

ENTROPY

Viola Grace



Alia Morgan is a geothermal specialist assigned to the ice planet Yana, but she experiences a disruption to her routine when her best friend's brother arrives to invite her to participate in Ember's wedding, in two days. They are halfway to the main city when Symon drops the bomb. For Ember to have a covenant marriage, the most binding and formal of arrangements, she needs a virgin to be deflowered on her wedding night. The problem is, Ember is pregnant and no longer qualifies. Alia was the only virgin she knows.

Symon then has to break the news that he is the one she will be coupling with, and despite her urge to jump into the snow and run for it, part of her is intrigued. Symon is tall, handsome, and has long fingers that she can't take her eyes from, how bad could the wedding night be?

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Entropy
Copyright © 2010 Viola Grace
ISBN: 978-1-55487-609-9
Cover art by Martine Jardin

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Published by eXtasy Books
Look for us online at:
www.eXtasybooks.com

ENTROPY
A TERRAN TIMES NOVELLA

BY

VIOLA GRACE

CHAPTER ONE

Chaos was swirling around her, but Alia Morgan kept her head. It wasn't easy, but she managed to get her readings before heading back through the blizzard of the Yana ice fields. Her senses picked up on an approaching being, but she was almost out of time in the wind and snow so she continued forging back to her home in the rock face.

She would put some tea on for her guest.

Her door felt welcome, as it always did when she had completed her readings. It took two hard slams with her shoulder to dislodge the ice that built up in the few minutes since she had exited, but she made it into her home with only minor loss of heat.

A geothermal examination of Yana was not a glamorous assignment, but she was happy to have it. Her last two global assessments had been disasters. Ali puttered around her home, setting the kettle on before stripping off her insulated leggings and jacket. She threw on her woolly

shawl and waited for her visitor to knock.

The kettle had whistled and she was steeping a pot when the knock came. Ali rushed to open the door, stumbling back at the blast of cold that froze her to the bone. Dressed in the cloak and the casual garb of his kind, a Yanese male entered her toasty abode. He stomped his feet to dislodge snow while closing the door.

No one on Yana left a visitor in the cold. It was horribly rude.

"Tea?" she blurted out the one word that she could manage as she took in his pale green features framed by black hair with intense green eyes. Little green men did not describe the Yanese, though they were some of the visitors to ancient Terra.

"Please. Alia Morgan?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Symon Ioneal. Ember's brother." He shucked his cloak, removed his gloves and placed them on the drying rack near the door. Such arrangements were standard on a world locked in a perpetual winter.

"How is she?" Alia flipped her black braid behind her and placed a cup of tea with condiments on the table. He added sweet and citrus to his, and she followed suit.

"She is getting married and wishes you to attend the ceremony." He grinned at her as he

delivered the bombshell, "As the handmaid of honour."

The sputtering was not ladylike, but she couldn't help it. The moment he looked at her, she lost all composure. Those green eyes saw right through her and she wasn't sure he liked what he saw. His eyes were very intense, taking in every inch of her face before sending his gaze down to her breasts for assessment.

"Why me and why didn't she come herself?"

"As her brother, it is my duty to see to details of the wedding, that includes getting you to the ceremony." He sipped at his tea and nodded in satisfaction. "Who taught you to make tea?"

"My foster mother. We make it the same way on Terra. Sorry if it is too strong." She was babbling, but his gaze was exceptionally intense. "May I ask why you are staring at me?"

"Oh, I will be your partner at the wedding, I am the groomsman of honour. I am just getting used to your colouring."

"Oh." Lavender eyes were unknown on Yana, her black hair was common enough though. Her skin pinked under his scrutiny.

"You change colour, how lovely. I was afraid you were snow white all the time."

She didn't dignify that with an answer, sipping deeply at her tea before pouring him and then herself another cup.

She had six months left on Yana before she would be recalled to the Alliance. As a Terran Volunteer she had only one task left before she was able to roam where she wished and find a home. Ali had to have a baby and the Alliance had to approve her match. She shook her head. That was nonsense and she would deal with it later. "When is the wedding?"

He sipped at his cup and pursed his lips slightly as if he didn't want to speak. "The day after tomorrow."

Her cup clattered in the saucer. "What? Why so soon?"

"Ember is pregnant. She and Rudai are having a covenant marriage right off the start. No easing into it." His mouth pulled in a grimace.

"Not a planned baby then?"

"No. Rudai knows better, but he wanted her and he was determined to have her."

There was something behind his irritation. "Friend of yours?"

"For twenty years. Didn't stop him from fucking my sister though." He scowled.

Alia blinked and barked out a laugh. "From what Ember said, I am fairly sure they met in the middle on that one."

"She mentioned him to you?"

"Yes, when I was in Teness before I came here to the geo station." She thought about it for a

moment. "I don't know if I can get leave from my duties."

"It is already done. I have contacted the prefect and have arranged clearance for you to attend the wedding and ceremonies."

She smiled at him, not looking into his eyes. "When do we leave?"

His tone was smug. "How fast can you be ready? The creeper is idling on the other side of the escarpment."

She blinked. "Do I need to bring clothes?"

Symon looked as if he wanted to say something naughty, but instead he said, "Clothing will be provided for you. Your circumstances are known."

She nodded, ignoring the lump in her throat. As the Terran Volunteer, she had ship suits and jumpsuits and nothing more. The insulated clothing had been given to her by the Yana government, it wasn't even hers. She had nothing.

Alia set the heat and maintenance levels of her small facility to keep it above freezing. She plugged in a few data runs that needed to be processed, then pulled on her leggings and coat.

Stomping into her boots, she quickly rinsed and dried the tea set, putting the accessories into the fridge so they wouldn't freeze.

At Symon's nod, she pulled on her gloves, wrapped the lower part of her hood so that only

her eyes were exposed and vulnerable. The Yanese cloaks were known for their insulating properties, but they were valuable and not offered to aliens. Alia had to make do with the snowsuit.

He pulled the door open and waved for her to precede him. Symon latched the door behind them and took the lead. She followed closely through the swirling snow, catching up when he paused to wait for her. In this whiteout, only a few feet made the difference between life and death, so getting lost was not a good idea.

She threw her senses open again, keeping a tight grip on his signature as they walked to the creeper. The hum that the vehicle emanated was only audible from a few feet away. The snow absorbed all other sound.

Symon practically threw her into the creeper, she shivered around in the cab until she was firmly seated and he took the steering mechanism into his hands to start them moving.

"How long have you been out here? Ember didn't mention it." The instrument readings in front of him lit the path that would lead them back to Teness.

"Six months."

"Six months alone in that shed?"

"Yes. It isn't the worst assignment I have had." She shrugged to hide her defensive instinct. She was touchy when folks insulted her home.

He nodded, his black hair sliding free of his hood. "What do you know about Yana wedding ceremonies?"

"They are similar to Terran ones except in the restriction of wedding parties. The bride and groom take different vows depending on their level of marriage. If it is convenience, they agree to honour their families, if it is a love match, they swear to formalize if their love brings children, and if a covenant, the bride must be a vir... How is Ember having a covenant marriage?"

He set the creeper on auto and turned to look at her. "There has to be a virgin on the wedding night at a covenant marriage, but it does not have to be the bride, merely a member of the bridal party."

Ten miles from her home and safety, locked in a vehicle with someone claiming to be her best friend's brother, she only had one thing to say, "No fucking way."

CHAPTER TWO

“Calm down, Alia. It isn’t the end of the world. All required permissions have been granted. It is why I was so late in coming to get you. We had to clear it with your Representative first.”

“They sold my virginity?” Her question was more of a shriek.

He looked like he wanted to touch her to calm her, but she was bristling with irritation. “More like rented it. If you wish, a physician can restore you after the bridal night, but that night you and I will consummate the wedding on behalf of Ember and Rudai. The sheets will be shown and you will be free to leave after the wedding breakfast.”

She peeled off her glove and rubbed at her forehead. She tore open the closure of the hood and scowled at him. “That was exceptionally sneaky.”

“Thank you. It was Ember’s plan.”

“Well, it explains why you were sizing me up.

You were trying to see if you would fit." Being crass was her only defence, but it was worth it to see the flare of heat in those leaf green eyes.

"Not just that. I was admiring your creamy skin, the silk of your hair and those fascinating eyes of yours, wondering if they would go wide while I was inside you."

She blinked as heat flooded through her. Okay, two could play that little game. "I think we should keep quiet until we arrive at Teness."

"Good. If you keep getting my blood up, there may be one less virgin at the wedding." He chuckled and turned back to the steering column, returning manual control and accelerating across the ice fields of his home world.

The hours of travel were standard and boring, but as soon as they reached the encapsulated city of Teness, she sighed in relief. The Yana had powerful pheromones when in a hunting state to bemuse their prey. Since Symon was imagining her naked, the inside of the creeper had a thick atmosphere.

Alia had her hands clenched on the inside of the door to keep herself from jumping Symon and her knuckles were sore by the time they arrived at Symon's home. Having a well-off relative host the wedding was a Yanese tradition. That left the groom's home clear for the couple the next day.

She exited the creeper without waiting for

Symon. Inside Taness, she could have removed her outerwear, but she was having the urge to wrap herself from head to toe in concealing garments. Waiting for her host made her dance from foot to foot. He didn't keep her long, handing the creeper's controls over to the servant who had been waiting for them. "Come this way, Alia."

Symon removed his cloak and gloves the moment that they entered his home, turning to assist her, grinning when she backed away. "I will not take you now, Alia. The ceremony has to be conducted according to our traditions, that means you will be a virgin on Ember's wedding night. Now take off your outerwear, you will catch cold."

She snorted, but shucked her gloves and outer clothing, leaving her in her baggy jumpsuit and stockings.

Vulnerable did not even begin to qualify her feelings. She was terrified, her mind a swirling vortex of chaos as it always was in a new situation. Using her talent here was useless, it only read a city full of people. Being a Sensor was not a useful skill.

As if sensing her discomfort, Symon said, "Come I will take you to Ember and you can rake her over the coals in person."

A servant came forward and handed her a pair

of soft leather slippers and she almost bawled. Instead, she slipped them on her feet and followed Symon up the great staircase in the entryway, looking at the amazing home that spread out around it.

Ember was in a guest room at the end of the hall, probably to keep her out of her brother's way. She was seated at a desk and rose with a happy shriek when Alia came into her room. "You said yes? Oh thank you!"

The hug was on the violent side and it suddenly came to Alia why Ember was so desperate. "You couldn't find another virgin, could you?"

Ember sniffled, tears of relief in her eyes. "No. We looked, but the women threw themselves at their boyfriends rather than face a night with my brother."

Symon was lounging in the doorway, looking amused and mildly offended. "I resent that."

"Resent it all you want, Sy. It was true." Ember led her to sit on the edge of the bed and continued, "We asked the prefect, he agreed to allow you to stand in, then we had to ask the officiant, then the Alliance, and finally your Representative. Only after all of that could we ask you and you said yes. I am so grateful Ali."

Ember kept a close hold of Alia's hand as if she was afraid that she would bolt.

"I didn't exactly say yes to the publicly

acknowledged deflowering, I said yes to participating in your wedding. Symon waited until we were ten miles from my home before he broke the rest to me."

With green eyes gleaming, Ember admitted, "That was my idea."

Alia reached out and pinched her, deliberately.

"Ow." Ember rubbed her arm, but kept a grip on Alia's hand.

"I am not running away, Ember. You can let go of my hand." She struggled to free her fingers, flexing them when her friend let go. "You look lovely. New gown?"

Distracting Ember was painfully easy as the bride stood and twirled. "Isn't it lovely? It was a gift from Rudai."

"Ember, Alia has had a long day and she might want to freshen up before dinner. You two can talk then. Alia, come with me please." Symon held out his hand and she extended her own, then pulled it back. She had been doing some housecleaning before the sounder signalled her time to head out for daily readings. Dark crescents were under each nail. "I will follow you, don't worry. Please lead the way." She stood and followed him. "See you later, Ember."

He was waiting for her down the hall. "Why didn't you allow me to touch your hand?"

"I was working before you arrived and didn't

realize that I have dirt under my nails. I was embarrassed." She still was embarrassed, but it wasn't in her nature to lie.

"Don't be, your room has an en suite bath that you can use to remedy that in a few minutes." Symon reached out, took her hand despite her protest and lifted it to his lips.

She had the most peculiar feeling, as if he was *tasting* her. His unsettling eyes closed for a moment and when he lowered her fingers, the smile on his face made her more nervous than anything so far on this particular day. She tried to speak, but had to clear her throat, "My room?"

"This way. There are clothes in the wardrobe that you can help yourself to, and you can withdraw a selection to take back with you if you wish." He opened a door for her.

She tiptoed inside, holding in a gasp at the comfort and beauty of the room. White wood made up the bedroom set, a gorgeously carved four-poster and headboard framed a huge bed. Navy blue bedding stood out against the pale wood, dark carpeting was plush under her feet.

Symon nodded for her to open the wardrobe and she did, this time letting the gasp escape.

Gowns, blouses, skirts and shoes filled the wardrobe. "I am guessing you have a lot of female guests."

He looked confused. "No, these were all

obtained for you.”

“I am only going to be here for three days. How many clothes do I need?”

“Ember said you needed clothing, so I ordered the clothing. Now that I see your colouring, I believe that only two thirds of the colours will suit you.”

“Ah.” That explained it. Ember had insisted that she have clothing. “I would really like to have that shower now, if you wouldn’t mind.”

He looked as if he wanted to say something, but nodded and left her alone, closing the door with a click.

She checked the bathroom and turned on the spigot of the shower. Hot water poured out and she tempered it until she could stand to be under it. The soaps and shampoos were scented with fruits and herbs. With relief, her hands came clean while the rest of her was revelling in the water. Her little facility only had a sonic shower and the hot water was a luxury.

She sighed and shut off the shower, exiting and wrapping her hair and body in thick, absorbent towels. The bathroom was huge. A large tub called to her, but she ignored it. There was no time for luxurious soaking, by her calculations, it was almost dinnertime.

Alia couldn’t resist the lure of the bed and launched herself into the air, twisting to land on

her back in the thick bedding. She bounced a few times before unravelling her body from the fluffy towel and wandering over to the wardrobe. Uncertainty gripped her until she realized that whatever she chose would be better than her coveralls.

Breast wraps were in a drawer, as were gauzy panties that were little more than a whisper of silk. Starting with her foundation garments, she tightened the wrap until her chest was on scale with a Yana female. The larger breasts of humans were attention getting so she bound them down. She had done so since the day the first males she met gawked at her and Ember informed her about the ins and outs of Yana physiology.

She chose a gown that would not expose her wrap, dropping it over her head before fighting with the laces that would keep it fashionably tight. A knock at the door caught her right before she started screaming. "Come in."

Why she was surprised to see Symon in the doorway, she didn't know. To hell with dignity, "Help?"

He entered and closed the door behind him. Without a word, he walked up to her, loosened the laces, moved past her to the wardrobe and selected a different gown. Symon dropped the new gown over her head, then peeled the other gown up and around the new one so she was not

completely exposed.

She tugged it down into place. The new gown was a deep blue that matched her bedding.

Symon finally spoke, "You know, I am rarely on the end of dressing women. This is quite a change from my normal routine."

"I am glad I could change things up for you."

The blue was a much better choice for her. The mirror that was next to the wardrobe was full length so she could watch Symon's face as he tightened her laces. The tautness of the skin on his cheekbones and the blaze of heat in his eyes when he met her gaze in the mirror made her knees weak.

His voice was husky. "All done, you may want to take care of your hair before dinner though."

She blushed a furious pink and ran into the bathroom. Her hair was indeed wild, but a little exploration yielded a set of brushes and combs. She anchored her hair into an appropriate configuration and returned to the bedroom where Symon was leaning against the bedpost, watching for her.

"Did you think I was going to run?" She slipped on some slippers that matched the gown she was wearing.

"I have no idea what is going on in that head of yours." His keen gaze took in her hairstyle. "Lovely."

"Ember showed me how to do this when I was at my orientation."

He held out his hand and she took it without hesitation. When he brought her hand to his lips, she *knew* that he was tasting her. Not just her body, but her soul. The moment that his tongue flicked across her skin, she pulled her hand back with a jerk. "Stop that."

He chuckled. "You prefer the scent of berry to flower."

"There is nothing wrong in going through life smelling like a cookie." She gave him her foster mother's favourite quote. Suza had loved vanilla scent.

"I would have to agree. You smell delightful." Symon was approaching her with a determined gleam in his gaze.

"Isn't it time for dinner?" She backed toward the door and was up against the hard wood when he pressed his body against her. *Speaking of wood...*

"Alia, are you ready yet?" Ember's voice stopped Symon with his lips less than an inch from her own. The air was thick with pheromones and her knees trembled with the effort not to lean up to complete the kiss.

"Yes. Yes I am." She opened the door with her right hand and it swung open a crack before Symon closed it again.

"I will have a kiss from you, Alia. Before you go

to bed tonight." It was a sinister whisper that sent ripples of heat through her, swelling her breasts against the bindings.

She whispered back, "Probably, Symon, but don't count on it."

He leaned back with the gleam of an accepted challenge in his eyes. He opened the door to Ember's surprised gaze and offered his hand to Alia once again.

She twisted her lips in a frown, but took it.

Rudai was waiting at the foot of the stairs for his lady to descend. He waited until Symon and Alia cleared the stairs before he stepped forward to assist Ember down the last few steps. In formal silence, they walked to the dining room where a series of fluttering servants put the final touches on the table before exiting the room.

Alia's mouth watered. She hadn't had anything other than rations in six months. She carefully reined in her urge to savage the food and sat across from Ember at the elegantly appointed table. Symon sat at the head of the table and to his right, sat his sister and her betrothed.

They broke bread and Rudai asked Alia, "You agreed?"

She cast a rueful eye toward Symon, "More or less. For the sake of argument, yes."

The relief in his face was not feigned. He was delighted. "Thank you. There was no one else we

could ask, and we do not ask it lightly.”

She felt a little less used at that point. “Thank you for saying that. I was feeling a little bit cornered. To know that it matters makes it seem less like a trap.”

Ember and Symon both blushed. “I am sorry, Ali, but there was no way to get in contact with you. You know what communications are like across the snow.”

“I know, and I wasn’t saving my virginity for anything in particular, I just didn’t have the opportunity before I left Terra and since then I have been travelling a lot.” She shrugged and nodded for the soup to be served to her.

Rudai seemed to be asking all the questions that Ember said she would never ask. “What assignments were before Yana?”

“Elocar and Moi. I had to escape both of those with the locals on my heels.” She smiled instead of snorted. Her manners were on their highest setting. She wasn’t going to make any odd noises while she was in front of a stranger. Funny, but she didn’t consider Symon a stranger.

“Moi, I believe I heard something about Moi. Their planet finally woke out of a thousand year dormancy.” Symon was dunking his bread in his soup and eating as he watched her.

“Um. Yes. I did hear that.” She kept her gaze on her bowl and sipped at the truly lovely soup. The

combination of sweet, sour, hot and spicy was lovely after her restricted diet.

Rudai smiled. "You didn't hear any of that while you were there?"

"Nope. It must have happened after I left."

Ember piped up, "What were you doing there?"

"Geological scans, same as here." She didn't mention that she had sent her Sensor scans out and touched the mind of the planet, waking it unceremoniously.

Ember was curious, "What have you found here?"

"Lots of snow, ice and the deep thermals that keep Taness up and running." She decided to change the subject, "Symon, what do you do for a living? I have rarely seen such a well appointed home in Taness."

Ember looked cautiously at her brother. Rudai looked uncomfortable.

Symon answered her, "I am the anointed avatar, should Yana wake. Your history of waking planets was why you were initially brought here. The people have had enough of the ice age, but can't break the cycle if the planet doesn't wake."

Alia could feel her mouth open in shock. Symon reached out and pushed her jaw up, smoothing his fingers down her neck in a sensual caress that woke her from her surprise. "You knew this whole time?"

"Of course. We didn't know if it was something that you did or something that happened to you over time in a place, but you were the only link between those planets and their waking."

Rudai and Ember were quiet as the conversation got heated, but with a softening sentimentality, Alia noted her friend's hand being held by her lover.

"So, the Yana requested me with the hope that I would wake the planet? Why didn't they tell me?" She heard her voice getting higher and made an effort to calm herself.

"What could you have done?" He was leaning back in his chair, watching her.

"I could have woken the damned world the day I landed and been somewhere else getting my ass kicked by now!" Manners shmanners. She was ticked. She pounded her hand against table, making the cutlery jump.

That widened his eyes. "You can do it that easily? Why has it not happened by now?"

"Because I learned to control my talent after Moi. Elocar was my first encounter with a new planet and the contact almost drove me mad. Moi was an accident, her soul was much higher than Elocar's, I touched it without meaning to."

"What do you mean *mad*?" Symon leaned forward.

"The wild chaos, the entropy, of a planet's mind

is too much for me if I am not expecting it. Too many variables are being calculated at one time for me to deal with. I have spoken with two avatars and they both told me that they never touch the entirety of the planet's mind at once."

He leaned forward eagerly. "Very wise, but can you touch the mind of Yana?"

She shrugged, "Sure. When?"

Ember broke her fascinated silence. "Not until after the wedding, or maybe after the baby."

Symon looked at her. "I would like my niece or nephew to be born into a warming world. So, one day after the wedding, I will ask Alia again."

Three days and he would be the avatar of the world. The tiny fantasies that she had begun to spin in her mind came crashing down around her. They would never be a couple, holding hands and cuddling. He would be making arrangements for his people and his planet and she would be on to the next world.

When the servants removed her bowl, she felt part of her heart go with it.

CHAPTER THREE

The rest of the dinner was remarkably silent. The food was wonderful, but Alia couldn't enjoy it as much as she wanted to.

As the dessert dishes were removed, they went into a drawing room to listen to Ember play wonderful compositions on an instrument that sounded like a harp crossed with a piano.

Rudai sat on the loveseat, his enjoyment of Ember's skills evident in his face.

Alia took up a place on the centre of the couch and perched in a ladylike manner. When Symon stopped watching her from the doorway, he took a seat next to her and pulled her against him. He leaned down to whisper in her ear.

"Why are you upset with me?"

She tangled her fingers in her lap and whispered back, "I don't know."

He raised his head and looked to Rudai. "How did you know that Ember was yours, Ru, aside from her flinging herself after you at every

opportunity?"

Rudai's eyes showed his smile. "You know as well as I do, her taste, her scent."

Ember was blushing furiously, but she kept playing.

Symon whispered, "It is how we choose. The women choose by scent, the men by taste." He idly lifted her hand and brought it to his lips. His tongue flicked out, traced the veins under her skin and left her shivering.

Silence had fallen, Rudai and Ember were looking at them in amazement. Finally, Rudai said, "Remember, brother, we need a virgin for the wedding night."

Hypnotized by his eyes, his scent, just *him*, Alia leaned toward him.

Symon's voice deepened into a husky growl. "That leaves so many other options." He still had her hand in his grip and as he slowly stood, he took her with him.

She only had one question as he led her up the stairs, "What kind of options?" she knew her face held her curiosity and for the life of her, she couldn't keep a thought in her head.

He looked back at her in surprise and then chuckled. "We will discuss them." He led her past her room to the room next door.

His room was decorated in the same manner hers was, but with rich bronzes instead of blues.

She didn't have time to investigate further as he tugged her to the bed and stood next to it, pulling her tightly against him. He ran his hands over her, starting at her shoulders and working down her torso.

When he thumbed her nipples through the breast wrap, she suddenly came out of her hormone-induced haze. "Symon."

He bent to nuzzle her neck, "What is it, Alia?"

"I am afraid my body might repulse you. I am not built to Yana standards."

He stood, looking down at her with curiosity in his eyes. "Really? Do tell."

"I...um... Oh hells, get me out of this dress and I will show you." She turned her back and waited for him to unlace her.

His fingers skimmed her spine as he unlaced her. She turned to face him as she unwrapped the breast wrap. At first, he was mildly amused, but as she revealed her D-cups his eyes widened in surprise. Waiting to see his revulsion, she watched him closely as he bent to examine the exposed flesh carefully and gasped as he ran his tongue from the upper curve of one breast, across the nipple and lapped at the underside. He murmured between her breasts, "You still taste like mine."

That one sentence burned in her mind and liquefied her bones. She buckled in his arms and he lifted her quickly, seating her on the bed.

"Alia, no matter what happens, my pants are staying on. Aside from that, I plan to taste every inch of you." The intensity of his gaze was boring into her own. His words caused flames to run through her body, and if she had an idea that foreplay was this intense, she would have tried it years ago.

Symon flung off his shirt, buttons popping and she giggled with his haste. The green of his skin was darker on his face and hands, paler on his chest. A thin trail of dark hair led into his trousers and she uncharacteristically wanted to follow it to its destination.

"No clothing restrictions for me?" She kicked off her shoes and wiggled her toes against his legs.

"I will leave your pantalets for as long as I can, but I will taste you before we sleep." He leaned over her until she tipped back from trying to keep his face in focus.

She backed away from him and he followed her until he was covering her from head to toe. The heat radiating from him was incredible and she arched up to him, rubbing her breasts against his flesh. He groaned and she moaned at the contact. "That feels better than I could have imagined."

"I would have to agree." He snaked an arm under her and rolled until she was straddling him. "Do that again."

Obligingly, she rubbed her breasts across his

chest, sighing happily at the feel him against her recently confined skin. Symon reached between them and caressed her clit through her panties. The dampness of the fabric had her blushing and he groaned.

He leaned up and took one of her nipples between his teeth, sucking and nipping as he rubbed at her slick flesh through the fabric. Her breath caught in her chest as a coil in her body wound tight and released in a rush that set sparks off behind her eyes.

He lowered her body to his, spreading her thighs until she was astride the ridge of his cock. "Again, do that again." The deep pitch of his voice vibrated through her.

His hands directed her to move, so she braced herself with two hands on his abdomen and rocked back and forth, using the friction of their clothing to drive her body and his closer to release.

She wanted to say something witty and clever, but his scent was a stimulus in itself and she was shivering as another release swept over her. Symon gripped her hips and groaned as he arched off the bed. She would be bruised in the morning, but it was not her immediate concern. He pumped against her as his release dragged on with hers.

When his grip relaxed, she moaned softly. He pulled her down against his chest and held her

tightly. She snuggled into him, his scent and the warmth of his skin relaxing her totally.

"Why did you leave your home world?" He was drawing absent patterns on her naked back.

"Because there was nothing for me there. I became a Volunteer so that I could leave and find a new home. I had no idea it would be so hard." A tear pricked her eye and she breathed deeply, finding calm in Symon's scent.

"The Terrans that were chosen were all exceptional from what I understand."

"I was the exception to the exceptional rule." She laughed against his neck, trailing her lips over the pulse in his throat. She worked her way along his jaw line until she reached his lips, giving him a sweet kiss that she put her thanks for this experience into. The next kiss was deeper, parting his chiselled lips with her tongue, dipping in to taste him. His taste was as intoxicating as his scent. She nipped, sucked and licked at his mouth until he couldn't hold still any longer. With a groan, he gripped the back of her head and took charge of the kiss, tasting, plundering and arousing her with a surety that made her shake. Her body throbbed, ached and replayed each sensation she had felt since they touched.

He drew back from her and held her so that she met his gaze, "You are an exceptional woman, don't ever think you are not."

She wanted to say something clever, but tears choked her. Symon groaned and rolled so that she was under him, holding her for an endless time before he started making his way down her body, using his hands and mouth to forge his path.

Alia wove her fingers into his hair, trying to control his actions, but he pulled her greedy hands aside and pinned them to the bed. When his tongue dipped into her navel, he didn't need to hold her hands, she was gripping the bedding to stop her from writhing at that small sensual touch.

Symon chuckled and nuzzled the light band of her pantalets down until he swept the fabric from her completely. He nudged her thighs apart, using his torso as a wedge. His arms lifted her thighs and elevated her until her slick folds were even with his mouth. He lapped at her and then growled happily, diving in to savage her with lips and tongue until she screamed and offered up more of her cream. He paused to let her recover, then started a pattern of suckling her clit and lapping at her folds.

Her body was weeping, parting and aching for him to fill her. Her hips lifted against him, begging for more. Symon took his time, teasing her, pulling back when she was almost to the edge. Her previous releases seemed to have given him clues as to her cues. She could feel her thighs shiver and flex, but he wouldn't let her go over.

"Symon, please!"

He surged up her body, pressing his hips against hers, rocking against her until she screamed. When she came, her gaze locked with his, wild lavender against leaf green. Her Sensor talent flickered and flared, binding her tracking to him in that instant and there was nothing she could do to halt it. Mind and body, she locked with him.

He groaned and pressed his body to hers, shaking as his own senses overloaded. His mind collided with hers in a firestorm of sensation. She felt his cock, the spasms, her own body throbbing all in a welter of confused impulses. She was inside his body and he was in hers, his surprise was apparent.

"How are you doing that?"

"I am not. You are. We both are." She was gasping, her body confused as to what pleasure was its own and what was his.

"I have never felt anything like this before, and it was not my first time." He fell to one side and cuddled her against him.

"They briefed us on it in the Citadel. When two talents are compatible and they meet in intimate circumstances, a bonding of minds can occur. That would mean that you were a talent though."

He settled her more comfortably with her head on his shoulder. "I am a talent of a sort. It is what

makes me suitable as an avatar."

"You came in your pants, twice, you can't be comfortable."

"I don't want to let you go."

Her smile was bittersweet. "You will if you take on the mantle of avatar of Yana, at least we get the wedding night."

"I will shower and return immediately." He sat up, grimaced and moved off the bed.

"I will get dressed and return to my room. I don't think it is a good idea for me to stay here all night."

He raised a black eyebrow in surprise. "You don't trust me?"

"I don't trust me. There was a moment when you were licking me when I would have pulled you inside me without a second thought."

"I am going to make that a cold shower. Don't leave yet. That's an order from the master of the house."

Alia laughed as he darted into the bathroom. The shower was on and off in under three minutes. She sat up, wincing a little as her body complained about the unaccustomed activities, and looked for her clothing.

The breast wrap was a tangle and her panties were missing. The gown went on with a little difficulty as she had to manually flatten her breasts to manage it. Alia didn't tighten the gown

as she was going to be heading right to her room.

She had just slipped on her shoes when Symon reappeared, wearing nothing more than a towel around his hips. "You needn't have dressed."

"I am not going to sprint through your halls naked. Sorry."

He grinned and took her by the hand, leading her up to the wall that had her room on the other side. He pressed an icon in the panelling and a secret door slid open, giving him full access to her room.

"Sneaky bugger."

"Thank you, I do try." He led her into her room, removed her gown and helped her into bed, tucking her in. With her inside the sheets and covers, he lay next to her on top of the covers, wrapped around her.

She sighed. "Thank you for being such a gentleman. I don't know many who have your self-control."

"With Ember's happiness at stake, I am willing to torture myself for precisely two days. After that, I will not have to hold back."

"And then you join with a planet."

"And still I will want you with me." He pressed a kiss to her temple and whispered for her to sleep.

She smiled, concubine to an avatar was not a job description she had ever heard of, but it

sounded kind of nice at this moment.

This moment she wanted to last forever.

CHAPTER FOUR

Waking alone was a disappointment, but Alia showered, dressed and went downstairs in search of breakfast with a sense of optimism.

Ember was in the dining room and she quickly asked one of the servers to bring a plate for Alia. "Did you sleep well?"

"I did. Where are the boys this morning?"

"Well, Rudai is attending to his family's part of the wedding details and Symon went off to the council hall to talk with the prefect. If Yana is going to wake, he wants everyone ready."

A hot beverage was placed in front of Alia and she thanked the servant quietly. "Is the planet waking going to be a problem?"

"No! Don't think that for a moment. I want my baby to live in a world that can be green and growing, not white and frozen." Ember placed her hand low on her belly and smiled.

"If someone had just mentioned that that was my true mission, it could have been over and done

with by now." She smiled as a plate of Yana breakfast foods was placed before her. "I have never asked, why did the Yana stay when the planet iced over?"

Ember chuckled. "Our people were given the choice to leave or stay and many ships left, but some prepared for the oncoming winter of two thousand years and raised their families in domes around the planet. They are all located, as you know, in areas that are above the flood plains so we are safe when the planet wakes for a thaw. The domes are all designed to handle the wild weather and the Alliance will bring us supplies as Yana returns to life."

"Why did the planet go dormant to start with?"

"Yana's avatar, Sinan, had died, and no one wished to take his place. When we rejected the planet, it chose to give us two thousand years to find a new avatar. For the last five hundred years, an avatar has been selected and given this fine house. If the planet had woken, they would have gladly joined with it to restart a new chapter for our people."

"Okay, that explains a lot. Is the talent for being an avatar genetic?"

Ember looked surprised. "Oddly enough, yes. Our family is descended from Sinan's niece, Alrel. Most of the chosen avatars have been in our bloodline. I never thought about it."

"So when I first arrive you were living..." The house had been large, but pleasant with less servants and more family living in it. Alia had seen it once when she dropped Ember off during her societal training. Ember had been her instructor in all things Yanese.

"In my great aunt's house. It was closer to the university."

Ember had been a good teacher, but at the time, Alia hadn't known that she would be in an isolated outpost. The etiquette was coming in handy now, but it had not been needed for the last six months.

"So, you and Symon seemed to get along well last night."

Alia almost choked on her breakfast. "We found some common ground." It was between her thighs, but Ember didn't need to know that.

"I could see that. Are you still my handmaid of honour?"

"Of course. Symon would not jeopardize your future or that of your child, nor would I." Alia was slightly insulted, but since her intact state was a result of Symon's self-control and not hers, she really didn't have a leg to stand on.

"I am sorry, you are correct. You are a good friend, Alia. Thank you again. I can't believe I am getting married tomorrow!" Ember ended on a squeal.

"Explain the day to me tomorrow, I am fuzzy on the details."

Ember explained that Alia would be expected to rise at dawn and assist her in bathing and dressing for the first ceremony. Two hours before noon, the ceremony would start, consisting of meditation and chanting in an attempt to contact Yana to bless the union. At noon, the bride and groom would sign the contracts, and after that, food and drink would be served by the handmaid while everyone in Taness came to wish the new couple luck.

It was Alia's job to keep Ember fed, watered and to take her place in the greeting line when she needed to relieve herself. When Ember returned, Alia needed to pass on the names of everyone who had greeted her and then the line could keep moving.

When the line was finished, there would be a dinner for invited guests and dancing would begin. Anytime after the meal, the bride and groom could escape, leaving the handmaid and groomsman to bid the guests farewell at midnight.

"So, I am on my feet from dawn until midnight? And then I have to sleep with the groomsman?"

Ember grinned with a blush. "Yes, sorry, but it is tradition. On the plus side, if Yana doesn't wake, you and Symon can still have a covenant

marriage because of the stained sheets.”

“You mean, because we did it within the bounds of the marriage ceremony?”

Ember nodded. “Something like that. So the next morning, at noon, the sheets will be displayed and genotyping will confirm that it was one of the formal members of the ceremony and that it was virginal blood.”

“And then my week will be complete. Well, until I wake the planet and your brother takes on the mantle of avatar.” Alia worked her way through the unfamiliar breakfast selections, finding some too bitter, but most quite tasty.

Ember waited quietly for a moment. “And this afternoon a doctor is coming by to confirm your virginity.”

Alia was just picking up her cup and slanted a look at Ember. “You were going to gloss over that tidbit?”

“Well, I hate those exams and didn’t want to make you uncomfortable. Well, any more uncomfortable.”

“Thanks for that. Fine. I have had internal exams before and am not that worried about it.”

“Why would you have had a doctor...”

“To make sure that an abusive foster parent had not raped me. After that, I was sent to a woman who was very nice and gave me the support I needed to return my mind to its proper

alignment.”

“Was it difficult not having family? I can’t imagine life without Symon.”

“It was what it was. Dwelling on it only keeps me from moving forward.” Alia put her cup down on the table and paused, Symon was close. Her senses were telling her he was outside the house and on his way in. “I still can’t believe the women of Yana would dodge your brother.”

“There is a certain stigma to the avatar. They don’t usually marry, so potentially starting a covenant arrangement with them is pointless.” Ember brightened.

Alia could sense Symon right behind her. The kiss on her neck was a wonderful greeting. It sent shivers down her spine and made her breast wrap feel uncomfortably tight. She was wearing emerald green today because she wanted to match his eyes.

“Welcome to the morning, Alia.”

“Welcome to the morning, Symon, how was your meeting?”

He sat and the servants brought in food and drink for him. “The prefect and elders are both pleased and frightened. They wish to speak to you this afternoon.”

“What time? Ember has someone booked to fish around in my lady parts and it isn’t you.” She grinned at his shocked expression and then let her

grin fade as heat flared in his eyes.

"The virginity test will take only a few minutes. The others will wait until you are finished." Ember chimed in in an effort to break the tension.

"Oh, good to know. There is nothing I like more than a roomful of men knowing I just had to spread my legs for a stranger."

Symon grinned and sipped at his morning tea. "Not that strange."

Ember looked surprised. "Didn't Symon tell you? He was a physician before he was the avatar elect. He will do the confirmation."

She fought the furious blush with effort. "Aren't folks worried that he will...tamper with the result?"

Ember looked insulted and Symon simply ate the breakfast that was placed in front of him. "Of course not. The registers are sealed and there is no tampering with the equipment. Symon would never consider such a thing."

"Of course he wouldn't. Please pardon me for suggesting it." She inclined her head to both Ember and Symon.

Symon's eyes were sparkling in amusement. "So, it is me."

It took her a moment before she realised what she had said and how she phrased it. "Oh, that won't be awkward at all."

"I intend to make it as painless as possible."

Symon's entire attitude was rippling with a smugness that made her squirm in her chair.

She sipped at the water that a servant placed in front of her. Her mind whirled with the hormonal overload she was undergoing. Logic fought through the chaos and reared its head. "I need to contact the Alliance to see about a new assignment. After Yana wakes, I don't think the population will want me around anymore."

Symon looked up with the glare of an angry predator. "You will wait until after I am avatar before you start looking for another assignment. You have quarters here with clothing, my hospitality and anything you need, I want you to ask for."

Ember nodded. "I am moving out after the ceremony, so you will have the house to yourself while Symon acclimates to the planet in his mind."

The thoughts that filled Alia's head defied words. Images of her body tangled with his, their minds locked together flashed through her head. Symon's body jerked as if the image of her licking her way down his abdomen transferred itself to him.

"Alia, control your thoughts please. You only have to manage it for one more day." His fist was clenched on the table and his other finger rhythmically stroked the side of his plate until she managed to clear her mind.

"I do apologise. I wasn't aware that I was broadcasting."

Ember was looking between them with a bemused expression, "Broadcasting what?"

"You didn't feel that?"

"No."

"Never mind, Em. Don't you have a final fitting for your bridal gown today?" Symon tried to distract his sister.

"Yes, and Alia has to try on her handmaid of honour gown. I get the feeling that alterations will be necessary."

Symon looked fondly over at Alia's breasts, "So do I. You are going for the design without wraps then?"

Ember looked to Alia, "Yes. I am sorry, but the gowns were arranged months ago. They are cut low in both front and back so undergarments are not required."

Ali shook her head. "Excellent. Just what I need for your perfect day. Whatever you have for me to wear, I will wear."

The conversation turned to wedding details and Symon excused himself. He stopped behind her and kissed her neck again before he left. Ember was looking at her with amusement and Alia was feeling all warm and wanted.

CHAPTER FIVE

“**Y**ou two make a really good couple, you know. Perhaps after he becomes the avatar you could stay around for a while.”

“For what? To do readings on a planet that is bringing itself out of dormancy? There isn’t a lot to do here once the planet wakes. I also have a clause in my contract that can’t be satisfied with an avatar.”

“What would that be?”

“I am supposed to have a child by an Alliance picked partner. Either in vitro or by a standard conception.” Ali shrugged. “With my scores, I may not be chosen by anyone, and therefore I will be out of the contract.”

“That would be perfect, it would mean you could stay here.”

Alia chuckled. “Could, but won’t. I will find a small place out of the way and live quietly for the rest of my life. It’s been the only thing I have been planning since I left Terra.”

Ember looked over at her with pity in her eyes. "Is that all you have lived for, to die alone?"

"Pretty much. It is the only thing that has burned in my mind. To be safe and alone in my own home where no one can make me leave." She was holding her water glass with both hands and it started to vibrate in her grip. Breathing deeply, she controlled herself and released the glass.

"What was that, Ali?"

"Just a talent manifestation. Nothing major. Don't worry about it."

Ember smiled. "Symon used to say that when the house shook. It was how we knew what he was."

Alia finished her water and they talked about shoes, formalities and the proper poses during the two-hour meditation.

"What is the meditation for?"

"It symbolizes our attempts to contact our world. The ritual was added to the ceremonies when the snow rolled over the surface." Ember rose from the table and led her up the stairs.

In her rooms, where the desk had stood the day before, a dressmaker's dummy with a gown made of shimmering rust-coloured lace now held court. Next to it was a gown of navy blue in the same lace.

Lots of skin would be exposed and her body would be outlined faithfully, but Alia liked it.

Meditation would be done while kneeling, so she didn't have to worry about the sheath confining her.

"I don't know if that is going to fit. My breasts don't fit into Yana clothing without a wrap."

"The seamstress is on her way." Ember chuckled. "Oh, before I forget, I have a gift for you."

Wedding gift. "Oh my God, I am so sorry, Ember, I forgot to get you a gift."

Ember laughed. "It is not expected, Ali. You barely had time to dress, let alone shop. There will be no time today, so you are forgiven."

A knock on the door heralded the seamstress and her crew. Ember was tucked into her gown, a variety of pins were placed and the assistants made the minute adjustments while they wrestled Alia carefully into her own gown and assessed the requirements.

Her breasts pushed the lace out and she was turned from left to right and back again before the seamstress started her work. No one mentioned her excessive attributes, but a few of the assistants threw wide-eyed glances at her chest.

Breasts aside, her body was very similar to those of the Yanese. Wedges of lace and a few open seams and the dress was removed for the assistants to work on.

Wearing silk robes, Ember and Alia walked

down the hall to an open sitting room. A light snack was waiting for them. They had enough time to chat, snack and return to her bedroom to see the seamstresses finish Ember's gown.

The rust colour against her green skin was beautiful, encasing her charms while giving peek-a-boo access to her flesh under the lace. The vee of the gown was just above her navel and the inner curves of her breast were enough to draw the eye. A double layer of lace in a matching vee down toward her knees in front and behind concealed the shadow of her sex quite effectively.

"You look wonderful, Ember. Rudai will have a hard time keeping his mind on the ceremony with you next to him." The admiration in Alia's voice was heartfelt.

"You think so?"

"I know so."

The seamstress fussed with the final adjustments personally. A perfectly fit gown done for the wedding the next day.

"Alia, help me with this. You will have to dress me tomorrow." Ember winked at her as Alia knelt to lift the gown up and over her head. She placed the gown back on the dummy as Ember slithered into her robe.

"All right, miss. I believe that your gown is ready." The stressed women surrendered the deep blue gown with relief and some fear.

Blushing lightly, Alia pulled the gown on over her head and settled it into place. Her breasts needed to be lifted slightly to snug into the light cup that had been formed for them. The surprise of the assistants was countered by the smugness of the seamstress's gaze. "Perfect. How you get around with those things I don't know, but they will be comfortable for the wedding day and that is as it should be."

The mirror showed Alia her own startled face, bright eyes and enough cleavage to give her a heart attack. The blue lace made her skin glow chalk white. The doubling of lace at strategic points gave her enough nerve to wear this gown in public, but otherwise she would have confined it to the bedroom.

The seamstress knelt and tucked the lace lightly beneath her breasts into a miniscule dart that immediately smoothed the fabric around it into an even column around Alia's torso.

"At home we have something called a brassier. A band that goes under the breasts and cups that support via straps over the shoulders. We start wearing them during puberty." She turned as she was ordered to and then was given the all clear for removing the gown.

A tingling stopped her when the gown was up to her knees. She dropped it immediately.

"Alia? You need to put the gown on the

dummy."

With a cursory knock, Symon came through. "I need to speak with Alia."

"I will be with you in a moment, Symon." The seamstress and assistants were studying the floor.

He was staring, his eyes flicking as he took in her magnificence. She moved forward and shoved him out the door, leaning against it while her heart tried to pound its way out of her chest. The images that assailed her mind were not hers, they were his and they were graphic. In his mind, the straps of her gown were around her elbows, she was lying back with her thighs spread and the lace was framing a sight she had only ever seen in a mirror.

"How did you know he was coming in?"

"Just lucky, I suppose, but I had better get out of this gown before he comes back in again." She peeled the gown upward and draped it over the dummy before slithering into her robe. "He is coming back, so I had better get moving."

"I will have your gown brought to your room."

Alia opened the door just as Symon was reaching for it. "Impatient much? Bye, Ember. See you later."

He took her by the arm and hauled her into the hallway, down to his room where he pressed her against the wall, lifting her so that her legs were around his waist for stability. His kiss was savage

and his erection unmistakable, heat flowing between them as he rocked against her until she moaned and he shuddered. Her robe had parted and she had dampened the front of his trousers.

"I am going to run out of pants if we keep doing this." He wore her to the bathroom where he sat her on the counter while he removed his trousers and cleaned himself up. He dampened a clean cloth and moved her robe aside to press it against her, removing her body's cream.

She had caught her breath. "You started it." She twitched the robe back into modest lines.

"I need to do the virginity test before the elders start arriving."

"When will they be here?"

"Half an hour or so." He took her hand and led her back into his bedroom. "Up you go. Knees up."

"Without a cocktail? How rude." She scooted onto the bed and watched him get a medical kit together. "Are you serious?"

"I am. I was a physician before my talent manifested and I was tapped to be the avatar elect. Lean back and raise your knees, or you won't get a treat." He pressed her back and she raised her knees and spread her thighs.

A warm probe entered her and pressed until it butted against her hymen. She winced and squirmed a little, but otherwise lay as still as

possible. She heard chirps and beeps and then the invading probe was withdrawn.

She started to sit up, but a hand to her rib cage kept her in place. "What? I have to get dressed, Symon."

"You haven't gotten your treat." His words made sense when she felt his breath on her and she squirmed as he used his tongue on her over and over until she gasped and thrust her hips toward him.

She opened her eyes to see him over her and when he leaned in for a kiss, she tasted herself on his lips, tangy and faintly sweet. He slid his hand up and cupped her hip as his tongue duelled with hers. A regretful squeeze and he backed away.

"You had better get dressed. My self-control is wearing a little thin."

She slid away and turned back to look at his slumberous eyes and the bulge of his erection. Sighing regretfully, she pressed the connection between their rooms and moved into her bedroom. The day gown was on her bed and she quickly got into fresh undies to wear under it. With her gown in place and new shoes on her feet, she was ready for whatever the elders had to throw at her.

She knocked on Symon's door. Then knocked again. Hands grasped her waist from behind as he pressed a kiss to her neck. "Looking for me, Alia?"

She leaned back into him and leaned her head over to allow him full access to her neck and shoulder.

He laughed, but kissed her again, running his lips up to her ear and nipping at the lobe.

"Don't we have a meeting?" She sighed and stepped away from him.

"We do. They are in the council room downstairs. They wish to discuss the waking of Yana with you."

He wove their fingers together and held her hand as he led her down the stairs and through hallway after hallway. "How big is this place?"

"It is the home of the avatar or the avatar elect. It needs to be big."

She flashed images through her mind and he laughed.

"No, I am not compensating for anything."

A blush was high on her cheeks when she was introduced to the Yanese elders.

Symon sat next to her and kept her hand in his possession.

The prefect began, "Alia Morgan of Terra, we have questions to ask you."

"If I have answers I will give them." She was sitting as upright as she could when all she wanted to do was lean back into Symon.

"How many planets have you woken?" The question was direct.

"Technically two."

"Technically?"

"I touched my home world once. She sent me to the Volunteer centre." Gaia had been kind, but the maelstrom of emotion and caring had been a thousand mothers at the same time. Overwhelming.

"Which other planets?"

"Moi and Elocar. Elocar went volcanic when he woke, I caught him by surprise." She smiled. "He was my first alien world."

"Will the waking of Yana be the same?"

Alia thought it over. "No. I will wake Yana gently. When I spoke with Moi, I was able to understand what was missing in my technique. It will be a gentle waking and Yana will assess the offered avatar and take possession."

The men beamed at her. Apparently that was the right answer.

Dinner was a formal affair, the prospective in-laws were attending and Symon had selected another gown that turned her into a fairytale queen. When the toasting started, the comments got a little ribald and old tales were dredged out regarding the bride and groom.

Rudai's brother stood and lifted a glass, "To Alia, the most generous handmaid that has ever been seen. A virgin today and sore tomorrow."

Alia smiled weakly and looked down into her lap, but Symon didn't take it lightly. He stood and glared at those who were laughing until there was no more mirth at Alia's expense. "To Alia, who sacrifices herself so that the child my sister bears may be born into a covenant marriage. To the honourable handmaid and her sacrifice."

The last was echoed by the crowd and the moment of tension was over. During the after-dinner mingling, Ladai came up to her. "I apologize most heartily for my words. Your coming to this place has been a moment of luck for Rudai and Ember."

"And for me as well." Symon was at her side, glaring down the other man.

It was the first moment she had seen him next to other Yanese and he was inches taller than the average male. Ladai bowed and left them.

She looked up at him, "I believe I need to go to bed, tomorrow starts early."

He frowned, but kissed her forehead gently. "I have to deal with the guests or I would join you."

"You will be joining with me tomorrow. One night won't kill us." She kissed him lightly and it turned into a savage connection that left the room silent.

Gasping, she broke free and walked calmly out of the room. She waited until she was up the stairs before she let out the moan she had been holding

in. Waiting until the next day wasn't going to be easy.

CHAPTER SIX

Dressing a bride who didn't want to wake up was difficult, but the cold shower helped. Getting Ember cursing on the day of her wedding was somehow satisfying.

"You are supposed to bathe me in flower petals." Ember spluttered as Alia adjusted the temperature.

"And you were supposed to be a virgin for a covenant marriage. We all improvise where we can."

Ember just looked at her for a long moment until she threw her head back and laughed. Alia exfoliated the heck out of that bride.

Alia had taken her own shower before coming to fetch the bride and when she wrapped Ember in fluffy drying clothes, Alia pulled on the robe she had worn coming in.

She manoeuvred Ember into her gown and sat her down to work on her hair. This was the only part that she wasn't nervous about. She was

familiar with the combs and had studied hairstyles back on Terra, with the long tresses to work with, she was able to shape something that Ember pronounced *stunning*.

Now that the bride was putting on her jewellery, it was Alia's time to dress. The gown draped to her feet after she got her breasts into position. Her own hair was arranged in a similar, but simpler style held in place with three jewelled combs.

She knelt to help Ember into her shoes and smiled as the bride lunged forward to hug her. Alia got into her own shoes and stood next to the bride.

"You need something to add some sparkle. I think I tried to give you this the other day, but we got distracted." Ember went to her wardrobe and withdrew a long box.

When Alia opened it, tears pricked her eyes. A pair of earrings that would dangle to mid-neck were lovely and made of lavender and black crystals. The three-foot necklace of the same crystals had her sniffing.

"Go on, put them on."

With trembling hands, Alia put the earrings in and then she draped the necklace so that it hung between her breasts, to her pubic bone. It led the eye through the fun park.

"Wow. Symon was right."

Suspicion loomed. "What does he have to do with it?"

"He brought them yesterday. I forgot to get you a handmaid gift." Ember blushed. "You look beautiful."

"So do you, let's get your last meal as a free woman."

Laughing, they walked together down to the dining room. No men were in the house yet. The ceremony was going to take place in the courtyard.

Servants were thin on the ground today, but the ladies were served a lovely breakfast by those who remained. To Alia's astonishment, they were both draped with drop cloths that covered all of their bodies and incidentally their gowns.

"I feel like a toddler." Alia was grinning, but it didn't stop her from stuffing her face with everything in sight. When Ember asked her about her consumption, she replied, "We don't get to eat again for over eight hours."

Ember immediately saw the wisdom and ordered more toast.

They finished their meals and were working on finding a way to turn a tight corner with the trailing gowns without flashing too much ankle. Hilarious in gowns you could almost see through.

The prefect came in while they were fighting fits of the giggles. "Ladies, we are about to begin."

“Wonderful. What do I have to do again?” At Ember’s widened eyes, Alia hugged her. “No. I remember, just making a joke.”

She squared her shoulders, followed the prefect and walked out the front doors with her head held high. Outside the door, she stopped and stepped aside, lifting her skirt slightly so she could give Ember clearance.

The bride walked out and the crowd that was straining to see her gasped at her magnificence. Once Ember was five steps in front of her, Alia fell into step behind her. Rudai was waiting for her to come to him, his shirt was opaque and Ali had a moment of thinking of the fairness of men’s clothing versus women’s.

Ali felt heat on her skin and it suddenly struck her that it was Symon’s gaze on her. They locked gazes over the distance and Alia felt the connection between them grow stronger as she approached. She took her place behind Ember, facing the crowd, and Symon was next to her. The officiant said a few words.

Gel pads had been laid out for the bridal party and they knelt as one. She admired the comfort of the position after she removed her shoes. Symon extended his hand, palm up, and she laid hers within it. She almost felt an audible click at the contact.

With her hand in his, two hours of meditation

began.

She drifted, floated, her senses and thoughts free and easy. She opened her mind wide and reached down into the planet. She knew rather than guessed that Symon was with her all the way.

Their minds twined, parted, clung and dove.

Do you see that, Symon?

What?

That dome of ice slowly spinning. That's Yana. Do you want to say hello?

I do. Will it wake him?

Perhaps, but we will try not to.

With her spectral hand outstretched, she caressed the ice, Symon joined her. Their hands together melted a patch in the slowly spinning ice. Their joined hands shifted and opened a wider path. The rush of intelligence wasn't there. It was a slow trickle of awareness that Alia found it easy to bear.

A gong sounded in the distance and just like that, they were back in their bodies, blinking in surprise.

They stood on wobbly legs for the formal vows and ceremony, and the taking of their blood as witnesses and participants. Alia quickly slipped on her shoes as they began the walk to the greeting area.

Ember and Rudai were kissed by all, one by one. Ember only needed to excuse herself once to

use the lav and Symon's scowling presence was enough of a deterrent to those who wanted to cop a feel on her lace-covered boobs. A few women had cast disgusted glances at her breasts, but none were crass enough to mention it.

It took five hours for the population of Taness to come through. None chatted, they simply kissed and left.

The dinner for the select guests started when the line finally ended. Alia served Ember and Symon served Rudai.

Toasts were given, music was played and then dancing began. Alia watched the complicated patterns with amazement. When Symon held his hand out for her to join him, she blurted out, "I don't know how."

"I will teach you. It is deceptively easy." He simply hauled her to her feet during a slower song and soon they were swaying, connecting, parting, turning and swaying over again. Their bodies were making a lot of contact and it was arousing her to a ridiculous degree.

She was shaking like a leaf when he returned her to her chair. She winced as Ember announced that she and Rudai were leaving.

Ember hugged her and wished her well, Rudai offered to help her run and they retreated within Symon's home.

Alia and Symon were now sitting side by side.

"How long to we have to stay here?"

Symon grinned at her. "Until the party dies down. That should be fairly soon, I had a mild sedative put in the wine they are being served."

True to his word, the party came to a close in half an hour. When the last guest left, they were free.

Vibrating with eagerness, she took the hand he extended to her and let him lead her up the stairs. "Now, dear Alia, before I get carried away, there is a way for me to make the first time painless, but you will still bleed as is required."

"Painless is fine, but will I miss out on anything else?"

"No. Not if I am precise in my aim."

This had her curious.

Halfway to his rooms, he swung her into his arms and increased his speed down the hallway. In his room, he locked the door and laid her on the bed. He grabbed his med kit and looked down her body. "Please, spread your thighs and raise your knees. I promise you will get a treat."

Laughing, she did as he said, opening herself to whatever he was planning.

Her gown still concealed the juncture of her thighs, but when he was ready, he flipped the lace back and made a groan of appreciation at what he saw. His fingers caressed her for a moment before he slid the warmed object into her. Tiny pinpricks

deep inside her were the only discomfort and soon even that small pain was gone.

Symon withdrew his hands and a clatter behind him made her laugh. He had thrown whatever he had been holding in favour of sliding two thumbs into her, parting her for the slide of his tongue. He lapped at her until she squirmed, flicking her clit over and over with wet heat until she moaned and then he slid up her body to kiss her.

The ravenous kiss started with her under him, but as they rolled across the bed, she was straddling him with her gown up around her thighs. She broke the kiss. "You are wearing far too many clothes."

He sat up and took her with him. "We need to consummate this in your chamber. Come on."

He carried her from his room to hers, and when she saw the thick folded white sheet waiting for her, she understood. The formal sheet needed to be stained with her blood.

When he placed her on the sheet, she bent to remove her gown.

"Let me. I have this image in my mind..." He placed his hands on her shoulders and slid the top of the dress down by moving the shoulders of the gown off her arms to the elbow. He arranged her thighs, raised her knees and spread them before flipping back the lace.

"Just like that."

Symon stripped out of his formal wear with no attention to the value of the fabric. When he put his hands on his waistband, she held her breath. A black nest of hair cradled the thick tree that was his erection and her body pulsed in anticipation.

He knelt between her spread thighs and slid two fingers into her, spreading and stretching her until she rocked against his hand. He worked a third finger into her and started a slow beat while he rubbed at her clit with his thumb.

Alia gasped and groaned when her body shook under his deft touch, and that was all he had been waiting for. Surging into her with a strong thrust that made the most of the slickness that coated her, he braced his body on hands to either side of her breasts to make it through her hymen in one shot.

She felt the pressure and then the sudden release as he made himself at home within her. She looked up into his eyes and saw the apology there. "It's okay, now get moving."

He chuckled and rested his forehead against hers for a moment. "Give me a moment, mistress, or it will be over before it starts."

She lifted her hips, testing the depth and breadth of him.

He hissed, "So damned tight."

She suddenly got worried, "Is that bad?"

Sweat was coating his body. She ran her hands

down his sides as her body cradled him. The coppery tang of blood was in the air.

"Gods, no. It is wonderful, perfect, but I can't hold back anymore." He reared back and slid slowly forward, the sensations rippled along every nerve inside her.

"Oh, so *that* is what all the fuss is about." She could feel her pupils dilate as he rocked into her and slid back over and over.

He let out a harsh laugh and started to thrust in earnest.

She clung to him, winding her arms around his neck and holding on until the storm of sensation was over. His breath started to come out through clenched teeth and he groaned, reaching between them to caress her clit once again. Alia shrieked as the orgasm to end all orgasms ripped through her, making her eyes widen as her mind spun free of her body to meet Symon's.

He groaned and held his hips against her as his body emptied itself into her. He pulsed against her once, twice, before slowly coming to rest on her breasts, his mouth on her shoulder.

Their minds locked, spun and touched the thawing core of Yana.

You are my avatar. The voice of Yana was strong and calm.

Symon bowed to the presence of the planet, *Yes I am.*

No. *You are my avatar.* Yana was insistent.

Alia looked over at Symon and then back to the glowing presence. *Me?*

A chuckle made it into their minds. *The Alia-Symon is my avatar. You two are one, I would not separate you.*

Alia looked at the presence of Symon with surprise. *I am not of Yana.*

Not now, but you were. Images flowed through her of Yanese on Terra seducing women with pale skin and flower coloured eyes.

I am a Yanese descendant? No one ever mentioned. Surprise ripped through both her and Symon.

My sister knew it. She sent you to me. To him, to us. Together we will bring my people back to the Alliance and make my surface fertile once again.

Can you wait on that?

Yana was bemused, *Wait how long?*

Two days. They expect me to wake you in a calm and deliberate manner.

I enjoyed being woken in pleasure. Usually the avatar came to me in fear. This was much better.

Symon was laughing.

Laughter is good, too. I will wait, but I am already within you, so you only need to summon me and I will manifest.

Thank you for the warning. Alia bowed. *I am honoured to be your avatar.*

The Alia-Symon is a worthy vessel. We will have many centuries together.

The dismissal was unmistakable and Alia found herself back in her body with Symon still inside her.

"Did we just..."

"Yes."

"And Yana said that I was..."

"Yes." Symon was grinning with a possessive gleam in his green eyes. A spiral of black ran through his eyes, surprising her.

She felt the presence of Yana in her own mind as well. Symon's eyes widened.

"Are you seeing a black starburst in my eyes?" She caressed the side of his face with her hand.

"Yes. Mine, too?"

"Yes. Yana isn't as subtle as it likes to pretend." They chuckled.

Symon withdrew from her, the smell of blood and musk heavy in the room. He helped her stand and they walked into his bedroom, leaving the stained sheet behind.

He led her through to his bathroom where a bath had been drawn with flower petals on the surface. "Up on the counter. This will help with any residual pain."

Symon wiped the blood and semen from her thighs, then opened a jar with a complex label and covered two fingers with its contents. He reached inside her, stroking and spreading the cream until he reached the front wall of her channel. She

hadn't ever felt contact on her g-spot before, but knew what it was when ribbons of pleasure snaked through her.

He kissed her, thrusting his tongue in an imitation of what his fingers were doing inside her. Her eyes widened in surprise as he lifted her to slide inside as she started to come. She moaned and dropped her head back, exposing her neck to him and he licked and sucked at her neck and shoulders as he thrust into her in a rapid-fire pattern that drew her orgasm out into an eternity of sparking pleasure. As his shout came from above her, she fainted in his arms.

Water was warm and hands were gently bathing sweat from her with a soft cloth scented with berries and flowers.

Alia was leaning up against Symon, grinning at the pleasant fatigue in her limbs. The warm bath would take some of the sting out of the unused muscles, but she would know that she had had Ember's wedding night.

"Are you awake?"

"I am. Sorry, it was very intense and I wasn't prepared." She wove her fingers through his and smiled as he turned his hand so that they were palm to palm.

"That is quite the compliment."

"Well, I was a virgin, so I don't have any basis

for comparison." The pinch he gave her backside made her laugh.

"I will just have to give you more experiences then." He wrapped his spare arm around her and held her tightly against his chest.

He finished bathing her, lifting her from the tub and wrapping her in a fluffy towel while he dried himself. She wanted to touch him, but was too sleepy. She nodded on the small chair and he caught her before she fell.

Without a word, he brought her to the bed and tucked her in between cool sheets and warm blankets. Dawn was sliding its fingers through the window as she revelled in the feel of Symon against her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I declare the covenant marriage valid and formalized." The prefect stood and smiled at the happy couple.

Alia leaned against Symon in the background, the horrifying sight of the bloodied sheet explained her fatigue. "Thanks for not telling me."

"I didn't want you to panic." His voice in her ear was low and sent a shiver through her.

"It looks like there wasn't a virgin deflowered, but sacrificed."

"You are a bleeder. It happens. Not usually like that, but it happens." He held her tightly against him, deterring speculative gazes. When she woke up, he had taken all the breast wraps from the room and hidden them until she promised not to flatten herself anymore. He would arrange for clothing that was more fitted to her figure.

Ember and Rudai were glowing with happiness. It was lovely to see.

"Do we get today to ourselves?" Hope was in

her voice and she knew it.

"I see no reason why we shouldn't. What would you like to do?"

"You."

His hand moved down to her pelvis and pressed her back against his sudden erection. "That can be arranged."

"You are so accommodating." She grinned up at him. "Lunch first though. I need to keep my strength up."

She led him back into the avatar residence and into the dining room where a buffet lunch was waiting for the ceremony attendees. Alia filled a tray with snacks and was going to take her seat at Symon's left when he pulled her into his lap.

Snuggled together, they fed one another, shocking a few of the gathering who had watched the last of the ceremonies. Alia had done her part as had Symon, they were off the hook.

A few of those who took a seat at the table muttered something about alien harlots, but Alia ignored them. She was chosen of Yana and Symon and tomorrow everyone would know. For today, playing the harlot sounded like fun.

She took Symon by the hand and drew him out of the room after stopping to congratulate a bemused Ember and Rudai.

Alia let go of Symon's hand and sprinted up the stairs and to his room. He was behind her every

step of the way, giving chase.

With eager hands, she opened his shirt and kissed her way across his chest the moment that the door was closed behind him.

She followed the trail of dark hair to his trouser line and when she opened the trousers to free him, he groaned when she took him in her mouth. Her tongue flattened against the head and with a smooth gesture, she drew the entire stalk into her mouth. She sucked on the backstroke and licked her way forward until he fisted his hands in her hair and arched into her mouth, jetting his seed down her throat.

She licked the sweet-salty cream from him until he stopped spewing and swallowed. When she looked up, she saw black stars glowing inside his eyes. "Yana, that is cheating."

A deeper voice that she could feel through the soles of her feet spoke, "I don't want to ignore pleasure. I have been quiet and alone for a very long time."

"Did Symon at least feel it?" She was pouting, on her knees in front of the man she wanted to spend eternity with.

"Oh yes, I felt it. Yana merely watches, shares." Symon drew her to her feet. "Now it's my turn."

Spending a day in the arms of a man she didn't even know a week earlier didn't feel as wrong as her Terran upbringing said it should. Symon was

hers, she felt it every time they touched and that instinct overrode everything else.

When their maelstrom of pleasure was over and they were lying in the sated silence of happy bodies, another happy hum joined them in the room. *Planet Yana, biggest voyeur ever.*

“Alia Morgan of Terra, will you wake Yana gently?” The prefect and councillors were gathered around, Symon knelt across from her on one of the same pads that they used for the wedding meditation.

“I will.” She knelt and closed her eyes. Yana came to her immediately and she asked it for patience and to inhabit Symon visibly, alone.

She breathed deeply and opened her eyes. “Yana has woken and has taken its avatar.”

Symon’s eyes opened with the black stars on the green background. “I am awake. May I keep this vessel for my own?”

The prefect bowed to Symon. “The vessel is a volunteer chosen for his ability to take you into his mind. He is yours.”

The prefect looked at Alia. “Your assignment here is completed, a ship is waiting to take you off world. Now.”

Yana’s eyes narrowed. “She may not leave. *They* are my avatar and to separate this body from its mate will be against my wishes.”

The murmur of shock that ran through the room was not quiet or polite. Eventually the prefect said, "She is not Yanese, she has no right to be here."

Alia sat back in her own body as Yana took over and walked her to stand next to Symon. Her hand waved and the images that she saw on the psychic plane were now in front of her. The men, the women, the coupling.

"She is of the Yanese that were. They who were bound by pursuit of joy. *These* were the Yana who always had an avatar for me so that I could share in their joy. With this avatar, the Alia-Symon, I am finally complete and willing to restore the surface to a glowing and lush environment."

The prefect was shaken and the councillors were no longer glaring, but looking at each other in confusion. "Those Yanese were sent from the planet, for being hedonists."

"Yet they were my most beloved children. They valued life and love with equal measure. When the technology took over, my people decided that I was not worthy of a voice. Those were the ones that did not deserve a living world, so I went to sleep until one of my most precious returned. She is here and now I will bring life back to the plants, the oceans and the air."

Symon's arm came around her and they waited, facing the room at large until they fell silent. When

a tech ran through the doors and begged pardon, the prefect nodded for him to speak.

"The atmospheric temperature. It has risen four degrees in half an hour. Something is happening."

The prefect looked back toward them and Yana bowed their heads in acknowledgement.

"Thank you, avatar. Thank you, Yana. We will endeavour to treat the new one with the respect that you demand."

"I do not demand it, she deserves it. She alone has touched the mind of four planets, a feat never before attempted. She sacrificed her body for a friend and found love in the process. She is worthy of regard. Few can find pleasure and honour in the same place." Yana nodded their heads. "Now, if you don't mind, I wish to explore this new configuration a little further. It brings interesting possibilities to mind."

Alia and Symon found themselves walking back to the main stairs with Yana a faint echo in their thoughts. The planet was busy with its rebirth so now was the time to have their moment of privacy. Orgasm would bring Yana back to them, but delaying it could let them have a lot of pleasure in the meantime.

With grins fixed and eagerness in their minds, they shared images of positions and various states of undress until they reached his room.

Tangled together, their minds merged so that

they felt the sensations each generated in the other and then they formalized their joining in the most basic of ways.

Arm wrestling for who was going to be on top.

* * * *

Kyra vi Ranith, Councillor of Terra, was wincing as Amy reamed her out. "How could you have taken such a risk? Alia could have been hurt or driven insane when she touched those planets."

"It was a risk that had to be taken. She will be a wonderful avatar for Yana, Gant confirmed the match himself."

"That isn't the point. We are trying to help these women find matches that are safe and appropriate."

"Right. Like being thrown into Tiergar's cage was my idea and being assigned to get pregnant by Palden was yours. There is always a risk when it comes to love, Amy, and despite what you want, you can't control all of it."

Amy Tyrell, Empress consort of the Haldis Imperium, Terran Representative, grimaced. "Fine. I just wish you had told me what was going on. I could have sent Alia some care packages."

"Do it as a wedding present. I hear that Symon is going for a covenant marriage since they have already met the public virgin registration." Kyra

smiled. "Yana has also been talking about wanting a family so this is a whole new arrangement."

Amy whistled. "That would be new. A set of avatars linked to the same planet and a family? The Yanese are going to have some adjusting to do."

"It will be good for them." Kyra waved farewell and disconnected the call. What she hadn't mentioned was that the Volunteer records showed Alia as having Gaia as a sponsor. Humans had a hard time believing that their planet was alive, knowing it was a thinking being would probably cause riots.

It was a secret that a select few Terrans out in space would ever know. With no way to return home, they had to live their lives out in space with strange races and alien technology. Kyra looked out the window at her children. They were the future of humans in space, and they were fighting to wash a pig that their Azon grandmother had purchased for them.

Sometimes life didn't have much dignity to it and it was better just to roll with the punches.

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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