

She was still restricted to water. It was the blank taste with a little something extra that tipped her off.

She recoiled immediately. "There is something in the water." She had only wet her lips, but the violent swelling was proof of the poison.

The curse that Storoth let loose was lost on her as the room started to spin.

"Neuro toxin. Her nanites are flushing it, but this should speed things along." The doctor was at her side once again. This time, they were in her chambers, Storoth pacing, Hak standing by with a dark look on his face.

"How did it get in here? Hak?"

"I don't know, Your Highness. It was here when I returned. The water and the goblet. I never thought to send for new."

Storoth's face was a mask of fury. "She will be fine?"

"She will. She is recovering even now."

"Good. Bring me the guards who were supposed to be on duty."

"Prince Storoth, Moro is missing."

The roar of anger was deafening. Eva cringed but relaxed and let the doctor treat her. Her lover roared to Hak, "Stay with her."

"Where are you going?"

## Impatient

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"Hunting." He walked to Eva and caressed her face with a gentle hand, then stormed out the door, calling to his guard and leaving in search of a poisoner.

Hak read her worried look and watched the doctor change the drawing compress on her lips. "He will be fine. Nothing will come between him and vengeance now."

That was what she was afraid of.

## CHAPTER NINE

The light from the open bathroom door woke her. She waved at Hak to remain seated as she stood, weaved a little and walked into the bathing chamber. Large bloody paw prints marred the floor leading up to the shower.

"Hey, love. You came back."

"I will always come back to you, Eva. Even when you slept, I returned to you time and again." Tears streaked his face as he leaned under the spray of the shower. Blood was on his jaw and neck.

The lion had hunted and he had been successful.

"I am sorry, Storoth. So very sorry."

She walked into the shower fully clothed and held him while he cried. The guard had been young, been bribed and had to pay the price. He would not name the person who provided him with the poison but had gone to his death bravely in the face of his prince.



The tears turned to kisses, kisses to frantic touching and her gown was parted down the center in a heated caress of man versus fabric.

He took her up against the wall, no easing of flesh, only the hard pounding of skin against skin. He groaned his release and she held him while he slumped to the floor. Tangled with him, she waited for him to release her, but he didn't. He simply picked her up, wrapped her in a towel and carried her back to their bed.

Curled together, they waited until sleep claimed them. It was a long time coming.

She started her routine of eating what he ate and accompanying him to all meetings. Her near miss was the stuff of legend, she was a folk hero. The unbreakable woman.

It would have been funny if it wasn't so serious. They described her in hushed tones—she could read minds, smell poison and turn a methodical planner into a smiling fool.

Storoth was smiling, the rest of it didn't matter.

"Are you ready?" Storoth came up behind her, his hands on her abdomen pulling her back against him.

"Ready as I will ever be. Are you sure you can do this?"

"I have one chance, they have one chance. If

they do not kill me, they will have to watch me and my queen start a new dynasty." His interest in starting in the privacy of their rooms was obvious.

"How did your people come up with this idea? Royal sex in public does not seem very decorous."

"Well, you know of our break with the Avari. It was just another tradition we chose to start. To prove that the lineage would begin strong, a woman with nerves enough to face her husband in his transformed stated and enough trust to know he wouldn't hurt her."

"Have women been hurt?"

"Hak told you."

"He did. I am not worried for me, but what if it does something to you?" She turned in his arms and stroked his face. "There have been enough hiccups on our way to this moment. Just make sure it is *my* scent you seek out. If you go after Lady Olina, I will have to take matters into my own hands."

"Please do. I love putting myself in your hands." The glint in his eyes spoke of the night before where she had used her fingers to tease, taunt and caress him until he was on the fine edge of control. Then he had lost control and her vocal appreciation had brought the guards running.

His shift from man into beast had been the first one she had experienced at close hand and it left her stunned and the guards laughing as they left

the royal rooms.

The lion padding back toward her and up into the bed she had just been rolling around in was strange enough, but when he lay partially on top of her and started to purr, her body reacted with a violent lust that shocked her to her core.

Storoth shifted on top of her, regaining his human form in time to slide into her, but her body was so well primed by the excitement-fear of the lion that she came the moment his slow thrust into her brought them together. The pulsing and shivers of her body faded and he had grinned down at her, content to start from the very beginning.

Eva looked up at her lover, her husband, her love and smiled. Together, they would take on the Golaz usurpers and start a new life together.

Only death would stand in their way.

Her hair was sporting a dozen braids today. The two braids up front, love and fidelity, were Storoth's favourites. He touched the love braid almost constantly.

"What will you do if someone cheats?"

"I will find you, but feel free to cheat in return."

A knock at the door made them both turn. "It's time." Hak was wearing formal dress—a long open robe over trousers and boots.

The rest of the guard wore the same.

Together, they walked down the halls, the

guards no longer in front of them, but merely bringing up the rear. Storoth was on his own today.

Well, not really his own. If anyone got too close, Eva would be all over them.

The grand hall was full of people. A space was cleared in the centre of the room, the thrones of their people empty and waiting at one end of the hall.

The guards closed ranks around her and escorted her to the far side of the hall, leaving Storoth alone. This was the part Eva wasn't going to like.

"Let all who would challenge my right to rule step forward and select their form of combat."

Two men stepped forward immediately, their hands empty of weapons. A third was pushed forward by his wife and stood reluctantly in the open area of the hall.

"We will combat shift to shift." The first of the combatants stood and nodded.

"Any others? This is the final call."

A few moved from foot to foot, but none stepped into the ring.

Storoth eyed his challengers, then shifted into his lion form.

Eva let out a sigh of admiration, he was beautiful.

The first challenger attacked the moment that

he shifted. Claws flashed and teeth were bared. Blood spattered the stones. From Hak's information sessions, she knew that it would be left in place until it was worn down by bystanders. The stones of the grand hall carried the bloodlines of everyone in the room.

Storoth was victorious and the second attacker came at him. This one was faster, left bloody stripes on her love's shoulder, but was eventually subdued with teeth to the throat. This was not a fight to the death but to submission.

Death was reserved for treason.

Storoth had not released the second challenger when the nervous third jumped onto his back, raising a hissing boo from the audience.

It was cheating, plain and simple.

Storoth roared in pain but flipped the timid challenger to his back and had him pinned in seconds.

With his back turned again, a fourth challenger appeared from the crowd, charging forward with a spear.

Eva didn't think, didn't hesitate. She reached for the ceremonial spear that the guard nearest her was carrying, adjusted her balance and threw it in a straight arc, striking the cheater in his shoulder.

The crowd turned to her and then back to Storoth as he roared his triumph.

The ubiquitous Eslor stepped forward, pulled

the spear from the shoulder of the fourth attacker and tapped the butt against the floor.

“Will all ladies who consider themselves for the position of mate to Storoth Elengar please enter the selection room.”

Eva curtsied to her mate who winked in return and then followed the directions into the room. Lady Olina slunk by in a red gown that was horribly familiar. It was the gown Eva had worn the week before. Damn it, the bitch was cheating.

Five women stood in the room and at Eslor’s signal, the lights went out. Not being a complete fool, that is when Olina struck.

“He will come to me, Lady Eva.” The hiss came to her out of the darkness, covered with the oil that was Olina’s alone.

Eva didn’t care. She had more than enough of a distraction in skinning out of her gown. She had seconds to undo all of Hak’s work. The ties fought her, but she eventually ripped free of her dress.

With the puddle of fabric at her feet, she waited in the dark. Olina was wearing her gown, but the gown covered in Eva’s scent was under her feet. Just in case someone caught on.

The door opened and Storoth was silhouetted against the doorway. The door closed behind him and they were standing in darkness, the heavy panting of the large cat the only sound.

He paced up and down the line of women,

snuffling each of them. When he got to her she moved her foot, drawing his attention to the gown on the floor. She heard a rough chuff and then he walked down to where Olina was standing. A growl broke and he came back to her, snuffling her body from breast to knees. His head touched her hand and she extended it away from her body.

His teeth were horribly sharp, but the gentleness with which he held her and led her out of the room was enough to bring a tear to her eye. He clawed at the door and it opened, but he stopped it with one foot and released her hand. He reached out and tugged at one of the guard's robes and the startled man surrendered it without comment. Storoth turned his head to her and gave her the robe.

As soon as she was dressed, she extended her hand once again. And so she put her hand in the lion's mouth again, letting him lead her into the light. The outraged shriek of Olina making her smile as she stepped forward to take her place on the throne.

Now for the hard part.

As a lion, he dragged the rough surface of his tongue from her knee to the underside of her breast. Her knees trembled as she looked out at the avid crowd, but a rumbling purr got her attention back to the matter at hand, or knee. He was licking her slowly from knee to breast on the

other side of her body. She trembled when he shifted back to bipedal form and gave her the look that stated that she was the only woman in the worlds for him. He was nude in seconds and she enjoyed every inch of the view.

They kissed and let their hands roam freely, displaying their passion for any and all. With every feather-light touch, her body became more eager until the moment when he bent her over the arm of his throne and took her for all to see.

Each stroke elicited a sigh, a groan or a moan from her. She threw her head back and clawed at the seat of the throne as she swivelled her hips against him. When he pounded into her and roared his release, she followed suit with a howl of her own.

Gasping, spent, she hung over the edge of the throne and turned her head to look at the crowd. She needn't have worried about the voyeurs, they were all busy fucking each other after the passionate display by their leaders.

Storoth staggered as he disengaged from her body but moved her, sat on his throne and pulled her into his lap.

She nestled against him and sighed. She had her lover, her love, her husband and a throne and it only cost her sixteen years of her life. She could hardly wait to see what she would get after the next two hundred.



## Impatient

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"Squirt, what happens next?"

He sighed. "First, you stop calling me that and then we live happily ever after."

"Good plan. When can we start?"

"I think we can start now. Wanna go again?"

He chuckled as she squirmed around to mount him again.

"You only had to ask, love, you only ever had to ask."

## EPILOGUE

“**Y**our Majesty? There is a set of parcels waiting for you.” Seltha had had her baby girl and was now the queen’s secretary. Both women were happy with the arrangement. It gave Eva someone to keep Hak in check and it gave Seltha someone to complain about family to.

“Really? I guess they were really paying attention to the decanting day.” Eva was in the early stages of her own pregnancy. It was a coronation baby and had added yet another leaf to the shrub that was the mythology of the Terran-born Golaz queen.

“These were coming every six months during the whole time you were in stasis. They have an origin point of the Haldis Imperium.”

Oh. Presents! “Where are they?”

“They are being transported to your office as we speak, Your Majesty.”

“Then let’s go.”

“I believe the doctor needs to finish your

internal exam, Your Majesty."

"Fine."

She drummed her fingers on her abdomen until the doctor finished, then sat up and straightened her skirt. "Is everything all right?"

"You are the picture of health, my queen. Give the king my best."

"Well, I will give him *my* best. You are on your own. Besides, he doesn't swing that way." The ladies chuckled down the hall as they approached the queen's offices. There were a surprising amount of matters that she had jurisdiction over and she dealt with them every day, only occasionally sneaking through the connecting door to Storoth's office for a quickie. He gallantly returned the favour when he could.

The presents were getting her more excited than she should be. They would be the infamous care packages that Amy Tyrell had arranged, but she had never gotten one until this moment.

Her desk was piled high. But she opted for the most recent package. She slit the seals and opened it, then squealed loud enough to bring Storoth running and the guards with blades drawn.

"What is it, love?"

She looked at her beloved with shining eyes, her joy overflowing into their mental connection. With both hands, she held the parcel over her head. "Coffee!"

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

I love cats, I love cat shifters. And I love the idea of a man who will wait for his sleeping beauty. Hence...Impatient.

For more on Amy Tyrell, read Haldis Imperium, Book 5 of the Champions of Terra. Or read the whole series to see how she was manipulating the Terrans into stable relationships.

For more on their parent race...the Avari, check out Avari Nyx. Those nano machines are tricky little buggers.

If you want to see a type of shifter I have not mentioned yet, or if you would like me to revisit another one...email me.

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Thanks for being patient,  
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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